



Emerging Economic Geographies of Higher Education: A complex negotiation of value (and values) in the face of market hegemony.

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Emerging Economic Geographies of Higher Education:
A complex negotiation of value (and values) in the face of
market hegemony

by Erica Margaret Pani



Photo: Erica Pani

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Taking higher education (HE) in England as its case study, this PhD adapts and re-poses Roger Lee's thesis on the *Ordinary Economy* to help understand how neoliberal market values become negotiated, embedded and transformed in and through complex emerging economic geographies. In 2011, pursuing a somewhat neoliberal theme, the HE White Paper sought to further organize the sector through the application of certain market values and metrics, whereby a demand-led system would increase efficiency and competitiveness by making universities more directly accountable to their student-consumers than ever before. Since the late 1970s, ascendant forms of neoliberalism have come under scrutiny with some political economy and governmentality scholars underscoring neoliberalization's processual and variegated nature wherein geographies and extant political economic relations matter to its concrete manifestation. However, some studies have encountered difficulties in accounting for *how* top-down political programmes become "anchored into" the complexity of everyday life, and/or in pre-supposing that their desired "subject-effects" will be either automatically realized or successfully resisted (Barnett, 2005). Thus, by residualising "the social", theories of hegemony and governmentality often fail to illuminate the complex interplay between abstract policy programmes and the complexity of the *Ordinary Economy*. To overcome such weaknesses, this PhD follows Lee's assertion that economic geographies are always emerging and inherently relational entities in and through which value emerges from the practice and performance of socio-economic life. Thus, studying the economy means grappling with the multiple values, social relations and notions of value that constitute economic geographies. Adapting a framework to examine four universities in England, the PhD illuminates the transformative power of both political programmes *and* socio-economic relations as, in this case, market hegemony was (re)-produced in multiple and complex forms. Neoliberalization is thus shown to be a bottom-up as well as top-down process that is constructed *in practice*. For it is the practice of socio-spatial economic relations that determines what is and is not value.

Acknowledgements

Just over nine years ago, I was given the opportunity to study for an undergraduate degree in Cities, Economy and Social Change in the School of Geography at Queen Mary University of London. That opportunity changed my life. Not only did I lack any qualifications relevant to studying Geography – I had an A Level in Art and a very solid BTEC National Diploma in Building and Architectural Studies – I was faced with the opportunity costs of leaving a well-paid job at the age of 41. Perhaps it was simply my good fortune that my university of choice placed great emphasis on the value of widening access and that I entered higher education just before the student fee began its precipitous rise. However, I prefer to think that I was fortunate because at the time higher education and my ability to participate in it were still being actively valued as, predominantly, a public good. I am, therefore, extremely grateful to a whole host of people – in particular my teachers, mentors and colleagues at Queen Mary.

On completion of my BA, I was fortunate to receive an ESRC 1+3 scholarship that enabled me to undertake a Masters and PhD. Without the generosity of the ESRC I may not have remained in higher education. But I did; and for that I am thankful. Moreover, I am thankful to my supervisors Professors Jane Wills and Roger Lee whose experience, guidance, input, friendship and support have seen me through to completion. Whilst in this regard both Jane and Roger have been equally important, I cannot help but give special thanks to Roger for providing me the foundations of my thesis. His work on value and the *Ordinary Economy* has been my constant companion for more than five years and his insights are a constant source of inspiration. I simply could not be more grateful.

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List of Abbreviations

BIS	Department of Business Innovation and Skills
BoE	Board of Education
BTG	Block Teaching Grant
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CATs	Colleges of Advanced Technology
CPE	Cultural Political Economy
CVCP	Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals
DES	Department of Education and Science
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
LEA	Local Education Authority
MoE	Ministry of Education
NPM	New Public Management
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio Economic Classifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFFA	Office of Fair Access
PCFC	Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
SoSE	Secretary of State for Education
SNC	Student Number Control
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UFC	University Funding Council
UGC	University Grants Committee
UUK	Universities UK

PART I

1 Introduction

In June 2011, the release of the UK Government's White Paper, *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*, (BIS, 2011a) signaled an apparent further rolling-back of the state out of a previously held public service in favour of the market. With the notion that creating a demand-led system would increase efficiency, drive forward competitiveness, and make universities more directly accountable to their student-consumers than ever before, this 'technology of government' (Foucault, 2000) thus set out a conceptual and operational framework for the higher education (HE) sector, which in part reflected a distinctly neoliberal theme: that the best way to organize the economy and society is through the mechanisms of the market; and it is to the values of the market – not government – that a society of free individuals and organizations should turn.

Following the defeat of New Labour in the 2010 UK General Election, it had fallen to the newly elected conservative-liberal coalition Government to consider the recommendations set out in Lord Browne's Independent Review of HE Funding and Student Finance in England: *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education* (Browne, 2010). Having inherited "the largest budget deficit in post-war history" (BIS, 2011a: 4) following a global financial crisis that had begun in 2007, the Coalition had considered Lord Browne's recommendations as part of their Comprehensive Spending Review, which required substantial fiscal savings right across government. Indeed, on the 12 October 2010, the day of the Browne Review's release, Vince Cable MP, then Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, had addressed the House of Commons stating:

"Browne acknowledges that 'the current funding and finance systems for higher education are unsustainable and need urgent reform'. The issue is *how*; and it has been framed in terms of how the higher education sector contributes to the deficit reduction programme" (Hansard, 2010a: column 155, emphasis added).

To that end, the *how* that the Browne Review recommended comprised:

"...a radical departure from the existing way in which HEIs are financed. Rather than the Government providing a block grant for teaching to HEIs, their finance now follows the student who has chosen and been admitted to study. Choice is in the hands of the student. HEIs can charge different and higher fees provided they can show

improvements in the student experience and demonstrate progress in providing fair access and, of course, students are prepared to entertain such charges” (Browne, 2010: 3).

For the academic and social commentator Stefan Collini, full political implementation of the Review’s recommendations would have meant that HE in England could no longer be thought of as “a public good, articulated through educational judgment and largely financed through public funds” (2010: 23). Rather it would become “a lightly regulated market in which consumer demand, in the form of student choice” would be “sovereign in determining what [was] offered by service providers – i.e. the universities” (ibid). Certainly, the Review proposed that the financial effects of its metrics should not undermine the existing principle of increasing social mobility via access to HE. No one, no matter what their socio-economic background, should be put off from studying because they could not afford to live whilst they were *at* university (Browne, 2010: 26). However, according to Collini, the almost complete withdrawal of ex-ante Government funding which the universities had long-relied upon to underwrite their teaching, represented far more than a ‘simple, draconian cut’. Rather, it signaled “*a redefinition of higher education and the retreat of the state from financial responsibility for it*” (2010: 23, emphasis added). Thus, with the Review’s emphasis on the private gains accrued to the individual graduate over a lifetime’s earnings, and the need for institutions to respond to what students felt offered them “value for money”, both students and universities would need to think of themselves as “rational actors” taking part in a competitive market – guided by the metrics of competition theory and the socio-economic relations and values of the market (2010: 23-25).

While the 2011 HE White Paper differed from the Browne Review in terms of the tactics and techniques it proposed for achieving its aims, the ideological *how* by which the Coalition intended to ‘*redefine*’ HE was the same. By attaching up to £9000 per annum in cost-covering tuition fees to the home undergraduate, “more power” would be placed in the hands of HE’s consumers. As a result, “institutions that [could] attract students by showing them that they [could] offer good quality and good value for money” would have the opportunity “to grow and prosper”. Institutions that could not attract students would simply “*have to change*” (BIS, 2011: 15, emphasis added).

Although the specifically market-orientated discourses and metrics set out in the White Paper largely conform to the neoclassical economic logics of supply and demand, this PhD, while not wishing to eschew the structural significance of Governmental policy programmes, contends that such fundamental changes in the evaluations, values, actions, activities and subjectivities that the White Paper was seeking to impose are far from straightforward. For as Peck et al assert, the ideological *how* of neoliberalism – that is, *marketisation* – is never fully capable of becoming manifest in “a pure form”, as some “comprehensive regulatory whole” (2012: 271).

Certainly since the late 1970s, ascendant forms of neoliberalism have been extensively examined, with scholars from across the social sciences exploring neoliberalism’s power geometries; its social, economic and political consequences and compromises; its uneven geographies; and its contestations, contradictions, mutations and variegations (e.g. Bourdieu, 1998; Brenner et al, 2010; Harvey, 1990; Held et al, 1999; Jessop, 1995; Larner, 1997, 2000a, 2000b; Massey, 2007; Peck and Tickell, 1994; Peck et al, 2012; Stiglitz, 2003). In addition, with processes of marketization still apparently hegemonic, academics, politicians and members of the public alike have questioned what alternatives there are to the market model, and how neoliberalism actually survives (Peck et al, 2012).

Of particular interest to this PhD, some scholars of political economy and governmentality have pointed to the processual and variegated nature of the neoliberal project, preferring to understand the imposition of market rule not as a singular political ‘*ism*’ in which a “starkly utopian vision” would somehow be realized as a defined “political economic destination” (Peck et al 2012: 271, paraphrasing Peck, 2010), but, rather, as a process of *neoliberalization* in which geographies and extant socio-economic and political relations matter in terms of *how* neoliberal processes unfold in time and space. For example, taking a geographical political economy perspective, Brenner and Theodore (2002), Peck and Tickell (2002), and Brenner et al (2010) emphasize the need to examine “actually existing neoliberalisms” in which the contextual embeddedness of neoliberal restructuring projects matters insofar as they have necessarily collided with national, regional and local regulatory landscapes that have been inherited from earlier rounds of policy regimes, regulatory practices and political contestation. As such, they underscore the “ongoing creative destruction of

political-economic space at multiple geographical scales” as existing institutional landscapes are “transformed into emergent neoliberal projects” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 4).

Not dis-similarly, from the post-disciplinary perspective of cultural political economy (CPE), Jessop and Sum (2001, 2003) stress the path-dependent, contingent and always tendential nature of neoliberal capitalism, thereby rejecting the claims of orthodox Marxist’ accounts (or indeed, neoclassical economics) that it is possible to interpret the world as a closed totality. For these authors, taking the cultural turn seriously in political economy has meant analyzing “the articulation between the economic and the political and their embedding in broader sets of social relations” (Jessop, 2009: 336). In this regard, as well as focusing on the “existential necessity of complexity reduction” in the process of meaning making, and as well as illuminating “the role of evolutionary mechanisms in shaping the movement from social construal to social construction”, CPE has underscored the centrality of, what Foucault termed, “governmental technologies” as “the mechanisms involved in the governance of conduct and, *a fortiori*, in the production of hegemony” (ibid: 336-342).

Without doubt, analyses from the perspectives of both political economy and governmentality that have stressed the centrality of context as an inescapable concrete necessity in neoliberalization’s progress have made an enormous contribution to academic and scholarly knowledge – particularly in their culturally- and/or geographically- grounded forms. Yet, as Barnett (2005) has argued, despite their sensitivity to path-dependency, contingency and tendential transformation, some such studies have still presented neoliberalization as an inescapably “hegemonic” project by which a clearly defined neoliberal logic of capital is perfectly capable of dominating social relations by subordinating public values to those of the market. As a result, they have often encountered difficulties; for example, in accounting for the “suturing together” of top-down political programmes with the complexity of everyday life, and/or in pre-supposing that their implied “subject-effects” will be automatically realized or more-or-less successfully contested and/or resisted. Thus for Barnett, by treating “the social” as a “residual effect” of hegemonic political programmes, neither political economy- nor governmentality- inspired theories of hegemony have been able

to provide adequate insights into the complex interplay between society and polity in the seeming re-production of neoliberal domination.

In order to overcome these perceived weaknesses, this PhD adapts and re-poses the work of Roger Lee (2006, 2012) on the *Ordinary Economy* to help understand how neoliberal values of the market that are espoused in policy programmes like the 2011 HE White Paper become negotiated, embedded and transformed in and through multiple and complex emerging economic geographies. However, rather than attempting to bolster political economy and/or governmentality approaches by adding on further lenses, theories and concepts as other authors have done (for example, Keil 2002; Larner, 2000; Sum 2004) the PhD takes as its starting point a central element of all economic geographies over which there are perpetual social and political struggles: that is, *value*.

Following Lee, I argue that economic geographies are always emerging and inherently relational entities in and through which value emerges from the practice and performance of socio-economic life. As such, studying the economy means grappling with what Lee (2006: 416) calls the “*social relations of value*” – i.e. the multiple values; social, economic and political relations, and notions of value – that constitute economic geographies, which in turn are reflective of the multiple contradictions, power relations, ethical dilemmas and material circumstances of socio-economic life. Whilst there is an imperative on Government to attempt to maintain political-economic coherence across time and space through politically imposed programmes – from neoliberalism to socialism – the economy is far more complex than much political (or disciplinary) thinking allows. For as Chapter Two of this PhD will demonstrate, it is the way in which economy is normally practised in time and place that neoliberalization, most centrally, seeks to change. As such, the PhD suggests that through the conceptual lens of Emerging Economic Geographies and the *Ordinary Economy*, the political economic process of neoliberalization can be understood to connote: *the (attempted) transformation of existing socio-economic spatial relations into emerging economic geographies, more-or-less governed by the metrics and values of the market.*

The PhD adapts a framework from Lee's insights to examine the experiences of four very different universities in England as they made meaning of the HE White Paper in relation to their emerging economic geographies. In so doing, the thesis illuminates the transformative power of both political programmes *and* socio-economic relations as (in this case) market hegemony was (re)-produced in multiple and complex forms. Given what I claim in Chapter Three, Methodology, is the ontological necessity for normalisation and diversity to co-exist with one another in the *Ordinary Economy*, this PhD holds that neoliberalization is a bottom-up as well as top-down process that is constructed in practice in the context of an attempted normalisation of a particular understanding of value in the face of a diversity of values. As a result, the PhD concludes that hegemonic values such as those of the market are only ever partially constituted; and this has profound implications for what is meant by neoliberal hegemony and, indeed, for the political and social possibilities for its successful re-negotiation. The practice and performance of emerging economic geographies in light of new policy metrics offers both opportunities and constraints for actors to move on in the world. And it is the practice and performance of socio-spatial economic relations that determines what is and is not value.

1.1 The marketisation of higher education in England as a case study

The overarching aim of this PhD is to resolve the complex interplay between neoliberally informed policy programmes of marketisation, which are, themselves, geographically diverse, and the diversity of ordinary socio-economic contexts into which those policy programmes are inserted or imposed. As such, the marketisation of HE, with a specific focus on England, offers a highly interesting and relevant case through which to pursue that aim (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2 for why a case study approach was appropriate for this research).

1.1.1 The market order: shaping the social organisation of higher education

Over the past thirty-five years or so, the marketisation of HE has become a central focus for scholars concerned with the growing trend for national governments to deregulate their HE sectors and introduce market-oriented policies. Indeed, “the increasing influence of market forces on academic life”, as Dill puts it (2003: 136), is reported to have significantly transformed the framework of action for innumerable higher education institutions (HEIs) around the globe. Certainly since Leslie and

Johnson critiqued the United States' (US) HE system for pursuing a market model as early as 1974, studies from Australia to the Americas, Asia and throughout Europe have sought to unpick just how far a neoliberally informed 'market order' (Marginson, 2004: 180) has increasingly come to shape the social organisation of HE's core functions – its research, its staff, and its teaching of a variety of student bodies (e.g. Chevaillier, 1998; Douglass, 2009; Geiger, 2004; Marginson, 2003, 2004; McBurnie and Ziguras, 2001; Neave, 2004, 2012; Robertson, 2006, 2010a, 2010b; Salerno, 2004; Teixeira et al, 2004, 2014; Young, 2002).

Central to many of these explorations has been how a significant, and often politically purposeful, increase in the number of 'home' undergraduate students – that is, the 'massification' of HE – has led to substantial pressure on the public purse and, therefore, to problems in directing the management of HEIs to make more efficient use of their public resource allocations. As Teixeira et al put it:

“The political pressures for the control of public funds invested in the higher education system and the need to invent more effective and accountable models of organisation and management for the system have become prominent items on the agenda of policy makers and administrators” (2004: 1).

Back in 1974, for example, Leslie and Johnson argued that from the late 1960s the perceived need in the United States to equalize educational and economic opportunity across the population intertwined with a funding crisis in HE to produce a series of policy measures aimed at increasing efficiency into the system via some form of market competition. Rather than opening up public HE to the full onslaught of a 'free market', the aim was to encourage 'market-like behaviour' through a series of grants that gave individual students more geographic flexibility in choosing their HEI. Since the cost of student grants was largely offset by reductions in both federal and state block grants to institutions, HEIs would have to compete for students and increase internal efficiency just to maintain their financial resources. In this context, Leslie and Johnson (1974) argued that the student grant prompted an important market condition by casting the student in the role of the consumer to whom producer institutions would need to respond.

Similarly, in the UK strain on the public purse through massification became increasingly discursively produced as a problem that required intervention from the

late 1960s onwards. However, as Chapter Four of this thesis details, it was not until the early 1980s following the election of the “New Right” Conservative Government led by Margaret Thatcher (Bosanquet, 1981) that government began to employ strategies to induce greater efficiency within both universities and polytechnics on the basis of what Le Grand and Bartlett (1993) might call “quasi-market” principles. For example, in their first year of government, and as part of their wider agenda of public service reform, the Thatcher-led Government cut all public subsidies for overseas students and introduced full cost-covering fees instead, thereby opening up a full-blown international market. In their second year of government, the Conservatives reduced the universities’ block grant by some 15% and capped the Local Education Authority (LEA) funding pool for polytechnics, thereby attempting to drive internal efficiency on the basis of per-capita funding. As Gareth Williams argued in his account of the progression of a UK HE market, taken in combination the policies prompted the HEIs to recognize that “government could no longer be relied upon to guarantee [their] financial survival” (2004: 245). Instead, it became apparent that “the more efficient use of resources” and “income generation from other sources” would be “essential” if the universities and polytechnics “were to survive” (ibid: 244).

Importantly, and as illustrated by Teixeira et al (2004, 2014), Brown (2011) and Brown and Carasso (2013), the extent to which the mechanisms and values of a market imaginary have been implemented to co-ordinate the evaluations, actions and activities of, particularly, institutions but, also, students has differed greatly between nations. But not *dissimilar* strategies of market coordination have been implemented in countries around the globe as HE has been discursively produced as inefficient and a strain on public monies. This has included Australia – which closely followed the trajectory of the UK from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s (Marginson, 2003); Canada – whose HE system has expanded greatly whilst undergoing restructuring through market mechanisms (Young, 2002); the Netherlands – whose Governments since the mid-1980s have put considerable effort into “steering” HE “at a distance” through market principles (Jongbloed, 2003; Salerno 2004); and even France – whose HE system (whilst still highly centrally administered) implemented New Public Management (NPM) structures and more flexible working contracts for staff during the 1980s following rapid growth in student numbers (Chevaillier, 1998). Indeed, as early as 1990 the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

noted that *most member countries* were either considering, developing or implementing more sophisticated apparatuses for allocating funding on a more competitive basis in order to induce efficiency. Moreover, the role of student fees was becoming increasingly accepted as a central component of university finance and sustainability (OECD, 1990).

Thus, as Brown (2011) and Brown and Carasso (2013) have underscored, the term ‘marketisation’ has been applied to quite an array of policy measures ostensibly designed to make HEIs more competitive, efficient and more accountable to a range of external stakeholders including students, their families, employers, the taxpayer, and society at large. The term has also been applied to a variety of relationships within HE, with scholars often drawing clear distinctions between the possibilities for markets in staff (both nationally and internationally); markets in research (both in terms of funding and ‘outputs’); markets in PhD and Masters students (from both ‘home’ and ‘abroad’); and markets in undergraduates (e.g. Barnett, 2000; Dill, 1997a, 1997b; Deem, 2008; Douglass, 2005; Locke, 2011; Marginson, 2003, 2004; Musselin, 2005; Slaughter and Leslie, 1997).

1.1.2 An accidental market or deliberate political act? The wider political economy

For some authors the application of market principles to HE has seemed almost accidental: defined as a ‘sort of discovery’ (Jones and Young, 2004). Gareth Williams, for example, suggested that the UK HE sector “*stumbled into* a closely regulated market through a series of *ad hoc* responses” by both Government and the HEIs following the global economic depression of the late 1970s (2004: 243, emphasis added). Thus, for Williams, HE could be understood as no more than “an incidental actor” in the “radical changes” that took place during the 1980s, and the governmental policies designed to elicit such changes could be understood as no more than necessary elements of “a wider set of economic policy choices” rather than “debated ideas about the finance and organisation of higher education” (2004: 243-244). For other scholars, with opportunities for further cuts in public spending diminishing due to fears that the quality of HE teaching and research might fall, marketisation has seemed like “the only policy game in town” (Marginson, 2003: 3) in the steering, funding and social organisation of the sector (Barr, 2004, 2010; Bar and Crawford, 2005; Barr and Shephard, 2010; Brown, 2011; Brown and Carasso, 2013; Teixeira et al, 2004, 2014).

Yet, as Neave (2004) has argued, since the collapse of the Keynesian settlement, the purposeful application of market principles to HE has brought to bear the values and rationalities of a neoliberal political imagination at multiple spatial scales. According to Neave, this has been due to broader shifts in contemporary capitalism that have been taking place not only at the national level, but also across the globe. As such, scholars from across the social sciences have argued that whilst the national context of HE policy development clearly matters, in an era of globalization the market-orientated changes that have been taking place across the HE landscape cannot be seen as extraneous to the wider political economy and, more specifically, to the progression of neoliberalization (Jessop et al, 2008; Marginson, 1997, 2003; Neave, 2004, 2012; Robertson, 2010a, 2010b; Peters, 2003).

For Simon Marginson (1997, 2003, 2004, 2006) and Susan Robertson (2010a, 2010b), many of the market-orientated policy shifts in HE that have taken place since the fall of Bretton Woods are reflective of an increasingly dominant neoliberal paradigm in which market-based responses to perceived inefficiencies in public services have become *the* contemporary structuring framework in both the global North and South. Indeed, both authors have asserted that in an era of globalization a growing neoliberal political rationale has sought to mobilize state power in, what Tickell and Peck refer to as, “the contradictory extension and reproduction of market(-like) rule” (2003: x). As a result, neoliberal values of market efficiency, competition and economic rationality have affected the policy responses of both regional authorities and nation states in their attempts to rationalize and situate their HE systems, not simply *within* a globalizing economy but, also, as an evermore crucial sector *of* the global economy (see also Marginson and Rhodes, 2002; Marginson and Sawir, 2006; Marginson and van der Wende, 2007).

For example, Robertson (2010a), writing from a critical political economy perspective, has argued that following the shift to a new international division of labour in which a large proportion of the production of goods and services moved overseas from the ‘advanced’ economies of the West to (predominantly) the rising ‘Tiger’ economies of Asia, and parts of South America (see Dicken, 2011), many Western economies turned to the high-value end of the service sector in search of a new economic development

model capable of underpinning a new long-wave of accumulation (see also Harvey, 2007). Drawing on influential intellectuals writing in the early 1990s such as Robert Reich, Robertson has suggested that a dominant neoliberal view was that the global North needed to identify itself as a high-value producer and innovator that invested in the training of highly-skilled problem solvers who would provide the essential resources for a competitive economy fuelled by, and founded upon, knowledge. For Reich, there was a direct correlation between the income that workers could generate and their education; and it was the latter that was central to the innovation of new knowledge-based industries and opportunities for accumulation (Reich, 1991, cited in Robertson, 2010a: 12).

According to Robertson (2010a), the 1990s, thus, saw the political emergence of ‘the knowledge-based economy’ – a concept originally formulated during the 1960s. Innovations in technologies, communications and transportation, which are often seen as central facilitators and signifiers of globalization, were seen as potential markets that offered high-value returns for states capable of pushing their boundaries. Thus, any nation state wanting to compete effectively within this increasingly important global economy would need to expand its HE sector; making it leaner, more efficient and more competitive through processes of marketisation (see also Marginson and van der Wende, 2007).

Certainly, as Chapter Four of this thesis will detail, since the Dearing Report of 1997, HE policy in England has been firmly situated in a discursive context of the knowledge-based economy, perhaps bearing some witness to its apparent domination of national policy contexts as, what Sum (2004, 2009) has referred to as, a ‘global economic imaginary’. Indeed, through a fusion of (neo)-Gramscian notions of hegemony and (neo)-Foucauldian governmentality Sum has underscored that the (re)making of a distinctly neoliberal form of capitalism has required the specification of such imaginaries. It has also required specific actors, organizations, and knowledge networks that have had both the capacity and power to “simplify a complex reality by selectively defining the ‘economy’ as an object of calculation, management and governance” (2009: 185; see also Jessop 2004, 2008; and Jessop et al, 2008).

In the arena of HE, Jessop et al (2008) and Robertson (2010b) have argued that one such organisation, the OECD, has played a central role in advancing both the knowledge-based economy and competitiveness as key to the successful reproduction of neoliberal capitalism through sustained economic growth, with HE strategically positioned as an indispensable material component thereof. Often through the lens of globalization, publications such as the statistics series *Education at a Glance* (first published in 1992), Education Ministerial Papers, Education Working Papers, Best Practice Guides, and a variety of Policy Briefs, have underscored the vital role that HE has to play in training the world's workforce in order to fuel the engine of innovation and ensure the economic future of OECD countries. As one OECD Policy Brief puts it:

“In a globalising knowledge economy, OECD countries face competition in a number of markets. They are turning to knowledge intensive products and services, which increases the dependency on access to new technologies, research results and knowledge and skills... Higher education institutions are among the most important sources of knowledge and innovation. As a result, governments are rethinking how to maximise the benefits from higher education... not only at the national, but also the regional level” (2007: 1).

The OECD has also been a key international agent in promoting the expansion of HE within nation states and discursively reinforcing neoliberally informed strategies for effectively funding massification with a view to ‘ensuring’ the economic sustainability of the HE sector. In their publication *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society: Pointers for Policy Development*, the OECD suggested that a nation's funding approach should be consistent with goals such as expansion, competitiveness and cost effectiveness. Indeed, primarily through deregulation, the OECD stressed that HE funding should: facilitate the freedom to innovate; ensure institutional autonomy; be demand-driven; and be open, wherever possible, to private institutions (OECD, 2011).

Such selective definition, reinforcement and structuring of HE within neoliberally informed discourses of competitiveness and the global knowledge-based economy has been a central theme in OECD knowledge networks since the early 1990s. And again, as Chapter Four of this thesis will illustrate, OECD publications have enabled individual nation states such as the UK (specifically, England) to evaluate their actions and activities against other nations' performances (e.g. OECD, 1992, 2010).

Apart from being positioned as a key driver or facilitator of a global knowledge-based economy, a second and important argument put forward is that HE has been discursively and materially produced as an important global market in and of itself (Brown, 2009, 2011; Deem, 2008; Dill, 2003; Douglass, 2009; Marginson, 2003; Marginson and Sawir, 2006; Teixeira et al, 2004, 2014). For instance, as newly industrializing countries have moved up the ‘value hierarchy’ of global production networks, so countries such as China, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico and Colombia have become major ‘importing’ countries of HE services – seeking to up-grade their workforces in terms of knowledge and human capital by encouraging both undergraduate and post-graduate students to study abroad (see Marginson, 2004; Newman and Couturier, 2002; OECD, 2010a, 2010b; Sirat, 2010). In this sense, the cross-border flows of international students seeking a higher education has been positioned as an opportunity for individual nations to increase their income through an international trade in tertiary qualifications. Indeed, for ‘advanced’ economies of the West, HE has been positioned as a valuable ‘export’ market in which states such as the UK, the US and Australia have ‘comparative advantage’, particularly due to their long established and highly ranked HEIs (Collins, 2007; Marginson and van der Wende, 2007; Marginson and Rhodes, 2002; OECD, 2010a).

Once more, scholars from across the social sciences have argued that the OECD has played a central role in discursively positioning HE in this way. In addition, other regional policy assemblages and instruments, such as the EU’s Bologna Process (launched in 1999) and Lisbon Agenda (launched in 2000), as well as global agreements such as the WTO’s General Agreement on Trade in Services (first established in 1995) have been shown to have structured HE as an evermore valuable international market (as much as a collection of national markets) that is ‘open for trade’ (see Collins, 2007; Giroux, 2002; Marginson, 2003; Robertson, 2010b; Sauvé 2002).

Thus, for Marginson (2003, 2007), Marginson and van der Wende (2007), and Robertson (2006, 2010a, 2010b), national HE systems have been influenced by an increasingly pervasive neoliberal rationale of marketization, liberalization and privatization to look both “inwardly” to a variety of national markets and “outwardly” to various international markets in order to make the most of the value-producing

opportunities that HE now affords. Looking inwardly, for some nation states this has progressed only as far as the implementation of NPM structures to induce market-like behaviour amongst their universities and other HEIs. For others, it has meant allowing private interests to partake in HE provision while employing the ideal of market competition to discursively and materially construct the actions and activities of traditional HE providers. Looking outwardly, for some nations it has meant simply opening up their borders to an inward flux of overseas students, whilst for others it has meant encouraging their HEIs to ‘chart new waters’ by looking beyond the borders of the nation state to establish overseas alliances, off-shore branch campuses and franchise programmes.

Given the dramatic shifts towards policies of marketisation that have taken place at multiple spatial scales, it could be easy to argue as Marginson (2003) has that the seemingly “engineered” structuring effects of an evermore hegemonic neoliberal paradigm would be impossible for HE’s actors and institutions to escape. Indeed, drawing on Hayek, Marginson has argued that the *ideal* of market competition, which “rests on the assumption of rational behaviour”, seems to be “as much a method for breeding certain types of mind as anything else” (2003: 3, citing Hayek, 1979: 74-76 emphasis added). Thus for Marginson, writing on both the world-wide HE environment and the Australian national system, the decision by nation states to marketise their HE sectors is a “momentous” one for it (apparently) “imposes on the education system an arid neoliberal imagination in which society, culture and personality are mere outcomes of the economy, and [institutional] strategy is a trading game, in which the world is nothing more than opportunities for self enrichment” (ibid).

Yet, as Marginson himself asserts in an argument that he fails to address (at least in this paper), HE is “not the same in all places, nor does it remain constant. It is made and unmade by human action” (2003:6). There is, indeed, “much else” to HE “apart from markets or economy” (ibid). And what Marginson calls HE’s “endogenous economic dynamics” – *what in this PhD are referred to as HE’s social relations of value* – can, indeed, “only be understood in the larger social and cultural context” (ibid). As Chapter Two of this thesis will argue, it is the examination of the multiple and complex interactions between governmental policy programmes of marketisation

and the diversity of ordinary socio-economic contexts that holds the potential for understanding *how* processes of neoliberalization are constructed *in practice*.

1.1.3 The English HE sector: a brief overview

As Chapter Four of this PhD will detail, the English HE system has developed largely as a result of HE policy since 1902, and has a long and diverse history. Universities range in type and form from the so-called ‘ancient’ universities such as Oxford and Cambridge that date back to as early as 1100, to the so-called ‘new’ universities – not of the ‘Robbins’ expansion’ of the 1960s, but of the post-1992 variety formed, predominantly, of former polytechnics and some HE colleges. Although it has been argued that much system diversity has been lost since the Conservative Government of ‘92 granted university status to the latter – almost doubling the number of home undergraduate students attending university overnight (see Brown, 2011) – individual institutions remain inherently dynamic, socio-spatial, relational entities; each with their own history, identity, geographies, and path-dependencies that will variously inform and help shape the ways in which they implement (or not) new policy metrics.

In broad terms, English universities have organised themselves into four main groups: the Russell Group, the 1994 Group, the Universities Alliance, and the Million+ Group¹. Each of these groupings broadly relates to the universities’ various missions with an emphasis on research and/or teaching. For example, in 2011 when the Coalition’s HE White Paper was released, the Russell Group comprised a collaboration of twenty UK universities that placed enormous value on research and research funding, and for whom both national and international prestige, reputation and status were of paramount importance. For these universities, what Marginson (2003: 11) calls, the “positional goods” that they had to offer were of great value, as were their reputations for taking only the ‘brightest undergraduate students’; producing ‘world-leading research and research training’; benefiting the UK economy through ‘the commercialization of innovation and knowledge exchange’; and leading the UK’s university system in the face of ‘fierce international competition’ (Russell Group, 2011). In comparison, the Universities Alliance comprised twenty-three UK universities that had a strong orientation towards business and teaching – the majority

¹ In 2011, in addition to the four main Mission Groups, a small number of universities were affiliated to the Cathedral Group while other universities had no group affiliation.

having sought university status as polytechnics in 1992. Whilst in 2011, the Alliance was seeking to foster a ‘world-class, dynamic and innovative research base’, their commitment to teaching and social responsibility was apparent in their mission to ‘enable social mobility, increase social inclusion, and transform local communities’. For these universities, a core value was the education of over 25% of the country’s home undergraduate students through the provision of a higher education that the universities believed was ‘flexible enough’ to supply the number of graduates that the UK economy needed if it were to remain globally competitive (Universities Alliance, 2011).

England’s universities were, also, highly differentiated in terms of their relational geographies and the socio-economic makeup of their student bodies (specifically, their home undergraduates). For example, looking at the 98 multiple-subject universities in England that carried a Times Higher Education ranking for the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), the top-tier Russell Group institutions (which consistently dominate national and international league tables) were considered to be ‘selective’ universities with a wide spatial reach, tending to draw their home undergraduate bodies from across the nation (HESA, 2011a). Furthermore, they were considered to be ‘elite’ institutions given that the majority of their home undergraduates came from relatively well-off families from National Statistics Socio Economic Classifications (NS-SEC) 1 to 3 (ibid). Although *all* English universities under the existing legislation had to demonstrate strategies that would help to widen participation in under-represented groups (see the Higher Education Act 2004 and the 2011 HE White Paper), in 2009/10 the three most highly ranked universities of the 2008 RAE recruited, on average, just 14.1% of their home undergraduates from NS-SEC 4 to 7 – well below the national average of 30.1% (HESA, 2011a). The same universities also drew significant numbers of both undergraduate and postgraduate students from non-EU countries, teaching, for instance, an average of 2975 ‘international’ post-graduates in 2009/10 compared to a national average of 995 (HESA, 2011b). Of these postgraduates, many would have been Masters students taking part in a world-wide market in HE in which extremely high fees were being exchanged for the positional goods that the students received – backed by the reputations and ‘super-brands’ of their universities (THE, 2011).

In contrast, at the lower end of the 2008 RAE rankings, the socio-economic makeup of universities from, predominantly, the Million+ Group was significantly different from that of the 'selective' universities (HESA, 2011a). For example, in 2009/10 the three lowest RAE-ranked universities of this mission group recruited on average 40% of their home undergraduates from NS-SEC 4-7, with an average of 15.3% of the home undergraduate population coming from low participation neighbourhoods compared to just 3.5% for the Russell Group's top three HEIs. In addition, the vast majority of the so-called 'recruiting' universities of the Million+ Group drew significantly higher proportions of their home undergraduates from local communities (see Chapter Three), perhaps reflecting the fact that many of these institutions, at some point in their histories, came under the direction and funding of the LEAs. However, whilst all of the highest-ranked universities of the English HE sector recruited well above the national average in terms of postgraduate students from both home and abroad, the three lowest ranked universities of the Million+ Group demonstrated marked variation in their total postgraduate recruitment, ranging from 810 for the lowest-ranked university to 3835 for the highest-ranked of the three. And this variation was reflected in their recruitment of, solely, international postgraduates (ranging from 270 to 1245) suggesting that there was a great deal of diversity to be found in the strategies that individual HEIs had adopted in their attempts to secure their long-term survival.

Thus, at the time of the HE White Paper's release, there were clear differences between the ordinary contexts of a wide variety of universities that made up the English HE sector. In part, mission, status and reputation, and the socio-economic makeup and geographies of their various student bodies differentiated these institutions. So too did their individual histories, identities, physical geographies and path-dependencies. Taken together with the apparently hegemonic progression of a neoliberal rationale at multiple spatial scales aimed at shaping the universities' evaluations, actions and activities, the marketisation of HE in England presents an interesting and valuable case study through which to pursue the aims of this thesis (see Section 1.1 above and Chapter Three, Methodology).

1.2 Thesis structure

The thesis proceeds as follows: Chapter Two opens by setting out the theoretical argument for adopting a different approach to resolving the complex interplay between geographically diverse relations of neoliberalization and the diversity of ordinary contexts into which those relations are inserted or imposed. It then adapts and reposes the work of Roger Lee (2006, 2007, 2012) on the *Ordinary Economy*, thereby setting the theoretical foundations for examining the marketisation of HE in England with a specific focus on the universities' emerging economic geographies and the social relations of value that shape them.

Chapter Three, then sets out the methodology adopted for examining how four diverse HEIs in England negotiated their way through the 2011 HE White Paper. The Chapter begins by elaborating the ontological and epistemological foundations of my interpretation of Lee's thesis. It then details why a multiple case study approach was appropriate for this PhD, setting out the aims of the research, how the four HEIs were selected, and the qualitative methods adopted for their in-depth exploration, including the ethical issues that a researcher needs to consider when undertaking semi-structured in-depth interviews. The methodology also details the discourse analysis approach taken to analyze the primary and secondary documentation surrounding three important legislative/policy moments in the marketisation of England's HE sector following the Dearing Report of 1997: The Teaching and Higher Education Act, 1998; The Higher Education Act, 2004; and the 2011 White Paper, *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*.

Just how far a neoliberal 'market imaginary' as a 'semiotic order' (Jessop, 2004) has come to penetrate HE policy in England is set out in Chapter Four. My analysis begins in the early 1900s with the establishment of the primary funding bodies that would come to shape the iterative emergence of HE's economic geographies: the LEAs, whose funding structures underpinned the so-called "public system" of HEIs, and the University Grants Committee, whose system of grant funding would help to support the Liberal-based values of university autonomy and freedom for over sixty years. Drawing on both primary and secondary documentation, the first half of the chapter, thus, unravels the *longue durée* of politically imposed marketisation that followed an expansion of HE provision that wholeheartedly took purchase just after the Second

World War and continued post Lord Robbins' Review of 1963. The second half of the chapter then examines the progressive neoliberalization of HE policy, which from 1979 increasingly aimed to: a) induce the market metrics of competition and efficiency, and b) introduce consumer-producer relations and subjectivities, into HE's framework of action. Overall, the chapter's aim is to set out the social, political and economic context for HE's emerging social relations of value.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven detail the empirical analysis of how the four case study institutions made meaning of the 2011 HE White Paper in relation to their emerging economic geographies. Together, the chapters form what I am stylistically calling an "iterative emergence", the full meaning of which is set out in the Preface to Part II of the thesis. Importantly, each chapter underscores the concomitant power of a neoliberally informed market imaginary to shape the HEIs' social relations of value and the immediate variation of the market imaginary as it was interpreted, made meaningful and put into action (or not) in and through the universities' diverse concrete emerging economic geographies.

Chapter Five, *Meaning Making: Complexity Reduction*, argues that whilst the economic imaginary of the market put forward in the HE White Paper was central to the Government's aim of structuring the evaluations, values, actions, activities and (thus) subjectivities of HE's actors and organizations, in its real-world negotiation the reduced understandings of the White Paper were immediately (and inevitably) confronted by the multiplicity and complexity of semiotically- and materially-constituted social relations of value that make up the *Ordinary Economy*. The chapter seeks to illuminate this notion through an examination of how the universities reflected on certain aspects of their emerging economic geographies in order to: a) fix their undergraduate fees, and b) decide whether or not to participate in either of the primary policy initiatives devised by Government to bring further competition into the sector: i.e. the AAB+ competition and the 'flexible margin'.

Chapter Six, *Putting Strategies into Action: Complexity Re-Introduction and the Fallacy of Dualities*, empirically challenges overly simplistic assumptions that neoliberally informed policy programmes of marketization *either* become embedded/normalised into ordinary socio-economic relations *or* are successfully

contested and/or resisted. Through an examination of *'the Student as Consumer'*, the empirical evidence suggests that as the universities put into action certain strategies that, to varying degrees, were based on key discourses and metrics from the White Paper, so a whole host of HE's actors evaluated what could stay and what could go; what needed to be altered; and what new actions and activities (if any) could be introduced into their framework of action. As such, the White Paper had the potential to displace, diffuse and possibly, even, 'crowd out' the 'non-market' orientated practices and values of the HEIs. However – and of utmost importance – there was an immediate variation of the policy metrics as multiple and diverse values and understandings of Value shaped the universities' actual economic practices.

Chapter Seven, *Emergence: The Multiple and Complex Economic Geographies of Higher Education*, empirically demonstrates that, in the ontology of the *Ordinary Economy* wherein normalisation and diversity necessarily co-exist with one another, any apparent political-economic coherence that is achieved through the implementation of market-orientated policies will always be permeated by inconsistencies and variation. Through the lens of one particular market metric that every UK Government since 1979 had sought to embed throughout the HE sector – that is, *efficiency* – the empirical evidence presented suggests that as understandings of the value of HE emerged as multiple and complex following the release of the White Paper, so it became harder for my interviewees to disentangle their actions and activities as either 'market' or 'non-market'. For sure, each interviewee was adamant that they were *not* market actors and universities were *not* businesses; and indeed, adopted practices that would have been considered *inefficient* from a market perspective. Yet, at the very same time, they each found it virtually impossible to *not* think or speak of themselves *as* market actors and businesses – adopting practices that conformed to the Government's emphasis on market-led efficiency. The overwhelming result for each HEI was that they now thought of themselves as more "market-like" and more "business-like" than they had before the implementation of the White Paper.

Chapter Eight draws upon the evidence arising from my empirical investigations to present the conclusions of this thesis. Having taken an Emerging Economic Geographies and the *Ordinary Economy* approach to examining the complex interplay between geographically diverse relations of neoliberalization and the diversity of

ordinary, everyday socio-economic contexts, the chapter provides empirically grounded insights into: a) the processual nature of neoliberalization; b) *how* processes of neoliberalization become anchored at the level of everyday social life; and c) what this implies regarding the nature of neoliberal market hegemony. In so doing, the thesis suggests that the diverse practices of value that make up the economy underscore that emerging economic geographies are full of political possibilities. They therefore present actors and organizations with a plethora of shared values, practices and subjectivities around which to solidify a common voice of opposition to processes of marketization rather than remain divided by the political imposition of market-(like) rule – provided, of course, they possess, and can gather, the collective will to do so.

2 Neoliberalization and the *Ordinary Economy*: Arguments for a Different Approach

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the theoretical underpinnings for examining the marketisation of HE in England through a conceptual lens that, I suggest, has the capacity to resolve the complex interplay between neoliberally informed policy programmes of marketisation, which are, themselves, geographically diverse, and the diversity of ordinary socio-economic contexts into which those policy programmes are inserted or imposed: that is, *Emerging Economic Geographies and the Ordinary Economy*. The chapter, first, sets out a working definition of neoliberalism as a political ideology, which serves as a foundation for understanding what will be referred to throughout this thesis as the metrics and values of the market. I then move beyond this somewhat utopian view of neoliberalism to examine the processual nature of the neoliberal project – what Brenner and Theodore (2002), Brenner et al (2010) and Peck (2010) refer to as neoliberalization – in which *context*, as an inescapably concrete necessity, matters in terms of *how* neoliberal processes unfold in time and space. Bearing in mind this necessity, I then elaborate on the work of Clive Barnett (2005) to offer a constructive critique of two of the most dominant approaches that have underpinned innumerable scholarly analyses of neoliberalization’s progress: i.e. political economy and governmentality. Although I place great emphasis on the enormous contribution that these two approaches have made to academic and scholarly knowledge – particularly in their critical and geographically grounded forms – I conclude that their analytical capacity to deal with the complex interplay between policy programmes and the multiple social, political and economic relations of the *Ordinary Economy* is limited. However, rather than attempt to ‘fix’ their limitations by *adding on* a further lens as other authors have attempted to do – for example, Keil’s (2002) utilization of the *everyday* as a ‘category’ that ‘links’ the economy to individual experiences – I draw on the work of Roger Lee to set out an entirely different approach: one, which in essence, *strips back* the focus to a central element of all economic geographies over which there are perpetual social and political struggles: that is, *value*.

2.2 Neoliberalism: a working definition

In the opening chapter to *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey (2007) writes that “[f]or any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our institutions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit”. “If successful”, he continues, “this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question” (2007: 5). Thus, for Harvey, the founding figures of neoliberal thought, such as Friedman, Hayek, Simons and Röpke, “chose wisely” by placing the compelling ideals of human dignity and individual freedom at the heart of their political project: as “the central values of civilization” (ibid). Importantly for this disparate band of economists and intellectuals who would eventually, though unevenly, ‘conjoin’ as the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947 (Peck, 2010), these central values were threatened not only by the extreme dictatorial regimes of fascism, Nazism and communism, which they witnessed curtailing the advance of capitalism and human dignity around them. They were also threatened by *any form* of state economic intervention such as Keynesianism that sought to substitute collective values “for those of individuals free to choose” (Harvey, 2007: 5; Foucault, 2008). Whilst the neoliberals (if it is even possible to summon such a collective) disagreed ardently on important aspects of their political thinking, one fundamental unifying notion was held by all: that the best mechanism for the organisation of society was that of the market, and it was predominantly to the values of the market – not government – that a society of free individuals should turn.

Of course, as Peck (2010) underscores, the differences between the main pioneers of neoliberal thinking are not insignificant in attempting to chisel out a working definition of neoliberalism, even if the “explicit attempt to remake laissez-faire for twentieth-century conditions remains one of its definitive features” (2010: 39). Hayek of the Austrian School, for example, drew heavily from moral philosophy, probing Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as much as *The Wealth of Nations* in elucidating the process of ‘politicisation’ and how (for neoliberals) it should be stopped or curtailed. Indeed, whilst Hayek was convinced that the conscious, central design and organisation of society in the political sphere would inevitably lead society along *The Road to Serfdom*, he brought a rich, subjectivist, position to his analysis of spontaneous market order, eschewing the neo-classical preference for the clinical

separation of market values from the multiplicity of concepts, views and values held by individuals (see, for example, Hayek's series of articles in *Economica* from 1942 to 1944). That is not to say that Hayek did not concur with his contemporaries such as Friedman, that progress depended on man "giving an unthinking deference to the market" (Bosanquet, 1989: 31). Rather, his 'philosophical mission' was to defend the free market as a concept of *moral choice* in which morals are not merely (and necessarily) a phenomenon of individual conduct, but also "that they can exist only in a sphere in which the individual is free to decide for himself" (Hayek, 1944: 156). Hayek, then, was far more concerned with neoliberalism's "*antithesis*", as Bosanquet calls it: that "politics presents *extreme dangers*" to society, and any "attempts to bring about improvements through conscious design, however well intentioned, *will almost always go wrong*" (1981: 325; 1989: 7, emphasis added). As Hayek puts it:

"Though the pursuit of the selfish aims of the individual will usually lead him to serve the general interest, the collective actions of organised groups are almost invariably contrary to the general interest" (Hayek, 1976: 138)...

"Nobody with open eyes can any longer doubt that the danger to personal freedom comes chiefly from the Left, not because of any particular ideals it pursues, but because the various socialist movements are the only large organised bodies which, for aims which appeal to many, want to impose upon society a preconceived design" (Hayek, 1979: 129).

On the other hand, Friedman, the "economists' economist" of the Chicago School, whilst also concerned with the "evils of Government rule" (Peck, 2010: 42), centred his writings around neoliberalism's "*thesis*" arguing that, in fact, society has a natural tendency towards spontaneous order, and the economy has an inherent tendency towards growth – making the organisation of society through capitalist markets a natural and integrating force for good (Bosanquet, 1989). Indeed, writing in *Free to Choose* published in 1980 Friedman restates a conviction apparent throughout his work from the mid-1950s, and clearly stated in *Capitalism and Freedom* published in 1962: that the natural sciences share an affinity with economics in describing and testing an unintentional and natural order. As Friedman notes:

"Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' is generally regarded as referring to purchases or sales of goods or services for money. But economic activity is by no means the only area of human life in which a complex and sophisticated structure arises as an unintended

consequence of a large number of individuals cooperating while each pursues his own interest” (1980: 25).

For Friedman, the complex structure of language, the development of scientific knowledge, a society’s values, culture and social conventions, all develop in the same way as markets: “through voluntary exchange, spontaneous cooperation, [and] the evolution of a complex structure through trial and error, acceptance and rejection” (1980: 26). Like Hayek, Friedman underscores the multiplicity of values that may underpin an individual’s pursuit of his or her own “self interest” – rejecting the notion that “self interest” can be defined exclusively in terms of “immediate monetary reward” (1980: 27). However, and contra Hayek’s thinking (see Bosanquet, 1989; Caldwell, 1988; and Tomlinson, 1990), his emphasis on positive economics as an ‘objective science’ – devoid of any normative judgements, and based on statistical testing and modelling – underpins his conviction that neo-classical economic theory can demonstrate the validity of markets by the robust nature of its predictions rather than the “real-life” complexity of its assumptions (Friedman, 1953).

Superficially, Friedman’s primary focus on the “*thesis*” and Hayek’s emphasis on the “*antithesis*” merely suggest two different, yet intertwined approaches to the same utopian project: the organisation of society through markets rather than centrally planned government. Yet the differences between these two leading protagonists of neoliberal thinking – Hayek’s deep concern with the inescapably *subjective* and *situated* nature of economic activity and its ramifications², and Friedman’s confidence in the power of *objective* economic science to disentangle, model and predict the validity of markets – underscore the central question in their twentieth-century re-formulation of nineteenth-century liberalism. *To what degree should, and can, the state be involved in the organisation of economy-society?* Put another way, it underscores a central dilemma that, in fact, *all* modern societies must face – and one that is of central concern to this thesis (developed below). *Who decides what value is and how value should or can be practised?*³

² See for example, Hayek’s writings on economic knowledge and urban economy in *Individualism and Economic Order* (1949).

³ This reference to value and how it is practised refers to the ex-ante ‘fixing’ of value through state regulation versus ex-post emergence of value through the market. As my thesis develops, this (often unsupportable) duality will become clear.

Putting the *thesis* and *antithesis* together, Nick Bosanquet (1981) adeptly illustrates the neoliberal problem, predicted in its modelling, borne witness to in history, and named in Polanyi's classic "double movement" in which the crisis tendencies of laissez-faire capitalism are responded to by a variety of social forces struggling to re-embed and re-regulate the market. As Jessop puts it, "if [neo]liberalism can be interpreted as a more or less "spontaneous philosophy" rooted in capitalist social relations, one should also recognize that it is prone to "spontaneous combustion" due to tensions inherent in [the] same" (2002: 109).

For Friedman, the answer to the neoliberal problem lay in the strength of the *thesis* and the predictability of short and long-term modelling. With society's tendency towards spontaneous order and "certain propensity to truck, barter and exchange" (Smith, 1776), his view of government is rooted in the role of the market (Bosanquet, 1981). Drawing heavily on Schumpeter, Friedman underscored the 'economic miracle' produced by laissez-faire capitalism in both Britain and the United States during the 19th century, not merely in terms of the accumulation of capital and wealth made possible by the *ex-post* emergence of value through markets, but also, "the opportunities it has offered to men and women to extend and develop and improve their capacities" (1962: 169). Driven by the search for surplus value, competition and the courage of the entrepreneur to innovate, take risks and embrace uncertainty, such improvements took place through the long waves of "recurrent rejuvenation of the productive apparatus" inherent in capitalism's "creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 1942).

For Friedman (1962), society simply needed to understand that in the long run, free from government interference, capitalist market forces would lead to constantly rising minimum incomes and the alleviation of absolute poverty. Market forces would even lessen inequality, more so than alternative systems of organisation such as Keynesianism or socialism, and certainly with less coercion. Although people would experience capitalism's 'destructive moments' in the short term – and certainly rally against them – the, so-called, democratic political process could never proportionally represent as many plural interests and valuations as could the market. As such, the primary role of government was to "determine, arbitrate and enforce the rules of the game" such as private property rights and the provision of a monetary framework

(1962: 27). And by-and-large *the game* could be defined as that of “*voluntary exchange*”, free from coercion, and practised through competitive capitalist markets⁴ (see also, Friedman, 1980).

For Hayek, the answer to laissez-faire capitalism’s crisis tendencies lay in the totalitarian consequences of the *antithesis* in which politicisation arises, in part, from the public outcry *against* capitalism’s ‘moments of destruction’, but also from the nature of the political process itself (Bosanquet, 1981). Drawing heavily on De Tocqueville in his three volumes of *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, Hayek underscores the inherent dangers of a democracy based on “a form of government where the will of the majority on any particular matter is unlimited” (1973:1). Here, driven by a desire to expose the intellectual errors and ‘fatal conceit’ of all forms of socialism in their claims that central planning can better co-ordinate the social division of labour, the division of knowledge, and information in a superior manner to markets, Hayek asserts that government has come to be about coercion based on ‘social’ interests and misplaced ideals rather than the maintenance of general rules that would uphold the necessary conditions for liberty and “the spontaneous order of a free society” (1973: 2; Tomlinson, 1990).

Certainly, the economic misfortunes and ‘moments of destruction’ that Hayek recognized as “an inseparable part of the steering mechanism of the market” (1976: 94) could lead individuals “to follow the marsh lantern of ‘*social justice*’” (Bosanquet, 1989: 17) – a form of politically imposed egalitarianism, which Hayek saw as anathema to market functioning and the values it embodies. But it was the democratic process itself if left untamed and open to calls for legal social entitlements, the *ex-ante* ‘fixing’ of value through extended public services and nationalisation, urban planning and the like, that was the greatest threat to liberty and the route to totalitarianism. Thus, for Hayek, democracy is acceptable – *and necessary* – only in so far as it is constrained by a constitution that limits the power of government. It is not acceptable to allow a temporary majority of citizens to grant unlimited powers to government in order to coerce individuals and “impose a different system of valuation” from that of the market (Tomlinson, 1990: 22).

⁴ My thanks to Roger Lee for pointing out how remarkable it is that Friedman in particular, but also other neoliberals, was seemingly unable or unwilling to see capitalism as anything other than a manifestation of individualism organised through market relations rather than as a heavily structured mode of production.

In line with Friedman, then, Hayek believed that government was about setting the abstract ‘rules of the game’ – particularly around the institution of liberty, the meaning of law, the meaning of justice, and the democratic process. However, whilst in each of these arenas *the game* is the organisation of society through competitive markets, Hayek was more distant from the laissez-faire ‘dogma’ than Friedman. Instead, he envisioned a system of market rule in which there was a *positive* role for the state in “planning *for* competition” (1944: 31). He advocated local collectives as a democratic means of facilitating pluralism. He also went much further than Friedman and other Chicagoans in underscoring the need for limited government interventions in terms of mitigating some market failures (for example, he advocated a minimum income and compulsory social insurance), and providing for some public goods – although these, too, should be open to private competitive tender and/or internal competition in order to instill market values (Hayek, 1944, 1973, 1976, 1979).

Neoliberalism, thus, began life as a somewhat ‘un-unified’ project that was never a cookie-cutter remake of laissez-faire liberalism. It was a product of time and place that had to be “constructed anew”, evolving as a working project that contained many differences and perspectives, particularly around the role of the state (Peck, 2010: 52). In so doing, it set “a foundation for a *designed* market order” that could be seen as a viable alternative to the Keynesian orthodoxy and more socialist (and fascist) projects of the time (ibid). Yet, as Peck asserts, the contestations and differing perspectives that were apparent *within* the neoliberal project might actually be telling us something very important about the “*unattainability*” of its central goal: “frictionless market rule” (2010: 16, emphasis in original). If, as an ideology, neoliberalism is complicated, put into practice in and through existing political economies and socio-economic relations, it can only be more so.

2.3 Neoliberalization: from ideology to process

What began as a utopian project based on the antagonisms of free-market economic theory and politicisation, neoliberalism has, since the late 1970s, “become the dominant ideological rationalization” (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 33) of political economic activity both at a national level in the form of contemporary state restructuring, and globally – setting the framework for the deeper functional

integration of the world's economies (Brenner et al, 2010; Dicken, 2011). Indeed, in what Peck and Tickell (2002: 33) refer to as “the new religion of neoliberalism”, this “ideological software” has combined a *profound commitment* to the extension of market values through commodification and the logics of competitiveness and efficiency with a *deep aversion* towards all manner of Keynesian or other “collectivist strategies”, both “inspiring and imposing far-reaching programs of state [reform] and rescaling across a wide range of national and local contexts” (ibid: 33-34).

Thus, for Jessop (2002), as a *new* strategic political response to the perceived failures of Keynesian or analogous modes of interventionist regulation to manage, displace or defer the crisis-tendencies of their associated regimes of accumulation (such as Atlantic Fordism), this “neoliberal regime shift” has involved a necessarily contradictory process. On the one hand, neoliberalism seeks to “roll back” the state calling for the liberalization and deregulation of economic activity and transactions both within and across national borders; the deregulation of industry and/or privatization of state-owned enterprises and state-provided services; the dismantling of welfare programmes; opening up the public sector to (at minimum, partial) private provision; and the utilization of market mechanisms or ‘proxies’ in whatever public sector services remain. On the other hand, it involves “rolling forward” and rescaling “new forms of governance... that are purportedly more suited to a market-driven (and... knowledge-driven) globalizing economy” (ibid: 107). The internationalization of policy regimes to international economic organizations such as the WTO, the IMF and World Bank; key strategic roles for urban and regional governments, growth coalitions and business partners; a shift of power from government to market forces and partnership-based forms of governance – all have been variously instigated with the view of promoting supply-side competitiveness and securing smooth operating conditions for national and international markets (see also Dicken, 2011). As such, undertaking the neoliberal political project has paradoxically involved an increase in state intervention (even if, as neoliberal supporters claim, the state will eventually retreat in deference to the market) (Jessop, 2002: 106-107). Or, as Peck and Tickell more forcefully assert, it has entailed a “formidable and robust pattern of proactive statecraft and pervasive ‘metaregulation’” in the “purposeful construction and consolidation” of market rule (2002: 37).

Since the initial rise of neoliberalism in Chile in 1973, followed closely by the US and the UK from the late 1970s, many economies have provided “fertile ground” for political, economic and social transformation in the name of neoliberal capitalism: Canada, New Zealand and Australia being well-documented examples (e.g. Argent, 2005; Keil, 2002; Kipfer and Keil, 2002; Kelsey, 1995; Larner, 2000a, 2005; Larner and Walters, 2000; O’Neill and Moore, 2005). And whilst many nations of the Global South have suffered neoliberal structural adjustment under the conditionalities imposed by the International Financial Institutions – first aggressively during the 1980s and then with a more “human face” following the Washington Consensus of the 1990s (Jolly, 1991; Gould, 2005) – many have since unilaterally adopted a variety of neoliberal policy strategies in order to gain purchase in the geographically and socially uneven neoliberal market game (Stiglitz, 2008). Even social democratic economies such as Norway (Pani and Holman, 2013) and Denmark (Nielsen and Kesting, 2003) have become ‘unusual suspects’ caught up by the ‘common sense’ meter of the market. And with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in the late 1980s (Smith and Rochovska, 2007; Smith and Stenning, 2006) through to China’s, now, specific brand of market-led growth (Ong, 2007) it is difficult to name but a handful of countries that have not opened up their economies and societies to some degree of discipline through (capitalist) market values (Brenner et al, 2010). Perhaps, then, Harvey is right to suggest that towards the end of the 1990s Blair and Clinton could have easily reversed Nixon’s earlier statement and proclaimed that “we are all neoliberals now” (2007: 13). But possibly more shockingly given the global financial crisis of the late 2000s, perhaps President Obama and the Cameron-Clegg Coalition could quite easily have done the same (Peck et al, 2012).

However, as Peck (2010) underscores, such “purposeful construction” or “planning *for* competition” (Hayek, 1944) does not connote – indeed, *cannot* connote – that we are dealing with some coherently formed “*ism*” or “*end-state*”. Rather, the necessity for neoliberal ideals to be put into practice by, in and through existing state forms and sociospatial relations highlights the inherently path-dependent, geographical, historically specific, contradictory, relational, emergent, and tendential nature of neoliberal projects. As such we should consider the contemporary construction of capitalist market hegemony as a process of neoliberalization rather than a fully actualized policy regime. And its uneven or “variegated” concrete manifestations are

best thought of as “actually existing neoliberalisms” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Brenner et al, 2010). For Brenner and Theodore this means emphasizing:

“...the contextual *embeddedness* of neoliberal restructuring projects insofar as they have been produced within national, regional and local contexts defined by legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles” (2002:4, emphasis in original).

This is not to ignore or underplay the hegemony of market disciplinary discourses in the “worldwide imposition of neoliberalism” and its attempts to “restructure the present” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Brenner et al, 2010). Rather, it is to underscore the “ongoing creative destruction of political-economic space at multiple geographical scales” as “existing institutional forms [and landscapes] are transformed into emergent neoliberal projects” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 4). Indeed, although the market oriented restructuring projects of the past three decades have variously ‘flailed and failed’ forward in their attempts to secure sustainable capitalist economic growth (Peck et al, 2012: 274), if as Marx (1971) asserts capitalist regulation takes place through the habits, rules, norms and valuations of particular institutional social relations, then the various geographically and historically situated politico-institutional infrastructures that neoliberalization confronts are not unproblematic.

As such, Brenner and Theodore’s reworking of Schumpeterian creative destruction to describe the necessarily dialectical moments and processual nature of political-economic change – no matter its Left/Right orientation – entreats the researcher to explore the variegated character of neoliberalization. Moreover, there is a need to recognize the multiple variations that arise as neoliberal reform initiatives are imposed, contested and struggled over “within contextually specific institutional landscapes and policy environments”:

“Most crucially... the notion of actually existing neoliberalism is intended to illuminate the complex, contested ways in which neoliberal restructuring strategies interact with pre-existing uses of space, institutional configurations, and constellations of socio-political power:... the (partial) *destruction* of extant institutional arrangements and political compromises through market-oriented reform initiatives; and the (tendential) *creation* of a new infrastructure for market-oriented economic growth, commodification, and the rule of capital” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 14-15, emphasis original).

To couple this understanding of actually existing neoliberalism with Schumpeter's original formulation of creative destruction in which society will inevitably rally against the inherent crisis tendencies of capitalist markets (and with which Polanyi, Hayek and Friedman were so deeply concerned) is surely to describe an 'actually existing', circuitous, ongoing, and increasingly destructive neoliberal perfect storm. For on the one hand, neoliberalization necessarily challenges and seeks to dismantle the extant social relations and modes of valuation that contradict or resist the regulatory values of the market (Gough, 1996a, 1996b, 2002), whilst on the other, if left unfettered, it creates the very tensions that solicit calls for social justice and fairer social and economic conditions that are a potential challenge to (neo)liberal market rule (Hayek, 1944; Polanyi, 2001/1944).

Yet, as Brenner et al (2010) assert, where market-orientated regulatory projects have failed to overcome the putative shortcomings of the 'collectivist strategies' they have sought to displace, the neoliberal meter has hardly been abandoned. Instead, "endemic policy failure has tended to spur further rounds of reform within broadly neoliberalized political and institutional parameters" (ibid: 209), driving forward a "*spiraling*" process of regulatory transformation – "crisis-induced, crisis-managing and crisis-inducing" (ibid: 210) – that is inherently combative. As they argue:

"Each round of neoliberalization profoundly reshapes the institutional landscapes in which subsequent neoliberalization projects unfold. The substantive character of each round of neoliberalization is forged through the contextually specific forms of friction, resistance, conflict and crisis that are engendered through this combative encounter. In effect, the interplay between neoliberalization projects and inherited landscapes produces a propulsive *ricocheting* of multiple, differentially spatialized yet interconnected double movements across places, territories and scales".

Nonetheless:

"By way of successive, crisis-riven and often profoundly dysfunctional rounds of regulatory restructuring, the ideological creed, regulatory practices, political mechanisms and institutional geographies of neoliberalization have been repeatedly reconstituted and remade... In this sense, neoliberalization has *never* represented a stable institutional 'fix', despite being repeatedly animated by the search for this fix... This is not simply a matter of movements in the global tides: currents, eddies, and

blockages in regulatory dynamics at all spatial scales make a (constitutive) difference” (Brenner et al, 2010: 197-210).

It is little wonder, then, that the neoliberal regime shift of the past thirty-plus years has become such a focus of academic attention with scholars from across the social sciences having interrogated neoliberalization’s power geometries; its social, economic and political consequences; its uneven geographies; its social and political compromises; its contestations, contradictions, mutations and variegations (e.g. Bosanquet, 1981; Harvey, 1990; Peck and Tickell, 1994; Jessop 1995; Held et al, 1999; Bourdieu, 1998; Stiglitz, 2003; Massey, 2007; Brenner et al, 2010). And with the metrics of the market and processes of marketization still, apparently, hegemonic – despite the increasing frequency, scale, and extent of neoliberal capitalism’s crises – it is also little wonder that academics, politicians and lay people alike are questioning what are, and where are, the alternatives; and how neoliberalism actually survives (Peck et al, 2012).

2.4 Political Economy and the problem of hegemony

One common framework shaping many such accounts of neoliberalization is political economy, which can be broadly understood as the examination of how the political environment (including political behaviour, institutions, policy and ideology) and the economic system (be-it capitalist, socialist or mixed) either influence one another (Weingast and Wittman, 2008) or, indeed, are inseparable from one another (Polanyi, 2001/1944). Brenner et al (2010) for example, root their analysis of variegated neoliberalization in geographic political economy arguing that any sufficient examination of marketised modes of regulatory restructuring and their alternatives must take into account how successive waves of uneven neoliberal forms of capitalism have had cumulative impacts on uneven institutional landscapes across all spatial scales: first, through the establishment of “interconnected, mutually recursive policy relays within an increasingly transnational field of market orientated policy transfer”; and second, through the “infiltration and re-working of geoinstitutional frameworks, or ‘rule regimes’, within which regulatory experiments [necessarily] unfold” (2010: 182). However, despite the theoretical, methodological and empirical purchase that political economy has had (and still has) across the social sciences (Massey and Meegan, 1985; Barnes et al, 2007), this ‘family of approaches’ has come in for much criticism (Payne,

2006). Indeed, scholars working both within the field and beyond it have expressed dissatisfaction with its totalizing and essentialising tendencies (e.g. Gibson-Graham, 1996; Harraway, 1985; Jessop and Sum, 2003; Sayer, 1995). Still others have not been wholly satisfied with its explanatory power of *how* neoliberal capitalism has gained such purchase (e.g. Cox, 1987; Jessop, 2004; Joseph, 2012; Larner, 2000, 2003; Ong, 2006, 2007; Sum, 2004, 2009).

Jessop and Sum (2003), for example, root their approach to a more ‘culturally inflected’ political economy firmly within the Marxist tradition, which “examines the specificity of the basic forms, contradictions, crisis-tendencies and dilemmas of capitalism” as well as “their conditions of existence and potential impacts on other social relations” (Jessop, 2004: 161). Certainly, the authors state that the relevance of Marxism comes, in large part, from its “ambition to provide a totalizing perspective on social relations as a whole” in terms of the existence, dynamics and social organization of capitalist (re)production (Jessop and Sum, 2003: 1001). However, they reject any claims that it is able to interpret the world as a closed totality – particularly when expressed by one-sided deterministic arguments such as economism, politicism, ideologism, voluntarism or class reductionism. Thus, taking the ‘cultural turn’ seriously in its readings of neoliberalization, CPE stresses the contingent and always tendential nature of the different moments of capital accumulation rather than reifying, naturalizing or essentialising them as “objective forces” as often found in orthodox Marxist accounts, or, indeed, neo-classical economics (Jessop and Sum, 2003; Jessop, 2004).

However, for Barnett (2005, 2008) the sensitivity to contingency and tendential transformation such as that expressed in the culturally- and/or geographically- inspired accounts of Jessop and Sum (2003) and Brenner et al (2010) merely illuminates “distinctive manifestations of what, nevertheless, remain *varieties of a single genus*” (2005: 8). As such, they help to produce a narrative of neoliberalism as a “hegemonic” project. Indeed, Barnett (2005) argues that no matter the sensitivity with which it is handled, neoliberalization is still presented as a programme of ideas, policies and governance arrangements that vigorously pursue privatization, the liberalization of markets, competition, private property rights and the like. Furthermore, all are done in the interest of capital accumulation, and all are diffused downwards and outwards

through an ideologically grounded project sustained by an identifiable set of institutions located, predominantly, in the West. As a result, authors in the political economy tradition are basically proposing “a new variant of a hegemonic class-driven project of state restructuring in the interests of free markets and expanded accumulation” – often further inflecting their conceptions of neoliberalization through the lens of Gramscian state theory (ibid: 8).

For Barnett, the inflection of Gramsci entails two important propositions: first, “that political dominance is exercised by the formation of coalitions amongst different interests”; and second, “that the primary medium for suturing together such formations is a set of coherent ideas and images of the world” (ibid). In turn, the latter proposition involves tying together elite actors within a “ruling bloc” around these hegemonic ideas, which must, then, also do the “more ordinary ideological work of legitimizing the political subordination of entire populations” (ibid). In light of Gramsci’s desire to escape any economic determinism associated with Marxism, he theorized the capitalist state as two over-lapping spheres: a ‘political society’, which rules through force, and a ‘civil society’, which must rule through consent (Heywood, 1994; Morton, 2007; Strinati, 1995). In Gramsci’s eyes, the latter was the public sphere in which ideas, norms, values and beliefs are shaped and where the hegemony of the ruling class is reproduced in and through cultural life, assisted by the media and respected institutions such as universities and the church to ‘manufacture’ consent and legitimacy (Heywood, 1994: 100-101). As Strinati’s rendering of Gramsci explains:

“Dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the ‘spontaneous consent’ of subordinated groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominated and dominant groups” (Strinati, 1995: 165).

In this sense, the accomplishment of hegemony signifies that dominant groups have, somehow, succeeded in persuading other groups (or classes) to accept a set of moral positions, ideas, and political and cultural values that are not, strictly speaking, their own. Consent is thereby “given” by a majority of the population to reproduce a particular direction that is put forward by those in power. As such, a sort of “common sense” prevails in and through which an ideological consensus is practised and dispersed (Heywood, 1994; Morton, 2007; Strinati, 1995).

Much to Barnett's chagrin, the turn to Gramscian notions of hegemony to help explain the political legitimation of neoliberalization thereby "...conveniently resolves the analytical problem of the relationship between politics and economy" (2005: 8). Neoliberalism as hegemony presents a clearly defined, purposive project in which the logic of capital is a "directive ideology" perfectly capable of dominating social relations by subordinating public values to those of the market. It, thus, 'bridges the gap' between the economic and political elements of political economy by subjugating the public to the private, the state to the market, and the social to the economic (Barnett, 2005, 2008; Brown, 2003; Clarke 2006). As Clarke puts it: "we [no longer] have to worry about how to think about 'relative autonomy' since we (apparently) live in a period when politics and economic interest are so directly fused" (2006: 91). Yet, as Barnett argues, the problem with many political economy accounts of neoliberal hegemony is that "they lack any clear sense of *how* consent is actually secured, or any convincing account of *how* hegemonic projects are anchored at the level of everyday life, other than implying that this works by 'getting at' people in some way or other" (2005: 9).

2.4.1 *The turn to Foucault*

In this regard, many scholars have turned to Foucault's understanding of governmentality to help explain 'the how' of neoliberal government (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999). The potential salience of governmentality becomes apparent from a series of lectures delivered by Foucault towards the end of the 1970s in which he develops an understanding of "*the art of government*", particularly in terms of (advanced) liberal forms of government, which have at their core the notion of individual freedom (Foucault, 1980, 1997, 2000, 2004). According to Foucault (2000), through the genesis of political knowledge and the advent of statistics during the late-17th/18th century period of enlightenment, government became centrally concerned with understanding the *population* and the mechanisms, apparatuses, tactics and techniques by which it could be regulated and governed (Dean, 1999; Elden, 2007). In recognizing that "population has its own regularities, its own rate of deaths and diseases, its cycles of scarcity, and so on" the population as a whole, rather than the family unit, became the ultimate end of government: its welfare, its improvement, the increase of its wealth, health, etc (Foucault, 2000: 216). At the same time, the economy became re-centred at

the level of the state, inseparable from population as a specific and principal sector of its reality and, therefore, a domain in and through which government would need to operate in order to achieve its ends (ibid; Dean, 1999: 19).

In elaborating this *'art'*, Foucault uses the term *'governmentality'*, which, as Lemke explains, “demonstrates Foucault’s working hypothesis on the reciprocal constitution of power techniques and forms of knowledge” (2001: 191). Indeed, governmentality links the meaning of to govern (*'gouverner'*) to systems of thought (*'mentalité'*) indicating that in order to understand the apparatuses, tactics and techniques of government we must, first, understand the political rationality that subtends them (Lemke, 2001: 191). For Rose and Miller (1992), political discourse is a technical domain in and through which reality is represented, analyzed and rectified. In part, this suggests that political rationalities are *'morally coloured'* addressing the appropriate powers and responsibilities of authorities and directing them towards a whole host of political and social ideals, for example: economic efficiency, economic growth, competitiveness, freedom, justice, equality, and so on. Furthermore, they are *'grounded in knowledge'* in that they express or embody some understanding or account of the nature of the objects to be governed. Finally, political rationalities are *'made thinkable through language'*. Here, political discourse is far from mere rhetoric. It forms an *'intellectual machinery'* for problematizing reality within the considerations of a political rationale (see also Dean, 1999; Lemke, 2001).

Indeed, it is through problematizations that seek to understand certain failings or difficulties in society that practical and technical *'programmes'* or *'regimes'* of government are devised (Dean, 1999; Rose and Miller, 1992). Problems of regulation, market freedom, economic competitiveness and the like, may all elicit the attention of government, which draws upon the expert knowledge of economists, academics, professionals and other authoritative parties, to calculate ways in which a problem may be rectified. Although the problems upon which government focuses are intrinsically linked to the ideals, desires and values of government itself, programmes of government thereby claim legitimacy through embodying a “rationalised knowledge” of the problem to be dealt with whilst concomitantly assuming that the problems faced by society “appear susceptible to diagnosis, prescription and cure by calculating and normalising intervention” (Rose and Miller, 1992: 183).

This brings us to the second element of Foucault's hypothesis: power.

Governmentality involves a complex form of power, which has at its core not principals of domination and discipline or instruments of the law (though these cannot be excluded) but rather, the *normalisation* of processes through the conduct of individuals and collectives in a population. As such, through the employment of various tactics, techniques and what Foucault (2000: 217) refers to as "technologies of government", Government seeks to get the population to "self-govern": to act upon and within itself in order to achieve its needs and aspirations whilst remaining (largely) oblivious to its manipulation. In this sense, government becomes the '*conduct of conduct*' encompassing both the government of others and the government of the self. It is a "calculated means of the direction of how we behave and act" (Dean, 1999: 2).

For Rose and Miller technologies of government are the multitude of mechanisms through which political rationalities and the desires, ideals and values of government become "capable of deployment" and, potentially, "normalised" (1992: 183). Within a multifarious network of connections, diverse forces (be they legal, professional, administrative, financial and so on) seek to regulate the actions of groups and individuals in relation to "authoritative criteria" based on calculations, knowledge and expertise. As such, we see the emergence of a central concept of governmentality, which is the ability to "control at a distance" through mechanisms immanent to the population (ibid: 184). In this sense the state becomes part of a vertical and horizontal network of actors, able to 'steer' individuals toward achieving specific outcomes rather than (solely) disciplining them into doing so (Dean, 1999; Joseph, 2012).

Dean (1999) argues that conceiving human conduct, identity and agency as attributes that can be regulated, shaped and normalised through surreptitious actions implies some amount of autonomous reflexivity on the part of the individual or collective. In part, this has a distinctly moral undertone if morality is to be taken as "the attempt to make oneself accountable for one's own actions" (ibid: 11). In addition, there is an assumption that those being governed are free and capable of making rational and responsible decisions regarding their own actions. As such, government presumes "a set of standards or norms of conduct by which actual behaviour can be judged, and which act as a kind of ideal towards which individuals as groups should strive" (ibid:

10). In this sense, the “authoritative criteria” set out in the technologies of government encourage actors to work out “where they are” in relation to “where they should be” and to come up with strategies for “improvement” (Rose and Miller, 1992: 186-187). Thus, in modern liberal forms of government, “power is not so much a matter of imposing constraints upon citizens as of ‘making up’ citizens capable of bearing a kind of *regulated freedom*” (ibid: 174, emphasis added).

Whilst it is tempting to view Foucault’s understanding of governmentality as a rejection of power as centralized, top-down and hierarchical, Joseph suggests that it “helps qualify” and “give nuance” to our understanding of *how* power works (2012: 13). For, rather than rejecting the idea of sovereignty or state power, Foucault is concerned with understanding how the disparate arenas of rule and governmental techniques through which identities must be shaped, behaviors must be regulated, and the population must be governed become incorporated into the state’s juridical and administrative procedures (1980:121). As Foucault puts it: “rather than asking ourselves what the sovereign looks like from on high, we should be trying to discover *how* multiple bodies, forces, energies, matters, desires, thoughts and so on are gradually, progressively, actually and materially constituted *as subjects*” (2004: 28, emphasis added).

A key implication of this technical aspect of government is that it contests those models that wish to see government as solely, or predominantly, a manifestation of an ideology or world-view. If government is to achieve its ends or to realize its values, it must use technical means. As Dean summarises:

“[Government] therefore involves various forms of thought about the nature of rule and knowledge of who and what are to be governed... it employs particular techniques and tactics in achieving its goals... it establishes definite identities for the governed and the governors, and... it involves a more or less subtle direction of the conduct of the governed” (1999: 18).

2.4.2 Governmentality and the production of hegemony

Before I turn to some of the substantive difficulties associated with governmentality and its implementation alongside political economy, it is worth exploring how various studies of neoliberalization have utilized governmentality to great effect (although the

examples presented here also need problematizing, which I undertake in the next section). For example, in exploring the possibilities for liberal democracy's⁵ survival in a post-9/11 America, Wendy Brown (2003) underscores the pervasiveness of a neoliberal political rationality, which (in her eyes) has, over the past quarter century, emerged "*as governmentality*", eroding liberal democratic institutions and practices through the extension and dissemination of market values, not only in terms of the economy but, moreover, "*to all institutions and social action*" (ibid: 7, emphasis in original). Indeed, eschewing the inevitable historical unfolding of capitalism's laws and the "ontological givenness" of rational economic behaviour found in many traditional political economy accounts, Brown argues that neoliberalism is a *constructivist project* which, through discourses, policies, tactics and techniques that promulgate its criteria, has deliberately set out to produce rational, self-interested actors, instill entrepreneurial behaviour, and impose a hegemonic market rationale for decision-making in all spheres of life. Whereas, over the past two centuries, liberal democracy has provided a modest ethical gap between economy and polity through sustaining the relative moral, economic, and political autonomy of certain institutions both from one another and from the market – for example, the law, elections, the police and the public sphere – a neoliberal political rationality has closed it by submitting every aspect of political and social life to economic calculation. Thus, for Brown, "liberal democracy cannot be submitted to neo-liberal governmentality and survive" (2003: 23). As she explains: "there is nothing in liberal democracy's basic institutions and values... that inherently meets the test of serving economic competitiveness or... withstands a cost benefit analysis" (ibid).

Wendy Larner (1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2005, 2007) and Aihwa Ong (1999, 2006, 2007, 2008) have also applied the analytical weight of governmentality to great effect in their respective accounts of neoliberalization in New Zealand and Asia. Indeed, rejecting neoliberalism as a top-down ideology or, as Ong (2007) more forcefully puts it, a capitalist "economic tsunami", both authors underscore that the technical implementation of neoliberal policies has set a framework of market governance, attempting to re-constitute and mobilize very particular identities and subjectivities

⁵ Liberal Democracy in the USA should not be confused with neo-liberalism. Whilst the latter puts forward the notion that the best mechanism for the organization of society is that of the market with very limited government intervention, the former – in the USA – often signifies a progressive political position that supports, for example, the welfare state and other components of New Deal politics, alongside relatively high levels of social and political intervention (see Brown, 2003).

cast along market lines. For example, Larner's (1997) examination of when New Zealand's telecommunication's sector first came under neo-liberal calculation, emphasizes how political technologies such as the "Telecom Pledge" and the "Kiwi Share" enabled the Government to propagate ideals of efficiency and competitiveness in its attempts to produce a "hegemonic consumer identity" and a "neo-liberal self" (ibid: 384). Similarly, Ong (2007) describes how, in China, neoliberal calculations have identified spaces and populations in and through which global market opportunities can be optimized. Here, on the one hand, market reforms have been introduced through "zoning technologies" that encode alternative territorialities for experiments in economic freedom and entrepreneurial activity. On the other, pro-market policies have sought to foster self-enterprising and highly skilled subjectivities capable of creating surplus value and economic growth through rational, self-interested behaviour.

Furthermore, a number of scholars have sought to develop productive dialogues between neo-Foucauldian understandings of governmentality and neo-Marxian structural accounts of capitalism and/or neo-Gramscian concepts of hegemony in order to examine the neoliberal remaking of capitalist market social relations (e.g. Ekers and Loftus, 2008; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Jessop, 2007, 2009; Jessop and Sum, 2003; Kiersey, 2009; Peet, 2002; Springer, 2012; Sum, 2004, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2005; Watts, 2003; Weidner, 2009). Indeed, Sum's (2004, 2009) rendering of cultural political economy specifically seeks to 'creatively interweave' Gramsci and Foucault by addressing not only the "discursive and extra-discursive dimensions" of their analyses but, also, by integrating "their respective strengths into a broader historical materialist framework" (2009: 186). On the one hand, Gramsci provides "the lens for studying how hegemony is produced and re-produced in class divided and otherwise inegalitarian social formations" as well as "the 'real' mechanisms, tendencies and counter-tendencies that interact to produce the processes and events at the level of the actual" (Sum, 2009: 185-186). On the other hand, Foucault provides "a valuable corrective to studies that naturalize and reify economic and political objects and categories" (Sum, 2004: 2) by providing "an entry point into the discursive aspects of subject formation and techniques of subjectivation" (Sum, 2009: 186). As such, Sum argues that CPE is able to:

“...examine the relationship between the micro-dynamics of disciplinary-governmental power relations and their strategic codification to produce specific hegemonic effects [or “imaginaries” such as that of ‘the market’] at more encompassing levels of social reality. [CPE thereby] ...facilitates a deeper examination of the discursive features of capitalist social relations and how they are mutually implicated with structural features in *the production of hegemony*” (ibid, emphasis added).

2.4.3 Governmentality and its problematizations

Although such accounts claim a hegemonic inculcation of a neoliberal market rationale across various spatial scales, even some of the authors themselves recognize problems with governmentality’s explanatory powers. For instance, Larner (1997) and Ong (2007) are highly sensitive to the intensely geographical and uneven nature of political processes. As such, they stress that the tactics, technologies and techniques implemented by respective governments have necessarily had to take into account the uneven social, political and economic norms and values of already existing contexts. Larner, for example, emphasizes how the “Telecom Pledge” and the “Kiwi Share” were necessarily shaped by “a legacy of the social”, explicitly responding to public concern about the risks of deregulation and privatisation by pinning down certain values through the ex-ante implementation of regulatory safeguards to protect domestic and rural consumers (1997: 383). Similarly, Ong (2007) describes how the zoning technologies she examines have been implemented and market subjectivities called upon “without annulling the existing political matrix of socialist planning” (ibid: 6). Hence, in China, pro-market policies “are interwoven with a socialist state, private enterprises flourish alongside repressive laws, [and] consumer culture cohabits with the lack of inalienable rights” (ibid).

Attempting to account for such tendential variegation in terms of hegemony, Sum underscores that “even when hegemonic projects seem to create social unity and consensus, these are always partial, unstable, and temporary” (2004: 2). As she explains:

“...hegemony is vulnerable to de-stabilization at the personal, institutional, and macro-structural levels. On the personal level, the multiple subjectivities of individuals and the gap between discursive justifications and actual practices open a space for alternative conceptions of society and counter-hegemonic subjectivities. Similarly, on the institutional and macro-structural levels, because hegemonic projects exclude,

marginalize, or suppress some identities and interests in creating an ‘illusory community’, space opens for subaltern forces to engage in tactics of resistance, demands for reform, and counter-hegemonic strategies” (ibid).

Given such problematizations, it would seem that the turn to Foucault in some theorizations of neoliberalization is simply insufficient to overcome the limitations or shore up the weaknesses in Marxist or neo-Gramscian theories of contemporary socio-economic change (see also Ekers and Loftus, 2008 for a valuable critique). Again, Barnett (2005: 7) takes up this argument positing that the dominant interpretation of governmentality mistakenly supposes that the desired subject effects of policy programmes or ‘rule regimes’ are either: a) “automatically realized”; or b) “more or less successfully contested and resisted” (see also Bevir and Rhodes, 2006). This leads the author to a two-fold argument. Firstly, given that governmentality must account for both the precise regulation of conduct at the very detailed level of everyday practice *and* the extension of state power across large territorial scales, it has “exactly the same problem as theories of neoliberalism-as-hegemony” (ibid: 9). For Barnett, Foucault avoids this problem in his illumination of disciplinary power “wherein detailed and bounded spatio-temporal routines automatically inscribe precise subject effects” (ibid). Yet, across the spatial scales implied by “control at a distance” (Rose and Miller, 1992: 184), governmentality ignores the necessary trade-off between “*scope and intensity*”, thereby continuing “to present the reproduction of power-relations as a matter of *social control*” (Barnett, 2005: 9; see also Allen, 2003). As such, the turn to Foucault still fails to address what Barnett calls “middle ranges of agency” by remaining enslaved to a constructivist version of subject-formation “that privileges mechanisms of recognition and subjection” (2005: 9). Furthermore, these mechanisms are seemingly un-problematically sustained across time and space in an environment where social relations and subjectivities are, otherwise, apparently “free” (see *The turn to Foucault*, above) (see also Clarke, 2006).

Secondly, Barnett argues that the instrumental or “technical” (Dean, 1999) application of governmentality proffers an overly simplistic, two-dimensional image of political power in which a multitude of actors “out there” are forever engaging in acts of resistance and contestation *against* imposed policy programmes. As a result, between an overtly economic rendition of political economy, and an overly statist interpretation of governmentality, neoliberalization manages to “squeeze out” any

thicker sense of social relations, reducing them to nothing other than “residual effects” of hegemonic governmental projects (2005: 10). Indeed, drawing on the example of the UK, Barnett argues that, whilst the privatization, deregulation and marketisation of public services may form “one dimension” of a hegemonic project that has contrasted the freedom of market provision against the rigidities of the state, state restructuring has in fact involved a multiplicity of factors “that add up to a much more dispersed populist reorientation of policy, politics and culture” (ibid). For Barnett, populist tendencies such as changing consumer expectations, the decline of deference, refusals of subordination, and the emergence of contested inequalities cannot be understood simply as technically induced expressions of a hegemonic neoliberal rationale. Rather, “they are effects of much longer rhythms of socio-cultural change” that have emanated “from the bottom up”, complicating and confounding simplistic understandings of the past forty years or so as a straightforward shift from the left to the right, from collective-public values to values of the market, or a binary opposition between good and bad (ibid). Thus, the technical focus of governmentality has tended to overlook “the pro-active role of socio-cultural processes in provoking changes in modes of governance, policy and regulation” (ibid). Moreover, it has also tended to oversimplify the multiple and complex nature of social, economic, cultural and political practice and change.

Although, echoing Brenner et al (2010), I would question Barnett’s assertion that the market oriented restructuring that has been witnessed since the late 1970s can just as plausibly be viewed as “a muddled set of ad hoc, opportunistic accommodations” as it can the outcome of relatively coherent political/ideological neoliberal projects (2005: 10), his overall argument is still important. For the combination of Foucauldian renditions of governmentality with neo-Marxist/Gramscian narratives of neo-liberalism leaves too many unanswered questions regarding the multiple and complex processes that take place at the intersections between abstract, centrally promoted policy programmes – their tactics, their discourses, and their imaginaries – and the multiplicity and complexity of socio-spatial relations at the level of everyday practice (see also, Clarke, 2004; Keil, 2002; Tilly, 1999, 2000, 2002).

Some scholars of political economy and/or governmentality have turned to a variety of theories, concepts and authors to try to overcome such perceived weaknesses,

including: feminism to help illuminate oppositional identities and the often contested, messy and hybrid nature of discursive practices and political imaginaries (Larner, 2000); De Certeau (1985) and Spivak (1988) to provide insights into the dilemmas, negotiations, tactics and ‘weapons’ of subalterns as everyday resistances to market values provide counter-hegemonic narratives (Sum, 2004); Rancière (2003) to theorize how the constitution, organisation and normalisation of space confers on some the power to govern while leaving others to be dominated (Dikeç, 2007); and Lefebvre (1972, 1991) to underscore the *everyday* as “the decisive category linking the economy to individual experiences” (Keil, 2002: 235, quoting Ronneberger, 2002: 43). Each of these studies has provided important insights into how processes of neoliberalization are necessarily made problematic through particular ‘categories’ such as subjectivity, values, geographies and the everyday – reminding us that the potential reproduction of a neoliberal market hegemony is neither a straightforward restructuring of the political economy nor a simple application of technologies of power.

However, it is my contention that deepening our understanding of single ‘categories’, whilst useful, is simply insufficient when considering the multiplicity and complexity of everyday socio-spatial economic practice in and through which the abstract policies of neoliberalization such as deregulation, privatization and, most centrally, marketization, must necessarily be negotiated (see Pollard et al, 2015 for a not dissimilar argument). As my arguments have demonstrated, it is, most centrally, the way that economy is normally practised in time and place that neoliberalization seeks to change. Identities and behaviors, geographies and temporalities, evaluations and activities, values and the construction of value, and a multitude of (often politically charged) social relations and their materialities – all interact to make up ‘economic life’. As such, I suggest that an approach is needed to grapple with the intersections and interstices between regulation and the multiple and complex nature of the *Ordinary Economy* (Lee, 2006, 2011). Such an approach will provide deeper insights into *how or if* neoliberalization emerges in time and place – even if such insights will always, and inevitably, be only partial. Through such a lens the term neoliberalization would be understood to connote *the (attempted) transformation of existing socio-economic spatial relations into emerging economic geographies, more-or-less governed by the metrics and values of the market.*

2.5 Emerging Economic Geographies and the *Ordinary Economy*: a conceptual lens

It is precisely the multiple intersections, tensions and negotiations between abstract regulatory policies and the complexity of everyday socio-economic practice that is the focus of Lee's (2006, 2011) thesis on the *Ordinary Economy*. Deeply concerned with the irreducible material need for actors to produce value and to maintain economic coherence across time and space such that social reproduction can be sustained, Lee argues that, whilst productive arrangements must always be in place to enable sustenance, there are multiple ways in which this irreducible need can be met. In as much as, together, it is the production, consumption, exchange and circulation of value that constitute the inescapable material relations that people must engage with in order to make a living, economic geographies are, quite obviously, *economic*. However, the centrality of such materiality does not signify, indeed *cannot* signify, that economic geographies are necessarily driven by a purely material set of economic logics that can be inculcated through the insistent promulgation of market metrics. For as Lee (2011: 368) asserts, "both the potentially infinite variety of ways in which people may make their living across space and time... as well as the necessary non-economic relations involved in all economic activity" underscore the diverse social relations of economic geographies that give rise to such variety and shape the material forms, dynamics and trajectories of the economy (see also, Carrier, 1997; Massey 1997; Sayer 1997; Jessop 2009; Pollard et al, 2015).

As such, the *Ordinary Economy* can be understood as a diversity of economic geographies that are performed and practised through a continual tension between: a) "certain material imperatives of societal reproduction"; b) "the potentially infinite, day-to-day variability of economic practices, social relations and conceptions of value"; and c) "the regulatory and calculable frame of 'the economy'" (Lee, 2006: 413). Whilst economic geographies are certainly subject to varying degrees of politically reflexive modes of evaluation, regulation and normalisation, they always already involve multiple forms and relations of value that are simultaneously practised as an integral part of ordinary, everyday social life. As a result, Lee contends that "economic geographies are always hybrid and always in a state of becoming" and, therefore, we should expect normalisation and diversity to constantly exist alongside one another in the *Ordinary Economy* (ibid: 413-421).

To consider political economy – in this case, neoliberalization – through a complex lens is not altogether straightforward (Jessop, 1997). Yet that is precisely the point. For, as can be seen from my argument set out above, the economy is far more complex than much disciplinary or political thinking allows. It is both comprised of and, in turn, comprises a complex range of social relations and understandings of value, and is an inescapably integral part of ordinary, everyday life – “full of the contradictions, ethical dilemmas and multiple values that inform the quotidian business of making a living” (Lee, 2006: 414). As such, there can be no simple separation of (political)-economy from society, or the economy from place (Mitchell, 1998, 2008). Indeed, both the practicality of economic activity and the relationality of its construction reveal the inseparability of polity, economy and society and, thus, the inherently geographic nature of (political)-economic practice (Lee, 2006, 2007, 2011).

2.5.1 Value in economic geographies

To help us deal analytically with such complexity, Lee (2006) tackles head-on the question of value in economic geographies, which is of central concern to *all forms* of modern society: particularly those who seek to regulate the economy. Although Clarke suggests that in practicing the economy (and perhaps, even, studying it) “it is necessary to have done with value” (2010: 265), Lee echoes Gunnar Myrdal’s (1969: 15) claim that value is “the starting point for all economic analysis which really tries to probe beneath the surface”, arguing that:

“...economic geographies are the geographies constituted through peoples’ struggles to construct circuits of value sustainable across space and time, and so to make a living through the consumption, exchange and production of value” (2006: 417).

Explicit here is the imperative of the practical consistency of economic practice without which material social reproduction would be untenable, or at minimum, extremely difficult. Whilst there is ample evidence that economic geographies are not easy to sustain over the long-term – particularly under the inherent crisis tendencies of capitalism and/or the chronic conditions of underdevelopment (Harvey, 2005) – they must have some degree of “economic coherence” if the anticipated coordination of activities in circuits of value is to be sustained (Storper and Salais, 1997: 20).

However, privileging the question of value asks us to interrogate not only *what* economic geographies are about but, also, *how* the economy is practised. Economic

geographies are made by people. They are socially constructed, not simply pre-given (Sayer, 1995). As such, Lee enjoins us to consider “the relationships between the materially inescapable feature of economic activity... and the diversity of values shaping such materialities” (2006: 417).

Let us consider, then, what Lee proposes value to be and how value becomes valuable: i.e. “what it is that endows things and practices with *worth*” (Lee, 2007: 22, emphasis added). For Lee, “the nature, value and evaluation of value, emerge from economic practice” – the latter being shaped by three distinct notions of value that are interlinked (2006: 415).

First, *value* refers to the contribution made to the (re)production of social life by the vital “life-sustaining” things, ideas, labour power, relations and practices etc., that are produced, exchanged and consumed in circuits of value. Whilst life-sustaining value may be evaluated and valued in diverse ways, the point is that it enables the sustenance or improvement of economic activity through the circulation of material and immaterial items that are of value, worth or use – if only for a period of time and in a particular place.

Second, *Value* refers to the Theories of Value that seek to interpret, understand and identify the bases, origins and nature of Value. Theories of Value ask the important question: “where does Value come from?” On the one hand, Theories of Value may be somewhat philosophical, for example, in proposing that Value is derived from the labour process (following Ricardo and/or Marx). On the other, they may be more practical or ‘ordinary’ in proposing, for instance, that Value is embodied in a commodity (be it a thing or practice) that reflects certain values of the producer. These are themselves derived, at least in part, from prevailing social relations of value and may be considered as the basis of the commodity’s Value. Thus, a belief in individual human creativity – as espoused by Hayek, for example – may itself be understood as a profoundly significant basis and source of Value. It is not surprising, then, that interpretations and understandings of where Value comes from are “brought to bear on, and contested in the practice, performance and regulation of economic life” (Lee, 2006: 415).

Finally, *values* are the “forms of life, relations, things, thoughts and practices that are held dear and [to some] are considered inalienable”. They are, also, the norms, standards and ethics that both inform social activity and, by which, evaluations are, in part, made (Lee, 2006: 415-416).

Importantly, unlike Ricardo’s labour theory of value, wherein the prices of goods are directly determined by the amount of labour time embodied in their production; and unlike Marx’s subtle, yet notable, modification of Ricardo’s theory, wherein Marx asserted that the value of a commodity is determined by the labour that is *socially necessary*⁶ to produce it, Lee is in no way *essentialising* value. Indeed, as I will elaborate in a moment, Lee is concerned less with searching out the essence of value than with recognizing that – whatever its bases – value is, in practice, always a relational construct that cannot exist outside of time and space or, somehow, pre-exist the material and social relations of production, consumption and exchange. Not dissimilar to Brenner et al’s (2010) emphasis on the *processual* nature of neoliberalization, Lee’s account of value is wholly contextual; for value, *per se*, is not the author’s concern. Rather, Lee is interested in value in terms of *practice*: in what makes economic geographies work in time and place, and what material and social relations shape their trajectories.

Thus, for Lee, the implications of his triptych of value raise two key questions. First, how are value, societal reproduction, and understandings of Value linked? And second, whether, therefore, interpretations of where Value comes from “may, or may not be *validated* in social practice or *imposed* in political practice” (ibid: 415, emphasis added).

Given the necessity for economic practice to enable social reproduction, one might assume that the answer underlying both these questions is the achievement of ‘material success’: i.e. the capacity to produce enough value in circuits of production, consumption and exchange in order for society to reproduce itself (Sheppard and Barnes, 1990). However, Lee argues that material success is “a necessary but insufficient condition of life-sustaining value in economic geographies” (2006: 415).

⁶ Where *socially necessary* signifies that both the techniques of production and the commodities themselves are socially necessary in order to co-ordinate – through the price mechanism – supply and demand (see Sheppard and Barnes, 1990: 36-37).

Certainly, to be successful “economic geographies must be capable of producing at least as much value as is necessary to enable those involved in them to stay alive and to be fit enough to continue to produce value” (ibid). And for this to occur, a surplus of value (wherein outputs exceed necessary inputs) is always required to deal with life’s ups and downs and disruptions. However, as the author asserts, not only is value practised and performed in diverse ways across the multitude of circuits and networks of value that make up economic geographies, but various understandings and practices of Value are “simultaneously present within such circuits” (ibid). Crucially, this is because:

“...the values (embodied, for example, in individualism, egalitarianism, environmentalism... [and] modernism) that inform social activity, shape the particular forms and evaluations of ‘life-sustaining’ value produced, consumed and exchanged within economic geographies... Such values can never be merely suppressed, ignored or reduced to trivial relations of economically marginal significance. Indeed, they shape the conduct and consequences of economic geographies in myriad ways” (ibid).

This is an important insight, for Lee is not merely underscoring the multiplicity of values and notions of Value that help shape economic geographies *per se*. Rather, despite the fact that value is the means of economic success in the reproducibility of society, the author is calling into question the notion that all economic geographies either tend towards or operate under some iron Law of Value – such as the labour theory of value elaborated by Marx⁷ – or, indeed, can be guided by *just one* particular set of values – such as that elaborated through a “directive” neoliberal ideology (Barnett, 2005).

Certainly, a commodity may embody Value that reflects the values of the producer – for example, in the form of aesthetics, certain environmental considerations, or notions of social justice. However, such Value may not enable the spatial and temporal sustenance of economic geographies by embodying the value necessary to facilitate material social reproduction. For what is of value to one person (or in one context) may not be of value to (or in) another. Thus, as Lee underscores, the reproducibility of society is never resolved, solely, in material terms. Rather:

“... it is the social relations of value – involving shared or imposed understandings

⁷ See Harvey, 2006: 14-38.

about the nature of value, Value and values – which establish the criteria through which the performance of economic geographies may be evaluated” (ibid: 416).

I will return to the social relations of value in more detail in Section 2.5.2 below.

However, of central importance, here, is what Sheppard and Barnes (1990: 37) refer to as “validation through exchange”. The act of exchange links consumption and production (and, of course, use-values to exchange-values – see Harvey, 2006). But it does far more than simply transfer value between parties. Value is valued for a reason – if only in a particular time and place (Lee, 2011; Miller, 2008). Thus, if value is to be exchanged *and validated* it must be valued in some way or other by both the producer and consumer. Yet, as Lee (2006, 2011) underscores, there are multiple understandings of Value and values that may facilitate this crucial process in the *Ordinary Economy*.

The implications of such complexity for regulation are profound, as Lee expounds:

“The dialectic between material practicality and social diversity is forever present. Unless effective mechanisms of regulation and evaluation are in place to maintain specific criteria by which value is assessed – and thereby to impose a particular trajectory upon economic practices and the spaces through which they take place – value may be ever changing, not only in form and specification, but also in the mode and criteria of its evaluation. Under such circumstances, the sustenance of the practical coherence of economy across time and space may be severely hampered” (ibid: 416).

What Lee is highlighting here is the constant struggle that *all* modern societies must face, that is: *the struggle to control what is and is not value* (see also, Smith, 1984, on the struggle for socialism). And this is particularly true for those forms of governance where neoliberal values and processes dominate and, thus, power and regulation are seemingly pursued ‘at a distance’ (Barnet, 2005; Dean, 1999). For the valuation of life-sustaining value is never resolved simply via the metric of material success, but also via the multiple and complex social ideals, beliefs, values and notions of Value that constitute economic practice. In short, value is socially constructed: it means nothing outside the environmental, geographical, social, historical and practical context in which it is evaluated (Lee, 2011: 374). As a result, value is *inherently diverse and full of political possibilities*.

Since, then, as Marx posits, “value cannot stalk around with a label describing what it

is” (1967: 74, cited in Harvey, 2006: 37), Lee enjoins us “to discover how value is valued through social practice” (2006: 416). Indeed, following Daniel Miller’s (2008: 1122) suggestion that the question to be asked is not “what value is” but “what value does”, and David Harvey’s (2006: 38) assertion that “the goal is to find out exactly how value is put upon things, processes, and even human beings, under the social conditions prevailing”, Lee underscores that “some iron Law of Value is never simply pre-given to economic practice or to its analysis” (2006: 416; see also Doel, 2009). As Lee explains:

“Like the economic practices through which it is created, circulated and consumed, value is geographically and historically variable. But, at the same time, the imperative of adding – and not subtracting – value through the practices of economic activity is vital to the sustenance of social life. It is the political and often violent negotiation of this space between variability and constraint in circuits of value that defines ‘what is and is not value’ and so shapes the trajectories of economic geographies” (2006: 416-417).

2.5.2 *Social relations of value*

Given the above account, it would seem that in attempting to regulate the economy across time and space it is necessary for government and/or other parties with vested interests to try to shape the ways in which value is practised in economic geographies, and to try to ‘crowd out’ other forms of valuation that oppose the values and notions of Value they seek to promulgate. And yet, as indicated above, choosing between and practising various understandings and relations of value through constantly dynamic circuits of production, consumption and exchange are, as Lee puts it, “the central purposes of economic geographies” (2006: 417). Indeed, if we return to the ruminations of Hayek set out at the opening of this chapter, his dislike of neo-classical economics as an ‘objective’ science that could purportedly disentangle, model and predict the validity of markets stemmed primarily from his deep concern with the inescapably *subjective* and *situated nature* of economic activity and its ramifications.

Certainly, the diversity of economic practices that has been demonstrated to exist in modern society is not at question in this thesis (e.g. Carrier, 1997; Cellarius, 2000; Gibson-Graham, 1995, 1996, 2010; Hall and Soskice, 2001; Humphrey and Hugh-Jones, 1992; Smith, 2002; Smith and Stenning, 2006). Rather, it is *how*, or if, neoliberalization emerges in and through such diversity that is of concern (and, indeed,

what this might tell us about the nature of neoliberal hegemony). For it is the diversity of human economic activity – its inescapably *subjective* and *situated* nature – with which politics must become entangled – *and dominate* – if the trajectory of the economy is to be shaped: ideologically, materially and practically.

As demonstrated above, it is simply not possible to consider economic geographies merely in material terms; for the fact that they have social purpose, are meaningful and intentional, tells us that “[t]he social relations that shape and guide them are a necessary component of their materiality and their trajectories” (Lee, 2011: 3). It is not, then, that ‘anything goes’ in the circuits and networks of value that make up economic geographies. Where applicable, the material characteristics and social relations of, say, capitalism cannot be discounted in understanding the form and dynamics of modern socio-economic practice. But nor can we take such characteristics and relations as simply ‘given’. This is because the diversity arising from history, space and place – that is, *from human geography* – cannot be reduced to a single entity like capitalism as “*the bedrock of explanation*” (Barnes, 1989: 299, emphasis added). As Lee confirms:

“...the social and material circumstances... in which ‘capitalist acts’ may emerge are themselves shaped in part by earlier relationally formed circuits of value, with the conditions prevailing there and then formed by earlier circuits still, and so on back” (2006: 420).

As such, it is the examination of the formative nature of the multiple and complex social relations of value in economic geographies that result from this space and time path-dependence that I suggest will deepen our understanding of “*how* hegemonic projects become anchored at the level of everyday life” (Barnett, 2005: 9).

Taking a relational view of economic geographies recognizes that all economic activity is strongly shaped by the particular context in which it literally *takes place*, thereby underscoring the temporal and spatial path-dependency of economic geographies and the “political responsibilities” that they carry (Lee, 2006, 2011; Massey, 2004, 2005; Bathelt and Glückler, 2011). Indeed (and, again, reflecting back on my arguments above), this unavoidable grounding and placing of economic activity in concrete economic geographies is highly formative of political practice, highlighting that, whilst power relations are certainly important, a two-dimensional understanding

of political power is insufficient in interrogating how economic geographies emerge (as Foucault, himself, recognized⁸).

Certainly material diversity is inherent in economic geographies in that the nature and organisation of production, consumption and exchange in circuits of value are inescapably spatial and temporal (see for example, Polanyi, 1944; Carrier, 1997; Lee and Wills, 1997; Peck et al, 2012, etc.). However, given that such materiality is itself socially constructed, it is through the social relations of value that economic diversity primarily arises. For Lee (2006: 419), social relations of value can be understood as:

“...relations of shared, or imposed, understandings about the nature, norms, purposes and parameters of circuits of value within particular spaces and times... They make sense of, legitimate and give direction to value and circuits of value and so provide the ties that bind economic geographies together...”

It must be noted that this latter point is highly problematic for neoliberal forms of governance that seek to inculcate individualistic, rational, profit-maximizing behaviour on the part of economic actors, and hence attempt to reduce the space for political reflexivity – a point that I’ll return to in a moment. Nevertheless, Lee continues:

“...Critically, social relations of value offer a framework of evaluation of circuits of value (what is good/bad; better/worse), thereby mapping the limits of the (economically) desirable and setting the agenda for economic regulation. By so legitimating (if only through relations of power or by force) the distribution of value amongst those engaged in economic geographies, social relations of value shape the ways in which people engage in consumption and production and condition the ways in which they come to understand their relationship to the natural and social world...”

However, and most crucially:

“...Social relations of value reflect the diverse socialities of human being... and so deny the possibility of the autonomous individual reacting mechanically and independently to external stimulæ” (ibid).

Again, these are important insights. Social relations of value help people to make sense of their economic life-worlds by shaping their understandings about why, normally,

⁸ Indeed, in his lecture on “governmentality” Foucault argued that in recognizing the importance of the population with regards to the economy, government would necessarily need to take into account the needs and desires of the population in order to govern. Interestingly, Hayek argued the same noting that government could not, successfully, ignore the historical trajectory of the economy and society in setting out its policies.

they do what they do in economic practice. By offering a framework of evaluation, social relations of value are necessarily politically charged, reflecting, for example, the struggles over: how value is distributed through society (e.g. through the market or through the state); the nature, form and dynamics of the material and social conditions of production and consumption (for instance, Fordism versus flexible specialization); the possibilities of what is economically desirable or even attainable; the form and parameters of the regulatory system, itself; and not least, therefore, the meanings of the socio-economic geographies of evaluation and understanding that emerge and which establish the (always contingent, yet ever emerging) social bases of what value is and how it should or can be practised.

However, offering a framework of evaluation does not imply that diverse forms of value cannot be simultaneously present or co-exist in circuits of value. Nor are the social bases of value purely economic. In fact, the diverse socialities of being human – what Sum (2004) might term, the “multiple subjectivities” that both individuals hold and which differentiate actors from one another – alongside the non-economic relations that inevitably influence all economic activity intimate that “multiple logics” are necessarily at play in the evaluation of economic practice (Lee, 2006). Indeed, for Lee (2006, 2011) the sustainability of circuits of value across time and space *requires* a diversity of norms, values and evaluations of Value such that socio-economic life can be reproduced. Put another way, given the fragility and relative “improbability” of the smooth reproduction of complex economic geographies, retaining a “repertoire” of social and material practices and resources is essential in responding successfully to disturbances and crises (Jessop, 2004: 162, drawing on Grabher, 1994).

The implications of such multiplicity for neoliberal forms of regulation that seek the organisation of society through the market are insightful – revealing neoliberalism’s double nature, its contradictions and its inherent crisis tendencies. For on the one hand, the central purpose of neoliberalization is to *set value free* and enable its “*frictionless*” evaluation through the vast expanse of the capitalist market and the practice of ex-post, *voluntary exchange* (see Friedman, 1980; Sayer, 1995; Peck, 2010). Yet, on the other hand, one of its most foundational bases of maintaining economic coherence in terms of social relations of value is to narrow down the diverse socialities of being human and the multiple logics of evaluation through the inculcation of a particular

“economizing” identity: i.e. homo oeconomicus (see Callon, 1998; Caliskan and Callon, 2009a, 2009b). It is not only, then, that some theorizations of political economy and governmentality are unable to account for such contradictions in the production of hegemony. Neoliberalization is, itself, inherently contradictory. It is, *at once*, both expansive and constraining, requiring enormous work and regulation if it is to be maintained at all.

Very much in line with Polanyi’s (1944) “double movement” there are two primary factors to emphasize here. First, as Lee asserts, the more work that neoliberal regulatory practices put into emphasizing the individual and self interest in the economy “the less that politics involving any form of collective action is seen as either relevant or desirable” (2011: 377). Second – and as witnessed by the recent global financial crisis (Pani and Holman, 2013) – setting value free to the evaluative criteria of the capitalist market can severely undermine the “economic coherence” of concrete economic geographies that Storper and Salais (1997: 20) note is central to their ongoing coordination and reproducibility. Both of these factors underscore the potential loss of “the ties that bind economic geographies together” (Lee, 2006: 419) and highlight the intense probability of neoliberalism’s variegation (Brenner et al, 2010); or, as Baudrillard (1994) and Malin (1990) might argue, the *unattainability* of its utopian imaginary.

That said; “the political effort” required to sustain economic coherence across time and space against any tendencies towards incoherence is a constant feature of *all* economic geographies (Lee, 2006, 2011). Full as they are of the multiple and complex social relations of value, diverse materialities and the recursive and reflexive evaluations of actors regarding their past experiences and potential futures, economic geographies are constantly prone to interruptions. As Lee puts it:

“...[E]conomic geographies are always becoming, always a product of interior and exterior influences, always fragile and always perpetually interrupted and reconfigured by the diverse relations, ethics and subjectivities of daily life in and around which value flows or is unable to flow. At the same time, social and material imperatives interrupt, reconfigure and constrain daily lives which must come to terms with [those imperatives]” (2006: 418).

Again, Lee draws us back to the constant tension that exists in the *Ordinary Economy*

between the material imperatives of social reproduction, the potentially infinite variability of day-to-day social relations and practices of value, and the regulatory frame of the economy. And yet, the emergence and embedding of particular sets of social relations of value – such as those of a neoliberally informed capitalism – cannot be simply understood as powerless, innocent or benign. Indeed, as Lee (2006, 2011) confirms, once particular social relations of value have begun to take hold in society through their successful operationalization and institutionalization those actors involved in them and/or benefiting from them have an interest in maintaining their practical economic coherence.

2.5.3 Economic imaginaries, semiosis and the (always partial) production of hegemony

Drawing on cultural political economy (Jessop and Sum, 2001; Jessop, 2004, 2009; Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008), Lee suggests that one particular “political effort” to achieve such coherence is the variation, selection and retention of specified “*economic imaginaries*”, which is enabled by the process of “*semiosis*” (2006: 420). However, as I will elaborate in a moment, Lee also stresses that when confronted by the inherent diversity of the economy, the political application of such imaginaries is far from unproblematic.

According to Jessop, economic imaginaries – such as that of the market or the knowledge-based economy – are “semiotic systems that frame individual subjects’ lived experiences of an inordinately complex world and/or inform collective calculation about that world” in light of some representation of economic success (2009: 344). They “identify, privilege, and seek to stabilize some economic activities from the totality of economic relations and transform them into objects of observation, calculation, and governance” (Jessop, 2004: 163). Semiosis implies “the intersubjective production of meaning” (Jessop, 2004: 161), and all social relations have a semiotic nature (although they are not reducible to such) in that meaning and meaning making are central to social practice. Indeed, Jessop (2004, 2009) argues that semiosis is both causally efficacious and meaningful in that it both enables actors to interpret the world *and* helps to explain it. As a condition for “going on in the world”, individuals and organizations must first make sense of it through what Jessop refers to as “complexity reduction” (2009: 337); and a central mechanism by which complexity

is reduced is semiosis wherein actors focus in on particular aspects of the world and attribute meaning to them either on their own terms or on the terms of others. Thus, as actors interact with complex environments, only salient data is given their full attention, implying that they hold some sort of model or understanding of the real world that enables them to relate semiotically to their social and material environments – allowing them to rank or select between meanings (Bains, 2006; Hoffmeyer, 1997).

Given the reductive nature of economic imaginaries, Jessop differentiates “‘the actually existing economy’ as the chaotic sum of all economic activity (broadly defined as concerned with the social appropriation and transformation of nature for the purposes of material provisioning) from ‘the economy’ ... as an imaginatively narrated, more or less coherent subset of these activities” (2004: 162). As the author expounds:

“The totality of economic activities is so unstructured and complex that it cannot be an object of calculation, management, governance or guidance. Instead, such practices are always oriented to subsets of economic relations (economic systems or subsystems) that have been discursively and perhaps organizationally and institutionally fixed as objects of intervention. This involves economic imaginaries that rely on semiosis to constitute these subsets (ibid).”

Thus, for Jessop, meaning making not only serves to reduce complexity: it also gives meaning to the world, as some aspects of it are deemed more salient than others. Hence, as economic imaginaries are operationalized as semiotic referents, their discursive representations of the world – as well as how they are construed by individuals and organizations – “contribute to the construction of the natural and social world in so far as they guide a critical mass of self-confirming actions premised on their validity” (2009: 338; see also Sum and Jessop, 2013: 149). Given that economic imaginaries are semiotic systems that comprise genres, discourses and styles, they may represent distinctive ways of acting and interacting; particular social practices and corresponding materialities; and certain identities – all represented from a particular vantage point regarding the social world, and all attempting to regularize that vantage point within the social world.

Importantly, Jessop argues that economic imaginaries develop across spatial scales as political, economic and intellectual forces attempt to delineate and (re)define “subsets of economic activities as subjects, sites, and stakes of competition and/or as objects of

regulation” (2004: 163). In so doing, they articulate visions, strategies and projects that, in Lee’s terms, reflect the practices of value, values and Theories of Value that such forces hold in relation to these imagined economies. Furthermore, the regularization and construction of specific economic imaginaries may involve – amongst other forces – political parties; organised business interests; organizations such as the WTO and OECD; unions; policy transfer networks; as well as education through the mass media and the like. Such forces turn to a variety of “governmental techniques” – in the broad sense of government (Miller and Rose, 1992) – employing power and knowledge to gain recognition of, and institutionally and structurally embed, the preferred social relations and materialities of these imagined economies (Jessop, 2004: 163). As such, Jessop (2004, 2009) follows a similar line of critical inquiry to Sum (2004) by combining a neo-Gramscian political economy and neo-Foucauldian governmentality in exploring the production of hegemony.

However, as Lee argues, to become hegemonic, economic imaginaries – such as that of the market – must necessarily be understood and constructed “through the diverse day-to-day practices and social relations of making a living” (2006: 421). Furthermore, if economic imaginaries are to be borne out as more than “arbitrary, rationalistic, and willed” (Gramsci, 1971: 376-377) they must significantly correspond to real material and social relations in the ‘actually existing economy’, which includes relationships between economic and non-economic factors (Lee, 2006: 414; see also Jessop, 2004, 2009). As a result, relatively successful economic imaginaries may well have a somewhat “performative” role (Callon, 1998; MacKenzie et al, 2007) in shaping socio-economic relations as they become temporarily fixed in and through economic geographies as actors move from construal to construction or from complexity reduction to, what I term in this thesis, ‘*complexity re-introduction*’ (elaborated in Chapter Six). However, they must, as Lee asserts, “draw upon prevailing social relations of value” to achieve any relative success (2006: 421).

The practical and material coherence and particular notions of value that are represented through economic imaginaries are “constantly confronted by social diversity” (ibid). As such, by virtue of competing understandings, evaluations and practices of value, and through the inevitable shortcomings in their capacity to specify the totality of the economic and non-economic relations involved, each imagined

subset of the economy can only ever be partially realized (see also Jessop, 2004: 163; see also Jessop, 2009; Jessop and Sum, 2001; Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008). As Lee concludes:

“Semiotically- and materially- constituted social relations of value, and the calculations and Theories of Value through which economic activity is evaluated are the very language through which economic geographies are performed... More than that, they are what make for the relationality and diversity of economic geographies and the value produced, exchanged, and consumed through them... Thus, notwithstanding the powerful and insistent constraint on creative economic thought and the inhibition of economic geographies asserted through the practice and performance of Laws of Value, it is hardly surprising that normalisation and diversity are constantly co-present in the ordinary economy” (2006: 421).

2.6 Conclusion

As the above arguments suggest, it is simply not possible to reduce economic geographies to a single set of dominant social relations of value that remains static across time and space. Although the material and social form and relations of economic geographies may be imagined as subsets of economic activity before they are put into action, they are, as Lee argues (2006, 2011), in a constant state of emergence, and are full of multiple, complex, competing and often conflicting social relations of value that make up the *Ordinary Economy*. Thus, whilst the political-economic process of neoliberalization can be understood to connote *the (attempted) transformation of existing socio-economic spatial relations into emerging economic geographies more-or-less governed by the metrics and values of the market*, the arguments set out in this chapter underscore that any attempted transformation will only ever be partial. In the transition from “imagination to practice” (Lee, 2006: 421), or as Jessop puts it, in the movement from “social construal to social construction” (2009: 336), innumerable modifications, interruptions, displacements, values, logics, and often competing logics are involved, which inevitably disrupt the normalisation and embedding of reductive policy metrics and values.

However, I have also argued that an entirely relativist position cannot be taken in examining the economy. It is not that ‘anything goes’ in the circuits and networks of value that make up economic geographies. The material and social characteristics and the power relations involved in neoliberal forms of capitalism – which are themselves

geographically diverse – cannot be ignored in understanding the form and dynamics of socio-economic practice as economic geographies emerge under processes of marketisation. Indeed, the fact that economic geographies have social purpose, are meaningful and intentional underscores that the social relations of value that shape and guide them, as well as the non-economic relations involved, are central to their materiality and their trajectories. And this is true of *any* form of modern socio-economic practice.

Hence, as I argued in Section 2.5.2 above, it is the examination of the formative nature of the multiple and complex social relations of value in economic geographies that I suggest will deepen our understanding of “*how* hegemonic projects become anchored at the level of everyday life” (Barnett, 2005: 9). Social relations of value are, as Lee underscores, “the very language through which economic geographies are performed” (2006: 421).

As set out in Sections 2.3 and 2.4 of this chapter, geographically- and critically-grounded approaches to political economy and governmentality that have emphasized the importance of context as an inescapable concrete necessity have contributed enormously to academic and scholarly knowledge regarding neoliberalization’s progress. Yet questions regarding *how* purportedly ‘top-down’, hegemonic policy programmes of marketisation become anchored in the complexity, diversity, and apparent fragility of ordinary, everyday economic contexts remain unanswered. For even where critically grounded fusions of neo-Gramscian understandings of political economy with neo-Foucauldian renditions of governmentality are claimed to have facilitated “a *deeper* examination” of “the production of hegemony” (Sum, 2009: 186, emphasis added), such studies still, as Jessop states, “*pose questions about the regularization of [economic] practices in normal conditions*” (2009: 341).

As this chapter has demonstrated, identities and behaviors, geographies and temporalities, evaluations and activities, values and the construction of value, and a multitude of often politically charged social relations and their materialities all interact to make up ordinary economic life. Thus, as Jessop states somewhat problematically (see Chapter Six below), although the medium- to long- term effects of relatively successful economic imaginaries may or may not tend to “narrow the scope” for

variation in economic practice, in the transition from imagination to practice, “there are always interstitial, residual, marginal, irrelevant, recalcitrant, and plain contradictory elements that escape any attempt to identify, govern, and stabilize a given economic arrangement or broader economic order” (2004: 163).

The relational approach of Emerging Economic Geographies and the *Ordinary Economy* that I have set out here recognizes, as Lee asserts, that “economic geographies are constituted geographically, politically and socially” and, hence, *are practised* “as co-present and dynamic hybridizations of alternative, complementary or competing social relations which may vary over the shortest stretches of time and space” (2006: 421). And it is this diversity of human economic activity and contexts with which politics must become entangled – and attempt to dominate – *if* the trajectory of the economy is to be shaped: ideologically, materially and practically.

Thus, it is the suggestion, *or hypothesis*, of this thesis that neoliberalization – with the emphasis on its processual nature – is a bottom-up as well as top-down process, which is constructed *in practice* in the context of an attempted normalisation of one particular notion of value in the face of a *diversity* of values. And this has implications for what is meant by neoliberal market hegemony.

2.7 Overall research aim and questions

The overarching aim of this PhD is to resolve the complex interplay between neoliberally informed policy programmes of marketisation, which are, themselves, geographically diverse, and the diversity of ordinary socio-economic contexts into which those policy programmes are inserted or imposed. Thus, given the theoretical arguments set out in this chapter for examining processes of marketisation through the conceptual lens of Emerging Economic Geographies and the *Ordinary Economy*, the thesis explores the following research questions:

- To what extent do neoliberal policies of marketization succeed in shaping the subjectivities of economic actors – their values, evaluations, actions and activities?
- In order to move on in the world, how do actors make meaning of, and negotiate their positions within, the multiple and complex social relations of value that make up their economic geographies?

- Given the inherent temporal and spatial path-dependency of economic geographies, what impact do the existing economic geographies and identities of actors have on their future trajectories?
- As economic geographies emerge under processes of neoliberalization, what happens to the inherent diversity of understandings and practices of value?

The empirical findings of these research questions are detailed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Chapter Eight then draws conclusions from these investigations.

3 Methodology

3.1 Ontological and epistemological foundations

Ontologically, this thesis holds that our economic material forms and social practices are shaped by multiple and complex social relations of value, and that normalisation and diversity are constantly co-present in the *Ordinary Economy* (Lee, 2006, 2011). Economic geographies and the circuits of value of which they are constituted are, as Lee puts it, “a condition of social survival”, and in order to sustain social life they “are constituted of certain necessary processes involving the establishment of social relations and the material practices of consumption, production and exchange” (2011: 376). At the same time, the specific circumstances in and through which these necessary processes literally *take place* are not only geographically and socially variable, they are profoundly influential and the consequence of political and social struggles. As such, I argue that economic practice is at once *structured/constrained* – in that it is comprised of relations of power, institutions, norms, and certain material and social imperatives, dynamics and tendencies – *and variable*, in that it is subject to multiple and complex interpretations, evaluations, values, logics, beliefs, dilemmas, and relations – all of which emerge relationally in time and place in the struggle to define what is and is not value.

To further clarify this ontological position, let me set out what I reject and what I accept in terms of other approaches to, or understandings of, the economy. Firstly, it is not that I reject *critical* approaches to political economy and/or governmentality. For, as a critical realist might argue, people do not make the world just as they please, nor do they make it under circumstances that are wholly and directly chosen by themselves (Sayer, 1992: 19). Structuring factors do exist and do have causal effects (Jessop, 2005).

Yet, the concrete practices of economic geographies cannot be understood as singular, linear or essentialising processes (Lee, 2011; Sayer, 2007). As Sayer states in general terms:

“...In changing our social and natural milieux we change the forces and conditions which shape the character of society and its people. As new kinds of work and social relations develop, people develop new needs. In other words, human beings have a

capacity for ‘self change’, for making their own history.... [which] not only happens *to* people but is made *by* them consciously or unconsciously” (1992: 19, emphasis added).

Everything that is of the social world is made in and through social relations. Hence, we must reject the tendencies of orthodox political economy to naturalize and/or reify its theoretical objects. Similarly, we must reject the tendencies of some political economy and governmentality accounts to offer scant explanations of how subjects and subjectivities are formed, how different modes of calculation emerge and how these become normalised and get modified (Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008: 1157). However, the social world that we encounter in our everyday lives is no less real for the fact that it has been produced and is continually being reproduced, by people.

Secondly, therefore, I do not accept the entirely relativistic notions of society that arise from the “immaterial discursivism” (Springer, 2012: 134) or “babble of voices” (Ley, 2000: 620) put forward in some postmodernist or constructivist accounts (e.g. Olsson, 1991). Certainly, I hold that the semiotic process of meaning making plays a central role in the constitution and reproduction of society. The moment that the economy is either imagined or put into practice by individuals and organizations it is confronted by a multiplicity of subjectivities, interpretations, logics, and social relations of value that are both economic and non-economic. For this is precisely what the economy is: it is complex, it is multiple, it is ongoing, and it is relational.

However, social relations of value *necessarily* reflect political struggles and power relations over the shaping of identities, subjectivities, and economic geographies; and these struggles and power relations constrain the limits of social and material reproduction, which are a fundamental reality or necessity to economic practice (Lee, 2006, 2011). As such, we must reject the tendencies in some postmodernist and/or constructivist accounts to suggest that nothing really exists outside of discourse or thought, or that through discourse, almost anything can be conjured into being. As Springer argues, such discursivism “dismantles the possibility of any apparatus that might be used to effectively talk about the ‘real world’” (2012: 134).

Thus, my ontological position arises from a fundamental recognition of the inescapable intersections between the material and the discursive: their co-evolution, co-constitution and co-existence in the *Ordinary Economy*. Since economic

geographies are necessarily relational – in other words, since they are socially constructed, and historically specific both temporally and spatially – they are inherently diverse. However, multiple, intersecting material and social relations of value that are *intrinsic to* those economic geographies, and often involve considerable relationships of power, concomitantly constrain, and/or seek to constrain, that diversity. In the ontology of the *Ordinary Economy* where normalisation and diversity necessarily co-exist with one another, this is an inescapable truth.

The ontological position that I have outlined almost refuses to be pigeon holed by narrow disciplinary thinking. Epistemologically, I understand Lee's thesis on the *Ordinary Economy* as similar to – *but different from* – the cultural political economy project (or post-disciplinary paradigm) set out by Ngai-Ling Sum and Bob Jessop (2013). For these authors, to know what we know about contemporary political economy, CPE is best understood “as a response not only to a one-sided emphasis on the materiality of economic and political institutions but also to a one-sided cultural turn in political economy” (ibid: 22, emphasis in original). Indeed, in attempting to find a suitable analogy to describe such a disciplinary dilemma, Jessop and Sum refer to the Greek myth of Scylla and Charybdis in which the challenge is to steer a perilous path between two sea monsters on either side of the narrow straits of Messina with the dangerous *structuralist* rocks of Scylla on one side and the inescapable *constructivist* whirlpool of Charybdis on the other (ibid).

However, in my interpretation of Lee's work, I am not trying to navigate my way through two opposing extremes – either ontological or epistemological. Economic geographies are at once constrained and variable, and the extremes of structuralism and constructivism simply don't provide a valid epistemological position or horizon for “knowing what the world is like” (Gregory, 2000: 226). The oppositional positions of Scylla and Charybdis necessarily *exclude* the Other, meaning that from either perspective nothing *socially real* can ever be seen. Thus, even if, as Rose (1997: 319) so accurately underscores, as researchers “we cannot know everything, nor can we survey power as if we can fully understand, control or redistribute it”, in order to know that the world is complex, my epistemological position must *be* complex in and of itself. Subsequently, as an economic geographer, in order to “deal analytically with

the complex multiple relations between the inescapable material singularity, dynamics and tendencies of economy and the diverse economic practices shaped by multiple social relations of value”, as Lee (2006: 422) enjoins us to do, I must accept the realities of an inescapably *situated* social complexity – its geography, its temporality and its relationality – and, thus, I must accept the limitations of any academic research that seeks to explore it.

In the sections that follow, I set out my research methodology, which adopts a case-study-orientated, mixed methods approach. Understanding that my explorations of a socially complex reality can only ever be partial and never fully impartial (Rose, 1997), the best that I can hope is that the methods chosen and my subsequent application of them will shed some light on the complex interplay between variability and constraint in the *Ordinary Economy*.

3.2 The case study approach

3.2.1 Introduction: The marketisation of higher education in England

As set out in Chapter One, this thesis undertook an examination of the marketisation of HE in England, which presented a rich and interesting case through which to investigate my research questions. Very briefly, HE in England holds a strategically important position in a global HE market, itself a vital element of an expanding global knowledge economy. As a state funded public service, it was long-held as a *public good* – particularly in terms of its home undergraduate student body – even if in purely economic terms HE fails to reach the exacting criteria that may be expected (see Calhoun, 2006). However, like many other national HE systems around the world, HE in England has been consistently challenged to marketise as part of a wider neoliberal agenda of public sector reform. Indeed, since the early 1980s when a neoliberally informed Conservative Government first attempted to induce a “cult of efficiency” (Stein, 2001) into HE, a variety of policy measures have been introduced to instill market values, including: new public management structures and culture; metrics to induce competitiveness and efficiency; the incremental introduction of undergraduate student fees; and the dismantling of the block teaching and capital allocation grants. With the implementation of the HE White Paper in 2011 (BIS, 2011a), the most recent aim of a Conservative-led coalition Government has been to induce a “demand-led system”. This has been seen by many critics as a deliberate attempt to steer the

evaluations, actions and activities of HE's actors through the mechanisms, criteria and values of market relations, and to induce market subjectivities – transforming institutions into *producers* and students into *consumers* (Collini, 2010).

However, as in most other countries, the HE system in England is inherently diverse, differentiated by: mission; wealth; status and reputation (often indicated by both national and international rankings); geographies (in terms of location and both national and international spatial reach); and the socio-economic makeup and geographies of their student bodies (specifically, home undergraduates). As such, I felt that the varying histories, identities, geographies and, hence, path-dependencies of institutions would, likely, impact HEIs' evaluations and negotiations of any neoliberal market imaginary set out in policy and the possibilities for its transformation; thereby helping to shape the economic geographies of HE that emerge. Thus, in order to fully explore my research questions, I undertook a *multiple-case study*, examining four diverse HEIs in England, selected for either their “representative” or “deviant” qualities (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Yin, 2003). The methodology for selecting the cases is detailed in Section 3.2.3, below.

3.2.2 *Why undertake a case study approach?*

Reframing my research questions to reflect the field of HE, and posing one further question regarding the penetration of a market discourse into English HE policy itself, the aims of my research were:

- To set out how far a neoliberally informed strategy of marketisation has penetrated HE policy in England, with a particular focus on the current White Paper;
- To elucidate to what extent neoliberally informed policies of marketization are succeeding in shaping the subjectivities of HE's institutional leaders – their values, evaluations, actions and activities;
- To understand how, in light of recent policy measures, individual HEIs make meaning of and negotiate their positions within the multiple and complex social relations of value that help shape their economic geographies;
- To explore what impact the existing economic geographies and identities of individual HEIs have on their future trajectories – particularly given the inherent temporal and spatial path-dependency of economic geographies; and

- To illuminate how understandings of the value of HE, alongside the subjectivities of the HEIs, may or may not emerge as more multiple and complex under processes of neoliberalization.

Given the above aims, I felt that a case study approach was appropriate. For Yin, a case study signifies “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (2003: 13). Similarly, Flyvbjerg (2011: 301) draws on the definition set out in the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2009), which states that a case study is “an intensive analysis of an individual unit (as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment”. In both instances, the authors underscore that a researcher would undertake a case study where she (or he) particularly wishes to explore *contextual conditions* because she believes that they may be “highly pertinent” to the object under investigation (Yin, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2011). Furthermore, a well-designed case study allows the researcher to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” such as policy implementation and organizational and managerial processes (Yin, 2003: 2).

As noted above, having recognized the diversity of the English HE system, it seemed clear to me that to fully explore my research questions I would need to examine multiple cases. Indeed, Yin had suggested that a multiple-case design was preferable to a single-case design due to the analytical benefits that could be derived from comparing and contrasting across cases (2003: 53). On the one hand, analytic conclusions that arose independently from two or more cases would be “more powerful” than conclusions from a single case. On the other, where common conclusions arose from diverse situated contexts the “external generalizability” of findings would be “immeasurably expanded” compared to a single-case study (*ibid*). What mattered was that there should be a clear rationale for selecting the cases. For instance, what Flyvbjerg (2011) calls a “deviant” case might help underscore a point more dramatically than a “typical” or “representative” case; or a “paradigmatic” case as an “exemplar” of my field could potentially offer a valuable reference point for developing theory and understanding.

The positions set out by Flyvbjerg (2011) and Yin (2003) resonated strongly given my ontological position and object of enquiry. I felt that a multiple-case study of HE in England comprised of appropriately selected HEIs would provide a solid foundation for exploring my research questions, testing ideas and building theory. Indeed, following Flyvbjerg (2011) and Yin (2003), the main strength of the approach was the depth of understanding it would afford me in the exploration of contemporary, complex social phenomena: that is, the detail, richness, completeness, and within-case variance that I could bring to life and illuminate through the in-depth study of real-life, situated economic practice across diverse HEIs. Recognizing that cases evolve over time, often as a string – or what I call in this thesis, an ‘*iterative emergence*’ (see Part II, Preface) – of meaningful, concrete events and developments that are historically and geographically grounded, helped me to consider my cases and research questions holistically. In this sense, through exploring the material and social relational context of my selected universities, my aim has been to make a significant contribution to academic knowledge in relation to the more abstract questions set out in Chapter Two.

Of course, although case studies can provide opportunities for the researcher to explore particular situations in great depth, I was aware of suggestions that they were somehow inferior to investigations involving a large sample (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2003). For example, Abercrombie et al (2006) argued that the detailed examination of one or two examples could not provide reliable information regarding the broader class. Thus, the authors suggested that generalizations from case studies were impossible, and that their contribution to scientific knowledge was limited. Moreover, they argued that the case study was primarily useful as a “preliminary investigative tool” and for “making hypothesis” rather than testing them. As such, they suggested that the approach was limited in theory building and in analytical rigour (ibid: 46-47).

In contrast, Flyvbjerg (2011) and Yin (2003) have both argued that the concerns regarding transferability, theory building, dependability, credibility and validity have stemmed from some basic misunderstandings of what research and case studies are all about (see also Baxter and Eyles, 1997). Yin, for instance, suggested that it is a mistake to think that case studies can produce the sort of “statistical generalizations” about a population that arise from inferences made on the basis of “empirical data

collected about a sample” (2003: 32). Rather, the mode of generalization that case studies can underpin – particularly where multiple cases have been undertaken – is “analytic generalization” wherein the empirical results of the cases can be compared to, and contrasted with, previously developed theory. This allows the researcher to either uphold or refute the claims of existing theories or to propose new theories. Indeed, according to Simons (2009), this is one of the great strengths of the case study.

Further, both Flyvbjerg (2011) and Yin (2003) have suggested that social science has rarely, if ever, succeeded in producing general theories that are context-independent. Rather context-*dependent* knowledge is essential to theory building – bearing in mind, of course, that *any* academic knowledge can only ever be partial (Rose, 1997). This resonated strongly for me as a geographer, particularly given the complexity, relationality and situated nature of economic practice. Through the in-depth exploration of ideas and research questions, causes can be successfully linked to outcomes provided that the researcher remains sensitive to concepts, context and historical explanations, and provided the study is undertaken with due rigour.

3.2.3 Selecting the cases for in-depth study: the first steps

As noted above, the English HE sector is diverse, serving a broad range of students from home and abroad and holding different “missions”, which can be primarily distinguished as teaching-led or research-led. As such, I felt that the varying histories, identities and geographies of HEIs would impact their evaluations and negotiations of policy and the possibilities for its transformation. In addition, my analysis of the HE White Paper (BIS, 2011a) – the method for which is detailed below – indicated that the Government was attempting to steer the HE sector on two, potentially, competing fronts – specifically regarding home undergraduate students. On the one hand, Government was attempting to free-up value to market relations – at least, to a greater extent than ever before – and to induce competition in both higher and lower ranked institutions⁹. On the other hand, it was attempting to pin down a certain understanding of the value of HE through the ex-ante regulation of institutions to promote social mobility (see Chapter Four, Section 4.3.3). Understanding the diversity of the system

⁹ Wherever the term ‘rank’ is used throughout this thesis, it refers to the widely employed process of placing HEIs into a hierarchy based on certain sets of criteria found in a variety of both national and international league tables.

alongside the competing discourses of policy, helped form my rationale for selecting the HEIs that would comprise my multiple-case study.

Lower-ranked and, often, more teaching-led HEIs, are frequently considered to be ‘recruiting’ universities with relatively high populations of home undergraduate students from National Statistics Socio Economic Classifications (NS-SECs) 4 to 7. Such HEIs are often thought of as ‘local’ as they recruit relatively high numbers of undergraduate students from schools and further education (FE) colleges within their immediate locales – particularly in highly populated catchment areas (see, for example, MacLennan et al, 2000; McNay, 2006). Conversely, higher-ranked, research-led HEIs are thought of as ‘selective’ with relatively high populations of home undergraduates from NS-SECs 1 to 3, and a much broader spatial reach in that highly qualified students compete for places from all over the country (ibid).

To a degree, such suggestions can be verified using statistical data freely available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). HESA Table T1a (HESA, 2011a) provided variables pertaining to the participation of young, full-time, first-degree undergraduates entering HE in 2009/10, giving a detailed breakdown of home, first-year, undergraduate student bodies of all HEIs in England: their recruitment from state schools and colleges, NS-SECs 4 to 7, and low-participation neighbourhoods. Unfortunately, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), which provides HESA with its student data, had altered its data definitions and recording procedures significantly across the period 2006-2009, thereby precluding any time series comparisons due to validity issues. I therefore utilized the most recent data available (i.e. 2009/10). When examined alongside the Times Higher Education (THE) rankings of the 2008 RAE¹⁰, a preliminary examination of Table T1a – specifically, the ‘location-adjusted benchmark’ – seemed to suggest that there might be some correlation between the rank and mission of a university and the spatial reach of the institution. However, as detailed by HESA (2011a), their location-adjusted benchmark is only ‘suggestive’ of this. In order to overcome this problem, specific data regarding the number and percentage of students recruited from the ‘local’ area and their socio-

¹⁰ Ranking by the RAE enabled me to distinguish broadly between research-led and teaching-led HEIs without noise from other variables (such as National Student Survey scores) fuzzifying the data. This is dealt with further below.

economic backgrounds (NS-SECs 1 to 3 and 4 to 7) was purchased from HESA, which I then analyzed.

Problematic in requesting the computed data from HESA, was the arbitrary definition of 'local'. Unfortunately, HESA's only means of establishing a measure for 'local' was by creating a 'within X distance' radius around the main campus of each HEI (indicated by postcode), and relating this to the postcode of students' normal residence (domicile) at the time of recruitment/application. The two postcodes were then linked to Ordnance Survey Gridlink datasets to give the Easting and Northing of each student domicile and institution location. The difference between the Northings and Eastings (obtained using the National Statistics All Fields Postcode Directory) of each were then squared and added together. The square root of the result provided the distance between the two in a straight line (according to Pythagorean theorem) (HESA, 2011c).

Whilst, technically, the method available was robust (being accurate to within 50 meters in line with Ordnance Survey grid reference inaccuracies), methodologically deciding upon some arbitrary distance to define 'local' that would suit all HEIs was problematic in a number of ways. First, some HEIs are relatively isolated by their physical and human geographies. For example, the University of Exeter is situated in a sparsely populated area of Devon, just six miles North East of Dartmoor National Park. Further, it is some 35 miles from Plymouth and 70 miles from Bristol both of which have their own universities. Yet still, the population of Exeter is just 117,000 (ONS, 2012), which is not large enough to maintain the relatively large size of the university's undergraduate student body which in 2010 stood at 17,720 compared to an average of 18,401 for THE/RAE ranked institutions in England. Second, some HEIs have multiple campuses that are spatially dispersed. For example, the University of Brighton (whose main campus sits in the heart of the city) also has major campuses in Hastings and Eastbourne, which are over 15 and 30 miles away respectively. Any definition of 'local' based on the situation of the university's main campus would, thus, likely omit candidates living locally to distant branch-campuses.

Given such difficulties, any robust methodology for defining 'local' would need to take account of the size of the university and the location of its various campuses; the size of surrounding populations; the proximity of other institutions; and a 'distance'

that would be deemed ‘local’ – commutable perhaps – by potential or attending students. Since HESA informed me that it was able to link its spatial data to other sources provided they were grid-referenced and compatible for use with GIS, following Mateos (2007) I undertook an exacting search of literature to see if other researchers had produced such data, but to no avail. Certainly, some studies had been undertaken, which defined ‘local’ as students attending university while living in the parental home (e.g. Charles, 2003; Christie, 2007; Holdsworth, 2006, 2008). However, such studies would have included students with long commuting distances as well as students who chose to designate their parental address as their term-time address even though the addresses were different. Additionally, UCAS held mobility data on undergraduate acceptances to universities within their domicile region. However, such data would have been problematic for regions such as London in which a high number of universities are located. Thus, I needed to make a choice between undertaking such a study myself (which would have been both time consuming and costly) and making my choice of ‘distance’ as robust as possible given the data at hand.

In order to do the latter, I began by mapping out different radii for a wide selection of universities around the country and found that 15 miles seemed a reasonable figure for the vast majority of HEIs. Whilst a 10-mile radius would have excluded myriad towns that neighbour numerous HEIs (thereby significantly reducing the populations upon which they might draw ‘locally’), a 20-mile radius (suggested by HESA) often overlapped significantly with towns and cities where other institutions were located. For example, a 10-mile radius around the University of Portsmouth excludes Chichester to the East, Petersfield to the North and much of the Isle of Wight – all areas traditionally counted into the wider Portsmouth catchment area (ONS, 2011a). Yet a 20-mile radius significantly impacts Southampton to the West whilst reaching beyond Bognor Regis to the East – both of which have universities or university branch-campuses, and neither of which are classified as ‘local’ to Portsmouth’s “urban area” (ONS, 2011b).

Almost inevitably, a fifteen-mile radius was found to be problematic in some cases and for similar reasons. For example, London has over twenty universities. Given their proximity to one another, fifteen miles may well be deemed too high. And for universities that are quite isolated like Exeter (see above) and Lincoln (which has a

large open hinterland up to Grimsby and Skegness) it may have been too low. However, by mapping out diverse radii around HEIs; checking them against the extent of the relevant ONS urban areas; checking them against potential population draw (ONS, 2011a); noting the proximity of other institutions; and examining the institutions' widening participation agreements to see what areas (if any) they classed as 'local', fifteen miles was deemed a 'reasonable fit' for the purpose of helping to select case studies. Once calculated, I was able to establish:

- 1) The socio-economic backgrounds by NS-SECs 1 to 3 and 4 to 7 of young, home undergraduate students recruited locally in 2009/10 for all HEIs in England; and
- 2) The percentage of HEIs' 'local recruitment' compared to their overall student populations.

A further set of variables from HESA Table T1b (HESA, 2011b) provided domicile data (numbers and percentages) on all students attending English HEIs in 2009/10 including, home, other European, and non-European undergraduates and post-graduates. Together with the first set of variables, this data provided a general profile of the HEIs' 'spatial reach' in terms of their total student populations in 2009/10¹¹.

3.2.4 Computing the data set and making the selection

In order to select my case studies, the above data was interrogated by university against: national THE/RAE 2008 ranking; mission – derived broadly from either, a) Mission Groups – i.e. the Russell group, 1994 group, the Universities Alliance, the Million+ group, and the Cathedral group; or b) individual mission statements where no group affiliation was noted; university 'type' (for example, 'plate glass', Victorian red-brick, etc.); and proposed fees for 2012/13.

Based on Table T1a, HESA provided data for 122 HEIs in England¹². Of these, ninety-eight carried a THE/RAE 2008 ranking for multiple-subject institutions. All single-subject institutions, which are ranked separately, were excluded, as were institutions with incomplete data. Of the remaining ninety-eight HEIs, ten were excluded from calculations due to the spatial dispersion of multiple campuses, and ten were excluded

¹¹ Unfortunately, HESA restrictions prohibit me from publishing the full data set purchased from them.

¹² One HEI from the 123 HEIs in Table T1a withheld data.

on the grounds of isolation (see above explanation). This left a working data set of seventy-eight HEIs. In order to establish if there was any correlation between rank and degree of ‘local recruitment’, a simple linear regression was run between the two variables. An R^2 value of 0.27 indicated that just 27% of institutions’ degree of local undergraduate recruitment for 2009/10 could, perhaps, be explained by THE/RAE rank. Examining the data showed that almost all London institutions had a higher than average percentage of undergraduates living in the local area at the time of recruitment/selection (see Table 3.1, below).

Data Set	Average Local Recruitment (Students with known ‘recruitment distance’ and NS-SEC upon application)	Range
Ex London (56 HEIs)	23.9%	1.3% to 81.7%
London Only (22 HEIs)	49.3%	23.7% to 74.1%

Table 3.1 Average Local Recruitment of First-time, First-year, Home Undergraduate Students in England, 2009/10. Source: Author’s calculations using HESA Data.

To adjust for this anomaly, standard residuals (SR) were calculated for the data set (78 HEIs), and thirteen London outliers (with SR scores of more than +1) were *temporarily* excluded. For the remaining sixty-five HEIs, an R^2 value of 0.48 demonstrated that almost 50% of institutions demonstrated a significant correlation between local undergraduate recruitment and THE/RAE ranking – underscoring just how different London is from the rest of the country. However, from the scatterplot below (Figure 3.1), it was clear that correlation decreased as university ranking lowered.

Indeed, a regression for the top 30 HEIs (RAE rank 2 to 58) produced an R^2 value of 0.46, whilst those ranked 59 to 127 produced a negligible correlation of just 5%. Certainly, ‘selectivity’ and ‘RAE Rank’ were well correlated for the top 30 HEIs. However, some lower-ranked HEIs showed much lower levels of ‘local’ recruitment than I had expected while others were extremely high (see Table 3.2). As such, my data analysis demonstrated that the HE system in England showed a much more complex picture than received wisdom had previously suggested.

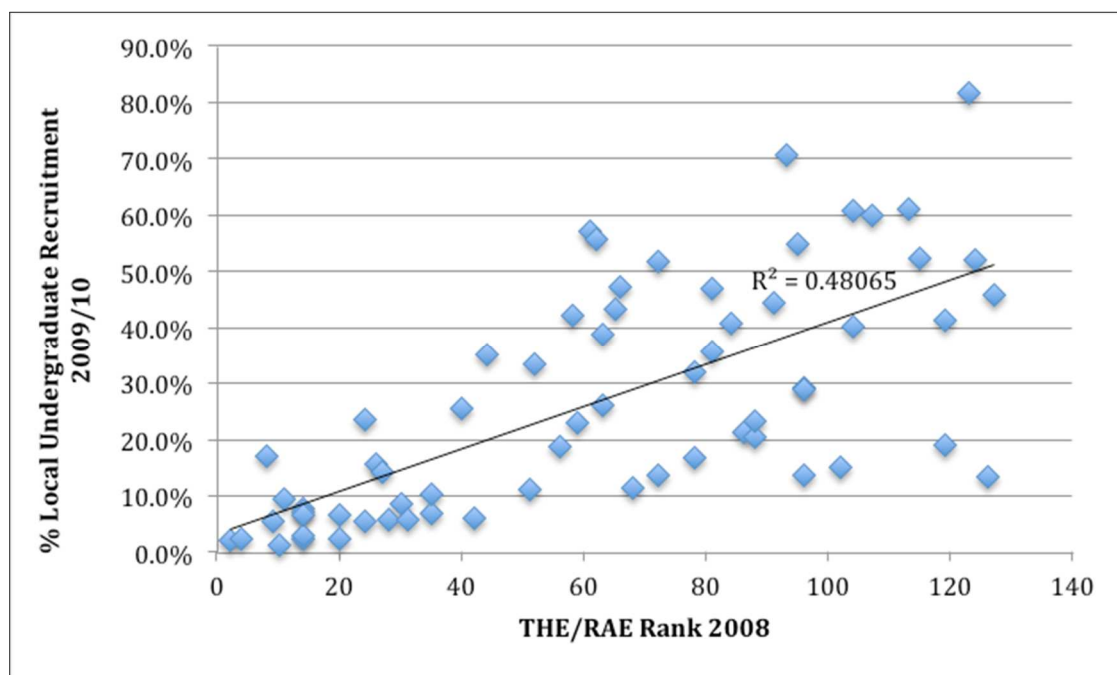


Figure 3.1 Scatterplot of Local Undergraduate Recruitment (2009/10) Against THE/RAE Rank (2008) – 65 HEIs in England. Source: Author’s calculations using HESA & THE data.

Ex London Outliers (65 HEIs)	Correlation (R^2)	SR Range
Top 30 (RAE, 2 to 58)	46%	-0.055 to 1.034
Lower half (RAE, 59 to 127)	5%	-2.563 to 2.211

Table 3.2 Correlation Scores (R^2) for Local Undergraduate Recruitment (2009/10) Against THE/RAE Rank (2008) – 65 HEIs in England. Source: Author’s calculations using HESA & THE data.

Replacing all London institutions in order to examine potential ‘deviant’ cases, and taking all data into consideration, a shortlist of twenty-five institutions was drawn up from which I selected four HEIs that I would, ideally, like to investigate. These included:

- One ‘representative’ high-ranking, research-led university from the Russell Group with a broad spatial reach and a relatively low percentage of students from NS-SECs 4 to 7 – demonstrating its selectivity;
- A second high-ranking, research-led university from the 1994 Group that demonstrated some ‘deviant’ characteristics from the norm for high-ranking institutions: i.e. relatively high local recruitment of students and from hard to reach groups;
- One lower-ranking, teaching-led university from the Million+ Group with a high proportion of locally recruited students and from hard to reach groups; and

- A second lower/mid-ranking, teaching-led university from the Universities Alliance with a low proportion of locally recruited students and some ‘deviant’ characteristics from the norm for lower-ranked institutions: i.e. a relatively high percentage of students from NS-SECs 1 to 3 and an above average mix of overseas undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Detailed, anonymized profiles of the four selected HEIs are provided in the Preface to Part II of this thesis.

3.3 Methods

Debates regarding methodological rigour have been intense in the field of economic geography (see, for example, Amin and Thrift, 2000 vs. Martin and Sunley, 2001 vs. Barnes, 2001). It was, therefore, essential to adopt a plausible research design and methodology that, in Yin’s terms, would provide a “logical sequence” that would connect my empirical study/data to my initial research questions and, ultimately, to my conclusions (2003: 20). In light of the ontological and epistemological position of this thesis, a critical engagement with political economy, semiotic analysis and governmentality was methodologically essential. Moreover, in order to explore my research questions thoroughly it was vital to examine the case study universities and their social and material relations *in action*. For, as Lee asserts, it is the “shared or imposed understandings about the nature of value, Value and values, which establish the criteria through which the performance of economic geographies may be evaluated” (2006: 416). In order to move on in the world, all actors must make meaning of it; engaging with, reflecting on and attributing meaning to some aspects of the world rather than others. As such, it was imperative to explore the *situated* evaluations, interpretations, actions and activities of individuals and organizations within the complex social relations of value that help shape their economic geographies.

To this end, following a comprehensive literature review regarding the marketisation of HE in England, I employed a mix of complementary qualitative methods across two phases: first, an analysis of policy documentation; and second, in-depth study of my HEIs. The implementation of complimentary qualitative methods, including discourse analysis, observation, archival research and in-depth interviews, provided deeper

insights into my research questions than would a single method. Furthermore, it enabled the triangulation of data between sources thereby allowing well-supported conclusions to be drawn (Baxter and Eyles, 1997; Davies, 2007; James, 2006; Patton, 1990).

Before detailing my methods, it is worth noting the crucial underpinnings that a logical sequence of research provided. First, the literature review provided vital context for my research as it allowed me to consider HE as a complex field of social relations. In my reading, the literature highlighted the competing discourses of policy instruments; the diversity of the system; the complex spatialities and power relations of HE; and the multiplicity of values, theories of Value and practices of value that impact and influence its economic geographies. Second, both the literature review and analysis of policy documents were integral to selecting my four cases (detailed above) and forming my interview schedule. Without a good grasp of the field of HE, and without an in-depth knowledge of what diverse HEIs were being asked to make meaning of, implement and negotiate, it would have been impossible for me as a researcher to elucidate the multiple and complex nature of emerging economic geographies and of my interviewees' life-worlds. Through a systematic undertaking of procedures and analysis, following Baxter and Eyles (1997) and Yin (2003), I have sought to uphold the transferability, dependability, credibility and validity of my research throughout my thesis.

3.3.1 Exploring the production and strategic-selection of marketisation as a technology of government for steering HE in England

As discussed in Chapter Two, a key argument concerns the role that political rationalities and their economic imaginaries play in the semiotic process of complexity reduction as those who seek to regulate the economy attempt to shape the material and social practices and relations of actors in time and space (Lee, 2006; Jessop, 2004, 2009; Jessop and Sum, 2001). From a governmentality perspective, political discourse is central to the process of semiosis in that it forms an “intellectual machinery” for problematizing reality, and proffering certain tactics and techniques within the constructions of a political rationale (Rose and Miller, 1992). Yet, most fundamentally, it is in and through the diverse social relations of value that the strategies and policies of those who seek to govern must work if they are to become anchored in the *Ordinary*

Economy. Thus, shaping and forming the values and evaluations of actors is an immanently contextual and situated process that is confronted by diverse histories, geographies, subjectivities, positionalities and power relations etc.

In order to assess how far a neoliberally informed strategy of marketisation has penetrated higher education policy in England, I undertook a systematic analysis of primary and secondary documentation surrounding the production of three legislative manoeuvres since the Dearing Report of 1997: The Teaching and Higher Education Act, 1998; The Higher Education Act, 2004; and the 2011 Government White Paper, '*Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*' (BIS, 2011a). The documents analyzed included:

- The primary policy Report informing the subsequent legislation;
- Selected consultation documents gathered in reference to the Reports and the Acts (primarily from the four academic Mission Groups, Universities UK, HEFCE and prominent intellectuals/advisors);
- Selected submissions to the House of Commons Select Committees – these included views from business, MPs (as individuals), the main political Parties, academic interests and student representatives;
- Official policy texts from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and its predecessor departments;
- Specific addresses to the House of Commons by the relevant Minister outlining intended policy, and the debate surrounding those addresses – sourced from Hansard; and
- The 1998 and 2004 Acts and their White Papers, and the current White Paper (CM 8122).

In addition, for the most recent legislative manoeuvre I examined a selection of news articles (from the press and the BBC's website) covering the development of policy since, and including, the Browne Review (Browne, 2010). During this time, various potential initiatives had been 'tested' by government in the news media in order to gauge public and organizational opinion, and were either selectively retained or discarded. In order to avoid my own arbitrary and, perhaps, biased selection of newspaper articles, the research utilized a database of articles provided daily to staff by Queen Mary, University of London's Communications Office. These articles came

from newspapers that cover the political spectrum (from the Daily Mail to the Guardian), and included ‘tabloid’, ‘broadsheet’ and specialist higher education press.

Finally, between early 2011 and 2013, I attended a number of seminars as a *participant observer* held by the Westminster Higher Education Forum¹³ (WHEF). Not only was I able to access the transcripts from these events, which in and of itself was very useful, but I was also able to observe a policy network in action, witnessing what the participants said and how they interacted with one another. The seminars included: The HE White Paper – Next Steps for England’s Universities; The Student as Consumer; UK Universities in a Global HE Market; Exporting UK Education; Social Mobility in HE; Fair access and Widening Participation; and The Future and Value of Research in UK HE.

Whilst the WHEF has no policy agenda of its own, it organizes seminars on public policy at a senior-level aiming to “raise the quality of debate on public policy developments and so create opportunities for informed discussion” (WHEF, 2014). Ministers, academics, university officials, the National Student Union, UCAS, OFSTED, teachers, head teachers, and other interested parties regularly attend the seminars. As such, the organizers suggest that the seminars are “structured to facilitate the formulation of ‘best’ public policy by providing policy makers and implementers, and those with an interest in the issues, with a sense of the way different stakeholder perspectives interrelate” (ibid). From a research perspective, attending these events and analyzing the transcripts gave me first-hand and invaluable insight into how discourses are both constituted and constitutive, and how policies are both shaped and shaping in their development and implementation.

In all cases, it was important for me to engage with the neoliberal ‘imaginary’ of marketisation broadly understood from a CPE perspective. This meant thinking about the *language of markets* as well as references to HE as a field of economic and non-economic practices; and this needed to be considered both within the national context and beyond. For example, in a global context, competition, efficiency, market freedoms, comparative advantage, information, notions of supply and demand,

¹³ I am extremely grateful to WHEF for allowing me to attend these events as a PhD Student at a complimentary rate of “zero cost”. Without such subsidisation, I would never have been able to attend on such a regular basis.

economic growth and the knowledge economy have all been discursively and materially reinforced in relation to higher education through the OECD and the WTO (e.g. OECD, 2007; Robertson, 2006; Suavé, 2002). Such reinforcement has also occurred at a regional scale through the EU's Lisbon Strategy and Bologna Process (Jayasuriya, 2010; Robertson, 2007). Furthermore, it was important to engage with the "extra-economic" language (Jessop, 2004) expressed in various discursive arenas – particularly regarding the social and cultural benefits that higher education is said to offer society, and what might be thought of as "competing discourses" to the market rationale. In so doing, the research sought to explore the potential (re)production, contestation and (re)contextualization of marketisation as a hegemonic discourse. I also sought to explore how HE was being valued in the production and contestation of legislation, and what government was seeking in its attempts to shape the evaluations, actions, activities and subjectivities of HE's actors – most specifically the strategic leaders of its HEIs who would need to make meaning of and implement the 2011 White Paper but, also, its students.

Given the number of documents I wanted to consider, the time I had available, and my limited access to funding I broke my analysis into two levels of granularity. First, in tracing the penetration of marketisation discourses leading up to, but not including, current legislation, following Robertson (2007), I "stood back" from the documentation rather than take "a close reading" of each text. This allowed me to examine broadly the discursive shifts that have incrementally altered higher education's framework of action without getting bogged down in the identification and close analysis of "genres", "discourses" and "styles" (see below). Second, in examining the most recent policy I undertook a discourse analysis of selected documents and most specifically the Government's HE White Paper (BIS, 2011a). Given that some critics hold that this policy instrument is the most radical departure in English HE regulation since Dearing (1997) recommended the implementation of the student fee, this document and the context of its production was central to my research.

3.3.2 The discourse analysis

Brown and Yule (2003) and Reisigl and Wodak (2009) both offered useful approaches to critical discourse analysis, which supported the systematic analysis of the representational, ideational, material, institutional and relational moments in the

construction and constitution of the strategically selected policy measures under investigation (see also, Fairclough et al, 2003).

Brown and Yule (2003) put the *speaker* or *writer* at the heart of the communication process, noting that it is they who have topics and presumptions, assign information structure, and make references regarding the world in order to construct semiotic messages that can be directed towards “addressees”. Conversely, it is the *hearer* or *reader* who must interpret and draw inferences from such messages (ibid: ix). As such, the authors appealed for a pragmatic approach that included the study of the sentences and phrases that made up discourses. However, this could not be undertaken in isolation from their communicative contexts. Rather, it needed to include “considering the general principles of *interpretation* by which people normally make sense of what they hear and read” (ibid: x, emphasis added):

“Everything must be studied from the point of view of itself, as near as we can get to this, and from the point of view of its relations, as near as we can get to them. If we try to see it absolutely in itself, unalloyed with relations, we shall find... that we have... whittled it away. If we try to see it in its relations to the bitter end, we shall find that there is no corner of the universe into which it does not enter” (ibid, quoting notes from Samuel Butler).

Brown and Yule’s (2003) emphasis on relational context resonated strongly for me as a researcher on two key fronts. First, given my concern with the subjective and situated nature of economic practice and the multiplicity of values, evaluations and dilemmas that are involved, it urged me not to take policy documents as “meanings that exist as quasi-structures” that simply have to be set in motion to have full effect (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006). Policy documents both arise from relational contexts and are thrown into relational contexts. It is, therefore, simply not possible to understand them as static, once and for all events. Second, their emphasis reminded me that as an independent researcher I had to accept that, contra Actor Network Theory’s engrained ontology of *association*, it is impossible to follow the connections – “the actors themselves” – to the bitter end via some ‘and... and... and...’ process (Latour, 2005: 179). Instead, I had to understand my limitations and choose wisely in the selection of documentation.

Further, the central critical discourse analysis concepts put forward by Reisigl and Wodak (2009) were very useful in setting out my strategy for the interrogation and analysis of policy and policy-related documents. These were “critique”, “ideology” and “power”. First, *critique* can broadly be understood as “gaining distance from the data... embedding the data in the social context, clarifying the political positioning of discourse participants, and having a focus on continuous self-reflection while undertaking the research” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009: 87). I was prompted to look for “inconsistencies, self-contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas” (ibid: 88) in the discursive structures of the texts and specifically, how these related to marketisation and the field of higher education. I was also very aware that as a researcher I should render transparent the objects of my investigations, “demystifying” – as Reisigl and Wodak put it – the “manipulative character” of their discursive practices (ibid). This also held true for my own positionality, wherein I needed to justify, theoretically, why certain interpretations of discourses seemed more valid than others.

Second, the authors saw *ideology* as a rather “one-sided” view of the world made up of “related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes and evaluations” that are shared by members of a specific social or political group in time and space (ibid). Ideologies may (or may not) establish and maintain unequal power relations – or, indeed, radically transform them – for example, through the production of hegemonic relations or particular “identity narratives”. As such, in my analysis I paid particular attention to *how*, *why* and *with what social and material consequences* linguistic and other semiotic practices could potentially both mediate and reproduce a neoliberal ideology and hegemony. However, similar to Brown and Yule (2003), Reisigl and Wodak (2009) also sought to understand the ways in which hegemony is negotiated, contested and transformed. I therefore took the position that the discursive strategies embodied in policy and policy-related documents were *attempts* at reproducing hegemony, which could not be understood separately from their historical (contingent) and prospective (tendential) relational contexts.

Finally, the authors suggested that language alone is not *powerful* – although as Fairclough et al (2004) assert, language (as utterances that are understood) is ‘performative’ in that it has an effect. Rather, *powerful people* who have the means and opportunities to alter material conditions and social relations make use of language in

order to maintain or gain power. In this sense, power relates to an “asymmetric relationship”, or “power over” (Stone, 1989): that is, “the possibility of having one’s own will within a social relationship against the will or interests of others” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009: 88). For the purposes of my research, power in its authoritative form (i.e. establishing the rules, punishments and rewards of the game, and power over objects) was certainly significant. However, given what Foucault (2000) tells us about power in its neoliberal form – that is, gaining power at a distance – and how this was problematized in Chapter Two, I was again brought back to the importance of context. As Reisigl and Wodak (2009) assert, in discourses power can be legitimized or de-legitimized, and any political texts bare the traces of struggles over ideas, ideals, ideologies and dominance. As such, I remained focused on the ways in which power was both reflected and opposed in my chosen texts thereby offering invaluable insights into the struggles to produce material and social outcomes in the emerging economic geographies of HE.

To analyze my chosen documents, I followed Jessop’s (2004) understanding of the economic imaginary as a semiotic order (see Fairclough, 2003). For Jessop, “a semiotic order is a specific configuration of genres, discourses and styles” in which: *discourses* “represent... social practices... as well as the material world from particular positions in the social world”; *genres* “are ways of acting and interacting viewed in their specifically semiotic aspect and, as such, serve to regularize (inter)action”; and *styles* identify “ways of being – identities”. This sat well with, but added texture to, Reisigl and Wodak’s understanding of discourses, genres and *texts* wherein *texts* are an element of discourses that can be assigned to genres but, importantly, “make speech durable over time” thereby bridging “two dilated speech situations”: i.e. the situation of the speaker/writer and that of the hearer/reader (2009: 89-90). I, therefore, probed the texts around the semiotic order of marketisation but always in relation to HE, and always with an understanding of the multiplicity and complexity of social relations of value involved. My findings from this phase of analysis are detailed in Chapter Four.

3.3.3 *The in-depth study of the four HEIs*

Selecting HEIs that one would ideally like to study and actually recruiting them are two quite different things. Having read various studies that warned of the difficulties of

recruitment (e.g. Mountz, 2007), and given the tense climate that surrounded HE in England at the time, I felt that I needed a strategy that would help demonstrate, first, *why* I wanted to explore the experiences of any particular HEI, and second, *the qualities* about me as a researcher that an HEI might appreciate. To this end I wrote a short proposal that briefly presented the research context, my research questions, my objectives, methods and ethical considerations. This was tailored to each of my preferred HEIs setting out why the institution could, potentially, add depth to our understandings of how processes of marketisation are negotiated through complex social relations in time and place. Each proposal was attached as a PDF to an e-mail, which professionally set out the above but in a much shorter format: enough to make the approach meaningful, but not so much as to take up too much of the reader's time. Each e-mail ended with the following polite request:

If you feel, in principle, that it may be possible for (name of HEI) to participate as a case study, perhaps we could either meet briefly or talk by phone to discuss how to take this forward?

As I had friends working in two of my selected HEIs, they were able to advise me who best to approach. The person would need to hold a strategic position at the university and be senior enough to consider taking the request further. Having initial contacts proved very helpful, as I was able to mention in my e-mails that I was 'known' via colleagues. For another institution, one of my supervisors knew the Vice Chancellor very well and wrote a very brief and non-committal e-mail stating that I would make contact in the next few days, and this helped to 'open the door'. For my final HEI I knew no one, so I set about using the Internet to find a contact at the Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC) level who seemed to have interests in HE as a field of research. This meant searching through the profiles of all the PVCs, examining their job descriptions, histories, teaching and research interests. Eventually I selected one and sent my request.

Three institutions came back immediately with "yes, we think so". Of these, one asked me to travel in for a chat with the Deputy VC; one handed me over to their ethics committee who cleared my proposal and put me straight in touch with the VC; and the third handed me straight over to their Academic Registrar with whom I spoke on the phone. In all cases, I was given the opportunity to talk through my research objectives

and set out a plan for moving forward. The fourth institution was more cautious and arranged for the VC to call me at home on such-and-such a day at such-and-such a time. If this was designed to intimidate, it worked. At ten minutes to the hour I was pacing the floor wondering if I could hold my nerve. When the phone rang I could feel my heart in my chest, but that was nothing compared to how much I quivered as the VC told me:

“We don’t allow research on this institution”.

“Oh”, I replied gingerly. “Is that the end of the matter or is there some room for persuasion?”

The VC laughed.

“Well, I’ve read your proposal and I do think it’s good. But I’m wondering why I should take this before our board when we reject other researchers. What makes you so special?”

I thought for a moment.

“Well, it’s not me”, I said. “I’m so small you would hardly notice me in a well lit room, which could of course be a bonus. It’s your institution that matters: the position that you hold, the geographies that you have, the students that you serve, and your stated values. I really think your institution could add enormous texture to understanding what’s happening in higher education at the moment in terms of its value and marketisation.”

Perhaps my reply was a little ‘cheesy’. But it clinched the deal! A week later I heard back from the VC’s secretary that the board would allow my research and that I should send a list of potential interviewees for agreement. That was four-out-of-four.

3.3.4 Archival research

Having successfully recruited my four HIEs, I constructed detailed profiles for each, gathering data from web-archives and primary documentation regarding their histories, mission statements, current Vice Chancellors and strategic directors, access agreements, outreach programmes, strategic plans, fees, bursaries and fee-waiver programmes. I also examined the geographies of the HEIs utilizing web-archives and HESA data. Here, I explored their connections with other universities overseas; any existing or planned branch campuses; the geographies of their student bodies (i.e. home, EU and abroad for undergraduate and postgraduate students); any connections they held with local businesses and organizations, and any philanthropic or other work

in the local community. Putting in such effort before going out into the field provided not only an understanding of the HEIs' current economic and non-economic geographies and relations, but also offered a solid foundation for the development of a nuanced interview schedule.

3.3.5 In-depth, semi-structured interviews

In order to fully explore my research questions, I undertook in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a "purposeful sample" (Patton, 1990) of key informants selected for their strategic role within each university. The interviewees included Vice Chancellors (or equivalents), Pro-Vice Chancellors (or equivalents) and other members of the Strategic Board, Academic Registrars and/or Secretaries, Deans (or equivalents), key actors in finance, widening participation, educational outreach, admissions, marketing and recruitment, and Presidents of the Student's Unions. In all cases, interviews were requested with the Chair of the Board of Governors, but only one responded positively. (Please see Table 3.3 below for a breakdown of interviews by university). In total, fifty-five interviews were undertaken over a three-month period in early-mid 2012. This allowed enough time for each HEI to have formulated a Strategic Plan and Access Agreement in relation to the 2011 White Paper, and to have begun implementing that Plan in preparation for the 2012/13 academic year, which was the first year that the new policy would have full impact. The vast majority of interviews lasted around an hour-and-a-half. Only one was a disappointing 25 minutes, and the longest was 3 hours. A full, anonymized list of interviewees is provided in the Preface to Part II.

Given the climate in English HE at the time, I was concerned that recruiting interviewees may prove difficult in some institutions. The Government's White Paper had been met both positively, with some commentators saying it was about time that academia came down from its ivory tower, and negatively with many scholars, politicians, students and lay people alike protesting that this was a step too far along the neoliberal road to marketisation (e.g. Collini, 2010; Daily Mail, 2011; Guardian, 2010a; Telegraph, 2011a; Vernon, 2010). As such, having gained permission from each of the Vice Chancellors to undertake my research in their institutions, we agreed upon a list of actors whom I could approach to request an interview. Only one institution proved slightly problematic in this regard, denying me potential access to

two actors I felt were key. However, through very polite negotiation and professional reasoning, I was allowed to contact their ‘seconds-in-command’.

Strategic Position	GE	PA	DTC	FTL
Vice Chancellor	1	1	1	1
Deputy VC	1	1	1	2
Pro-VCs, Vice Principals	3	6	2	3
Deans/Chairs of Faculties	4	2	3	5
Chair Board of Governors	-	-	1	-
Registrar/Secretary	2	1	1	1
Director of Marketing	-	1	1	1
President of Student Union	1	1	1	1
WP, Education and Outreach	1	1	1	-
Other Strategic Directors	-	-	2	-
Totals:	13	14	14	14

Table 3.3 Strategic Positions of 55 Interviewees Across Four Case Study HEIs. Source: Author.

Notes: Each HEI has been given a pseudonym in order to preserve anonymity. These are: Global Entrepreneur (GE); Palace Aspirational (PA); Downtown Coastal (DTC) and Four-Town Local (FTL). A full explanation for their anonymity is detailed in Section 3.3.6 below.

To make my approaches, I drew up individualized interview proposals outlining the purpose of my research, the themes that we would explore, and my research ethics (see Section 3.3.6, below). In addition, I underscored that whilst permission had been granted for me to undertake my research, they were absolutely free to decline my request. The proposals were sent via e-mail to both the potential participants and their secretaries where appropriate. Out of sixty requests, fifty-five came back positive, which was an excellent response rate and well worth the effort made.

For me, the strength of the in-depth interview was that it allowed me to explore the experiences, feelings, perspectives and emotions of the participants at a much deeper and broader level than quantitative techniques such as questionnaires (Davies, 2007; Longhurst, 2003). Given the emphasis of my thesis on the complexity and situated nature of all economic practice, it was imperative that my approach enabled my

interviewees to explore their economic activities as “a set of lived practices” (Crang, 2002: 648) that are relational and may be subject to diverse evaluations, understandings, norms, dilemmas, and beliefs (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006). As such, I tried to make the questions *points for discussion* such that interviewees could form an “intellectual engagement” with the research in what Schoenberger (1991) refers to as “collaborative dialogue”. In practice, this enabled my participants to think about their responses and to interject comments, opinions and asides as though in conversation. Thus, they were able to both provide context to their narratives and experiences, and explore their emotions around those experiences. Indeed, one of the most fulfilling aspects of my research came at the end of the interviews with many participants expressing how much they either enjoyed the process or found it cathartic.

The interview schedules utilized open-ended questions and a set of semi-structured prompts that were based around five core themes:

- The value and valuation of higher education – exploring interviewees’ understandings and experiences from a personal and institutional perspective.
- The negotiation, implementation and transformation of the current higher education White Paper – exploring interviewees evaluations, understandings and strategies.
- The meaning-making process – exploring how institutions strategized the White Paper and what factors were most influencing actors’ strategies for moving on in the world.
- The current socio-economic geographies and identities of the institutions – exploring to what extent and in what ways these may or may not be shaping their decision-making processes and future trajectories.
- The trajectory of higher education – exploring interviewees’ experiences of the push towards marketisation over time.

Before taking the interview schedule into the field, the questions were piloted at another HEI to ensure that it reflected the aims of my research, which it did. However, two difficulties were highlighted. Firstly, the schedule was quite long and would take just over an hour to complete. I therefore decided to treat the core themes as a list of topics that, ideally, each participant would cover, but that could be tailored in light of any time constraints. This needed to be done sensibly to allow subsequent triangulation

between transcripts (James, 2006). Secondly, and relatedly, I would need to know the interview schedule inside out in order to achieve my aim of collaborative dialogue. The White Paper was a complex policy instrument attempting to shape a far more complex world, and I did not want to narrow down my interviewees' opportunities to explore their experiences.

3.3.6 Ethical considerations and difficulties

As my research involved human participants, I first needed to gain approval from the Queen Mary, University of London Ethics Committee before contacting any of my selected HEIs or potential interviewees. Although the Economic and Social Research Council funded my research, I did not need to gain their further approval. Indeed, Queen Mary's ethical standards corresponded fully with the ESRC's (see QMUL, 2014; ESRC, 2014). In line with QMUL's *Statement of Research Ethics Policy*, I needed to demonstrate that my research would be carried out "with honesty, integrity and due care for the rights of participants and researchers" and that I would always be mindful of minimizing or eliminating any potential risks (QMUL, 2014). To this end, and since my research was with adult professionals and concerned a relatively non-contentious subject, I completed the on-line, fast track ethics evaluation provided by the University. Here, I needed to state: that consent would be sought from participants; that they would be informed of my methods, the purpose of my research, what their participation would entail and any risks involved; that confidentiality and anonymity would be assured; that participation would be voluntary and free from coercion; that I would avoid harm in all instances; and that the independence of my research would be made explicit. Within a few days of submission, my application was passed with an ethics rating of 10/10.

Of my four HEIs, two required full anonymity – including the name of the university. Given that I wanted to examine their histories, geographies and positionalities within the HE sector, I felt this might be difficult. However, following discussions with my supervisors I proposed that I would safeguard their anonymity as far as possible by using pseudonyms for *all four* institutions and not referring directly to their geographic location or RAE ranking. Further, any freely available statistics used would be rounded to the nearest 5% so as to avoid identification where possible. A brief description of

each case study is provided in the Preface to Part II of this thesis. The pseudonyms are as follows:

Institution Position	Pseudonym	Abbreviation
Typical high rank	Global Entrepreneur	GE
A-Typical high rank	Palace Aspirational	PA
Mid-low rank, wide-draw	Downtown Coastal	DTC
Low-mid rank, local draw	Four Town Local	FTL

Table 3.4 Case Study Pseudonyms. Source: Author.

As detailed above, interviews were requested via invitation. At this stage, the potential participants were informed that: I would like to digitally record the interviews, but that this would be their choice; the interviews would be confidential, in that they would not be discussed with any other parties (other than my supervisors); any recordings would be transcribed and analyzed by me; and their narratives would be anonymized, avoiding as far as possible their individual identification. Whilst people often enjoy the opportunity to put across their point of view and explore their experiences and feelings, I was aware that some interviewees might find the digital recorder intimidating (Mountz, 2007). At the start of each interview I, therefore, asked if the participant was still happy to be recorded, and always placed the handset discretely to one side.

To help participants feel relaxed in the interview setting, the interviews were held on the participants' *home turf* in quiet, private offices chosen by them. To facilitate this, the interviews were planned well ahead and scheduled over a two-to-three week period for each HEI. This enabled me to plan travel, book accommodation *and eat* within my limited research budget. Before each interview, I confirmed the date, time and place with my interviewees. Having sat next to a terrific sales person in my previous incarnation as a production manager, I'd learned that 'confirming' appointments rather than 'asking' if the date was still OK hardly ever produced a negative response, and this certainly held true for my research. Throughout my time out in the field, my hotel rooms served as my base and provided important retreats from what was a tiring and emotional experience.

At the start of each interview, consent forms and information sheets were provided to interviewees, and each was informed that they could pause or withdraw from the

interview at any time without penalty. They were informed that my research was independent for my PhD and any subsequent publications, and that any recordings and transcripts would be stored safely for my sole utilization. Throughout the process I was aware that I should avoid harm and exploitation by empathizing with the positionality of my interviewees, seeking to minimize any vulnerability they might feel by “co-owning” and “co-shaping” the processes of “questioning, answering, listening and conversing” (Cloke *et al*, 2004: 129). Given that my interviewees all held quite powerful positions in academia, I was actually surprised that this held true for the majority of cases. Out of fifty-five participants, only two succumbed to the managerial, “puffer fish” stance described by Dunn (2007) – attempting to overwhelm me with their positions and avoid answering questions; whilst another displayed the puffer’s *shy-side* – hiding intently behind her bag and coat until she felt secure enough to unfold. Indeed, in most cases I definitely needed to consider my own positionality as a researcher in the very field that I was seeking to explore. I am, actually, a very small person: a mere 5ft tall, 43kg and totally bland when it comes to dress. But get me going, and my personality increases. Thus, I consistently tried to be reflective of my positionality and “put myself to one side” – attempting to maintain “neutrality” throughout the interviews (Davies, 2007). Although Rose (1997) warns that remaining reflexively impartial is practicably impossible in qualitative research, considering such issues was foundational to earning the trust of participants and helping them to feel like *partners* in the research process. It was also crucial to establishing the trustworthiness and credibility of my data (Baxter and Eyles, 1997).

At the end of each interview, after thanking my interviewees for sharing their experiences with me, I immediately completed my fieldwork diary, making note of the *intangible* moments that I would likely forget over the course of time, including any topics or issues that had been covered particularly well. For example, I noted the composure of my interviewees, their hand gestures and postur(ings); how relaxed or tense they were; their passion or dispassion. One interviewee spent four or five minutes turning and pointing out of the window when I asked what it meant to the university to be located where they were. “*That. That*”, she kept saying, pointing at a council estate and staring at the bleak prospects it represented for the young people of the city. On other occasions I noted where interviewees had come particularly prepared or had mentioned something I had not considered that could be of import. Regarding

the former, I wanted to note where interviewees seemed to be “performing” in order to guide me towards a particular stance (see Dwyer and Davies, 2010). However, it was very important not to confuse preparedness with disingenuity. For example, one very excited interviewee told me:

“Now watch me closely during the interview. Every time I think I’ve got something really interesting to say, I’ll raise my hand and you can note the time on the recording”.

And he did! And it was interesting! At the end of the interview we had a really nice chat and he told me to *“keep the recorder running just in case”*. He also paid me the compliment of noting that I never lost attention and maintained good eye contact throughout.

“You know your interview schedule very well”, he said.

Ultimately, I found keeping a fieldwork diary invaluable, not only for helping to verify the context and dependability of my data (Baxter and Eyles, 1997), but for bringing my interviews back to life as I set about transcription, analysis and reporting.

3.3.7 Analysis and reporting of interview data

All interviews were transcribed word-for-word which, whilst incredibly time-consuming, gave me the opportunity to get really close to the detail of my interviewees’ narratives. It is hardly surprising that after 55 interviews in four different HEIs, one’s memory becomes hazy as to who said what, where and when. But the process of transcription, which I always pre-empted by reading the relevant entry in my fieldwork diary, took me back – as far as possible – to the interview space as a *fly-on-the-wall* listening to what were largely friendly, complex, and emotional conversations between one attentive party, who listened carefully and asked lots of questions, and another who dug deep into his or her experiences and shared them in a private – yet public – room.

To deconstruct these personal time capsules seems a bizarre thing to do, for whilst the elements fit with themes that would help me explore my research questions, together they formed a whole, which illuminated, at that time and in that place, my interviewees’ thoughts on what was happening in HE in light of a political shift in their social relations of value. However, it is not the job of a researcher to publish 55 transcripts and ask the reader to make sense of them. As such, the transcripts were coded using TAMS Analyzer such that they could be considered thematically. Using a

specifically designed programme to organize, evaluate, annotate and keep track of the transcripts was incredibly useful, as it enabled me to search for codes developed from my research questions, the theoretical framework established via the literature review, and, importantly, emerging themes from the narratives themselves. However, my own iterative reading and re-reading of the transcripts was essential for the development of meaningful and insightful codes that faithfully represented the narratives of my interviewees. Using these two techniques together was undoubtedly time consuming. However, allowing myself to think complexly and reflexively about the narratives enabled me to consider existing literature alongside new data in ways that may have not been done before (Cope, 2003; Flowerdew and Martin, 2005).

For example, Jessop (2004) had stressed the paradox that the emergence of complex economies is forever based on round after round of complexity reduction, and had proffered that variation becomes less as economic practices become embedded into an actor's life-world or, what I would call in this thesis, *emerging economic geographies* and *social relations of value* (following Lee, 2006, 2011). Iteratively reading my interviewees' testimonies allowed me to challenge that assumption and provided the basis for my analysis in Chapter Six. Further, my interviewees' understandings of the value of higher education forced me to think hard about the performativity of social relations of value and their relationships to power. As we will see in Chapter Eight, this enabled me to consider the concomitant strength and fragility of a neoliberal hegemony.

Throughout the empirical Chapters Five, Six and Seven the reader will find a wide range of verbatim quotations, which, as Baxter and Eyles (1997), James (2006) and Rose (1997) recommend, allow the interviewees to speak for themselves. Where these have been used as 'representative' quotations, they have been triangulated between sources, reducing the risks of misinterpretation and misrepresentation (James, 2006). In addition, to ensure their accurate representation to the individual, 'subject context' has been confirmed via my fieldwork diary. All interviewees were offered the opportunity to verify transcripts but all refused. This was an extremely stressful and full-on period for the HE sector, and I was extremely grateful that my interviewees gave me their time, insights and experiences. As such, I have paid particular attention to ensuring that their words have remained in context, thereby reinforcing the

credibility and dependability of data and ensuring methodological rigour throughout (Baxter and Eyles, 1997).

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has developed the ontological and epistemological position adopted in this thesis and, more particularly, has specified the methods adopted in response to the research questions detailed in Chapter Two. A carefully designed case study approach stressing the significance of context dependency and based on the quantitative analysis of the diverse geographies within which English universities are situated has provided the frame within which the four universities were identified for in-depth study.

In the pages that follow, Chapter Four provides a discourse analysis of the historic unfolding of HE policy from the early 1900s to 2011, specifically regarding HE's funding. The purpose of exploring the historic context in the first half of the chapter is to illuminate the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) shifts that have taken place in HE's social relations of value over time, and the cumulative effects these have had on HE's framework of action. The second half of the chapter then focuses sharply on the intensifying marketisation of HE since the Dearing Report (1997). Chapter Four is followed by the Preface to Part II of this thesis, which sets out and explains the stylized flow of Chapters Five, Six and Seven, which together form what I am calling an 'iteration': i.e. one particular geographically, temporally, and relationally situated unfolding of my case studies' life worlds, from '*meaning making*' to '*emergence*'. By sticking rigidly to the discourses that arose from my interviewees' testimonies in relation to their understanding, negotiation and implementation – *or not* – of the White Paper, and by using their own words and narratives – to the point that I almost want to apologize to the reader for my abundant use of quotation marks! – the aim of these chapters is to *situate* any knowledge gained, *in* the 'real world': *in* their multiple and complex emerging economic geographies. Finally, my empirical findings will be discussed in Chapter Eight: the Conclusion.

4 Higher Education Policy and the Market Imaginary as a ‘Semiotic Order’

4.1 Introduction

In the introduction to the *University in Society*, Lawrence Stone writes that: “every university partly reflects the social, economic and political system, but partly also it gives a life of its own, independent of the beliefs and interests of the community”. Indeed, for Stone, the university is “one of the most poorly integrated of institutions”, which throughout history “has been obstinately resistant to changes, which were clearly demanded by changing conditions around it”. “And yet”, he continues, “in the long run, no institution can survive indefinitely in glorious isolation, and the interrelation between the university’s own built-in conservatism and the pressures on it to adapt to new external conditions is one of the most potentially illuminating, but most practically obscure, aspects of the process of historical change” (1975: v).

Although, as this chapter will demonstrate, universities themselves have often been powerful instigators of profound changes in HE, Stone’s words are no less resonant. No institution, indeed, no individual, can exist (indefinitely) beyond the social, economic and political relations that give human substance to the world in which we live. Of course, we each hold our own particular values – the ideals, beliefs, desires, morals even – that contribute enormously to whom we are and the ways in which we do what we do. But even these, whilst multiple and complex, do not arise in isolation. And there is, and always has been, the fundamental necessity of survival, which cannot be achieved apart from the social, economic and political relations that exist in time and place: the social relations of value that give form to the materiality and society of economy – to our economic geographies.

The purpose of this chapter is to set out how far a neoliberally informed “market imaginary” as a “semiotic order” (Jessop, 2004) has come to penetrate HE policy in England in the attempts of various Governments and interested parties to shape the economic geographies of HE that emerge. My discursive analysis begins in Section 4.3, focusing on HE policy since 1997 when the Dearing Committee published its Report: *Higher Education in the Learning Society*. According to Peter Leuner, an academic observer of the time, the Report signified that the British university system

was about to change beyond all recognition. For Leuner¹⁴ (1997: 1), the “cozy consensual system that [once] provided a highly selective, state funded arrangement for a restricted group of students” had already been eroded “by both politics and markets” as Thatcherite policies to expand student numbers without increasing per-capita funding had whittled down the unit of resource producing “profound changes in institutional culture”. The Dearing Report – or more specifically, the ‘New’ Labour Government’s interpretation, variation and partial retention of it – was “unlikely to run counter to more than a decade of identifying university students as consumers in a market relationship with the higher education system”. This was despite the fact that Labour had resisted the marketisation of public services whilst in opposition, and despite the fact that “linking markets with higher education would have been unthinkable” when Labour last held power (ibid).

However, to begin my analysis in 1997 would ignore the important historical development of HE in England. For example, up until 1992, HE was divided along an important binary line, the trespassing of which brought together the two very different cultures of the so-called ‘public system’ and ‘autonomous system’ (detailed below) with profound effects. A decade before that, Keith Joseph – a dedicated admirer of Friedman and Hayek¹⁵ – was Secretary of State for Education and Science (SoSE) in Thatcher’s Conservative Government and was beginning to give real political substance to the *longue durée* pressures on HE to turn towards market principles for its survival. I say *longue durée* because fiscal pressures to curtail HE spending had been intensifying since the early 1960s when the Robbins Committee (1963) attempted to codify and move forward an expansion that had already been taking place since 1944. The earlier phase of expansion, from ’44, had progressed in an atmosphere of optimism and intense public pride in a university system and further education (FE) system that, together, were seen to be supporting the aspirations of the country by underpinning its “hopes for growth” (Carswell, 1985; Moberly, 1949; Shattock, 2012). However, the Robbins expansion, from the 1960s, whilst still shrouded in optimism, was dogged by intense financial and political tensions as a deepening economic crisis unfolded.

¹⁴ Peter Leuner was Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at the American International University in London. *World Education News and Reviews*.

¹⁵ See Nick Bosanquet’s (1981) brilliant paper “Sir Keith’s Reading List”, which sets out the theoretical contents of a list of papers and books on the New Right with which Sir Keith insisted his civil servants familiarize themselves upon his taking office at the Department of Industry.

Section 4.2, therefore, begins in the early 1900s with the establishment of the primary funding bodies that would come to shape the iterative emergence of HE's economic geographies: the LEAs and the University Grants Committee (UGC). On the one hand, the funding structures of the LEAs, which underpinned the "public system", were to provide vital purchase for various Governments from the 1970s onwards to introduce market principles into HE's framework of action. On the other, the relational context of the UGC was to provide an important system of grant funding that helped to support the Liberal-based values of university autonomy and freedom for over sixty years. Whilst the universities had come under frequent pressure from diverse Governments to be more efficient and (latterly) more competitive, the UGC's replacement by the University Funding Council (UFC) in 1989 signified a distinct rupture in the universities' long-established social relations of value.

Of course, to begin my research in 1902 is not to ignore the foundational role that the 'ancient' universities of England (and Scotland) played in establishing the (still) broadly held understanding that the values of university autonomy and freedom signified an *independence* that was central to upholding what Newman (1852), classically, expressed as the *Idea of a University* (see Section 4.2.1 below). As this Chapter will highlight, England's universities have long-struggled to avoid the influence of Government and the market in setting out their strategic direction(s); and as Moberly (1949) asserts, the (Christian) power, or 'virtue', of the *Studium*¹⁶ embodied by Oxford, Cambridge and then, later, Durham and UCL has been central to that struggle: to sustaining the life, health and "*high church*" values of the system (see Newman, 1852; Rashdall, 1895; Haldane, 1910; Moberly, 1949; Stone, 1975; Carswell, 1985). Rather, to begin in 1902, my intention is to detail a period in which the economic and social value of both universities and other institutions of HE became intensified under a public and political gaze, and which is inextricably entangled with the most recent technical incursion into HE's social relations – the Coalition Government's White Paper, *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System* (BIS, 2011a).

¹⁶ Sacerdotium (priesthood: ecclesiastical authority), Imperium (empire: political authority) and Studium (university: intellectual authority or 'licentia docendi', i.e. the license to teach) are what Rashdall (1895) sets out as the three 'powers' or 'virtues' whose co-operation helped maintain the life and health of Christendom. Thus, the university – *given its power and intellectual authority in the production of knowledge* – deserved the same serious investigation as that received by the Papacy and Empire.

4.2 The iterative emergence of a higher education sector

Table 4.1 UGC Recurrent Grant List, 1919-1989 (Universities Only). Source: Author's compilation from various resources.

Ten English Universities on Original UGC Recurrent Grant List (RGL) (1919)	Approx. Date of University Status
University of Oxford	Before 1167
University of Cambridge	1209
University of London, comprising: St Georges, UCL, King's College London, Royal Holloway, Queen Mary, Goldsmiths, LSE, Imperial, and SOAS. Later additions: Birkbeck (1920), Courtauld Institute of Art (1932), London Business School (1964) (see Note 6), and Heythrop (1971).	1836
University of Durham	1837
University of Birmingham	1900
University of Liverpool	1903
University of Leeds	1904
University of Manchester	1904
University of Sheffield	1905
University of Bristol	1909
Other British Universities on Original UGC RGL (1919)	
University of St. Andrews	1410-1413
University of Glasgow	1451
University of Aberdeen	1495
University of Edinburgh	1583
The University of Wales, comprising: Aberystwyth, Cardiff and Bangor. Later additions: Swansea (1920) and St. David University College (1971).	1893
Other English Civic Universities & Institutions on UGC RGL (Pre-1963)	
University of Reading*	1926
University of Nottingham*	1948
University of Southampton*	1952
University of Hull*	1954
University of Exeter*	1955
University of Manchester Institution of Science and Technology	1956
University of Leicester*	1957
University of Keele	1962
Newcastle University	1963
Murray's Seven New Universities (added post-1961)	
University of Sussex	1961
University of East Anglia	1963
University of York	1963
Lancaster University	1964
University of Kent	1965
University of Warwick	1965
University of Essex	1965
Robbin's Former CATs (added post-1963)	
Loughborough University	1966
Aston University	1966
Brunel University	1966
University of Surrey	1966
University of Bath	1966
University of Bradford	1966

City University, London	1966
University of Salford	1967
Other Institutions (added post-1963)	
Royal College of Arts	1967
Cranfield Institute of Technology (now Cranfield University)	1969
Manchester Business School	See Note 6
Other British Institutions (added post-1963)	
University of Strathclyde (UK's first technological university)	1964
Herriot-Watt University	1966
University of Dundee	1967
University of Stirling (a UGC/Robbins' new university)	1967

Notes: 1) * These universities were on the original 1919 UGC RGL as 'University Colleges'. 2) Table 4.1 does not account for any HEI added to the UGC RGL beyond the universities arising from the Robbins' expansion. Any other HEI added before 1989 (when the UGC was replaced by the UFC) would not have held full university status. 3) All post-1992 universities receive their recurrent grants through HEFCE. 4) The University of Ulster and Queen's University of Belfast did not receive a UGC Recurrent Grant (RG), although the UGC did advise on grants to both institutions. 5) Neither the Open University (DoE) nor the University of Buckingham (private) received a UGC RG. 6) The London Business School and the Manchester Business School arose (as business schools) from Robbins (1963) and the Franks Report (1963) and subsequently received a UGC RG.

4.2.1 Propagation: the roots of two 'systems'

To consider the roots of the 'public system' my inquiry begins in 1902 when Arthur Balfour was Prime Minister of a Conservative-Liberal coalition Government, and before which education beyond the age of 12 was understood as a costly privilege taken up only by the elite and the middle classes. LEAs, along with new secondary schools, were established under Balfour's Education Act (1902) the discourses around which situated the problem of the ad hoc provision of education within a framework of national efficiency and economic competitiveness (Hansard, 3 December, 1902). Relative to its major competitors Britain was in economic decline, and if it were to maintain its position in world trade and compete with the industrial powers of Europe and the USA it would need to provide its industries with an educated workforce. Rather than rely on market forces to coordinate education in the collective interests of society, the system was to be organised through a "complete unity of administration" that only government could provide and which was "so necessary to efficiency and economy" (Fabian Society, 1903: 6). Otherwise, as the Member of Parliament for Cambridge University put it, the nation would be in "urgent peril" due to such "grave national disadvantage" (Hansard, 3 December, 1902).

The general oversight of elementary and secondary education was to be undertaken by the Board of Education (BoE) with necessary input from the universities and other

knowledgeable experts on educational quality. However, Local Authorities¹⁷ (LAs) had local tax-raising powers, and were thus charged with designating LEAs in order to fund, from local taxes and rates, the growing system of state, technical, continuation, voluntary, and endowed grammar schools and evening classes in conjunction with central Government funding. Similarly, the LEAs were to pay the fees, scholarships and bursaries of less well-off students staying on or progressing into what were then *all* regarded as elements of ‘higher’ education: i.e. a secondary or grammar school education beyond the compulsory age of staying at school (which at that time was just 11); technical institutes; teacher training colleges; university colleges; and universities. Furthermore, the LEAs were to “supply or aid the supply of education other than elementary” deemed desirable in their localities¹⁸ (Education Act, 1902). Thus, the LEAs became a significant provider of various higher and further educational services, and a significant source of funds for universities and aspiring university colleges.

Importantly, the ‘universalization’ of *local* rates to help fund education was seen as engendering a crucial sense of “communal obligation” in the minds of the public, and was deemed only right given the widely held understanding of the public value of education to the nation’s economy and society (Hansard, 3 December, 1902; Education Act, 1902). By 1918, a national system of public education, organised through local interests, was ready to be consolidated through the ‘Fischer’ Education Act (1918). The Act espoused a central value which was to further embed an understanding of the public good of both elementary and higher education and shape the latter’s trajectory for many years to come, i.e. that such a system should be “*available for all persons capable of profiting thereby*”¹⁹ (1918, para 1).

When the UGC was established in 1919, David Lloyd George was Prime Minister of a Liberal-Conservative coalition Government, which had come to power in the midst of a social and economic crisis precipitated by the massive losses of the First World War. Perhaps in a twist of irony, just shy of a century later, in 2008 the Governor of the Bank of England, Mervin King, drew parallels between the financial crisis that had

¹⁷ These were, predominantly, the town councils of the county boroughs, and county councils designated under the 1888 Local Government Act (Fabian Society, 1903).

¹⁸ The LEAs could also help finance ‘higher education’ in towns and cities outside their area where they felt it expedient to do so.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that this principle is often attributed to Robbins (1963) but, as indicated, it has a much longer lineage.

been crippling global stock markets since August 2007 and the financial crisis that began in 1914 in anticipation of the War (Pym, 2014). In both instances, crises were to provide justification for the Governments of the time to consider varying their relationship and that of the country with the nation's universities, although, as we will see, their deliberations are both similar and vastly different.

Following the 1902 Education Act and a subsequent rise in local demand, five 'civic', 'red-brick' institutions became universities under royal charter, making a total of ten universities in England (see Table 4.1, above). In his memoir, John Carswell²⁰ (1985) suggests that by 1919 the universities did not much enter into the consciousness of the nation as a whole, but did engender a great sense of pride in the locales in which they were embedded both through the fees and scholarships furnished by the LEAs, and for the facilities, education and employment that the universities provided. They also held "an extraordinary power over the feelings and outlook of those who studied in them" (ibid: 2-3), many of whom progressed into the professions, the civil service, all levels of government and industry, and many of whom felt an enormous sense "of having acquired values by which to live" (ibid). Given that the universities, either jointly or severally, held seats in the House of Commons, their influence and connection at this time was significant²¹.

Having suffered from underinvestment during WWI, the beleaguered universities were to be channeled public funds via the UGC, which was established under the direction of the Treasury rather than a Parliamentary Ministry. The UGC's role was to listen to the needs of the universities and negotiate with them their quinquennial settlements, which were to be calculated on a 'deficiency principle' – that is, to make up the difference between the substantial income they derived from other sources (such as endowments, student fees and LA grants) and the amount calculated as necessary for each to fulfill its anticipated expenditure and to survive over the five-year cycle. Initially, no university derived more than 30% of its income via the UGC, and other than ensuring that the grant was reasonable and properly administered, in no other

²⁰ John Carswell, then a civil servant, was assigned to the Treasury in 1960 and helped prepare Treasury evidence for the Robbins Committee. He then became the DfES Undersecretary responsible for the university programme, and later Secretary of the UGC.

²¹ By 1919 Oxford, Cambridge and the University of London formed individual University Constituencies whilst all other English universities were represented jointly under the Combined English Universities. The universities of Scotland, Ireland and Wales were similarly represented (Craig, 1972).

sense was the UGC “an instrument of Government policy” (ibid: 13). Indeed, the devolution of executive responsibility to a Treasury committee meant that, “political and parliamentary questions did not enter into the delicate issues involved” (ibid: 10; see also Shattock, 1994). As such, the relational context of the universities’ central public funding would adhere to the Liberal principles set out by Lord Haldane (following Newman, 1852) in his Royal Commissions on University Education (1910 to 1913): that Government should be kept at arms length from universities in order to maintain the central values of academic freedom and autonomy such that the universities could maintain academic standards, produce good and cultured citizens, train an elite of future leaders, and pursue and advance knowledge *as an end in itself* (Haldane, Lord, 1913).

4.2.2 Expansion

Since the end of WWI, technical education had been strategically selected as central to the future economic success of the country given the substantial innovations in manufacturing and technologies emanating from Germany and the USA. Certainly, the LEAs had responded favorably under instruction from the BoE, providing basic science education and technical certification through both statutory education and non-statutory ‘further’ education to the age of 18 and above (BoE, 1934, 1935). Similarly, individual universities had, very slowly, expanded their science departments as demand in the economy rose – although as the 1935-49 Chair of the UGC, Walter Moberly, noted, both the universities and the UGC strongly resisted the “Copernican change” in university values and culture that following such state-led demand would have required²² (Moberly, 1949).

However, in 1943, with the shift to Keynesian demand-side regulation and welfarism underway, then Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and his cross-party ‘War Ministry’ released their White Paper, *Educational Reconstruction*, stating in no uncertain terms that: “*Upon the education of the people of this country the fate of this country depends*” (BoE, 1943: 1). For the authors, the War had underscored the necessity to

²² Copernicus overturned long-embedded beliefs that the earth was at the centre of the solar system rather than the sun. His arguments represented a paradigm shift from the Ptolemaic model to a heliocentric model. By invoking this metaphor, Moberly (a Christian-Liberal) was suggesting that to follow the state-led demand for technical education would overturn the long-held values of university autonomy and freedom, forcing the universities to shift from a ‘liberal’ provision of education to a ‘servile’ provision (1949: 31).

take advantage of what was being discursively constructed as the nation's most valuable asset: its youth. If education was to serve the values of the individual and the nation then a "*public system*" had to be established (ibid). As such, the White Paper proposed to streamline general education into three progressive strands – primary, secondary and further education (including teacher training) – with LEAs being statutorily obliged to extend both part-time and full-time FE to the over-18s through a system of "county colleges". Moreover, no fees were to be charged in any educational establishment under LEA control such that no one capable of benefitting could be excluded on the basis of wealth or location. This was to be a *public system, publicly funded, for the public good* (BoE, 1943).

This consolidation of a localized system of statutory FE provision was given legal substance in the 'Butler' Education Act, 1944, which further concretized relations between central Government and the LEAs through the establishment of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Both Carswell (1985) and Shattock (2012) argue that, initially, the MoE preferred to deal with organised educational interests such as LEAs, voluntary bodies, trade unions, and educational associations, rather than focus on bureaucratic and Ministerial relations in Whitehall. However, the direct line of power and the funding system that the Act brought into being – from Government, to the Ministry, to the LEA, to the educational establishments – were to prove potent mechanisms of control as the public system expanded.

Concomitantly, the universities were experiencing shifts in their own social relations of value. Throughout WWII, the quinquennial grant of 1938-39 had been maintained, with no university receiving more than 50% of its income from Government. However, under Lord Hankey's recommendations on Further Education and Training (BoE, 1944) the number of university places was to increase by 50% to around 75,000. This move was backed by the Association of University Teachers (AUT), the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) and a variety of university interests who urged the UGC to ask the Treasury to provide 75% of the required funding on the grounds that "this would be less injurious to academic independence than to have to be dependent on local authority contributions" (Shattock, 2012: 11). The LEAs were answerable to their local ratepayers, and dependence on LEA contributions would only undermine the 'higher values' to which the universities aspired by allowing local

values to become entangled with the process of funding. Furthermore, receiving funding through the UGC would put the universities in control of their rate of expansion and allow them to protect their unit of resource rather than having to be responsive to, or rely upon, LEA and student demand (Carswell, 1985; Gosden, 1976).

The CVCP was largely supportive of expansion, discursively linking its value to both the economic success of the nation and to the gains that could be made by the universities through increased student numbers, higher staff salaries, more time for research, and better research links with industry. But such advantages could not be at the expense of academic standards or autonomy (CVCP, 1945). Rather, the preferred route to achieving these values was to maintain the Treasury-UGC-University relations, with the UGC acting as the universities' "collective Minister" (Carswell, 1985: 12). Undoubtedly, these relations were sometimes strained and compromises had to be made. For instance, in 1943 the Treasury had reorganized the UGC's board to include a majority of serving academics who, the Treasury felt, would better respond to national demand²³ (ibid). This annoyed the CVCP, who would rather have maintained the board's ex-academic and non-academic membership in the knowledge that their distance from the day-to-day pressures of HE had long-helped ensure the universities' autonomy. Further, in 1946, in response to both the Percy Report (1945) and the Barlow Report on Scientific Manpower (1946), the Treasury had altered the UGC's terms of reference such that they should prepare and execute plans to ensure that the universities were "fully adequate to national needs" (Treasury, 1946, cited in Carswell, 1985: 14). Yet, throughout this period the CVCP and the universities remained utterly committed to their funding relationship with the UGC. Shattock (2012: 15) puts this down to "a common 'Oxbridge' culture built up particularly through the War years which bound together senior university figures, the UGC, Treasury officials and (some) politicians", whilst Dodds et al (1952: 112) suggest that they were "cut from the same cloth" understanding "what a university [was] and why it should be free from interference from amateurs". However, whatever their motives, the UGC mechanism was to both protect the universities and prove a watershed in university-state relations – not least because the recurrent grant would now form *the*

²³ Carswell is not explicit as to why serving academics rather than ex-academic or non-academic board members should respond more favourably to Treasury demands. However, in the context of his writing, I assume that he is implying that serving academics, perhaps, have more to lose given that their livelihood is gained largely through state funding, and/or that they can see more readily the national value of HE given their 'front-line' relations.

majority of the universities' income. The implications of this “quiet measure of nationalisation” (Carswell, 1985: 14) would not only open up the universities to eventual scrutiny and audit from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG); this shift in their social relations of value would also become a powerful lever in terms of Government control.

4.2.3 *Setting the pattern*

By the time the Committee on Higher Education, chaired by Lord Robbins, was appointed by the Treasury in 1961 to “review the pattern of full-time higher education... in the light of national needs and resources” (Treasury, 1961²⁴), two quite distinct ‘systems’ had evolved. From before the end of the War, Governments from across the political spectrum²⁵ had each problematized the value of further and higher education through discourses of national economic competitiveness within which science and technological education were underscored as central to economic success (BoE, 1943; Robbins, 1963). However, the expansion was equally driven by *popular* demand. Certainly, quantitatively, the increased birthrate following the War and the tendency for children to remain in, a now ‘free’, secondary education underpinned MoE and UGC calculations regarding the rate and extent of expansion. Yet, as the Robbins Committee (1963) argued, the demand for expansion also came from both schools and parents. Firstly, a lack of places meant disappointment for schools, teachers and students for whom HE had become a tangible measure of success. Secondly, more parents than ever – from across the classes – now had aspirations for their children to gain a higher education. As Carswell asserts, during the War years many parents had, for the first time, been brought into direct contact with university graduates who served as their superiors. As a result, HE was now more widely valued as “a precious asset” (1985: 26).

From 1938/39 to the mid 1950s, the number of full-time students in LEA controlled teacher-training colleges grew by over 100% from 13,000 to 28,000. Similarly, those studying full-time for advanced qualification in FE institutions had doubled from 6,000 to 12,000. In addition, LEA institutions catered for the vast majority of part-time students with well over 50,000 students gaining advanced qualification in the vast

²⁴ Treasury Minute of Appointment, 8th February 1961 in The Robbins Report, 1963.

²⁵ These were: Churchill’s all party ‘War Ministry’, Attlee’s Labour Government and three successive Conservative Governments.

network of technical colleges that had come into existence by 1954/55. Britain's universities had also expanded markedly. By 1949, some 85,000 students were studying to degree level and beyond – 10,000 more than Lord Hankey had called for in 1944 – although this had tailed off to around 82,000 by 1954/55 (Robbins, 1963: Tables 2 and 4). By the time Robbins was set in motion in 1961, both LEA and university numbers had increased even further, as had the divide between the two systems.

The die was cast with the MoE's White Paper on Technical Education, 1956, which codified debates that had raged between the universities, the LEAs, the UGC and the MoE since the Percy and Barlow Reports. In 1948, the National Advisory Council for Education in Industry and Commerce (NACEIC) had been established by the MoE to take the Reports' recommendations forward, which it attempted in 1950. Accepting the universities' evaluations that they were research-led and should therefore remain far closer to fundamental science than the technical colleges, the NACEIC adhered to the principle that the autonomous universities and the UGC must design their own expansion (Shattock, 2012: 21-22). Barlow (1946) had recommended that the UGC should oversee the creation of an entirely new 'technical university', which the CVCP had resisted on the basis of academic values and value for money. The NACEIC didn't press the matter. Instead, they called for a National Institute of Technology to come under the LEAs and a higher level of teaching and qualification in the LEA colleges, which would award degrees through affiliation to their local universities (NACEIC, 1950). The LEAs largely supported the former, but rejected the latter stating that it would weaken their level of control. They wanted degree awarding powers of their own (Shattock, 2012: 24).

On the basis of these debates, a number of significant developments followed. Firstly, in 1953 the Treasury announced to Parliament that Imperial College was to greatly expand rather than the UGC providing a new technical university. The decision helped concretize CVCP and UGC values that scientific study in the universities must be set within a broad culture of learning (Carswell, 1985). In addition, £43million was to be channeled into expanding a further thirteen existing universities with work to begin in 1957. This began to further differentiate some of the 'civic' universities (which were already considered to hold "a different mission" from the ancient institutions – see

Moberly, 1949) – as more *technologically* focused and with a broader base of student recruitment (Shattock, 2012). Furthermore, under the Chairmanship of Lord Murray (1953-63), the UGC and the universities were developing plans for seven *brand new* institutions to help accomplish a proposed expansion in university places to 170,000 by 1970. The universities would be (largely) residential and nationally selective, constructed anew on green-field sites with no lineage to any other previous institutions (Carswell, 1985). Thus, like their ‘ancient’ predecessors, “they represented the ultimate realization of the concept of autonomy” (Shattock, 2012: 43): the freedom to govern academically without the restrictions of local values and local markets²⁶.

Secondly, in 1954, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, ‘Rab’ Butler MP, announced to the Cabinet that the CVCP and UGC would not support degree-awarding powers in the technical colleges on the grounds of inadequate facilities and teaching standards. The universities would only support degrees offered in high-level institutions (ibid: 27). Thus, in 1956, the MoE White Paper called for massive investment in twenty-four of the best technical colleges with a subset being selected as Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs). Drawing on the dominant understanding that the only way to protect academic values and standards was to shelter institutions from both political and ‘market’ influences, the latter were to be put under direct MoE control, thereby providing an “independence appropriate to the level of their work” (MoE, 1956). It was from these institutions that ten further universities were to arise under Robbins (see Table 4.1); and it was this divided pattern of HE that Robbins was asked to problematize and resolve.

4.2.4 *The last hurrah!*

“Higher education has not been planned as a whole or developed within a framework consciously devised to promote harmonious evolution... But higher education is so obviously and rightly of great public concern, and so large a proportion of its finance is provided in one way or another from the public purse, that it is difficult to defend the continued absence of coordinating principles... The needs of the present, and still more of the future, demand that there should be a system” (Robbins, 1963: 5).

²⁶ Newman (1852) also underscored the value of studying away from home that the ancient universities provided, arguing (as did Rashdall, 1895, in his exploration of *Studium*) that the segregation of students and scholars away from everyday social influence provides them with the freedom to think in a rich, focused learning environment.

With the above words, Robbins (1963) set out an agenda for a co-ordinated expansion that would uphold the interests of all the elements of HE: the universities, the colleges of education, and further education. But this was not a call for central planning. Rather, setting “great value upon the freedom of individuals and institutions” (ibid: 5), the Committee called for a *decentralized* initiative to be co-ordinated through common principles, supported by a new Grants Commission and the LEAs, and upheld via *ex-ante*, public funding.

In terms of expansion, the three elements together would need to increase full-time provision from 216,000 in 1962/3 to 392,000 by 1973/4 with numbers projected to reach 558,000 by 1980/81 – an overall growth of 160% in eighteen years (ibid: 160, Table 44). In the university sector, the seven new universities initiated by Murray plus a further six would provide growth over and above expansion in the existing universities. In addition, the ten CATs were to be granted university status and, alongside the colleges of education, these would join the ‘autonomous institutions’ to be administered by a single Grants Commission (see Table 4.1 for the institutions that finally came under UGC funding). This would be similar in structure, procedure and principle to the UGC, but would come under a new Ministry of Arts and Science²⁷ capable – as was the Treasury – of protecting the system from external influence: be it political, financial (in the sense of audit), ‘market’ or otherwise. The remainder of FE was to expand through the regional, area and local colleges, which would remain under LEA and MoE control²⁸.

Certainly, the Robbins Report’s principles underscored that the variety of institutions in Britain should be equally valued for their diverse contributions to the nation’s economy and society, and that “there should be no freezing of institutions into established hierarchies” (ibid: 9). Instead, individual colleges – particularly the best technical colleges – should naturally evolve into universities on the basis of excellence and reputation. However, both the pattern of the proposed expansion and the dual “machinery of government” (ibid: 238) put forward for its co-ordination were

²⁷ The proposed new Ministry of Arts and Science would also oversee “other autonomous state-supported activities” such as the Research Councils, the Arts Council, and the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries (Robbins, 1963: 250). It would also need some adaptation in the case of Scotland.

²⁸ The terms used here refer to FE in England and Wales. The same was to occur in Scotland through their equivalent institutions and governance structures.

dominated by the two principles that had long-shaped HE in Britain: first, that HE should be available for all those qualified and wishing to undertake higher study (ibid: 8); and second, that the freedom and autonomy of the university system was paramount to their achieving their higher values (ibid: 230). Although “the matter” was “of great difficulty and delicacy”, the latter would have to be balanced against the necessity for the universities “to serve the nation’s needs”²⁹ (ibid: 228).

Within 24 hours of the Report’s publication, the then Conservative Government released a statement confirming its support for the proposed expansion to 328,000 by 1967/8. Higher and further education had grown in public esteem over the past decades and general opinion, including the press and the voting public, was widely supportive of the expansion and the values for which it stood. However, the re-composition of the ‘autonomous system’ to include the colleges of education was rejected (Carswell, 1985: 70). For sure, resistance had come from the LEAs and MoE, which were opposed to the idea on the grounds that it would sever important social and pedagogical links between the locally embedded schools and colleges and the teachers who taught in them. In addition, the LEAs had already conceded control of the CATs to the MoE, and now these were to leave the ‘public system’ altogether. For the LEAs and the MoE, the natural evolution of their best institutions into the autonomous university system could only undermine the value of the institutions left behind (ibid).

Resistance also came from the UGC and the universities. Shattock (2012) notes that whilst the UGC was largely supportive in its evidence to the Robbins Committee, under the new Chairmanship of John Wolfenden they rejected the inclusion of the colleges of education fearing that it would open up the universities to the scrutiny of the CAG. Unlike the institutions under MoE control, the quinquennial grant had protected the universities from audit – despite their level of public funding – and this was not a protection that the universities or UGC wished to concede. However, their determination to hold on to this principle, and, indeed, Robbins’ lengthy defense of it

²⁹ Underscoring the complexity of their understanding of freedom, The Robbins Committee notes: “We believe that a system that aims at the maximum of independence compatible with the necessary degree of public control is good in itself, as reflecting the ultimate values of a free society. We believe that a multiplicity of centres of initiative safeguards spontaneity and variety, and therefore provides the surest guarantee of intellectual progress and moral responsibility. We do not regard such freedom as a privilege but rather as a necessary condition for the proper discharge of the higher academic functions as we conceive them” (1963: 230).

(Robbins, 1963: 235-238), revealed a vital lever that could be pulled on ethical grounds.

4.2.5 He who pays the piper

In 1965, Anthony Crosland, then SoSE under Wilson's Labour Government, was the man who pulled the lever. In the final months of Government, the Conservatives had established the Department of Education and Science (DES)³⁰, thereby putting paid to the dual 'machinery' proposed by Robbins. Instead, the DES had absorbed the MoE in its entirety and had acquired the functions of the Treasury in relation to the universities with the UGC still in tact. As a result, the UGC and its now enlarged list of around 50 institutions (see Table 4.1) became "a specific group within the education system" (Carswell, 1985: 55).

In the April, at Woolwich Polytechnic, Crosland set out the case for embedding the 'binary line' that had long-shaped HE. His solutions had wide support from colleagues within the Department (such as Toby Weaver, his right-hand civil servant), the LEAs, the trade unions and the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions (Shattock, 2012: 59). But there were to be some major differences from the past. Predominantly, Crosland called for a non-university sector "with a separate tradition and outlook": one that could meet the "ever increasing need and demand for vocational, professional, and industrially based courses" (cited in Carswell, 1985: 72). However, rather than encourage an "unhealthy rat-race mentality" spurred by the evolutionary competition proposed by Robbins, the sector should be "comparable to the universities" with degree awarding powers of its own. Moreover, its value in being "responsible to social needs" meant that it "should be under social control" and not sheltered from public scrutiny by the values of autonomy (ibid).

The primary outcome of Crosland's intervention was the establishment of some thirty polytechnics under LEA control – a strategy that was given governmental purchase through the DES White Paper: *A Plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges* (1966). However, as Carswell notes, Crosland's arguments also underscored that it was "perfectly possible to carry on higher education without the privileges of autonomy

³⁰ The establishment of the DES broadly followed Harold Shearman's *Note of Reservation* to the Robbins Committee, which warned against the two-Minister model (Robbins, 1963: 293-296).

and freedom from public audit” (1985: 73). As a result, when the Public Accounts Committee and CAG, again, demanded access to the universities’ finances for audit, “the walls of Jericho fell” (ibid: 86). Without the protection of the Treasury³¹, the universities were opened up to the governmental tactics, strategies and management procedures of Whitehall. Whilst the quinquennial grant remained in place, the autonomy to which the UGC, universities, Robbins and many other interested parties attached such value would never be the same again.

Undoubtedly, it would be a mistake to consider Crosland’s evaluations of HE solely in terms of his ideological and political opposition to removing *local* institutions (which, for him, promoted social justice and widening access) from the predominantly Labour-controlled LEAs and aligning them with, largely, *nationally selective* universities (Crosland, 1982). By 1965, university annual expenditure had increased from just £3.7m in 1945 to £134.5m, 70% of which now came from the state. Furthermore, the Anderson Committee (1960) had recommended the introduction of a national entitlement scheme, which made LEAs liable for *all* home student fees and maintenance grants (subject to parental income) – effectively removing any barriers to students studying away from home³². Anderson’s recommendations had been given legal purchase in the 1962 Education Act – *whilst Robbins was in progress* – and were beginning to hit the public purse due to an expansion the scale of which Anderson had not considered (Hillman, 2013³³). More broadly, Iain Macleod, then Conservative Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, was warning of stagflation in a direct attack on Keynesian economic theory, echoing the discourses of inflation, price control and efficiency that had underpinned the first public expenditure survey (PES) of 1962 (Macleod, 1965). For the first time, the PES had enabled Cabinet to set a limit on public spending against which the diverse departments of government would need to compete. HE policy simply *had to* be aligned with budgetary considerations and the Treasury’s long-term view of the economy.

³¹ The PES of 1962 (see below) was to be undertaken by Treasury officials. Thus, realizing that (to some extent) a financial survey of university expenditure would be like the Treasury scrutinizing itself, the Treasury severed its relationship with the UGC (see Treasury evidence to Robbins, 1963).

³² A further innovation that effectively increased the number of students studying away from home (and their ability to do so) was the introduction of the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) in 1961 by Murray (Chairman of the UGC). Each of these initiatives – a national grant system, UCCA and the Robbins expansion – collectively altered the economic *geographies* of HE whilst putting enormous strain on the public purse.

³³ Nicholas Hillman was David Willetts’ Chief of Staff and then special advisor on HE policy from 2007 to 2013. At the time of writing, he was Director of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI).

By the end of the decade, Britain was on the brink of a severe economic crisis, as was the rest of the globe. In the November of 1967, the Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson had devalued the pound warning that it was the only way that the country could “break out of the straitjacket of boom and bust economics” (BBC, 1967). And by 1969 the Keynesian settlement, which, for many, had produced a “golden age” of global economic stability, was on the verge of total collapse (Held et al, 1999). Shirley Williams, then SoSE, attempted to influence HE’s framework of action, reflecting the fiscal pressures. Her strategies included: reducing or removing student maintenance grants and introducing a system of loans; worsening staff/student ratios to gain economies of scale; developing a system of loans for student accommodation; and the more intensive use of university buildings to gain efficiencies and encourage financial inputs via external ‘consumer’ relations. Although Williams’, almost, *market-like* solutions were not taken forward, they partially reflected measures *already* considered by the CVCP between 1966-67 under demands for greater university efficiency (CVCP, 1966a, 1966b). She also captured the sentiments of Treasury officials relayed in their evidence to Robbins in which they underscored the need to consider financing student fees through loans in order to, a) reflect the *private* as well as *public* benefits of HE, and b) avoid “imperiling” its proposed expansion through lack of solid economic forecasting (Robbins, 1963). Despite the optimism and valuation of HE that had shrouded Robbins³⁴, the 1960s had not been a decade of coherence for HE’s emerging economic geographies.

4.2.6 “Roll-up!” “Roll-back!” “Roll-out!”

In 1979, a distinctly neoliberal emphasis on market principles came into the nation’s economic, social and political relations with the election of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Government. Whilst discourses of national competition, economic growth and efficiency were just as central as they had been at the turn of the century, their ideological and expert problematization produced radically different solutions. HE would still need to expand and serve the public good, but its projected costs to the public purse would need to be reduced through the incremental engendering of market practices, values and subjectivities. Like all good followers of Hayek, the Conservatives understood that any changes could be *only just* ahead of the political

³⁴ A content analysis of Robbins (1963) shows that “value” is mentioned 29 times; “valuable”, 29 times; “values”, 3 times; ideal(s), 6 times; and “principle(s)”, well over 100 times.

curve without severely risking the support of voters (Tomlinson, 1990). But they had inherited a social and economic landscape that was in deep crisis. If the “Misery Index” had swung the US elections of 1976 and 1980 towards the monetarist followers of Friedman, the warning from Wilson’s Energy Minister in 1975, that Britain’s economy faced a “wholesale domestic liquidation” following the oil crisis, inflation, unemployment and recession that had plagued the first half of the decade, had surely done the same (Cabinet Minutes, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c). The moment was ripe for change.

In the university system, bureaucracy caused by the, now, annual public audit had spiraled, as had the costs of salaries, capital grant allocations and general university costs. The situation was similar for the polytechnics, although their monies were distributed via the LA ‘pooling system’, and, as such, they were not subject to public audit (Carswell, 1985). Inflationary pressures, the unions, and an ideological commitment to the public sector – particularly on the Left – were all held to be major causal factors behind an *economic problem* to which neoliberal principles must be applied.

The first move by the new SoSE, Robert Carlisle, was to announce full cost fees for overseas students, thereby creating a full-blown international market³⁵. Until Crosland had announced, in his “Lancaster speech” of 1967, that overseas student fees were to rise to £250 whilst ‘home’ student fees were to remain static, the geography of the public good had not been fully problematized into policy³⁶. However, once Crosland implemented the strategy, amidst calls from the Treasury for greater efficiency and public outcry over the level of overseas subsidization, almost every SoSE that followed recognized the potency of this simple tactical device. Certainly, tying the public good of HE to the national boundary through government policy could diminish public expenditure. But more importantly, based on the deficiency principle (described above), increasing the ‘alternative’ income that the universities derived from fees – *be they overseas or home* – diminished their UGC grant. The polytechnics, which were funded through the LEAs, had *already* turned to overseas recruitment to drive up income as an alternative to competing with the highly rated ex-CATs for home

³⁵ The implementation of full cost fees for overseas students was given full political purchase in the 1983 Education (Fees and Awards) Act.

³⁶ Robbins (1963) had recommended a rise in general fees in order to increase overseas’ contributions and reduce their subsidy from the public purse, but this had not been translated into policy.

students. Now, the universities could be driven to think about projected *student numbers* in relation to income and internal economic management rather than, predominantly, relying on the UGC grant. University autonomy could be breached by the tactic of per-capita funding.

The second move was to begin establishing the ‘machinery’ needed to shape HE’s social relations of value in line with central Government ideology. The Conservatives saw the LAs as their *political antithesis*: inefficient, controlling and a drain on public resources (Bosanquet, 1989; Mohan, 1999). Thus, in their first Budget, the Conservatives severely restricted LA spending – alongside the whole of public expenditure – and capped the LEA funding pool, effectively ending the open-ended expansion of the “public system” that had been under LA control since 1902³⁷. When Keith Joseph took over from Carlisle as SoSE in 1982, he finalized the establishment of the National Advisory Board for Public Higher Education. The NAB was set up specifically to rationalize the public system and take the expansion forward on the basis of lower per-capita spending at marginal cost – driving internal efficiency and self-regulation whilst helping to separate institutional interests from those of the LAs (Shattock, 2012: 73-75).

In the ‘autonomous system’, home fees (derived via the LEAs) had risen substantially throughout the 1970s and now made up over 50% of university income. Thus, in an attempt to lower per-capita spending, the Government cut the UGC quinquennial grant by some 15% (*Guardian*, 1982). In theory, this was designed to drive efficiency measures across the entire autonomous sector. However, rather than move forward with a diminished unit of resource the UGC responded by reducing student recruitment in selected institutions – particularly in the new universities. As *The Guardian* put it, the move represented the “*death of a dream*” that the new universities would produce citizens “who could solve the country’s economic problems” (ibid: 13). Whilst the Government faced public outcry and uproar in the Commons, Keith Joseph noted that at least the cuts were “rational”, stating: “It [the UGC] has distinguished between the good and the less good, the stretched and the over-stretched, the duplicated and the over-duplicated” (cited in ibid). Numbers – or “human units” as Carswell (1985) puts

³⁷ See the 1980 White Paper on Public Expenditure. Shattock (2012: 70) states that LEAs drew on a ‘pool’ to fund student numbers. This favored larger LEAs that could exploit their catchment areas and expand more rapidly than smaller LEAs.

it – were what controlled the system: not the “national need for places” stressed by Robbins (1963).

In his Green Paper of 1985, Joseph struck out at the whole of HE stressing that it was “vital for our higher education to contribute more effectively to the improvement of the performance of the economy” (DES, 1985: para 1.2). He thus proposed two dominant strategies to shape “*the development of higher education into the 1990s*” (DES, 1985). First, a research assessment exercise (RAE) would measure the relative quality of research output and fund institutions accordingly. HEIs would either “publish or perish” (THE, 2002) as scarce resources were directed towards high-quality, research-led institutions. Second, the year-on-year state funding of universities and polytechnics would be cut in order to embed the metrics of efficiency – *of increasing value (output) for money (cost)* – into practice. If institutions, the UGC and the NAB did not respond accordingly then *they* would have to decide which HEIs were worth saving. As *The Sun* (reportedly) put it in support of Joseph’s proposals: “if, for example, [inferior institutions like] Essex were to fall into the North Sea, the only disadvantage would be to increase coastal pollution” (Hansard, 4 June 1985). For the polytechnics, the NAB warned that whilst they had increased student-staff ratios substantially between 1981 and 1985 against a 20% cut in per-capita funding, further cuts to the unit of resource would impact quality significantly (ibid). For the universities now facing bankruptcies and closures, the Jarratt Committee Report on University Efficiency (1985) set the foundations for NPM structures, eliminated new tenure, and increased student-staff ratios. The Report was commissioned by the CVCP.

The marketisation of HE was slow to start. Like many other public sector services such as the NHS, the civil service, policing and defense it was not a matter of simply ‘rolling back’ the state and allowing the market to become the primary mechanism of coordination. Rather, understandings of the social and economic value of HE signified that internal “quasi-market” (Le Grand and Bartlett, 1993) mechanisms were better suited to engender *market-like* behaviour whilst protecting against market failures. In 1992, Kenneth Clarke became SoSE for the reformulated Department for Education (DfE – no longer Science) having spent the previous four years as Health Secretary imposing an internal market and NPM structures on the NHS. For Clarke, engendering competition was key to inducing efficiency, flexibility and rational economic

behaviour. With the universities and polytechnics separated into two different systems with diverse funding structures, cultures and missions, competition was almost impossible. But in a *unified system* in which all the institutions would have to compete for a single pool of students, competition would be almost guaranteed (Kogan and Hanney, 2000).

The legislative groundwork for removing the binary line was set down by Kenneth Baker in his White Paper, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge* (DES, 1987) and his subsequent Education Reform Act (1988). Part II of the Act provided for the establishment of two new funding bodies: the UFC and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC), whose members would be appointed by the SoSE. Not only did the maneuver replace the UGC with a funding council whose remit to ensure value for money in relation to public funding would be directly answerable to the SoSE. The Act (1988: 120.1) also made a clear distinction between what constituted “higher” and “further” education, removing the authority of the LEAs to provide the former in their locales³⁸.

By 1991, under the ‘stifling’ conditions imposed by the new funding mechanisms, the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics (CDP) and CVCP had reached a consensus: the binary system had had its day. Both the PCFC and UFC had pushed forward an expansion by attempting to stimulate competitive prices at marginal costs through market-like mechanisms. In the polytechnics, where responsiveness to local demands and markets had long been part of their social relations, the tactic had worked. In the universities, which were still fighting for the values of freedom and autonomy, it had not (Shattock, 2012: 80-83). However, a joint working group between the CDP and CVCP found that the binary system – or, rather, its (lack of) funding – simply drove down quality and imposed too many restrictions (CVCP/CDP, 1990).

The Further and Higher Education Act (1992) abandoned the binary line, conferring university status on the polytechnics thereby creating a diverse, but *single*, HE sector. The PCFC and UFC were replaced by the Higher Education Funding Councils for England (HEFCE), Wales and Scotland. In England, HEFCE’s role was to “encourage institutional competition to promote the most cost effective use of resources within an

³⁸ The LEAs would still have to administer both fees and maintenance grants.

imperative to contain public spending” (Shattock, 2012: 83). The person to Chair the new Council was the man whose tactics and procedures had worked well with the polytechnics when he was Chair of the PCFC: Sir Ron Dearing. The marketisation of HE had taken a significant step forward.

4.3 The incremental extension of the market imaginary: HE policy from Dearing to Browne (and just a little bit beyond)

4.3.1 Dearing: The small issue of the fee

“As the world becomes ever more complex and fast-changing, the role of higher education as a guardian or transmitter of culture and citizenship needs to be protected. Higher education needs to help individuals and society to understand and adapt to the implications of change, while maintaining the values, which make for a civilised society. Other countries have reached similar conclusions, and other higher education systems are responding. The UK cannot afford to be left behind... However, no public service can automatically expect increasing public expenditure to support it. Higher education needs to demonstrate that it represents a good investment for individuals and society” (Dearing, 1997, Summary Report: paras 18-22).

The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education was appointed with cross-party support in 1996 under the Chairmanship of Sir Ron Dearing. Bearing in mind the diversity of the system – the different types of institutions, their missions, their students, and their geographies – the Committee’s remit was to recommend how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of HE, including support for students, should develop over the following 20 years in order to meet the needs of individuals and the nation. Its *Terms of Reference* stated that, “within the constraints of the Government’s spending priorities and affordability”, the Committee should have regard for certain principles including, that:

1. Participation rates should be increased for young and mature students in initial HE and for adults in lifelong learning;
2. Students should be able to choose between a diverse range of courses, institutions, modes and locations of study;
3. Qualification and teaching standards should, at minimum, be maintained and assured;

4. HE should be increasingly responsive to the needs of both employers and employees and include the development of widely valued skills;
5. Arrangements for student support should be fair and transparent; and
6. Value for money and cost-effectiveness should be obtained in the use of resources (Dearing, 1997, Main Report).

The Inquiry set out its rationale for achieving its remit within two particular discourses. First, echoing OECD (1996, 1997) representations of the vital role that HE had to play in training the world's workforce and fueling economic growth, the Inquiry argued that the UK needed to respond to a growing global, knowledge-based economy in which economic competition was increasing from both advanced and developing countries. As both political and technological forces were driving national economies towards greater integration, ever-more nations were placing increased premium on knowledge and lifelong learning, making them far more committed to HE and training. In turn, this was making national economies more dependent on HE's development of people of all ages with high-level skills. Furthermore, a global market place for HE had been rapidly developing since the WTO had underscored the need for the global North to identify itself as a high-value producer by including HE as a service sector in its first General Agreement on Trade in Services in 1995. If the UK were "to meet the international challenge" and "compete with global competition" it would need to *invest* in higher and further education (Dearing, 1997, "Wider Context").

Second, the British HE sector was facing a massive funding crisis and was no longer expanding. Public support for HE at 1995/96 prices had reached £7.2 billion (on a Public Sector Borrowing Requirement basis), whilst the unit of funding per student had been driven down by over 40% over the preceding 20 years. Moreover, as part of their public spending review (and prior to their defeat in the 1997 General Election), the Conservative Government had projected a further 6.5% reduction in the unit of funding over the next two-to-three years, which the Inquiry had to uphold (Dearing, 1997, Report 12). Certainly, there were now over 1.6 million full- and part-time students in HE, with almost 1/3 of young people from schools and colleges progressing into nearly 200 HEIs across the UK. However, in 1993, then SoSE, Kenneth Clark, had effectively halted national expansion by placing a cap on publicly funded undergraduate numbers and withdrawing most of the capital grant. As a result,

the Inquiry, citing oral evidence from the CVCP, was concerned that the long-term stability of the HE system and the reputation of UK awards may be undermined by “short term pressures to reduce costs, in conditions of no growth” (ibid, Main Report: 17.6). Something had to be done.

If 18 years of Conservative rule had embedded quasi-market mechanisms in order to induce and normalise neoliberal understandings of efficiency and competition into HE’s framework of action, Dearing’s solutions marked a far deeper penetration of the ‘market imaginary’ into policy. Certainly, as the opening quote to this section highlights, the Inquiry Committee was determined to preserve the traditional role of HE as the transmitter of values and culture that made for a civilized society. However, under international pressures to compete in a global knowledge economy and under austere national fiscal conditions, the principles formalized by Robbins needed to be “redefined and extended” (ibid, Report 1, “Key Points”). Demand for HE from people of all ages was expected to grow, and in order to keep up with other nations, participation rates for young people would need to reach 45%. Moreover, HE had “proved to be an excellent *personal* investment” with a return to graduates “averaging between 11 and 14 per cent” through improved earnings and their ability to give employers “a credible signal” of their potential. And this trend for graduates to be the major beneficiaries of HE was expected to continue, “even after further expansion” (ibid, Summary Report: 25). As such, the Inquiry concluded that students needed to be identified and understood more as ‘*consumers*’ of HE, and the universities more as its ‘*producers*’ (ibid, Report 12).

The central mechanism by which this could be achieved was that of *exchange*. Rather than have Government purchase (ex-ante) HE in its entirety on behalf of its consumers, potential students would need to evaluate *for themselves* the costs and benefits of HE through the payment of an up-front fee. Although the Inquiry recommended that the fee – which was calculated to cover the full cost of tuition – was to be shared with Government in order to reflect both its *private* and *public* value, the student contribution of around 25%, or £1000, was to be collected and administered by the universities, putting them into a direct producer-consumer relationship with the student (ibid, Main Report, Recommendations 72 & 79). In theory, this would make the universities more responsive to student demand; more competitive in trying to attract

students; more informative regarding their courses and standards; more proactive in diversifying income streams; more business-like in their internal accounting systems; and more cost effective and efficient. As the policy consultancy group London Economics put it in their Report to the Inquiry: “with more student-linked funding, one would expect institutions to develop the characteristics of *free market agents*” (ibid, Report 12: 2.2.1-2.2.3, emphasis added).

On 23rd July 1997, within hours of the Dearing Report’s release, the New Labour Government made an interim statement to the House of Commons agreeing with the Committee that, given the severe funding problems facing HE, funding reform was the only way to ensure that the system could improve and expand. As David Blunkett, then SoSE for the Department for Education and (now) Employment (DfEE), stated:

“Students should share both the investment and the advantages gained from higher education: rights and responsibilities go hand in hand. The investment of the nation must be balanced by the commitment of the individual: each will gain from the investment made” (Hansard, 23 July, 1997).

By February 1998, the Government was ready to finalize their proposals for taking the Inquiry’s recommendations forward. They did so through the simultaneous launch of two publications: their Green Paper, *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998a), which detailed their strategy for lifelong learning, and *Higher Education for the 21st Century: Response to the Dearing Report* (DfEE, 1998b). The recommended flat rate, up-front fee of £1000 was to be initiated. However, it would be means-tested in order to protect the less well off. Students currently assessed as eligible for full maintenance support would pay no fee at all with the level of contribution for remaining students being assessed on a tapering scale pegged to parental or spousal income. As promised in New Labour’s pre-election statement on lifelong learning, all remaining maintenance grants for living costs were to be replaced by ‘interest neutral’ loans, which would be repaid on an income contingent basis (Labour, 1997). Again, in order to protect the less well off, repayment would only begin once the graduate’s income reached £10,000 with the level of repayment being directly linked to monthly earnings.

The Government’s decision to mediate the impact of the fee on low-income families was an attempt to uphold the long-held value that HE should be available to all those capable of benefiting from it, regardless of location or wealth (DfEE, 1998a, 1998b).

Throughout the Dearing Inquiry, “fair” or “widening” access had arisen as a strong competing discourse to the market imaginary, and had informed many of the Committee’s recommendations. Furthermore, the social, cultural and economic benefits of widening access had underpinned much of the criticism levied at the Government for agreeing that fees were to now play a central role in funding HE. For example, Lord Glenamara, Labour’s Education Secretary in the late 1960s, declared to the House of Lords that he was “ashamed of the party” for initiating the fee (BBC, 1998). Ken Livingstone, MP, accused the Party of “whipping away a ladder of opportunity which they themselves had climbed” (ibid). And debates regarding the Teaching and Higher Education Bill (DfEE, 1998c) highlighted what Baroness Blatch expressed as, “the irony of all time” that it was a *Labour* Government that would be dissuading young people from low-income families to participate in HE due to the level of “state organised debt³⁹” they would accrue (HoC, 1998). Although David Blunkett’s statement of July ’97⁴⁰ argued that *to not* ensure the investment needed for the future of HE would be “to betray the next generation”, New Labour’s turn towards market principles – no matter how mitigated – had left many people feeling betrayed (see also Leuner, 1997).

4.3.2 Blair: Top-up fees and a differentiated market

Certainly, the policies that the New Labour Government put into practice in 1998 further established the mechanisms and ‘machinery of Government’ required to embed market principles into HE’s framework of action. Aside from setting the legal foundations for student tuition fees and loans for living costs through the Teaching and Higher Education Act (1998), the Government used its regulation making powers to influence the actions and activities of HEIs and the ways in which they measured themselves against certain criteria. For example, to ensure that HEIs provided potential students with better and more-timely information regarding their courses and teaching standards, the Government pursued two avenues. First, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was established with the duty of reviewing university provision of careers services and guidance as part of its remit, thereby ensuring that HEIs better integrated advice on lifelong learning into their procedures. Set within economic discourses of

³⁹ The *Guardian*, 24 September 1997 – cited in HoC, 12 March 1998.

⁴⁰ David Blunkett omitted this phrase from his statement to the Commons. However, the statement read simultaneously to the House of Lords by Baroness Blackstone included the phrase. In theory, the statements should have been identical. See Hansard, 23 July 1997, volume 581 cc1445-58, House of Lords.

human capital and utility maximization, the aim was “to help people choose courses and careers which [were] right for them to maximise their opportunities” (DfEE, 1998b: 2.3). Second, the Government set up working groups to bring together representatives of schools, colleges, HEIs and student unions, along with other interested parties, to research students’ information needs and establish where improvements could be made. The explicit aim was to elicit rational economic behaviour by ensuring “that students [had] the fullest available information on higher education opportunities, costs and benefits as a basis for making choices” (ibid: 2.5). The Government also sought to increase university efficiency through extending the regulatory role of the Funding Councils. In England, HEFCE was to now issue the block-teaching grant (BTG), and as part of their funding formula, HEIs were required to increase efficiency and cut costs. Moreover, where any university spending was found to be well above the sector median, HEFCE now had the power to examine whether it “represented a good use of resources” and to penalize institutions that failed to evidence value for money (ibid: 10.4). Far from upholding the principle of autonomy by keeping Government at arms length from the universities, both the QAA and HEFCE extended the Government’s powers to engender neoliberally informed market subjectivities – affecting both universities and students alike.

However, it was not until 2003 with the release of their White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003a), that the Government put into policy understandings of student-led demand and a differentiated market through the implementation of, so-called, ‘top-up fees’. According to the Department for Education and (now) Skills (DfES) in their paper, *Why Not a Fixed Fee?* (DfES, 2003b) the variable fee was foundational to engendering certain market principles. Fundamentally, the Government believed that it was wrong to assume that every student wanted the same thing from higher education or that every university should be the same. A “one-size-fits-all model” was “unfair to students” and “too rigid for universities”. “Diversity” needed to be “celebrated not stifled” (DfES, 2003b: 4). Under variable fees, universities would be responsible for setting their own fees up to a Government imposed cap of £3000. As such, diversity, competition, efficiency, entrepreneurialism, excellence and innovation could all be encouraged by giving students more *choice* and institutions more *freedom* via the simple market process of relating supply to demand through variable prices (ibid).

On the one hand, through a discourse of *consumer choice*, the Government was attempting to differentiate student identities and match them with producer-institutions. For example, the DfES argued that whilst every student required “high-class teaching”, some were “looking for a specific job”; others “wanted to learn for the love of learning”; some “wanted to be pioneers in their fields”; and others just wanted “to be the first in their families to go to university”. As such, the country needed both *local* universities “working with their communities and regional economies” and *nationally/internationally selective* universities “doing leading edge research”. The sector needed to respond to the demands of all manner of students, not simply the most academically able (ibid).

On the other hand, through a discourse of *producer freedom*, the Government was attempting to engender a differentiated, competitive market in which universities and higher/further education colleges could identify and position themselves against their peers. For the DfES, HEIs needed the freedom to manage their own businesses and determine their own fee policies. It was simply wrong for Government to set fees centrally and stifle competition by making decisions that were best made by those responsible for delivering HE. As the DfES put it:

“It is their course and their provision; and they know best where to set a fee that offers good value for money to their students... An ability to compete on cost as well as quality will level the playing field for those universities and colleges able to offer excellent value for money but unable to compete on reputation alone” (ibid: 5).

Implemented as a ‘technology of Government’, the DfES underscored that **variable prices would make HEIs “think hard about what they charge[d] for their courses and about the attractiveness of the student ‘package’ leading to innovation and quality improvements right across the sector”** (ibid: 6). Yet embedding such market logic into HE’s framework of action would need to be bolstered through further improvements in student information. To this end, the Government proposed a two-pronged strategy. First, the DfES was to introduce a new survey for all final year students through which they would report on the content, nature and value of their experiences. Second, the universities would be made to publish summaries of external examiners’ reports revealing information regarding the quality of courses and the peer-learning environment. In both cases, the results would be made readily available through a

comprehensive guide to HE, which potential students would be able to examine against the cost of prospective courses, thereby helping them to choose which institution and course was right for them. Together, the strategically selected tactics of variable prices and better information would assure producer-consumer market relations, thus reaping benefits for all:

“The scope to raise more or less cash from students and the publication of better information about what their courses offer will incentivise universities to improve the quality of their offer to students and ensure that it offers good value for money... And because students will begin to take decisions that are informed by the personal cost and benefit of their courses, the sector is likely to be more responsive to the needs of employers, with knock on effects for the economy as a whole” (ibid: 6).

Again, the Government proposed to mitigate the impact of top-up fees on low-income families citing the social values of fair access and widening participation as its rationale (DfES, 2003a, 2003b). Under a new Graduate Contribution Scheme, students would no longer be required to pay the fee up-front. Instead, the value of the fee could be covered by interest neutral loans, which could be added to any maintenance loans repayable through the state-sponsored Student Loans Company (SLC). In keeping with the 1998 Act, the loans would be income contingent with no graduate making repayments until their annual earnings reached £15,000. However, in a highly regulatory move, the Government proposed that any institution wanting to charge top-up fees above the (then) annual fee level of £1100 would need to draw up a five-year Access Agreement setting out:

- The fees the institution wished to charge;
- The courses to which the fees would apply;
- The outreach work they intended to undertake with schools and colleges to help raise the level of attainment, aspirations and applications;
- The bursaries and other financial support the university would make available along with advice on financial issues; and
- The milestones and indicators the university would decide itself and against which it could measure progress towards its own ambitions of widening participation (DfES, 2003c).

A new Office of Fair Access (OFFA) would be established to both approve the universities’ Access Agreements and review their “overall efforts and progress” when

they came up for renewal (ibid: 4). And, supported by HEFCE, OFFA would have the power to impose financial penalties if the Agreements were not fulfilled.

Whilst, in principle, the majority of universities and other interested parties were supportive of the values of fair access and widening participation, many underscored that those values were being undermined by the level of student debt, which had rapidly increased following the 1998 legislation (HOCESC, 2002-03a: 63). Further still, many were opposed the notion of external ‘state’ regulation, fearing that it would be yet another breach of university autonomy. As the Standing Conference of Principals stated in its evidence to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (HOCESC):

“The access regulator... is bound to involve a layer of bureaucracy. [It] is bound to want to get involved in things that are not any of its business. Admissions is... one of the few areas of higher education that is not externally regulated closely by the funding council. It is now going to be [regulated]... so you are back to a state agency” (ibid: 47).

Through specific regulation of institutional behaviour, Government was attempting to pin down, ex-ante, a particular understanding of the value of HE as a return on the state’s investment.

Conversely, many of the witnesses giving evidence to the HOCESC also opposed the notion of ‘university freedom’ being gained through a differentiated market – albeit a regulated one. For example, the National Union of Students (NUS), the AUT, and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) stated that the vast majority of their respective members were *overwhelmingly opposed* to differential fees between institutions. For the NUS this was because it would “create a two-tier, elitist higher education system” (ibid: 54); for the AUT it “would impact [teachers]’ ability to make choices and help people on the basis of their academic ability rather than their ability to pay” (ibid: 55); and for NATFHE it would “destroy funding equality and thus genuine equality of opportunity” (ibid). Furthermore, having differential fees *within* each university was even worse. Most AUT members were “absolutely horrified by the idea that an internal market may well develop between departments and courses” (ibid: 58), while the University of East Anglia underscored that charging more to read English than Chemistry would “turn students into

consumers who inhabit rooms... in the same institution... wonder[ing] why one is cross-subsidizing the other” (ibid: 59).

Significantly, then SoSE Charles Clarke highlighted that the New Labour Government’s decision to operationalize top-up fees for full-time, home undergraduate students denoted “a major departure” in their strategic regulation of HE (ibid: 58). In 1998, the Government had not only rejected top-up fees on the grounds that they might cause home undergraduates to ‘shop around’ for courses or institutions on the basis of price rather than the appropriateness of the provision offered (Blackstone, 1997⁴¹). They had made top-up fees *illegal*, and had conferred upon HEFCE the power to financially penalize any institution attempting to charge over (or under) the fee set by Government (THE Act, 1998: Section 26). At that time, New Labour had reasoned that setting fees centrally was necessary because the CVCP alongside (specifically) the London School of Economics and seventeen other ‘leading’ universities had been threatening to charge a £300 levy on admissions due to the severe funding restrictions imposed under 16 years of neoliberally informed Conservative rule (HoC, 1998: 47). Now in 2003, just five years later, the Government was responding favourably to pressure from the CVCP (now, Universities UK) and, in particular, the Russell Group institutions to reinstate their powers to levy such charges and raise additional funds (see BBC, 2000, 2003).

Although the arguments put forward by the CVCP (UUK) included an understanding that having Government set university fees would undermine their autonomy and academic freedom, it was the universities’ ability to survive via an adequate system of funding that was foundational to their rationale (BBC, 2000, 2003; *Guardian*, 2002). According to UUK and a number of independent Vice-Chancellors and Principals, if the Government was not prepared to pay the real cost of funding the HE sector, then those who most benefitted from it – i.e. *the students* – would have to make up the difference (Barr, 2002; HOCESE, 2002-3b⁴²). Moreover, the value derived from the students would need to be sufficient to fund the sector over the long term. As Britain’s

⁴¹ Baroness Blackstone, Hansard, HoL Debate, 30th October 1997, column 1127.

⁴² See for example, oral and/or written evidence to HOCESE (2002-2003b) from Professor R. Floud (Vice Chancellor, London Metropolitan University); Professor A. Lucas (Principle, Kings College London); Dr. G. Copeland (Vice-Chancellor, University of Westminster); and Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Chief Executive, UUK): Questions 152-159 and 160-179 (Accessed at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmeduski/425/3021201.htm>).

leading expert and Government advisor on university funding, economist Nicholas Barr, put it:

“The current cap of £3000 is probably about right. [But] if the cap is too low for too long, a critical bulk of universities will charge the maximum, appropriating a system of flat fees. The result will be, a) to reintroduce close-ended funding, and b) to restore central planning by the back door” (HCESC, 2002-03a: 58).

Retaining the £3000 cap on top-up fees beyond the life of the next parliament would stifle the logic of market competition and banish HE to the impoverishment of a centrally planned economy (Barr, 2002-03). The political extension of the ‘market imaginary’ across HE’s social relations of value would, definitively, need to be revisited.

4.3.3 Current policy: students at the heart of the system

When the former CEO of BP, Lord Browne, was invited by the New Labour Government in November 2009 to review HE’s system of funding and student finance, Britain, along-side the rest of the globe, was in the grip of an economic crisis the effects of which had their roots in the neo-liberalized, de-regulated world of global finance (Harvey, 2011; Peck et al, 2010, 2012; Pani and Holman, 2013). Then Governor of the Bank of England, Mervin King, had likened the crisis to that of 1914 stating that, in both cases, it was the free-market policies and practices of *laissez faire* that had caused the value of assets held by the banks to plummet and thus precipitated their bailout by the nation’s tax-payers (Pym, 2014). Regarding the HE sector, between 1914 and 1919 two cross-party coalition Governments⁴³ had reacted to the austere fiscal conditions by setting up the UGC to ensure university survival through local and national *public funding*. In October 2010, when the Browne Review was released, both it and the newly elected Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition reasoned that the only way to ensure the long-term survival of the sector was *further marketisation*.

Similar to the Dearing Report (1998) and New Labour’s White Paper on the future of higher education (DfEE, 2003a), the Browne Review (2010) set out its strategies for representing and reforming HE’s framework of action within a logical, neoliberally

⁴³ From May 1915 to December 1916, Liberal leader, Herbert Asquith led a Liberal-Conservative-Labour coalition. From 1916 to 1922, Liberal leader, David Lloyd George did the same.

informed, economic discourse⁴⁴. In a competitive global knowledge-based economy, a strong HE system was vital to the national economy and Britain's international economic standing. Thus, in order to sustain future economic growth, increased investment in HE was required; otherwise, the benefits that HE could bring to individuals and the nation would be lost, as would Britain's international comparative advantage. However, due to the financial crisis, HE faced "significant reductions in public investment over the next few years", so whatever strategies the Review selected would require "a long term perspective": one that would provide "a sustainable funding solution for the future" (Browne, 2010: 17). To this end, the Review recommended:

"...a radical departure from the existing way in which HEIs are financed. Rather than the Government providing a block grant for teaching to HEIs, their finance now follows the student who has chosen and been admitted to study. Choice is in the hands of the student. HEIs can charge different and higher fees provided that they can show improvements to the student experience and demonstrate progress in providing fair access and, of course, that students are prepared to entertain such charges" (ibid: 3).

The mix of market reforms and arms-length regulation that had been implemented since 2006 under the Higher Education Act (2004) had provided English universities with the resources and freedom to invest in staff, infrastructure and widening access (Browne, 2010: 19). However, according to the logic of the Browne Review, the year-on-year ex-ante funding of institutions through the BTG – *regardless of their performance in relation to students* – had allowed the sector to become "complacent" (ibid: 23). HEIs needed to behave more like market actors. They needed to be *more* competitive, *more* efficient, *more* flexible, and provide better information and an improved student experience. Thus, the only rational solution, according to Browne, was to *deepen* the market logic of a demand-led system by placing students at its heart. The state valuation and subsidization of home undergraduate tuition fees via the BTG had to end (except in the cases of strategically important or vulnerable subjects). The time had come for the student-consumer to value HE through the payment of variable, full-cost covering fees – thereby forcing producer-institutions to deal with the realities and uncertainties of consumer choice in a competitive market:

⁴⁴ See Chapter Eight for a discussion on the interplay between the incremental normalisation of such discourses and the HE sector's diminishing resistance to marketisation over time.

“Our proposals put students at the heart of the system. Popular HEIs will be able to expand to meet student demand. Students will be better informed about the range of options available to them. Their choices will shape the landscape of higher education... HEIs must persuade students that they should ‘pay more’ in order to ‘get more’. The money will follow the student” (ibid: 4).

To support this discourse, the Review presented economic evidence submitted by knowledgeable experts. For example, numerous witnesses⁴⁵ had drawn upon OECD statistics, which suggested that those countries that had expanded their HE sectors more rapidly since 1960 had experienced faster economic growth (OECD, 2008, 2009). Universities UK (UUK) (formerly the CVCP) had calculated that, in Britain, HE was larger in size by Gross Value Added than the advertising, aerospace or pharmaceutical industries with an estimated annual output of £59 billion. The sector was part of a thriving international market attracting students from across the globe, making Britain the second most popular destination behind the USA (OECD, 2010); whilst, according to the QS World University Rankings (2010), 15 of the country’s universities were in the global top 100. Furthermore, as the Russell Group argued, with 45% of young British people now progressing into HE, the increase in employed university graduates between 2000 and 2007 accounted for some 6% of growth in the private sector, or £4.2 billion of extra output “as measured by the extra wages people earned as a result of being graduates” (Browne, 2010: 14).

Clearly, then, there were both public and private benefits derived from HE. Yet, as the expert witness Nicholas Barr claimed, according to economic theory the balance between the state’s contribution and that of the home undergraduate was totally wrong (Barr, 2010). According to the Browne Review, OECD (2010) research clearly demonstrated that the individual benefits of HE in the UK were, “on average, over 50% higher than the public benefits” (2010: 14). And yet, Research from the Institute of Fiscal Studies showed that, under the policies implemented since 2006, the additional private contributions that graduates would make over time through the repayment of their top-up fee loans (around £1.7 billion compared to the Dearing system) were almost equaled by the additional state support provided to students upfront to help ensure “participation and access” (£1.6 billion) (ibid: 21). The current

⁴⁵ These included the Russell Group, Million+ Group, Alliance Group, Cambridge University, the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, and Howard Davies – to name but a few.

system of funding had, therefore, *failed* to redress the disproportionate contribution that the state had been paying in order to protect, from market failures, the ‘positive externalities’ that HE brings to society at large (Barr, 2010).

In addition, evidence from HEFCE indicated that, contrary to concerns raised during the 2003 debates, demand from potential home undergraduates had increased, suggesting that they were willing to pay a higher price for a level of education that they, themselves, held as valuable (Browne, 2010: 20). Thus, the Review argued that:

“Unlike primary and secondary education, which are paid for out of general taxation, higher education is neither compulsory nor universal. Access to it is determined by aptitude... and by choice... As a consequence it is only reasonable to ask those who gain private benefits from higher education to help fund it rather than rely solely on public funds collected through taxation from people who may not have participated in higher education themselves” (ibid: 21).

According to Browne’s rationale, it was simply wrong to ask individual taxpayers who may not be deriving the private *use value* of HE to subsidize, collectively, another individual’s freedom to choose (ibid). There was, therefore, a persuasive *moral* argument based on neoliberal principles, as well as an *economic* one, to support the instigation of full-cost covering fees in a competitive market.

The discursive turn against collective policies was echoed by Liberal Democrat Vince Cable, the new Secretary of State for “Business, Innovation and Skills” (rather than “Education”), in his initial House of Commons’ response to the Browne Review (Hansard, 12 October 2010a). The Liberal Democrats had come to power in the June by negotiating with the majority Conservatives following Britain’s first hung Parliament since 1974. The outgoing New Labour Government under the Premiership of Gordon Brown had lost 91 seats in the party’s single biggest loss since 1931, perhaps signaling – as was claimed by their political opponents – that the voting public was wholly dissatisfied with a Government that had allowed the economy to run out of control (see Swaine, 2008). When the former New Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, had finally stepped aside to make way for Gordon Brown in June 2007, the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer had brought with him the reputation of a prudent, knowledgeable economist-politician dedicated to Third-Way strategies for seeking economic growth and stability across the fiscal cycle (Economist, 2005). Now, his

Keynesian-related demand-side strategies could be blamed for “Britain’s broken economy” (David Cameron, cited in Swaine, 2008), allowing Cable to obfuscate the failings of neoliberal market strategies and declare:

“...As a strategic direction the Government believes that the Review is on the right lines... Browne acknowledges that, “the current funding and finance systems for higher education are unsustainable and need urgent reform”. The issue [now] has to be framed in terms of how the higher education sector contributes to the deficit reduction programme... My own Party consistently opposed graduate contributions, but in the current economic climate we accept that the policy is simply no longer feasible... We are in a world in which we have inherited a massive financial mess. We have to come to terms with reality... That is why I intend, on behalf of the coalition, to put specific proposals to the House to implement radical and progressive reforms of higher education along the lines of the Browne Report” (Hansard, 12 October 2010a).

In fact, the Secretary of State alongside the Government’s new Minister for Universities and Science, Conservative David Willetts, spent the next seven months putting their message across and testing their ideas against political and public opinion. Between October 2010 and June 2011, which saw the release of their White Paper, *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System* (BIS, 2011a), the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills⁴⁶ (BIS) slowly set out its strategies through, often, “passionate and robust debates⁴⁷” in the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and the passage of the Education Bill (137) (e.g. Hansard, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d; HOC, 2011); in Written Ministerial Statements and Standard Notes deposited in the Commons’ Library (e.g. Hansard, 2010e; LSN, 2010a, 2010b); through Impact Assessments, BIS and HEFCE Circular Letters, and BIS webpages (e.g. BIS, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; HEFCE, 2011); and through both official and leaked releases to the media (e.g. BBC, 2010; Guardian, 2010b; THE, 2010; Daily Mail, 2011b; Independent, 2011; Telegraph, 2011b). Each of these fora provided the Government with the opportunity to construct a particular representation of HE’s framework of action by identifying specific actions, activities and identities for HE’s actors. They also enabled the Government to communicate the logic of their rationale for doing so.

⁴⁶ The Department for Education and Skills (DfES 2001-2007) became the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills in 2007, separating HE from education. The DfIUS became the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in 2009.

⁴⁷ David Willetts referring to the HOC Debate on Higher Education Fees, in Hansard, 9 December 2010.

For example, the identification of accurate, timely information and competition as indispensable components of an efficient market helped the Government to construct the consumer and producer identities and relations of value they wished to embed between students and HEIs. As David Willets stated to the Commons:

“...The bulk of universities’ money will not come through the block grant, but will instead follow the choices of students. It will be up to each university or college to decide what it charges, including the amounts for different courses. All universities and colleges... will be expected to publish a standard set of information about their performance on the indicators that students and their parents value: contact hours, teaching patterns and employment outcomes. We also propose to open up higher education provision to new providers, including further education colleges. These proposals offer a thriving future for universities, with extra freedoms and less bureaucracy, and they ensure value for money and real choice for learners” (Hansard, 3 November, 2010b).

The Government’s rationale for increasing information and competition was publicly circulated through the media, which in turn provided a forum for opposing-discourses to be put forward. For instance, *The Telegraph* noted the Government’s intention that information would “be fed into new price comparison-style websites that shame the worst-performing universities and allow students to apply to the best institutions” thereby “ensuring students gain maximum value for their additional investment” (Paton, 2011). However, countering the proposition, *Times Higher Education* suggested that the amount of information that HEIs were being asked to provide would “baffle, not enlighten, students” (Partington, 2011). Regarding competition, the *BBC* explained how the cut in the teaching grant would “go a long way towards creating a level playing-field” between public and private universities, thereby “removing the barriers” that had long-stifled competition (Baker, 2011). However, *The Observer* warned that the risks posed by private sector universities were being ignored – underscoring that the value of Britain’s “world-class reputation” was at stake (Boffey, 2011).

By the time the White Paper (BIS, 2011a) was released, every element of it (to paraphrase what a Government Minister told me in private conversation) had been ‘cogitated, argued over, and pulled to pieces’, both in public and in private, allowing the Government to refine its strategies before putting them into policy and practice.

That is not to say that public and professional opinion necessarily changed the Government's fundamental position. Indeed, the many public protests involving tens of thousands of students, families and teachers that took place across the country between November and December 2010 did nothing to alter the Government's rationale for replacing public funding with private funding, which, as Vince Cable stated, was "in some sense, ideological" (Hansard, 9 December 2010d).

However, considered as a 'technology of government', it was predominantly the White Paper (BIS, 2011a), alongside the Government's official Response to Lord Browne (BIS, 2011b), BIS's Impact Assessment (BIS, 2011c) and the minor amendments that arose from the White Paper Consultation (BIS, 2012), of which HEIs would have to make sense and meaning in relation to their existing socio-economic geographies.

The White Paper spans some 78 pages and sets out the coalition's "radical" yet "progressive" policies for regulating the HE sector from academic year 2012/13. On the radical side, following Browne (2010), the goal was to create a demand-led system, which would be "freed to respond in new ways to the needs of students" (BIS, 2011a: 3). To achieve this, the White Paper suggested rebalancing power and influence through strategically selected policies that would "do more than ever to put students in the driving seat" (ibid: 2). Up until now, Government funding of HE had taken power and influence out of the hands of students and weakened the incentives on institutions to improve their performance – including the quality of teaching and range of choice. Similarly, because undergraduates had not yet faced the full cost of undertaking HE, the incentive for them to put pressure on institutions to provide a better service, and at a better cost, had been lessened (see also, BIS, 2011c). As such, an economic discourse of 'government failure' coupled with the logic of free-market principles framed the metrics and criteria by which HE had to change.

On the progressive side, the goal was to widen participation further and to increase social mobility through certain Government interventions. Fundamentally, the coalition suggested that HE could be:

"...a powerful engine of social mobility, enabling able young people from low-income backgrounds to earn more than their parents and provid[e] a route into the professions for people from non-professional backgrounds" (BIS, 2011a: 54).

However, in accessing HE, there were often:

“...significant barriers in the way of bright young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds” (ibid).

For example, simply opening up HE to the uncertainties of the market might result in significant market failures whereby the public value of HE might suffer due to inadequate investment either by HEIs or individuals (BIS, 2011c: 21). Furthermore, although the system of student finance and Access Agreements implemented since 2006 had helped maintain participation levels of low-income students, “applicants with real potential” were still “not making it into the most selective institutions” (BIS, 2011a: 6). Thus, the White Paper argued that although, in principle, the Government supported the values of university freedom and autonomy they, concomitantly, endorsed the principle of access enunciated by Robbins. As a result, *all* individuals “with the highest academic potential” had to be provided a route into HE – “and to the most selective institutions in particular” (ibid: 7).

To meet these goals, the primary element that Government had to address was university funding and student finance. From September 2011, HEIs across England would see substantial cuts to their BTGs to make way for a new fees regime for full-time undergraduates. HEIs would be able to charge a basic amount of £6000 per year – which HEFCE had calculated would fully cover their basic costs – and then decide how much extra they wished to charge up to a maximum cap of £9000. The differential fees mechanism would make the sector more responsive to student demand and enable the diversity of provision by compelling HEIs to identify themselves in relation to their students and competitors. The cap would protect the public purse by driving further efficiencies, which would be bolstered by the fact that cost-covering fees would not come into operation until September 2012. HEIs would, therefore, face a direct cut to funding for the academic year 2011/12 – immediately stimulating the efficiency measures recommended by the Diamond Review⁴⁸, which UUK had, themselves, commissioned (ibid: 19-20).

Thus, the funding – *the “life-sustaining” value* (Lee, 2006: 415) – previously allocated via HEFCE on the basis of teaching and learning would now need to be raised via

⁴⁸ Professor Ian Diamond of the University of Aberdeen was leading a review of efficiency in the HE sector.

recruitment, thereby opening up HEIs to the risks and uncertainties of an undergraduate market. For the Government this was central to their market rationale:

“[The introduction of full cost-covering fees will] put more power into the hands of students. Institutions that can attract students by showing them that they offer good quality and good value for money, should grow and prosper, and may well increase their overall income. Institutions that cannot attract students will have to change” (BIS, 2011a: 15).

A re-vamped graduate contribution scheme would underpin the Government’s ‘progressive’ understanding of student finance. No first-time undergraduate would have to pay the fee upfront, although they could if they wished. Instead, interest-bearing loans would be provided via the SLC to be repaid on a “pay as you earn” basis through the tax system. Graduate borrowers would start to repay the loans only once they earned above £21,000 annual salary, and repayments would be deducted at 9% of income above this threshold. Interest would be charged at a tapered rate, again based on earnings, and capped at Retail Price Index +3%. After 30 years from graduation, any outstanding debt would be written off (ibid: 17).

Importantly, throughout the text BIS underscored the progressive nature of the scheme. As Nicholas Barr argued in his evidence to the Browne Review, it was imperative that the key message relayed to readers emphasized that it was *graduates* who repaid the loans, *not students* (Barr, 2010). This discursive splitting of identity between the consumer of HE and its purchaser enabled BIS to construct a ‘win-win’ discourse regarding the process of exchange. Since the repayments would be linked to actual earnings, the graduate contribution would reflect the quantum of personal gain, thus ensuring that the repayments would be based “on the ability to repay, rather than the size of their debt” (BIS, 2011a: 17). According to Government estimates, around 70% of total costs to the exchequer would be recovered over a 30-year period. The remaining 30% of costs would be borne by Government “to maintain the progressive elements of the scheme” (ibid: 15). High-earning graduates, *not students*, would be the major beneficiaries of and contributors to HE, leaving Government to finance the (remaining) value of the public good.

In order to further embed both a ‘market imaginary’ and the Government’s understanding of the public value of HE into HE’s framework of action, the White

Paper detailed three particular strategies. First, teaching had to be put back at the heart of the student experience in order to ensure the quality of the system. The key to achieving this was by better regulating the availability and type of information that student-consumers could access. From 2012/13 all publicly funded HEIs would have to provide a Key Information Set (KIS) for each of their full-time and part-time undergraduate courses covered by the QAA, who would now “make formal judgements” on the quality of information provided (ibid: 36). This would make it easier for student-consumers to locate and compare information across diverse institutions. Included in KIS would be statistics regarding: student satisfaction and NSS results; graduate outcomes such as employment and earnings; time spent in learning and teaching activities; methods of assessment and feedback; course tuition fees; student finance including bursaries, scholarships and other student support; entry tariff requirements; accommodation; and various metrics of teaching excellence. In case the student-consumer, institution-producer or any other interested party should misunderstand what role they should play or the purpose of KIS, the White Paper spelled out its market logic:

“[The] wider availability and better use of information for potential students is fundamental to the new system... It will be... harder for institutions to trade on their past reputations while offering a poor teaching experience in the present. Better-informed students will take their custom to the places offering good value for money. In this way, excellent teaching will be placed back at the heart of every student’s university experience” (ibid: 32).

The power to influence the quality of HE would be put into the hands of its consumers (ibid: 2).

Second, diversity and responsiveness had to be increased. Certainly, cost-covering fees, differential prices and better information would heighten competition somewhat. But these mechanisms, alone, were not enough to provide a system in which students could “choose freely between a wide range of providers” (ibid: 47). Popular HEIs and courses had to be able to expand, and new providers – including private providers and FE colleges – had to be able to “enter the market” (ibid: 46). Initially, the White Paper had wanted to create a “level playing field” by giving private providers similar access to public funding (via SLC loans) to that received by public HEIs (ibid: 47), but these plans were ‘temporarily postponed’ following the White Paper Consultation (BIS,

2012). Thus, the Government's primary strategy was to "liberate" Student Number Controls (SNCs).

Due to recruitment beyond HEFCE set targets by some institutions in recent years, strict SNCs covering home, full-time undergraduates were introduced in 2009/10 with "penalties" for institutions that "over recruited" (BIS, 2011a: 48). Whilst the fiscal reasons for SNCs remained valid, the controls were limiting student choice and restricting expansion, thereby stifling competition and diversity through an imbalance between supply and demand. Thus, within the confines of decreasing public spending and ensuring that overall costs were managed, SNCs had to be "set free" (ibid). To this end, the White Paper proposed:

"...a package of reforms to free up around 85,000 student numbers in 2012/13. We will do this by introducing a flexible "core and margin" model to be administered by HEFCE. From year to year, every institution will have to compete for the student numbers outside its core allocation and the core will reduce every year" (ibid: 50).

There would be two elements to their approach. First, the new regulations would allow "unrestrained recruitment of high-achieving students scoring the equivalent of AAB or above at A-Level" (ibid). Core allocations for all universities and FE colleges (with degree-awarding powers) would be adjusted by HEFCE to remove these places from the 2011/12 SNCs leaving HEIs with a 'reduced core'. Institutions would then be free to recruit as many AAB+ students "as wish to come" (ibid). Overall, the Government estimated that some 65,000 AAB+ places would be "liberated" in 2012/13, with the competition being extended year-on-year across the life of the Parliament, continuing with ABB students in 2013/14. This would allow "greater competition for places on the more selective courses and create the opportunity for more students to go to their first choice institution if that university wishe[d] to take them" (ibid).

The second element involved the creation of a "flexible margin" of around 20,000 places, which would be removed from each institution's 'reduced core' on a pro-rata basis. In order to "support expansion by providers" who combined "good quality with value for money" (ibid), HEIs and FE colleges would then be allowed to "bid" for this margin, provided their fees were no more than £7500, including any fee waivers. For institutions that won students, these would be added back to their core, producing a final student allocation for 2012/13. Unlike the AAB+ competition, the flexible margin

would not allow for expansion in overall numbers. However, by steadily increasing the flexible margin in future years a “greater dynamism in the allocation of places” could be achieved (ibid). Together, the AAB+ and “flexible margin” competitions would enable a diverse range of institutions (and students) to identify the actions and activities that fit with their self-perceived subjectivities and which they would need to undertake in a more competitive and dynamic market.

The final strategy that the White Paper detailed would compel HEIs to improve their Access Agreements in order to increase social mobility. Certainly, the state would play its part to uphold what the Government was now, very narrowly, constructing as the public value of HE. HEFCE would continue to recognize the additional costs associated with recruiting students from disadvantaged backgrounds by funding widening access activity through its recurrent targeted allocations to HEIs. HEFCE would also remain responsible for allocating the remaining teaching grant for specific subjects that were deemed too expensive (such as medicine), or were of national importance (e.g. the STEM subjects – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – and strategically important vulnerable subjects (SIVs) like modern foreign languages). Students from families with incomes of £25,000 or less would be eligible for a non-repayable maintenance grant of £3,250 per year, as well as a loan of £3,875 for those living away from home. And the least well off young people and adults would have access to the Government’s new National Scholarship Programme (NSP) – although the number would be limited. Finally, for the first time, part-time undergraduates (many of whom came from non-traditional backgrounds) would be extended tuition fee loans for courses starting in 2012/13 (ibid: 61).

However, as the Government’s ‘partner’ in their ‘public-private’ relationship (ibid: 2), HEIs would, also, have to play their part. Although the White Paper continued to underscored that the Government did not want to undermine academic excellence or institutional autonomy, every HEI in receipt of HEFCE funding would be legally compelled to spend more on their outreach activities, retention strategies, bursaries and fee waivers for widening participation students, whilst strengthening the rationality and metrics of their Access Agreements to be regulated by OFFA. Importantly, the additional funding required to achieve these aims would come from the undergraduate student fee. Any institution charging above the £6000 basic threshold would have to

demonstrate that a minimum proportion was being spent on its Access activities. They would also be expected to implement and match Government funding for the NSP (ibid: 60). What Government understood as the primary public value of HE – i.e. social mobility – had to be protected.

The White Paper, however, clearly articulated one proviso to this strategy. The progressive policies that the Government wished to put in place had to be subject to expenditure constraints and adhere to their overall rationale for putting HE funding on a sustainable footing. As the White Paper put it:

“Ultimately, the best way to widen participation is to ensure there are sufficient higher education places available for those qualified... However, each undergraduate place has a substantial cost for taxpayers and we need a more cost-effective sector if we are to spread opportunity more widely. We will be looking for real efficiencies... [and] increased value for money... The more efficiently that higher education can be provided, the less it will cost the graduates of the future, the more people will be able to benefit and the greater the national economic gain” (ibid: 7-8).

The public value of HE had to be supported, but that could not be to the detriment of realizing the value(s) of the neoliberal market imaginary.

4.4 Conclusion

As demonstrated in this chapter, HE has long been held as a central asset in the production of Britain’s economy and society. Indeed, since 1902 where my analysis began, the public value of HE has been consistently discursively constructed as indispensable to the economic competitiveness and comparative advantage of the nation; to the enrichment of society through the production of knowledge and well-educated citizens; and to the general betterment of society – from the production of elite leaders to the enabling of social mobility amongst the less well off. Yet over time, the political emphasis on who should pay for HE and the ‘machinery’ and/or ‘relations’ through which it should be funded have definitively shifted – both discursively and practically.

It is quite tempting to view this shift, quite simply, in terms of a political re-orientation towards neoliberalism: as a shift from the Left to the Right; from Keynesian demand-side economics to neo-classical supply-side principles; from an emphasis on the public

value of HE to an emphasis on individual gain; or from a belief in the efficiency of central co-ordination to a conviction that the efficient organization of economy and society is best achieved through the practices and values of the ‘free’ market.

Certainly, as demonstrated, since neoliberalism became a potent political force in the late 1970s, and particularly since the turn of the 21st Century, there has been a far deeper penetration of the market imaginary into HE policy – a point to which I shall return in a moment.

However, as detailed in my analysis, the development and application of HE policy up to the present day seems to have been far more complicated than that. For example, in the first decades of the 20th Century as Britain faced severe economic crisis, a wide range of interested parties including Governments formed of the three main political Parties, the universities, Lord Haldane, and the Fabian Society were, collectively, arguing that, given the importance of HE to the nation, a truly ‘public system’ should be established: one which should be publicly funded and centrally co-ordinated for the public good – as those interested parties understood it. Yet, it was the social relations of value of this ‘public system’ – the proximity of the LEA controlled institutions to DoE and central Government funding and to local ratepayer demands – that provided vital purchase for successive Governments from the 1970s onwards (variously formed of the same three Parties) to successfully introduce certain market principles into HE’s framework of action. At the same time, the universities, whose ‘liberal-based values’ (Moberly, 1949) of freedom and autonomy were held as so central to their public contribution, were being protected from both Government and market influences via their UGC-Treasury relations. Yet, it was their level of public funding and Crosland’s ideological resistance to their ‘elite’ or ‘favoured’ position that opened them up to public financial scrutiny – thereby breaching their autonomy and setting the foundations for eventual marketisation, which, under a neoliberal rationale, is meant to offer the universities greater autonomy and freedom! (See Chapter Two, Section 2.2 for a working definition of neoliberalism).

The concomitant iterative emergence of the pattern, size and make up of the HE sector has been no less complex. By the time Kenneth Clarke brought the two systems together in 1992 in order to engender market competition amongst a single, unified HE sector, a diverse array of institutions had emerged. The ancient universities, the (ex-)

‘civic’ institutions, Lord Murray’s new universities, Lord Robbins’ transformed CATs, Crosland’s polytechnics (many of which had absorbed the ex-teacher training colleges), and myriad FE colleges that provided ‘higher level’ qualifications: each had their own histories, cultures, identities, missions and relational geographies – from locally embedded institutions serving local populations to nationally and internationally selective HEIs. Each of these institutions had been part of a massive expansion over the course of a century, which, on the one hand, was guided by the common principle that HE was good for the nation and, thus, should be available to all those qualified and wishing to participate, whilst, on the other, was guided by a multiplicity and complexity of values, beliefs and motivations.

It is such diversity and complexity that HE policy must intervene and act upon in order to shape, further, HE’s framework of action. But here, too, the deeper penetration of the market imaginary into HE policy has been incremental and complex, having emerged – not necessarily uniformly or lineally – from previous iterations of political economy. For instance, the instigation of variable fees in 2006 by the second Blair Government signified a far deeper commitment on the part of New Labour to engender market competition in the HE sector than did their prior implementation of the up-front, flat-rate fee recommended by Dearing (1997). Yet, Blair’s simultaneous removal of the up-front process of exchange also represented an opportunity for HE’s actors to resist the sort of consumer-producer relations that New Labour was attempting to provoke, as was the Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government under David Cameron’s leadership.

That said, as my discursive analysis of the 2011 White Paper (BIS, 2011a) indicates, the coalition Government’s intentions to shape the evaluations, identities, actions and activities of HE’s actors via a neoliberally informed market imaginary are clearly manifest in the White Paper’s texts. The metrics or ‘tactics’ designed to engender market subjectivities and values are, by-and-large, “radical” (BIS, 2011a) and plain to see. Variable, full-cost-covering fees to stimulate consumer-producer relations in a demand-led system; KIS to allow student-consumers to shop around, thereby driving up quality and making HEIs provide a better service; the partial liberation of student numbers to drive competition, diversity and institutional responsiveness; and the willingness of Government to allow those HEIs that do not respond favourably to fail

in a competitive market. And even where policies have been put in place to uphold the Government's rather narrow understanding of the public value of HE, the detrimental effects that these policies might have on market efficiency and competition have been both tactically and discursively dissuaded. As the White Paper spells out for the clarity of the reader, the cap on student numbers remains in place just in case the Government's progressive funding regime induces institutional inefficiencies. But provided HEIs react well and maintain efficiencies the cap will be further lifted, in part to provide wider access, certainly; but, moreover, to drive forward *market competition*.

In Part II of this thesis, I explore how four, very different, HEIs negotiated their way through the coalition Government's White Paper, *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System* (BIS, 2011a). Together, Chapters Five, Six and Seven form what I am stylistically calling an '*iterative emergence*', the details for which are set out in the Preface to Part II. The purpose of these chapters is to understand:

- To what extent the coalition's policies of marketisation have been successful in shaping the subjectivities of HE's institutional leaders – their values, evaluations, actions and activities;
- How, in light of the White Paper, individual HEIs made meaning of and negotiated their positions within the multiple and complex social relations of value that made up their economic geographies;
- What impact the existing economic geographies and identities of individual HEIs had on their future trajectories – particularly given the inherent temporal and spatial path-dependency of economic geographies; and
- How understandings of the value of HE, alongside the subjectivities of the HEIs, may or may not have emerged as more multiple and complex under processes of neoliberalization.

In exploring these research questions, my aim is to shed light on how processes of neoliberalization must necessarily work in and through the multiple and complex social relations of value that help shape the economic geographies of the *Ordinary Economy*. In so doing, I will suggest that neoliberal hegemony is best understood as *a critical mass of moderate compliance with the values and rationalities of the market*: a critical mass which is always part of more diffuse and complex social relations of value that are always emerging and always open to negotiation, valuation, resistance

and transformation. As a result, emerging economic geographies have the potential for being the socio-political sites of hope in political economy – but only where there is enough of a collective will to conjoin around a particular set of values through practice. These suggestions along side the results of my empirical investigations will be discussed fully in Chapter Eight.

PART II

Preface

The purpose of this preface is to:

- a) Set out the rationale for adopting a stylized analytic for my empirical chapters; and,
- b) Provide brief descriptions of the four case study HEIs.

Firstly, Chapters Five, Six and Seven follow the pattern of what I am calling an *'iterative emergence'*: that is, an on-going, unfolding progression through time (and space) between the immediate past, present and future (and the here and there), which suggests a path-dependent, yet contingent (meaning open) sense of evolution. The idea for the analytic arose from the testimonies of my interviewees as they shared with me their experiences regarding their implementation of the 2011 HE White Paper. In this regard, what struck me most about their testimonies was how they each described a similar pattern of semiotically, reflexive evaluations and processes as they moved iteratively between the policy discourses, metrics and values with which they were confronted, their immediate past and existing socio-economic spatial relations, and projections of what potential relations might be useful and/or valuable to them in the future.

Based on my empirical findings, and by relating these back to my theoretical arguments set out in Chapter Two, I want to suggest that the iterative emergence of the HEIs' economic geographies progresses through three stages:

- 1) Meaning making (complexity reduction);
- 2) Putting strategies into action (complexity re-introduction); and
- 3) Emergence (demonstrating the on-going, multiple and complex nature of economic geographies).

The theoretical underpinnings and arguments relating to each of these stages set the foundations for the empirical investigations of each chapter, which follow and illuminate the pattern of these three stages. Importantly, as my research will demonstrate, it is in the transition from imagination to practice that the concomitant embedding and transformation of the White Paper's policy metrics and values literally begin to *take place*.

Secondly, whilst in-depth descriptions of the four case study universities are provided in the text of Chapter Five, these descriptions form part of my analysis. I therefore think it is useful to provide the reader with very brief profiles in this Preface followed by a full, anonymized list of interviewees. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, *Methodology*, I was asked to maintain the anonymity of the HEIs as far as possible. It is therefore not possible to state the universities' actual locations, or give any precise details regarding their histories or attributes that might unwittingly disclose their identities. The same is true for the interviewees.

As detailed in my methodology, four very different HEIs were carefully selected to represent the diversity of the HE sector in England and/or to provide interesting cases for empirical investigation. Table P1, below, details the universities' positions in the system, their mission groups, the pseudonyms used in order to provide anonymity and their corresponding abbreviations.

Institution Position	Mission Group	Pseudonym	Abbreviation
Typical high rank, nationally selective	Russell Group	Global Entrepreneur	GE
a-Typical high rank, locally recruiting, less selective	1994 Group	Palace Aspirational	PA
Mid-low rank, wide recruitment	Universities Alliance	Downtown Coastal	DTC
Low-mid rank, local recruitment	Million+ Group	Four Town Local	FTL

Table P-1 Case Study Pseudonyms. Source: Author

Global Entrepreneur

In the 2008 RAE, GE was ranked amongst the top ten universities in the country and recruited fewer than 6% of its home undergraduates from the local area, making it highly typical for a research-led institution. In 2009/10 they were teaching well over 28,000 students compared to an average of 20,758 amongst England's top twenty universities, making it one of the largest selective universities in the country, as well as one of the largest institutions overall. Of these students, around 65% were undergraduates and 35% postgraduates. And of the latter, some 3,000 were non-EU overseas students, giving GE a reasonably typical student profile for a research-led HEI. However, compared to other selective institutions GE recruited strongly from state schools and quite well from low socio-economic groups both nationally and

locally, with between 20% and 25% of home undergraduates coming from NS-SEC groups 4 to 7. In part, this reflected the university's stated commitment to widening participation through local outreach programmes, and a strong emphasis on reaching schools in low-participation neighbourhoods. Indeed, teaching and learning were strongly stated in GE's strategic vision as 'core values'. However, as will be seen in Chapter Five, one of GE's most defining features was its aim to increase its standing as a world-renowned research institution and to embed its global presence "into every aspect of the university's mission".

Palace Aspirational

For a university ranked in the 2008 RAE's top twenty, the geographies of PA's student body were quite unusual. For example, in 2009/10 the university recruited almost 60% of its young, full-time, first-degree undergraduates from its local base, well above the top-twenty average of 5.7% (excluding London) and 14.27% (including London). Of these students, almost 40% came from NS-SEC 4 to 7 compared to an average of 30.1% for all English universities, underscoring PA's long-standing commitment to widening participation, especially in the local community. Furthermore, in terms of the ratio between undergraduate and post-graduate students, PA's profile of approximately 3 to 1 was more akin to a teaching-led HEI (on average 79% to 21%) than one driven by research (69% to 31%). However, by 2012 the university was striving to raise its reputational standing amongst the country's elite by: increasing its intake of post-graduate students (including those from overseas); seeking to join the Russell Group by emphasizing the importance of research; and raising its tariff entry points requirements for its undergraduates. Of the four case studies, PA was the university undergoing the most significant degree of internal change at the time of my research.

Four Town Local

As discussed in Chapter Three, establishing a 'typical' low/mid-ranked institution was quite problematic due to the diversity of institutions in the lower half of the sector. I therefore decided to choose an institution whose level of local embeddedness was somewhat higher than other institutions of similar rank. As a teaching-led institution positioned in the bottom third of the 2008 RAE rankings, the geographies of FTL's student body are very interesting. For example, whilst most Million+ HEIs recruit a high percentage of their fulltime, first degree, home undergraduates from state schools, FTL's 2009/10 level of recruitment of around 99% was well above the national

average. Of their home undergraduates, some 70+% were recruited from the local area, demonstrating a very high degree of local and regional embeddedness. And over 50% of their undergraduates came from NS-SEC groups 4-7. At the same time, FTL's student body included just over 15% post-graduates – quite a long way below the national average of 25%. And around 1/3 of these students were from overseas. Such figures, no-doubt, reflected FTL's commitment to widening participation through local outreach programmes and its emphasis on reaching schools in low-participation neighbourhoods. Indeed, judging by its mission statement, the university placed a strong emphasis on social inclusion and social change that was driven by a strong ethical commitment to teaching and learning. In addition, the university saw itself as an educational hub that supported the local economy through encouraging knowledge, innovation and enterprise. As will be seen in Chapter Five, these aspects of FTL's mission largely articulated what the university understood as the public good of higher education: a public good whose definition the Government was attempting to narrow through the metrics of the 2011 HE White Paper.

Downtown Coastal

Finally, DTC was a teaching-led institution ranked in the third quartile of the 2008 RAE. For such an institution the geographies of its student body were quite 'a-typical', despite the diversity of institutions in the lower half of the RAE rankings. For example, the university had a broad spatial reach in terms of its home undergraduate students recruiting just over 11% from the local area in 2009/10 compared to a national average of 41.6% for other teaching-led HEIs. In addition it recruited quite a high number of non-EU students – both undergraduate and postgraduate – particularly from South East Asia and China. Moreover, quite a high percentage of its home undergraduates came from NS-SEC groups 1-3 (70%). Thus, DTC seemed more akin to a research-led institution, particularly in terms of its spatial reach, and I wondered if the university had to work hard at recruiting from far a-field – especially since it was located in a city with significant areas of deprivation and low achievement at GCSE O-level. Yet, according to its strategic plan, the university was ardently committed to widening access in local low-participation neighbourhoods and raising aspirations in the local community. I therefore felt that understanding how DTC made sense of its geographies in relation to the White Paper and, indeed, how they might impact the university's trajectory, would make a fascinating case study.

Global Entrepreneur	Palace Aspirational
101, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic	201, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic
102, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic	202, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic
103, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic	203, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic
104, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic	204, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic
105, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic	205, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic
106, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic	206, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic
107, Senior Management, Steering, Long-time Academic	207, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic
108, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic	208, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic, Public Service
109, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic, Public Service	209, Senior Management, Steering, WP, Project Management
110, Senior Management, Steering, Long-time LLL/WP, Long-time Academic	210, Non-Steering, EO/WP, Marketing, Careers-Education
111, Management, Steering, Long-time Administrator, Industry	211, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic
112, Management, Steering, Long-time Administrator, Public Service	212, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic
113, President Student Union	213, Management Support, Steering, Long-time Administrator
	214, President Student Union
Four Town Local	Down Town Coastal
301, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic	401, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic
302, Senior Management VCO, Medium-time Manager, Education	402, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic
303, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic	403, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic, Industry, Public Services
304, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Strategist	404, Senior Management VCO, Long-time University Finance, Industry
305, Senior Management VCO, Long/medium-time Academic, Industry	405, Management, Steering, Long-time Strategist, Public Services
306, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Strategist, Public Service	406, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic, Public Services
307, Senior Management, Steering, Long-time Academic, Industry	407, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic, Industry
308, Management, Non-Steering, Long-time Academic	408, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic
309, Management, Steering, Long-time Student Representation	409, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic
310, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic, Education	410, Senior Management, Steering, Long-time Strategist, Marketing
311, Management, Steering, Long-time Strategist, Marketing	411, Non-Steering, Student Finance, Industry
312, Management, Non-Steering, Long-time Academic	412, Non-Steering, EO/WP, Careers Support, Marketing
313, Management Support, Non-Steering, Long-time Administrator	413, Non-Steering, Administrative Support
314, President Student Union	414, President Student Union
	415, Non-Steering, University Governance, Finance Industry

Table P-2. List of Interviewees and Positionalities. Source: Author. **KEY: VCO** – Key Strategist in Vice Chancellor’s Office; **Steering** – Key Strategist but outside VCO; **Non-Steering** – Not involved in steering or strategy; **LLL** – Life Long Learning; **WP** – Widening Participation; **EO** – Educational Outreach.

5 Meaning Making: Complexity Reduction

5.1 Introduction

This first empirical chapter explores how each of the four case study universities made meaning of the discourses and metrics set out in the HE White Paper (BIS: 2011a) in relation to their existing economic geographies and, thus, decided upon initial strategies for “going on in the world” (Jessop, 2009: 336).

Stemming from the need to resolve the complex interplay between, 1) relations of neoliberalization, which are themselves geographically diverse (Brenner et al, 2010); and 2) the diversity of ‘ordinary’ contexts into which those relations are inserted or imposed, in Chapter Two of this Thesis I proposed that through the conceptual lens of ‘Emerging Economic Geographies and the *Ordinary Economy*’ the political-economic process of neoliberalization could be understood to connote: *the (attempted) transformation of existing socio-economic spatial relations into emerging economic geographies, more-or-less governed by the metrics and values of the market*. This proposition had two foundational, interrelated moments that subtend the process of emergence.

First, drawing on Jessop (2004, 2009) and Lee (2006, 2012), I underscored the centrality of economic imaginaries in the processes of complexity reduction and semiosis – i.e. the intra-subjective production of meaning – and the importance of these processes in enabling actors to move forward. For both authors, policy instruments such as the HE White Paper (2011a) and the economic imaginaries they put forward aim to direct or structure the evaluations, values, actions, activities and (thus) subjectivities of actors and organizations in line with a reduced understanding of the economy, which those who seek to govern hold as important and/or valuable. In essence, the ‘real economy’ is too complex to be comprehended in its entirety and, so, cannot be managed or governed as a singular object. Instead, subsets of economic relations are discursively fixed as objects of intervention that can be semiotically understood (Jessop, 2004, 2009). Thus, the reduced imaginaries and metrics set out in policy act as an important and often powerful set of simplified, semiotic referents that actors should reflect on as they negotiate their way through policy in order to progress forward.

Second, however, drawing on Lee (2006, 2012), I also argued that, in their negotiation, reductive political-economic imaginaries such as that of the market are immediately confronted by the multiplicity and complexity of semiotically- and materially-constituted social relations of value that make up the *Ordinary Economy*. Although all actors necessarily reduce complexity as a condition for moving on in the world, they still bring with them multiple logics, values and understandings of Value that may guide their evaluations, as well as multiple social and material relations that offer both opportunities and constraints. As such, it is my argument that whilst social relations of value are filled with relationships of power, economic policy initiatives such as the HE White Paper will inevitably become varied because the practice of economic geographies is always already multiple and complex. Between the values and logics by which complexity is reduced by policy makers and the values and logics by which complexity is reduced by actors who must make meaning of policy, a plethora of “socio-spatial disjunctures” (Pani and Holman, 2013) exist between discourse, construal and construction.

This first empirical chapter of three seeks to illuminate these ideas through an exploration of initial strategy formation. As detailed in Chapter Three, my research took place in early-mid 2012 just after the four case study universities had formulated an initial set of strategies in relation to the White Paper, and, indeed, were testing some of those strategies in practice (see Chapter Six below). The thesis is, thus, ideally placed to explore how each HEI made meaning of policy in light of their emerging economic geographies and, so, illuminate the disjunctures between policy discourses and ‘real world’ construal and construction. The chapter does this through an examination of how the HEIs set their undergraduate fee, and how and why they decided to participate in, or not participate in, either of the primary policy initiatives devised by Government to bring further competition into the sector: i.e. the AAB+ competition and the ‘flexible margin’ (see Chapter Four above). In so doing, the chapter illuminates the concomitant power of political-economic imaginaries (as discursively constructed in policy initiatives such as the Coalition’s White Paper) to shape social relations of value and the immediate variation of such imaginaries as they are interpreted and made meaningful in relation to the diversity of concrete economic geographies that exist. Even in the initial stages of meaning making and strategy

formation, the empirical evidence presented herein bears witness to political-economic power relations in which opportunities for normalisation and variation necessarily co-exist in the struggle over what is and is not value.

5.2 Meaning making and strategy formation: the concomitant potential for normalisation and variation

In the initial stages of strategy formation, each case study university made meaning of the White Paper in relation to their existing and potential relational economic geographies, moving iteratively between the reductive imaginaries, discourses and metrics that confronted them (or more specifically, what the HEIs understood them to imply) and a reduced notion of what they perceived as important. Here, through the inter-related processes of complexity reduction and meaning making, each HEI semiotically selected and reflected on some fundamental core features of their existing, complex socio-economic relations and practices, identifying what was important, useful and/or valuable to them. The point for each university was to develop an initial set of core strategies for moving forward as an institution: that is, to negotiate their way through the “new context” (Interviewees 103, 206, 302, 408) that the White Paper was attempting to bring into being and, most centrally, *to survive* this renewed and profound push towards marketization.

Importantly, as Sections 5.2.3 to 5.2.6 will demonstrate, the core features that the case studies reflected upon were by no means chaotic or accidental. Policies of marketization involve a reshaping of the social relations of value that give form to the materiality and sociality of emerging economic geographies. Thus, the HEIs chose to ask themselves fundamental questions that related to their economic practices and relations such as: What are our existing economic geographies and social relations of value? How might these change in light of our understanding of policy? What is our potential for moving forward? What must we do in order to survive? At a finer level of detail this involved asking themselves questions such as: Who are we? What is our purpose? Who are our students? Why do we do what we do? What are our values? Where do we fit within the system? How much value do we need in order to survive and continue doing what we do? In so doing, the HEIs understood more about what they were willing to accept from policy (be that eagerly, pragmatically, under duress or a combination thereof) and what they wished to reject (either in part or in full). In the

process, the tactics, technologies and techniques of the White Paper immediately began to affect the on-going trajectories of the HEIs' economic geographies, at the same time as the policy discourses of the White Paper immediately became varied in their negotiation in and through diverse economic geographies and the social relations of value that shape them.

5.2.1 Setting the home-undergraduate fee: where policy meets the Ordinary Economy

Examining how the HEIs decided on the level – or, “price” – at which they should set their home-undergraduate fee provides an excellent example for exploring the above processes. As detailed in Chapter Four, since New Labour's White Paper of 2003 variable fees had been discursively constructed as an essential element for instigating producer-consumer relations in a differentiated market. According to a variety of knowledgeable experts, the neoliberally-inspired market values of competition, efficiency, entrepreneurialism, excellence and innovation could all be encouraged by removing the block teaching grant and giving the universities the freedom to determine their own fee policies (within the parameters set by Government) and manage themselves as businesses, thereby forcing HEIs to identify, measure and position themselves against their peers (e.g. Barr, 2002-03, 2010; BIS, 2011a; Browne, 2010; DfES 2003a, 2003b; HOCESC 2002-03a; HOC 2011). Certainly, in 2006 when mere ‘top-up fees’ were introduced this ‘technology of Government’ had largely *failed* to produce a variation in fees across universities. However, in 2011 with the implementation of the full, cost-covering undergraduate fee, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition believed that such a “radical departure” in the way that HEIs were funded would force producer-institutions to deal with the realities and uncertainties of consumer choice in a demand-led system (BIS, 2011a; HOC 2011). *All* HEIs, from FE Colleges to universities, would now have to raise their “*life-sustaining value*” (Lee, 2006) via the student-consumer who could now shop around in a more competitive market. As a result, those institutions that failed to offer good value for money, quite simply, would not survive.

Given that the White Paper proposed that HEIs should calculate an appropriate cost-covering fee by costing out what they do, measuring themselves against the competition and thinking about their typical student-consumers and their demands, setting the cost-covering fee immediately involved each HEI reflecting on their

existing and potential social and material economic relations in time and place: the past, present and potential future trajectories of their emerging economic geographies. In order to derive life-sustaining value from their student-consumers rather than the block-teaching grant, my research indicates that each HEI chose to ask themselves the questions that I set out in Section 5.2 above, reducing the complexity of their life worlds to some core understandings. In the process, the discourses, metrics and neoliberal values of competition, consumerization, and market-demand all had the opportunity to become embedded into HE's framework of action at the same time as the policy discourses and metrics had the potential for becoming varied or, indeed, entirely resisted – provided the will to do so was present and collectively adequate.

5.2.2 The discursive context: the stories that we tell ourselves

Broadly speaking, the majority of interviewees from across all four case studies held severe reservations regarding the implementation of the full cost-covering fee for home undergraduates. Although the White Paper and accompanying policy instruments spelled out clearly the new system of funding and the socio-economic rationale for its implementation, the interviewees variously described the policy as a “chaotic mess”: a “complete disaster”, “done on the hoof with no proper consultation” (Interviewees 402; see also 112, 203, 403). The removal of the block teaching grant and its replacement with funding that would follow the student, only to be repaid by graduates once they had reached a certain level of income, was seen as “a huge social experiment” (Interviewee, 203) the value of which was “hard to understand” (Interviewee, 409). In its current form, the new funding system was “massively, financially unstable” costing the Government “£6 billion a year more than they were paying before”; and that meant that at some time there would “have to be cuts” (Interviewee, 101). So while there was “immediate pressure” on HEIs to alter their behaviour quickly (Interviewee, 213), a long-term perspective was hard to imagine – unless, as one strategic director explained, the universities reflected on the things they knew best and/or held dear:

“What we’re going through at the moment is shocking! It is absolutely radical! There’s nothing organic about what’s happening now.... People making policy don’t understand the direct impacts on the universities. They don’t understand how students get to universities or why. They’re basing their knowledge, often, on limited personal experience of particular kinds of universities. So it’s incredibly difficult to have a long-term perspective, except that you can hold on to certain truths, values, which you think

your staff can sign up to about the purpose of what you're doing and why you're doing it. But policy is making that rather difficult."

(402, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Two dominant discourses framed interviewee testimonies regarding the effects of this radical shift in their social relations of value. The first involved the production of producer-consumer relations in a differentiated HE market – a subject that I will return to in great detail in Chapter Six. For each of the interviewees, the production of producer-consumer relations had been on the political agenda since, at least, the introduction of the upfront fee in 1997. However, with the introduction of variable fees, the concept that HEIs should understand both students as consumers and themselves as producers in a market relationship had been “stepped up” (Interviewee, 205) with the current White Paper signifying a profound “acceleration” in the notion that institutions should respond to student-consumer demand (e.g. Interviewees 103, 205, 305, 408). Many individual HEIs had known for some while that they were in a competitive market for recruitment. However, now there was a sense throughout the sector that once students were paying up to £9000 a year for their education, they would be “far more demanding”, and as a result the universities would need to be “far more responsive” than they had in the past (Interviewee, 112). The league tables, Twitter, Facebook and other forms of social networking and information that enabled students to “shop around for their education” (Interviewee, 412) would put an even greater onus on the universities “to demonstrate, very openly and overtly” that they really were “good at what they do” (Interviewee, 205). In short, students were beginning to see HE as “a product” of which they had “higher expectations”; and it was all because they’d now be “looking for value for money” (Interviewee, 412). This was “the sort of language” and the “sorts of stories” that were coming into the sector (Interviewees 412, 103). And for the interviewees they represented a variety of ‘threats’, ‘constraints’ and/or ‘opportunities’ that the HEIs would need to reflect on when they considered their students in relation to setting their fees.

A second, related discourse involved the *uncertainty* that this consumerization and shift in funding mechanism were bringing into the sector. For one strategic manager (-205), HE could be described by:

“...lots of words beginning with ‘F’, not all of them rude: Fraught. Febrile. In flux.”

The removal of the block grant had taken away any “cushion” or “degree of certainty” (Interviewee, 401), making the universities more reliant on student numbers for their survival and, importantly, “leaving the fee to drive the way they think about recruitment and the uncertainty of demand” (Interviewee, 205). HEIs would need to consider their students’ attitudes, demands and behaviours in terms of expectations; *and* consider the competition – “upping their game” in order to secure those students who were “willing to pay the full-cost fee” (ibid). The universities could not afford to “stand still” or “become complacent”: they would need to “adapt” and “flex” and “secure new markets” in order to replicate their income streams and survive against their competitors (Interviewees 203, 205, 302). Indeed, as one senior manager and long-time academic stated with absolute conviction:

“No institution is immune from the uncertainty brought about by the neoliberal order. The whole sector has had its position in society deeply questioned, leaving institutions and certain disciplines feeling particularly vulnerable.”

(103, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Thus, whilst no institution was alone in this “guessing game” (Interviewees 311, 401), no one could envisage what it all might lead to four or five years down the line (Interviewee 105). The only thing that was “predictable” was “the direction of travel” (Interviewee, 102). Higher Education had become “very, very, politicized” with “the Minister... handing out money according to what *Government* [felt] was important” (Interviewee, 207). And due to a lack of collective resistance, that was “not about to be reversed” (Interviewee, 102). As one senior administrator underscored:

“...The ground rules have all gone! The rule book’s been ripped up; and no one knows from month to month what will be thrown at us next. And you can either cope with that or resist. We’re trying to cope with it [because] we don’t think resistance is going to succeed in this policy era.”

(313, Management Support, Non-Steering, Long-time Administrator)

Indeed, despite the severe reservations that the interviewees held regarding the attempt to further marketise undergraduate HE through the White Paper, the vast majority saw the absence of collective resistance as a profound failure on behalf of the sector “to

speak well enough with a strong voice, *as one*” (Interviewee, 402). For some, this was due to the diversity of the sector. With so many different institutions pursuing different missions and values how could the sector speak with one voice? Even the University and College Union had failed to represent the diversity of institutions because their needs were often “diametrically opposed” (Interviewee, 111). For others, unequal power relations within the sector itself meant that while some institutions, like those of the Russell Group, held the ear of Government, other institutions outside of the Top Twenty remained unheard – thereby weakening the sector as a whole (e.g. Interviewees 104, 212, 302, 311, 412). Moreover, for many of the interviewees the most obvious reason that the vice-chancellors had “remained supine” over the fees increase was that they’d be “getting more money!” (Interviewees 402, 403). If you looked at this shift in their social relations of value “in purely instrumental ways”, as one senior manager phrased it, then the universities would be “doing quite well out of it!” (Interviewee, 101). With the fees coming through over the next few years, *most* universities would have an increase in income, and more resources would be available for improving their offers. As such, although the financial benefits also came with a cost – the “*price tag of quasi-marketisation*” as Interviewee -101 put it – resistance to the increase in student fees had to be weighed against the universities’ own self-interest. As one strategic leader explained:

“I was at a meeting about three weeks ago where HEFCE’s research and innovation chap was saying to universities, ‘You’ve never had it so good’. And he’s probably right. If it wasn’t for the chaos of the policy he would be right. We are getting more money! So you do have to think about that.”

(403, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic, Industry, Public Service)

It was amidst this context of consumerization, heightened competition, uncertainty and absence of collective resistance that the four HEIs had to reflect on their material and social economic relations in order to set their fees and formulate a set of core strategies for moving on in the world. Certainly, many of the interviewees, *as individuals*, felt that asking the student to almost wholeheartedly finance their higher education was “disgraceful” and something that the universities “should all be out there fighting against” (Interviewee, 209) – regardless of the progressive nature of the graduate repayment scheme. However, the failure of the sector to pin down and articulate what they could *collectively agree* was of value had opened the door more widely than ever for a differentiated market to be “engineered: *socially engineered*” (Interviewee, 402).

As a result, the fees were here and each university would need “to weigh up their own situation”, which, according to Interviewee -209 was:

“...all very complicated: really complex”.

As one senior manager underscored, the direction that each university would decide upon depended very much on the values, culture and relations of the institution. As he/she summarized in words far more eloquent than I could devise:

“It’s the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are and how we pass that on from generation to generation.”

(103, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

5.2.3 Global Entrepreneur: escaping Government regulation

For Global Entrepreneur, setting their headline fee was “hardly worth debating. It was absolutely clear that it had to be £9000” (Interviewee, 105). Although, as one very senior manager pointed out to me while chuckling profusely that he/she could provide me with “all sorts of fancy stuff” to explain their rationale for doing so, the bottom line was, “*Why wouldn’t [GE] charge the top rate? Frankly, anything else would look bizarre!*” (Interviewee, 101). If GE had charged less for their headline fee, then they would have been seen as “a cheaper university” in some way (Interviewee, 105). And given the university’s core identity, class of student, and both national and international standing and reputation, that simply wasn’t an option (ibid). Rather, in order “to be seen” to be making a premium offering that students could associate with “the quality” of the institution, the “price signal” that GE sent out had to underscore “*the value*” that students would derive from their “investment” (Interviewee, 104). As such, given the Government’s fee-cap of £9000 – which surely would be what their competitors would be charging – GE had to price themselves at the level of a lead institution, because that’s where they wanted to be (Interviewee, 112).

In reality, in order to feel relatively secure in their evaluations and gain the backing of staff and, importantly, the validation of potential future students through the process of exchange, the university had, indeed, engaged in numerous debates, reducing down all the “fancy stuff” to some core understandings of why they needed to set their headline fee at the top rate of £9000 alongside devising a core set of strategies that would enable the institution to consolidate a sustainable economic trajectory moving forward (Interviewee, 101).

The university had undertaken a thorough costing exercise to ensure that whatever fee they charged, the value derived would be sufficient to ensure their on-going survival. However, this was not to be survival merely in the *material* sense of the word – although this was, of course, important (e.g. Interviewees 102, 103, 105, 107). Rather, for each interviewee the most fundamental factor influencing GE’s direction was “its perception of itself” (Interviewee, 105), which, according to Interviewee -103, had “come up a lot” in its strategizing “because, actually,” it was “core”. Determining its direction and determining its strategies in light of the new policy context was all about *who they were*, because it was this “collective identity” (ibid) that helped establish their institutional values and the existing and potential material and social relations that the university held as central to their on-going survival.

First and foremost, GE had “an overwhelming desire to be academically excellent and outstanding” in “every aspect” of the institution; and everything else came second to that concern (Interviewee, 102). Indeed, for all of the interviewees, being research-led was seen as “incredibly important” both financially and ideally, and there was a general sense that the institution should “make no apologies for that” (Interviewee, 107). In practice this meant that their “research identity” had to be embedded across every Department because, unlike some more “highbrow institutions”, research and teaching were not seen as separate at GE (ibid):

“*Quality research*”, stressed Interviewee -103, “*has to be infused with teaching*”.

In that sense, the university felt a “relentless drive for quality” (Interviewee, 111) – continuously wanting to “be better” and “push harder”, from undergraduate teaching to postgraduate research to the REF (Interviewee, 102). Thus, as one senior manager underscored:

“*Understanding that research quality in both a national and international dimension is absolutely central to who we are. That is our identity.*”

(103, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Although GE was still “relatively young” compared to other top UK institutions, its self-knowledge regarding its core identity and values, which it had carried with it since its formation, had lent the university a certain “gravitas” (Interviewee, 107) and “level

of maturity” which had given the university a certain degree of confidence (Interviewee, 105):

“It never has to feel that anyone is looking at it as anything less than a research-intensive, very high quality university in the UK”, explained Interviewee -107.

“We think we are good”, stressed Interviewee -110.

And if you just looked at what GE had achieved in forty-five years, it was “pretty impressive” (Interviewee, 102). As a result, GE had maintained the same trajectory rather than try something new simply for the sake of it – “just to see if it worked or if it failed” (ibid). In that sense, the “academic community” was “remarkably cohesive”, displaying a great deal of “acceptance” regarding the type of university they were in, and the fact that they had to keep that identity going (ibid).

According to interviewee testimonies, the self-confidence that this generated underpinned GE’s “can do” attitude (Interviewee, 108). The institution was “dynamic, active – those sorts of terms” (Interviewee, 103). It was “very energetic”, “very ambitious” and “quite entrepreneurial... Very entrepreneurial, actually – drop the quite” (Interviewee, 105). Indeed, GE was “good at being ‘fleet of foot’ and responding to new opportunities” (Interviewee, 112). So, if the university wanted to “explore new avenues or new ways of doing things” it was “willing to take the risks” (Interviewee, 107). Provided it was a good idea – which GE had the experience and internal machinery to analyze quickly (Interviewee, 102) – and provided it fit with their “higher level aims” – “*What sort of university are we? What sort of university do we want to be?*” – then they’d “*do it!*” (Interviewee, 112).

Again, this sense of identity had come from their founders, because “they realized that [GE] had to be different if it was going to succeed” (Interviewee, 104). However, whilst combining entrepreneurialism with academic excellence provided staff “a sense of being a bit special” (Interviewee, 102), it was more about “gaining competitive advantage” in their various HE markets, and being “hungry: hungry for more” (Interviewee, 103). As a result, one senior manager described having:

“...a real sense that [GE] is in motion, from something new and ‘greenfield’ to something where we could credibly be seen to be in the ‘Big Five’ and then, in another few years, as being a major international and global institution.”

(103, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Geographically, the institution was located in a bit of a ‘no-man’s land’; and although its location was “important” in the sense that they had a very strong economic regional engagement and extremely profitable ties with local industry, there was a general feeling that GE could be “located anywhere” and “still have the idea of being distinctive” (Interviewee, 104). In a “global world” where “everything [was] mobile – students, staff, research etc.” – one way of “enhancing” their reputation was to “leverage [their] connections with other institutions around the world” (ibid). That is: to “become a global hub of academic excellence; globally perceived; globally connected” (Interviewee, 106). Thus, as one senior manager and long-time academic expounded, GE’s “perception of itself as an internationally or globally excellent university” was “a very important feature in determining its direction and its strategies” (Interviewee, 105).

GE’s sense of identity was also reflected in its students. In terms of home undergraduates, its students were “very, very high quality” with “more applicants in the AAB category than any other institution in the UK other than Oxbridge” (Interviewee, 104). Although this had often been interpreted as being “very elitist”, there was an underlying socio-economic logic to the relationship:

“If [GE] is genuinely trying to be one of the top national and international institutions, then we have to be very ambitious in terms of the type of students we let in”, said Interviewee -103.

Most typically, their home undergraduates came from “quite well-resourced backgrounds” (ibid) and were “largely middle-class” (Interviewee, 105), and this too would influence GE’s strategies. First, given their socio-economic backgrounds and the quality of education they would receive at GE, their typical students would most likely progress into high-paying careers and, thus, pay back the full value of their fees and loans through the graduate repayment scheme. Second, given the high standard of their entry-level qualifications, their students would have a variety of choices in terms of selecting a university with an excellent reputation. Couple this with the fact that the majority of GE’s Departments recruited heavily in terms of overseas students and PGTs where “marketisation” was “at its most arrogant and aggressive” and fees were “*perversely high*” (Interviewee, 108)...

“...the perversity being that the higher the fee the more people... seem to think that [the degree] is of value!” iterated Interviewee -108...

... and there was a deep sense across the university that GE was “*more primed to think in terms of markets*” for their survival because they would “*always be in competition*” with other high-ranking institutions (Interviewee, 112). As such, in setting their undergraduate fee in light of the new policy context, GE simply *had to* emphasize the quality of the institution to their potential consumers. They had to demonstrate the value of their degrees:

“People really want to come here because they get a really good experience and it’s got a great reputation. So to demonstrate that, and as a sort of rationing tool, basically, we have to keep raising the [qualification and price] bar to try to eliminate numbers, otherwise you spend all your time trying to select students. So there’s always been a kind of market approach. The University’s always been trying to get to the top, and that’s just the [‘GE Way’]: to be one of the best universities. So people are used to the competition: it’s you against someone else and you’ve got to be seen to be better if you want to achieve success.”

(112, Management, Steering, Long-time Administrator, Public Service)

Setting their headline fee anywhere below the £9000 threshold set by Government was, therefore, not an option. When GE made meaning of the White Paper in relation to a semiotically reduced understanding of their complex economic geographies – their core identity and values; their national and international competitive and reputational standing; their typical class of student and the use value of their degrees; the fees that they charged in other markets; and their potential social and material relations for moving forward – the academic community “universally” upheld what Interviewee - 112 called, their “*value proposition*”: “*If we think about it strategically... it’s got to be £9000! What are we even debating?*”

On one level, then, it seemed quite evident that GE identified very strongly with the market imaginary set out by Government – selecting (privileging) and retaining (embedding/embodying) certain discourses, identities, actions and activities that fit well with both market and institutional values. However, in devising a set of core strategies to sit along side their headline fee, GE’s variation of Government policies and values was significant. For example, in terms of the AAB+ competition, although the university could, theoretically, have expanded their AAB+ intake, there was “no

thirst or enthusiasm” to significantly grow the university in terms of home undergraduate numbers (Interviewee, 112). Certainly, AAB+ was seen as GE’s “natural territory” (Interviewee, 102) and home student-consumer demand was high. Yet GE had no desire to expand at the cost of other English institutions by competing for what, ultimately, was a relatively finite pot of students (Interviewee, 104). For sure, given the increased competition and uncertainty that the AAB+ competition would engender, GE would have to make certain that they consistently recruited the numbers they needed to keep them in the Top 10 of national league tables (Interviewees 101, 103, 105, 106, 108). And the fee that the students would now be bringing with them would add “a huge additional dividend to the bottom line” (Interviewee, 103). However, even in the initial stages of strategy formation, the Vice-Chancellor and strategic directors were guided by multiple values and logics.

First, whilst in theory there was now more freedom and more of a financial incentive to expand their undergraduate body, some interviewees expressed doubt that their local material relations could cope. The additional land, teaching space, student accommodation and staff that the university would have to provide represented significant “constraints” and disincentives rather than “opportunities” for GE (Interviewees 101, 102, 104, 112). Second, the university was far more interested in exploiting its international socio-economic relations rather than simply focusing on the domestic market. Here, the interviewees expressed two dominant logics to explain their rationale.

The first wholeheartedly embraced the market value of competitive advantage. In the UK, a relatively small group of elite institutions consistently dominated the league tables, attracting the best students and winning the most research funding. Internationally, these universities could easily “go it alone and be big players” in the Top 30 to 40 globally renowned institutions (Interviewee, 112). In terms of domestic competition, GE was never going to surpass the “Big Five”; and internationally, at least for the moment, it was unlikely that they’d reach that “elite top-tier” (Interviewees 102, 104, 107, 112). But they were, now, at a point of being consistently recognized in the second-tier of globally excellent universities (Interviewee, 107) – and it was here that the Vice Chancellor and strategic directors envisaged GE’s most successful future social and material relations of value (Interviewee, 111). Already,

'International' was embedded across all of the PVC's portfolios, and the institution was "utterly committed to the notion of the 'Global University'" (Interviewee, 103). Moving forward, by forming alliances with other international universities in a similar position, GE could "share resources, share identities and share academic visions"; and in so doing they could establish "a critical presence" (Interviewee, 102) and "enough clout" (Interviewee, 112) that would allow them to become "*world research intensive institutions*": the "*global power houses*" of the second-tier (ibid). As Interviewee -111 explained, only so much of the university's future would be shaped or determined by the UK domestic market. It was through their international economic geographies that GE could "gain most impact" and "be seen to be successful", both of which were central to securing a sustainable economic trajectory for GE.

The second dominant logic underscored the multiplicity and complexity of values that underpinned GE's strategic evaluations. For sure, GE was very keen to "play to its strengths" in the national domestic market (ibid). However, its on-going success had to involve *all* of its geographic relations of value – local, national, and international. And in major part that meant breaking away from the restrictions placed upon it by Government regulation tied to public funding. The university had always recognized that if it was reliant on one slug of money from one resource, then it would always be susceptible to change – and that held true for Government funding as much as it did for relying on a single market customer (Interviewee, 104). Because GE was relatively young compared to Oxford and Cambridge, it didn't have a strong alumni base so it didn't have any rich endowments. Thus, in order to build its facilities and sustain its broad-church offer, it had always sought out "other funding streams that [would] allow more flexibility in the way [GE] allocated resources" (ibid). In most other English universities it was "money in and money out... with very little flexibility", and that had left them open to a constant 'financial hammering' since the late 1970s (Interviewee, 112). As a result, one senior strategist told me passionately:

"We don't care about Government funding – just to stop all the bloody interference, basically! The University has always been interested in insulating itself against the Government because they can be incredibly destructive for universities. This Government's policy changes will have massive impacts as happened under Thatcher whose cuts really clobbered places like Salford. For a long time, hammering higher education has been [Government] policy."

(112, Management, Steering, Long-time Administrator, Public Service)

Thus, GE's history, identity and values had always made the university seek out diverse sources of income, and their on-going global strategy was no different. Certainly, the strategy did reflect willingness – *eagerness*, even – on the part of the institution to think in terms of markets. However, their decision not to expand domestically through the AAB+ competition was underpinned by a far more complex set of logics and values than simply feeling that “material success” (Sheppard and Barnes, 1990) could be achieved through more distant economic geographies. It was also about who held power in their social relations of value. As one senior manager confirmed:

“Our job is to locate current policy in the direction the university is going in, not the other way around... We'll look at the White Paper in the context of the institution. We're not going to wait for Government to determine the future of the institution. We know that [policy] has an impact on us, and we need to engage with it positively and deal with it in a constructive way. But it's not going to set the strategies and ideals of the institution.”

(111, Management, Steering, Long-time Administrator, Industry)

5.2.4 Down Town Coastal: The unexpected shelter of the 'squeezed middle'

Down Town Coastal arrived at the value of their headline fee by reflecting on similar factors to Global Entrepreneur. However, the multiple logics and values guiding their evaluations were very different. Given their particular positionality – or, at least, their *understanding* of their particular positionality – DTC felt somewhat protected from the competition and uncertainty that they felt the White Paper was attempting to induce throughout the sector. As such, in setting their headline fee, DTC's primary strategy was to “hold a steady course” in what they largely perceived to be the “shelter”, rather than the Government induced “constraints”, of the “squeezed middle” (Interviewee, 401).

In terms of their core identity, the narrative that most dominated interviewee-testimonies was that, “actually”, DTC was “hard to characterize... or compare to other institutions” because they didn't “really have an identity, particularly” (Interviewee, 405). At best, the institution could describe itself as “a ‘middling’ university that historically [had] been very comfortable in being buffered from both ends”

(Interviewee, 406). They were neither top of the league tables, nor were they bottom. And whilst, on one level, they had often “struggled” with this “bland... contentment to be a mixture of things and sit in the middle ground” (Interviewee, 409), there was also “a great deal of comfort” that could be drawn from it because they were “never going to be exposed” to the sorts of pressures felt by other institutions that sat at either end (Interviewee, 406).

Although DTC was primarily a teaching-led university – what Interviewee -408 described as “a teaching factory” whose primary goal was “undergraduate bums on seats” – they also excelled at research; at least, they did “in *some* areas, but not necessarily *all* areas” of the university’s massive breadth of courses (Interviewees 402, 412). With well over 21,000 students, they could definitely describe themselves as “large”, which had to be “a good thing given the current climate” because, surely, there was “some strength in being large” (Interviewee, 412). Furthermore, financially they were strong, deriving some 85% of their income from teaching and the remaining 15% from research-type activity (Interviewee, 401). And, with over 3000 international students contributing some £20million in fee income that year alone, that was “a very, very significant contribution” to an already “healthy turnover of about £160-180million” (Interviewee, 405). Certainly, the university hit their Widening Access targets set by Government, but they didn’t exceed them. And their students came, largely, from the middle range of A-Levels – although the university did have to lower its tariff entry points when it came to ‘Clearing’, which did involve “an awful lot of people” because DTC was often considered by potential students as their “insurance choice” (Interviewee, 409). And whilst it was “nice” to think that potential students felt the university was “a solid, mid-range institution” that would make “a very good, safe, second choice” – *especially when their first choice was “a Russell Group institution!”* – it did make it difficult to control numbers (ibid); and that, of course, had financial implications (Interviewees 403, 404, 405). But there were “all sorts of things” that DTC could do that were “in the middle range of the sector” (Interviewee, 401). And whilst that made them “pretty indistinguishable” from their competitor institutions (Interviewee, 404) – “*a bit ‘average’ really, although that is a horrible word*” (ibid) – the university was “easy to sell” – although as their second in command of marketing iterated: “I would hate for you to think that we ‘sell’ it, because we don’t

‘sell’ it: it is quite an easy institution to ‘*promote*’” (Interviewee, 412, emphasis original).

Thus, as one strategic director underscored regarding DTC’s identity and what that meant in terms of setting their fee and strategy formation:

“I think it’s all about how [DTC] sees itself as a university...”

Then realizing just how unclear DTC actually was regarding its identity, he/she paused; then added:

“...It’s complicated, isn’t it?”

(408, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic)

Indeed. DTC’s situation was very complicated; and given the significant shifts that the White Paper was currently bringing into being – particularly in terms of their social relations of value – there was talk amongst the university’s leaders that occupying that middle ground may no longer be the safest strategy. Politically, there seemed to be “a clear agenda to polarize the system into a group of low-cost, high throughput providers” at one end, and “a group of more research intensive, internationally competitive institutions” at the other (Interviewee, 409). And there were “suspicions” that the “middle raft of institutions” may be “extremely vulnerable” (Interviewees 402, 405, 404, 409, 415).

For DTC, the primary problem was that they were due to lose a significant number of students from their ‘core’ due to the tactical arrangements that Government had set in motion to induce competition throughout the sector. And, of course, that could severely affect the university’s financial future. At the “top end”, according to HESA and HEFCE data, they were due to lose between four to five hundred AAB+ students – although DTC had hardly been aware that they’d had this number because they hadn’t been keeping proper records (Interviewees 401, 405, 415). At the “lower end” they were due to lose between six to seven hundred through the ‘flexible margin’, unless they were willing to risk bidding back for them by lowering the cost of their fee. But, of course, there was no guarantee that their bid would win Government approval. Moreover, “if the Government continue[d] to move money through the core-margin redistribution” next year, “by increasing the numbers to bid on, or extending the AAB+ policy to BBB”, then “that would be hugely destabilizing”: there was “huge

uncertainty looking forward” (Interviewee, 405, emphasis original). Thus, as one, *quite distressed*⁴⁹, strategic leader told me:

“We still don’t know how many students we will recruit in September! Policy decisions are being made which have, absolutely, detrimental impacts on the middle of the sector, which is where we sit... All of these things make it very difficult to realize the aspirations that we have, and it makes long-term development quite difficult because we just don’t know what will happen. The squeezed middle really does exist at the moment... You can’t win in these circumstances!”

(402, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Yet like every other HEI affected by the values, metrics, tactics and techniques of the White Paper, DTC had to win in order to survive in this “new, uncharted territory” (Interviewee, 403). They had to make meaning of the White Paper in relation to their existing and potential socio-economic spatial relations and devise a relevant and workable set of strategies for moving on in the world.

According to the interviewees, first and foremost DTC had to articulate a “clear identity” (Interviewee, 403) and a “clear set of principles” (Interviewee, 402) in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors and make themselves attractive to their newly positioned student-consumers. As Interviewee -401 explained, now that the full-cost fee was attached to the home undergraduate student, the discourse that had been circulating most throughout the HE sector was that students would be seeking out the “best opportunities” and “best value for money”, so DTC had to respond.

If you looked at DTC’s position in terms of geography and the sector, there were two similar institutions about 40 miles East and 50 miles West, with one Russell Group and one 1994 Group institution nestled in between. In some respects these institutions could be classed as competitors, but they were largely beyond DTC’s ‘Travel to Study Area’, so in DTC’s reckoning they were of little concern (Interviewee, 410). In addition, two “much smaller” universities sat to the North and East, but DTC considered these to be “more vulnerable” than they were to further marketisation. So, again, they didn’t pose any direct threat (Interviewee, 401). Rather, it was the more *local* Further Education Colleges with their increased degree-awarding powers that

⁴⁹ Evidenced from my field-work diaries.

most concerned DTC. These were primarily teaching-led institutions offering a wide range of vocational courses to predominantly *local*, medium-quality students, and this overlapped considerably with DTC's traditional mission, offer and potential student-consumer. What DTC had to do was differentiate themselves from these *local* competitors.

Reflecting back on their complex identity, the university's strategists selected three "core activities" that would reflect the values of the institution – values they felt would be most attractive to, *and valued by*, their potential student-consumers. Certainly *teaching* had to remain their primary focus given its importance to their students, staff and the financial health of the institution. But '*real*' *business engagement* and, moreover, *research* were activities through which DTC could articulate a clear identity – thereby differentiating themselves from the FE Colleges. It was here that they could provide "*real value for money*" in the face of "*increased competition*" – "*and win!*" (Interviewee, 408).

Similar to GE, then, it seemed that through the processes of meaning making and complexity reduction DTC were strategically aligning themselves with the values and metrics of the market as set out in the discourses of the White Paper. Indeed, given their strong identification with being a safe, second-choice institution, content with sitting in the middle ground, the impact that the White Paper was having on DTC was, in many respects, more profound than it had been for GE who considered themselves historically inclined to think in terms of markets (see Section 5.2.3 above). By shifting the dynamics in DTC's social relations of value, the metrics of the White Paper were – *at minimum* – asking the university to take stock of their "market position" and, in 'governmentality' terms, *measure where they were in relation to where they should be* (Miller and Rose, 1991).

And yet, when it came to setting their headline fee, DTC veered strongly away from the Government imaginary of a competitive market differentiated by price relative to current institutional standing. For DTC £8,500 was the value at which they decided to pitch themselves in the home undergraduate market. *That was just £500 less than GE!* This was an institution that had come some 60-odd places lower than GE in the RAE 2008 Rankings, and which, according to its strategic directors, knew that "with every

kind of league table that comes out” DTC were “in the middle” (Interviewee, 406) – presumably about to be squeezed by either end! Given that Government experts expected the diversity of institutions to differentiate and position themselves within a £3000 pricing zone calculated into the fee (from £6000 to £9000), I was intrigued to discover what factors had influenced DTC’s calculations.

Although a handful of interviewees suggested that the university had no clear strategy in setting their fee...

... “*There was no rationale!*” laughed Interviewee -406, “*It was about as rational as this Government’s policies! Everyone was just plucking a number out of the sky!*”...

...DTC had, in fact, undertaken a rigorous cost analysis to establish their bottom line. Depending on how generous they wanted to be in terms of bursaries and fee waivers, the university could have pitched themselves at well below £8000 and still derived a sustainable income moving forward. However, according to a majority of interviewees this would have been a strategic and financial error.

Rationally speaking, there were multiple and, oft-times, conflicting logics for this being the case, three of which I want to detail here. The first *did* conform to a market imaginary based on price. However, in DTC’s strategic imagination this was about identifying themselves with a ‘prestige market’ based on quality rather than a competitive, ‘price-lowering market’ based on volume, which was the opposite of what DTC felt the Government was trying to instigate through its metrics. In order to differentiate themselves clearly from the local FE Colleges, which in DTC’s calculations could probably deliver “quite a decent, high volume education for around £7000” (Interviewee, 405), the price signal that DTC relayed had to indicate the “quality and values” of the university (Interviewee, 411). Everyone across the HE market – potential students, schools, staff and competing institutions – all understood that the “best” HEIs, “*the research-led HEIs*”, would charge the highest prices, so DTC couldn’t afford to “look too cheap” (Interviewee, 412). Although the university recognized that they “couldn’t quite” position themselves alongside the Russell Group and 1994 Group, they didn’t want to price themselves too far below those institutions, because ultimately they needed to provide the type of research informed experience that the students would expect in return for their money, and that came “at a price” (Interviewee, 409). As such, the only way to communicate that value to their potential

consumers – “*and to finance it, of course!*” (Interviewee, 402) – was to charge a higher fee.

A second logic involved the identity and geography of their ‘typical’ home-undergraduate student and indicated that it simply *wasn’t necessary* for DTC to charge a lower fee. As noted above, DTC’s typical students came from mid-to-low income families and held qualifications in the mid-to-low range, so according to some of the interviewees they could be identified with “the increasing number of students who for good reasons [were] looking at a local market” (Interviewee, 410, emphasis original). Most fascinatingly, the majority of DTC’s strategic leaders believed that a large percentage of their students came from a catchment area of around 35 mile radius, within which sat DTC’s main “feeder institutions” (Interviewee, 405) – although this wasn’t actually the case⁵⁰. In turn the latter took many of their 6th-formers from the city in which the university was located – a location that had long influenced the university’s mission:

“That! That... (Long pause). That is what it means to be located in this city”, said Interviewee -404 emphatically as he/she stared out of his/her office onto the neighbouring social housing estate. *“People don’t realize that there is so much social deprivation here, but there is; and you can look at it from this window every day. [Down-Town] is a very poor city and I think our role here – providing jobs, social projects, raising aspirations and with widening participation – is certainly one of the reasons I’ve stayed... I think we are characterized by what we do in those areas”.*

By the same token, the university could benefit from the “sort of collective, cultural identity” that had developed amongst those same local populations (ibid). According to a number of the interviewees, anecdotally at least, many local people were hardly willing to leave the city boundaries:

“If you look at the typical [Down Town] stock – they are not going anywhere!” confirmed Interviewee -410.

⁵⁰ One of the reasons I approached DTC as a case study was that HESA data indicated that only about 12% of their students came from within a 12 mile radius of the institution. When I informed DTC that this was the case, they were quite incredulous, so much so that I offered to map out their most recent data for them using GIS – just to make sure I hadn’t made an error. Sure enough, my colleague Dr. Daniel Lewis and I found that most of their students came from 50-60 miles away and not from the local feeder institutions with whom DTC had established deep social relations.

“When I first moved here people kept telling me about the ‘Island Culture’ and ‘Island Mentality’... and unless you’ve lived here, in this city, you wouldn’t understand”.

Strategically speaking, when the role of the university and this “Island Mentality” were examined together there seemed to be “a deep sense of loyalty to the city that spill[ed] over onto the university” (ibid) which in terms of “a quality institution” was “the only show in town” (Interviewee, 406). As a result, the idea that DTC was suddenly going to “lose out to a swathe of low-cost competitors” or that their AAB+ students were going to “migrate to the Russell Group” was simply “*not proven*” (Interviewee, 410). Provided DTC took care of its low-income students through bursaries and fee waivers, and provided their potential student-consumers understood the implications of the graduate repayment scheme...

... “The money is not a major issue for a lot of our students... they’re not paying, that’s the key thing”, iterated Interviewee -403...

...then DTC could invest in a quality student experience by charging what they felt their market could stand (Interviewee, 402). And that was far closer to £9000 than it was to the £7000 that the *local* FE colleges were likely to charge.

The third logic involved another set of competing values contained within the White Paper itself and underpinned a firm belief amongst the university’s strategic leaders that, quite simply, DTC could not be “*competed away*” (Interviewee, 401). Whilst embedding competition into HE’s framework of action was a primary aim of marketisation, in order to ensure that costs to the public purse did not spiral through uncontrolled demand the Conservative-Liberal Coalition, like their Labour predecessors, had kept in place a cap on student numbers (apart from AAB+ students). As a result, DTC’s strategists understood the HE system to be “frozen”, meaning that the universities and FE Colleges were “*not in a real market, anyway*” (Interviewee, 401, emphasis original). Each institution knew they had the opportunity to recruit their ‘core’ student numbers but, in general, they couldn’t expand beyond them. And although some institutions at both the upper and lower end of the league tables would definitely “feel the draught” of marketisation, those institutions that sat “in the middle” were relatively “well protected” (ibid). Thus, as one strategic director in marketing underscored:

“People get too wound up about, “Oh we are all competing with each other”. No! The market is far more complicated than that... Competition is very dependent upon where in the country you sit. The economic models simply don’t play out in real places. You have to take real people and places into account.”

(410, Senior Management, Steering, Long-time Strategist, Marketing)

Taken together, the multiple logics that DTC applied to make meaning of the White Paper in relation to a reduced understanding of their existing and potential relational economic geographies signified that DTC could charge a higher fee and “hold a steady course” (Interviewee, 401) in the relative shelter of the squeezed middle:

... “Subject only, of course”, as one senior director (-401) told me with some irony, “to the difficulties of actually recruiting our target numbers”

5.2.5 Four Town Local: Clawing back the ‘ante’ for survival under ‘winner v loser’ politics

In theory, having removed students from each institution’s core numbers through the AAB+ and Flexible Margin competitions, HEIs should have been compelled by the metrics of the White Paper to compete with one another for those valuable students. Having replaced the relative security of funding HE, ex-ante, through the BTG with the in-security and uncertainty of attaching ex-post funding to the student-consumer, the primary method for HEIs to secure their life sustaining value was to attract and recruit potential students from across the HE market – as well as to diversify their income streams, of course. Yet as we have witnessed from the experiences of GE and DTC, the multiple and complex nature of social relations of value in the *Ordinary Economy* is not so straightforward. Even in the initial stages of meaning making and complexity reduction, we see the concomitant embedding, transformation and variation of Governmental values as embodied by the White Paper.

Four Town Local’s experiences provide yet another compelling account of the complex interplay between normalisation and diversity in the *Ordinary Economy*. However, as I will demonstrate below, their story also underscores the extensive and, largely, unforeseen damage that can be instigated by Governmental programmes that, in FTL’s words, are designed to create “winners and losers” (Interviewee, 307). For FTL, the intended redistribution of students through the AAB+ and Flexible Margin

competitions alongside the downward pressure that both would have on university finance signified only one thing: that Government was out to favour the high-ranked universities at the expense of the institutions that sat at the lower end of the league tables: that Government was out to “*shaft*” the institutions that were supposedly upholding the remaining value of the public good (Interviewee, 301).

Located in a region I want to call ‘Perpetual Twilight’, Four Town’s rootedness in time and place – in its *extraordinarily local* economic geographies – heavily affected how the university made sense of the White Paper. Established some 160 years earlier as a sort of Technical Institute that provided vocational training and general education to working men, FTL was “in and of its community” (Interviewee, 307), meaning that its connection to Perpetual Twilight’s history and identity signified that the present-day university “could not be preserved somewhere else” (ibid). In its heyday, Perpetual Twilight was one of the most industrialized areas of Britain made “black by day and red by night”, as Elihu Burritt (1862) put it, by the intensity of activity that echoed 24/7 through its “foul and melancholy air”. However, following the decline of its major industries throughout the 20th Century, and particularly since the neoliberally inspired economic restructuring of the 1980s, the region had suffered severe economic deterioration.

Today, a certain darkness still lingered over the area in the form of a “lack of aspiration amongst those born and bred in [Perpetual Twilight]”:

“There is almost a pride, here, in self-deprecation”, said Interviewee -310. *“People actually say, ‘It’s not pretty, is it? It’s a dump!’ Those are the sorts of words that are used”.*

Likewise, the only red that remained was Twilight’s standing as an “unemployment red-spot”, devoid of the economy that had once made it prosper:

“When you look at the spots on the unemployment map we are right there as one big red dot!” affirmed Interviewee -309.

Put these factors together with the high levels of crime and social deprivation that had “indexed” the four towns of Twilight as some of the worst positioned in the country (Interviewee, 304), and there was “a very real [Twilight] issue” that FTL “as the unofficial university of the region” needed to consider (Interviewee, 309):

“Don’t get me wrong”, said Interviewee -310, “but there’s a huge pride in that lack of aspiration. And that does reflect across, if you like, the level of aspiration here: ‘Yeah, but we’re not Cambridge, we’re [Four Town Local] aren’t we?’”

The fact was that the general lack of aspiration found in Perpetual Twilight seemed ingrained in the university’s primary student body – *its home undergraduate population* – and this had long-affected the university in terms of establishing and embedding its traditional mission. To begin with, some 70%+ of the university’s undergraduate population came from within a 15-mile radius of the institution, making it one of the most locally-recruiting HEIs outside London:

“Part of that is about the ‘[Twilight] Mentality’”, reasoned Interviewee -309, associating the lack of aspiration in the region with their students’ lack of imaginative and physical mobility. “Some of our students have never been to London before because it is so far away – and that is a real [Twilight] thing. If some of our students go to [nearly, ‘x-Big City’], that is a day out!”

Moreover, over 50% of their undergraduates came from disadvantaged or low-income households indicating that both the region and the university were dealing with socio-economic difficulties well above the national average (Interviewee, 305). Thus, whilst on one level FTL’s “focus” on being “a community university” could be seen as “a *conscious* decision” motivated by wholly rational reasons (Interviewees 309, 306), what the interviewees underscored as the fundamental value of the institution arose from a far deeper plane:

“When it comes to writing our new Widening Participation strategy, we don’t really need one”, said Interviewee -309, “It is in our DNA”.

Indeed, as one very senior director iterated, echoing the “deep sense of purpose to make a difference to local students” (ibid) that many of the interviewees discussed:

“Widening Participation... gives us our identity. There’s no doubt about that. It’s in the warp and the weft; it permeates through. It’s about mission, it’s about purpose, it’s about what we stand for, it’s about every interaction – it’s fundamental. So, it’s not ‘somebody’s job’! And I feel quite passionately about that. It cuts across and influences what we do on a daily basis”.

(302, Senior Management VCO, Medium-time Manager, Education)

Enmeshed as they were in this socio-spatial relational context, FTL had, for many years, ‘reached out’ beyond its boundaries to local schools and colleges in order to understand what the needs of their potential students might be in terms of the university’s provision. On the one hand, this meant thinking about the support mechanisms that might be required in order to provide their, largely, WP students whose tariff entry points were low with the best possible learning environment while they were at university. On the other, it meant thinking about what their students might want and require in terms of their future lives (Interviewees 302, 303, 308, 312).

Again, their students’ identification with the general lack of aspiration in the region informed a “key part of [FTL’s] mission” (Interviewee, 305):

“Our students want to live local... study local... and remain local”, said one very senior director (-301), *“so they’ll be less likely to travel for jobs.”*

Thus, to be successful in achieving their ‘purpose’ the university had to possess “a real bearing and weight within the local business economy” (Interviewee, 309). The majority of Twilight’s employers were small to medium-sized enterprises that were looking for graduates to add something to their businesses, and it was part of the mission of the university to gear the employment outcomes of their students to those local enterprises – thereby helping their students to gain the local jobs they desired while simultaneously impacting the economic recovery of the region. “That [was] an important value of the institution”, and it was one of their “unique strengths” (ibid, emphasis original). As one university strategist elaborated:

“For this university, Widening Participation is about giving an opportunity to those who have got the capacity from the locality or the region... to improve their lot in life. That means raising their aspirations, improving their education, improving their life chances, their employment outcomes and, therefore, the position of the locality. The important thing, here, is that they won’t all get degrees and then migrate to another part of the country. Indeed, we want them to stay in [Twilight] and help [Twilight] to thrive.”

(304, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Strategist)

Thus, as far as Four Town’s strategic leaders understood it, even according to the neoliberally informed discourses and metrics of the White Paper, FTL was the epitome of a university that served the public good (Interviewees 301-to-313). Given the identity of their typical student, without Government funding the mass provision of HE

in Perpetual Twilight would be subject to market failures. Further still, given the lack of inward market investment to the region, the positive spill over effects that the university was having would be subject to the same. As such, when I asked one senior strategic leader what had long-driven the university's mission, he/she responded:

"... As a sacrament to the area. I think we had that obligation as a publicly funded body. [FLT] had, and still does have, a sense of duty and obligation to do what we were set here to do, which was to help the economic, social and political development of [Twilight]."

(301, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

However, in the words of one strategist involved in marketing, given the university's understanding of their social value, when the White Paper was released it felt like "*an economic Tsunami*", with FTL "*standing on the edge of an ocean while something huge [was] being dropped in the middle*" (Interviewee, 311). Indeed, when viewed in the context of the "*wave upon wave*" of Government tactics that had swept across the HE sector since, at least, the 2010 Spending Review, the impact that the White Paper would surely have on their social relations of value could severely undermine all that the university stood for. More than that, it posed an imminent threat to their very survival (ibid). As Interviewee -311 underscored:

"The changes under this political Coalition... are a wake up call! ... We won't have any money in the next five years!"

For all of the interviewees, the metrics set out under the Coalition acted as a powerful set of simplified, semiotic referents that made them reflect upon their local, relational economic geographies. First, in the broad context of the region, the 2010 Spending Review was already driving the university towards certain "economic imperatives" (Interviewee, 302). For one, in recent years, where the local authority had been less able to afford provision, FTL had been helping to raise aspirations and educational standards by *selling* their expertise to local schools and public services – albeit on a not-for-profit basis. Now, with Aim Higher being dismantled and school budgets cut, any diminution in this financially and socially valuable market could signify a sizeable reduction in university turnover (ibid). Moreover, the Regional Development Agencies were being abolished and public services cut, so there would be less inward public investment and fewer jobs in Twilight. Traditionally, a lot of Four Town's students

graduated into the public sector, so given their desire to work locally that meant the university was facing a declining rate of onward employment for their graduates (Interviewee, 301). As such, given “the logic of supply and demand”, a “self-perpetuating spiral” could easily become “the downside” of the “double-edged sword” that being such a locally embedded institution denoted (Interviewee, 302). Thus, as Interviewee -301 stated definitively in summarizing FTL’s understanding of their regional position:

“Whilst there is economic decline in this area, we will always be in decline”.

Second, in the direct context of FTL, the AAB+ and Flexible Margin competitions alongside the uncertain funding of HE through the student fee could undermine the financial sustainability of the university even more profoundly. Perpetual Twilight had a high number of universities and FE Colleges that “technically” were within easy reach for FTL’s potential students (Interviewee, 313). As such, although the university liked to think of themselves as “the local link” (ibid), they were in fact “in an area of high competition” within which the White Paper seemed resolute on creating “winners and losers” (Interviewee, 307).

With two Russell Group institutions not too far away, FTL was concerned that they would “cherry pick” around 250 of their better-qualified WP students by offering them substantial bursaries the value of which FTL could not afford to match. Thus, the quality of FTL’s peer learning environment would be diminished simply in order for those high-ranked universities to meet their Government-set targets for increasing social mobility – the definition of which seemed to conform far more to the values of the Russell Group than it did to the values of institutions like Four Town:

“It is about plucking out bright kids and putting them into good universities!” declared Interviewee -304 angrily, *“whereas for us [it’s] all about... what gets added by the time the student comes out the other end... The value added, here, is enormous in comparison!”*

Furthermore, the local University Colleges and FE Colleges numbered in the tens, and were very similar to FTL in terms of typical student profile. In order to create a bidding stock for the Flexible Margin, HEFCE had reduced FTL’s ‘core’ by some 750 places, and the percentage reduction was not dissimilar for the local Colleges. As a

result, there was an expectation that once “the total sum of places taken away” was computed against “the total given back” through the bidding process, overall Perpetual Twilight would be “*a net loser*” (Interviewee, 313). Considering the institution’s identity and regional embeddedness, FTL felt “completely hobbled” by the inevitable rise in local competition (Interviewee, 307). Moreover, although the university’s strategic leaders had “outright rejected the concept of students as consumers” (Interviewee, 301), they none-the-less recognized that “in the new world order that [was] emerging” (Interviewee, 311) their on-going survival would depend on responding to local demand. As Interviewee -313 explained:

“Because we are regarded by people as their local university... and because people stay in the area, we survive or fall on that! ...If we don’t provide a good student experience and job opportunities at the end of it, word of mouth can go badly wrong for us as well as good (sic).”

(313, Management Support, Non-Steering, Long-time Administrator)

It was through this iterative process of meaning making that FTL reduced the complexity of their socio-economic relations down to a handful of salient points that would enable them to devise a new fee strategy for moving forward. On the one hand, it seemed clear that they would need to compete with the local Russell Group institutions for their AAB+ students. On the other, they would need to compete with the local Colleges for the students that made up their ‘core’. And all this was set against a backdrop of Government-induced marketisation that FTL felt was contrary to the value of the sort of higher education they provided (Interviewees 301-to-314).

But, compete they would!

In order to maintain their AAB+ numbers their strategy was two-fold. First, despite the fact that the university was regularly close to the bottom of most league tables – “*It’s like [wearing] an annual hair shirt*”, said Interviewee -304 – they would need to maintain a relatively high headline fee of £8,500 such that they could align the quality of the university with their prestige opposition (Interviewees 301, 302, 303, 304). In the past the university had “been content with ‘Asda Packaging’” because being understood as “a caring university” had felt more important than projecting “a quality image” given their local socio-economic spatial relations (Interviewee, 311). Now, in light of the Government-induced shifts in their social relations of value, those values

had to change. Second, they would need to focus more on research. Given the understanding across the HE sector that there existed “an inextricable link between good quality teaching and research” (Interviewee, 301), the current policy framework was providing a significant impetus for those “more reluctant” institutions and individuals “to dip their toe into a more diversified future” (Interviewee, 307). Although research-led teaching was held by plenty of Four Town’s academic staff to be of value, there were also those who had long-been content with “making life cosy for themselves, and easy” by shirking their research responsibilities (ibid). As such, the university could, now, utilize the power and discourses of the White Paper to push forward a research agenda, the value of which was, now, far more evident and compelling:

“If colleagues won’t go willingly, there is something actually, now, pushing as well”, confirmed Interviewee -307.

In order to retain a percentage of their ‘core’ student number, FTL would have to risk bidding back for those potential students through the Flexible Margin process. Certainly, demonstrating the quality of the institution through both their high, headline fee and research agenda would help to differentiate the university from their local, lower-end opponents. However, FTL could simply not afford to lose the value of the fees attached to those 750 students (Interviewee, 301). As such, the university’s leaders devised two further strategies. Firstly, by disbanding all of their bursaries the university could offer a fee-waiver of £1000 to all their undergraduates⁵¹. This would enable the institution to enter into the bidding process by conforming to the Government-set regulation of reducing the maximum cost to the Treasury to £7,500 per-student per-year. Yes, there would be downsides to the strategy. For one, disbanding individual bursaries would leave their very-low-income students a lot worse off – but the university could simply not afford to maintain the more ‘progressive’ distribution of its widening access funds given this new policy regime. For another, reducing the diversity of their bursaries down to a single understanding of Value would be far less attractive to their potential future students (ibid). Considering their typical student profile, fee-waivers had:

⁵¹ The only individualized bursaries that FTL would now provide were the funds they set aside to match the Government’s National Scholarship Programme, which, by tying funding to the achievement of A-Level grades AAB or above, they intended to utilize to try to attract local AAB+ students (Interviewee, 309).

“...no value and no benefit to the student! It’s cash in the pocket that matters to the student!” argued Interviewee -301, smacking his/her clenched fist on the table:

‘Bang!’

However, fee-waivers *were* clearly of value to *the Government*. On the upside they, also, were an effective mechanism by which FTL could maintain a high headline fee at the same time as competing in the Flexible Margin! As a consequence, the university’s strategic leaders recognized that they would have to shift their values somewhat:

“We’ve had to go with fee-waivers”, ceded Interviewee -301 pragmatically.

Secondly, in order to make up for any remaining shortfall in their ‘core’, FTL was:

... “Going to grow!” proffered Interviewee -301. “At a time when full-time student numbers will be reduced, we will seek to grow – which is an interesting challenge”, he/she qualified.

In the context of the removal of the BTG and the subsequent need to make “year-on-year surpluses” – such that they could “re-invest in the quality of the student experience and ensure [the university’s] survival” – FTL had to, somehow, recuperate the financial value that these Government-devised competitions were intent on taking from them (ibid). As Interviewee -301 elaborated:

“We are moving into a situation whereby the funding environment... means that we will have to be more entrepreneurial... fleet of foot... more creative. The University was operating very much as though it were funded on a block grant bases: a sort of ‘we’ll be all right for money’, mentality, ‘funding will come’. Well that goes! The new political environment says: ‘that goes!’... We need our schools to be developing new markets as quickly as possible and exploiting those markets!”

(301, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Looking at their past and current economic geographies, and projecting what might sustain growth moving forward, the strategists’ approach was two-pronged. On the one hand, the university would need to be even more “business facing” than ever before (ibid). Faced with the cuts to local public services alongside their graduates’ demands for local jobs, Four Town’s academic community would need to develop new markets with private industry in order to increase both university income and the attractiveness of their offer. For instance, where the School of Health had long-worked with – *and been paid by* – the local NHS in terms of student training and work-experience it

would now need to market itself to the local private health sector in order to compensate for the shift in their social relations of value – regardless of what their *individual values* might be:

“Just because the NHS can’t give us any places doesn’t mean that we can’t place students in the private sector, said Interviewee -301. “The local private healthcare sector is enormous, and hardly does any training of its own. So we’ve said, ‘let’s do things differently!’ Our systems and traditions are very much about a centralized, planned institution. It’s a bit like an old Soviet Union state... I mean... I’m opposed to private healthcare myself... But this is a very different way of thinking. This is very much more market orientated. That is the sort of thing we want to see our Schools doing.”

On the other hand, FTL would need to increase its student numbers. Looking forward, one particular market offered significant financial potential:

“We’ve always been committed to our post-graduate, overseas and part-time markets”, explained Interviewee -303. “They don’t sit in our student number control, so there is room for growth. But now that we know that part-time students have access to loans, it seems logical to look again at our part-time market”.

Thanks to the successful lobbying of institutions like Birkbeck and the OU which specialized in part-time students, under the more ‘progressive’ metrics of the White Paper both young and mature people wishing to study part-time were now eligible for tuition fee loans, the value of which was to be calculated on a pro-rata basis of intensity as compared to full-time study (Interviewees 303, 309, 312). As a result, Four Town’s strategists believed that increasing their part-time intake could provide a lucrative source of income: provided they could recruit those additional students, of course!

Bearing in mind the employment issues that Perpetual Twilight faced, the university had access to a substantial part-time market. However, in recent years those potential students had become increasingly risk averse. Thus, maintaining part-time numbers had become increasingly difficult – as had maintaining full-time undergraduate recruitment (Interviewee, 303).

“There is a lot of debt aversion in the low socio-economic families from which our students are likely to come to us”, highlighted Interviewee -309.

As such, the university would need to be more aggressive in its recruitment strategies. Already, they had stepped up their marketing activities in local schools and colleges trying to dispel the negative messages being circulated in the media regarding student fees and debt. But they were, also, recruiting large numbers of their most recent graduates to contact both potential part-time and full-time students to spread the message that, actually, they wouldn't have to pay the fee up front. Nor was it likely that they would graduate with high levels of debt that would need to be repaid – although the university did have to temper that message in order to still underscore the quality of their offer:

“The work-a-day degrees we are offering are quality degrees”, explained Interviewee -309. “...So we've avoided saying in quite the stark terms that ‘you will probably never earn enough to repay it all back’... We didn't want to dampen aspirations in quite that way. But we do say... quietly... about the amount they are going to repay: ‘If you are earning this much, then you are only going to repay this much’. And we've stayed at the lower end of that.”

When I asked one very senior leader of Four Town to reflect on the impact these shifts in their social relations of value might have on the HE sector, I was struck by the strength of his/her reply. He/she said:

“I think the big issue comes in about 2016/17 when the government finally accepts that it can't afford the scheme that it has introduced, and then it will be: wow! We can't afford higher education! ...Sure, we have difficulties over policy initiatives made with no evidence base and no real framework. But once you've accepted the idea that undergraduate students will be paying back from income, and there is no upfront fee, then to some extent you have to ask, ‘does it matter what the fee is?’”

(301, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

For FTL, any detrimental effects of their a) turning to the private sector to increase their income, and b) clawing back whatever ex-ante public funding they could access through the vagaries of the graduate repayment mechanism, could not be seen as problems of their making. Nor were they ethical issues that the university had to deal with. In the opinions of the interviewees, FTL was still by-and-large a public

institution, still publicly funded, and still serving the public good (Interviewees, 301-313). Rather, what mattered most to the university was that in the marketisation game of ‘winners and losers’ that this Conservative-led Coalition had devised, FTL could ensure their long-term survival:

“*We’ve taken the view that we are ignoring Government*”, said Interviewee -301. “*We are assuming that we are going to get shafted by every Government policy that comes along and we are just going to grab control of our own destiny. And anything that we can get from Government: Great! Bonus! So we have gone for that **hard view!***” he/she said, slapping the table with an open palm. “*I’ve said to people, you’re not going to get any more funding in future, you’ve got to generate it all yourself... This is about making sure that we are here in 10 years time*”.

5.2.6 Palace Aspirational: Calling time on timeless values – where aspirations meet the market meter

If FTL’s story demonstrates the unforeseen and complex consequences of a university’s determination to remain embedded in, and/or committed to, the perceived *opportunities* offered by its local economic geographies, Palace Aspirational’s story demonstrates the multiple and unforeseen consequences of a university’s attempts to unravel itself from the perceived *constraints* of its local socio-economic spatial relations. Similar to FTL, PA had long-identified itself as an institution that, certainly according to the narrow discourses and metrics set out in the White Paper, predominantly upheld prevailing Government understandings of the value of the public good. However, unlike FTL, PA was an institution seeking to create a new “immaculate picture” (Interviewee, 213) by which it could structure its forward-moving strategies. Such a ‘purified image’ might include the university’s traditional local social relations of value, certainly. But these could no longer be the institution’s dominant set of semiotic referents. Rather, they – and therefore the “*timeless values*” that they represented (Interviewee, 201) – would need to be subordinated to a *new* set of metrics and values: one which better represented the aspirations of the university in its struggle to define what is and is not value:

“*The strategy... is a formal statement of who we think we are, where we want to be, and what we want to achieve. It is this ‘immaculate picture’... that’s quite useful because it gives everybody something to hang on to and to point to. ...In terms of the headline strategic plan, I don’t think anybody in the organisation would really disagree with the*

aim: We want to be in the Top Ten. But in terms of how we achieve it and what's holding us back, then you get disagreements... and that's interesting because it becomes about metrics rather than metric."

(213, Management Support, Steering, Long-time Administrator)

Located in an area of 'a-Big City' that I'm going to call 'Selling Point' (the reasons for which will become clear in a moment), Palace Aspirational had established an "almost unique" identity and reputation for combining "a very high achievement in research" with "an almost unequalled record of embedding itself within the local community through its recruitment of local students", a very large proportion of whom came from low socio-economic backgrounds (Interviewee, 201). For sure, other, more prestigious universities either "matched or exceeded" PA's research achievements, while still others – "definitively lower-ranked" – either matched or exceeded their record on widening participation (ibid). However, if you took a good look at any other university across the UK, "*nowhere* [came] close to putting the two together" (ibid).

Similar to FTL, Palace's record in WP was rooted in its history, geography and local socio-economic relations, each of which registered an enormous sense of pride and value amongst the interviewees:

"There are a lot of people within this university who are very proud of what it does", said Interviewee -210. *"The roots of this university were established to educate the population in [Selling Point], and if you look at the make up of our student body, you can still see that happening".*

"One thing that is wonderful about this place... is the fact that we have a history of doing widening participation!" echoed Interviewee -212. *"We grew up doing it as a Technical College... And we shouldn't lose sight of that history: of the great good that we have done for a whole host of people over many years".*

"It's a genuinely diverse university: and long may that last!" added Interviewee -209 referring to the "very colourful" mix of cultures, ethnicities, religions, and socio-economic groups that made up the university's student body.

The fact that historically, the university had started as "part of a genuine will and desire to benefit local people", and the fact that PA was so "rooted" in a "both ethnically and socially diverse area – quite a poor one actually", was "genuinely valued by both staff and students" (ibid):

“We make a lot of it”, underscored interviewee -209. “Our geography, clearly, has a big impact”.

In contrast, in terms of its research, the university had had to work hard on increasing its overall quality and consistency; an activity it had chosen to undertake over the past decade or so under the leadership of its two most recent Principals, both of whom were variously described by colleagues as “ambitious” and “value-driven” (Interviewees 202, 203, 204, 207, 209, 212). For each of these leaders, high-quality research offered the university two extremely valuable assets: i.e. ‘*income*’ – derived from both the Research Councils and HEFCE’s Recurrent Research Grant; and ‘*standing*’ – derived from the ‘prestige-value’ that had been placed upon research activity throughout the history of the sector⁵².

Until around 2009/10, the fact that PA had managed to maintain this “unique” combination had brought the university “a great deal of respect... both locally and nationally” (Interviewee, 209), which for *all* of the interviewees was something to be “celebrated” and “valued”. Furthermore – but “*putting all the motherhood and apple pie to one side*”, as Interviewee -213 put it – in the face of ever-increasing competition it had offered the university “*a definite edge*” (Interviewee, 209), which many interviewees were loathe to relinquish:

“We are a world-leading, research university with very deep roots in the local community”, iterated Interviewee -207. “Our immediate competitors are [various Russell Group and 1994 Universities], and we could just become a clone of those. But we would lose the distinctiveness of that rootedness. I see that as a real ‘selling point’”, he/she underscored. “And I use those words deliberately! The fact that we work with the local community to improve their lives is a story that is very different from the Oxbridge or Redbrick Universities. If we lose that story, we lose something that is quite powerful and very attractive... We would be idiots to get rid of that identity”.

To varying degrees and based on their own individual logics and values, each interviewee put forward reasons for not wanting to let go of PA’s unique “characteristics”, “attributes”, or “selling points” (e.g. Interviewees 201, 203, 205, 206,

⁵² Interviewee references fully anonymized to avoid identification with other quotes.

207, 212). However, in spite of the perceived *opportunities* that their local socio-economic relations offered, being an international, research-led university with a local commitment to WP was increasingly becoming an identity that PA was finding “hard to maintain” (Interviewee, 201).

As the “rising star” of the league tables since the 2008 RAE, PA had been striving to reposition itself amidst the sector’s top institutions, such that in the not-too-distant future it could be considered for entry into the highly selective ranks of the Russell Group. As such, according to a majority of PA’s strategic directors, there were “*obvious constraints*” to being in Selling Point, which “everyone” apparently recognized (Interviewees 201, 203, 204, 205):

“Being here makes us need to try harder”, explained Interviewee -213. “There’s a real downside that’s around ‘getting noticed’... and people’s assumptions of what it’s like here... So there’s a sense that we need to prove something because we’ve always been seen as ‘them down in [Selling Point]’ and not so much as a big-hitting organisation... We can’t, and don’t, perceive ourselves as a local university. Yes, our location... gives a richness to the organisation... but that can’t be the sole purpose of our mission”.

From around 2009/10, the primary mechanism by which PA had been attempting to reposition itself was by demonstrating, via a variety of highly regarded league tables, that PA “fit” the identity of an elite institution. This meant iteratively reflecting on their current identity, activities and social-relations and comparing various aspects of them with the metrics that the league tables utilized to measure, sift and sort both national and international HEIs into their easy-to-identify, ranked positions: from “one to ten” on page one of the leagues, to a level that “the best students” wouldn’t even consider “beyond page two” (Interviewee, 203).

In recent years PA had started to get better feedback in the National Student Survey, which provided an important indicator of the quality of the sorts of student-oriented processes and activities that applicants would be most interested in when selecting an institution for study. However, the university still needed to “raise its game” in terms of its peer-learning environment and the “quality” of its graduate output (Interviewee, 205). Due to its historic focus on widening access to students from local schools, many

of which performed poorly in terms of A-Levels, the quality of PA's intake was "too low" according to the league table metrics, as was the number of First Class degrees that the university awarded (Interviewee, 201). As such, PA's strategic leaders felt that their best option was to raise their UCAS tariff entry requirements, thereby altering the make-up of their student body and, importantly, conforming to the evaluation of 'quality' as metricized by the various leagues:

"People like selling points!" stated Interviewee -206. *"People like to look down a simple league table and say, 'right, X is there and... that's better because it's three places above Y'. Sure people should be asking questions. But these days they seem very happy to take things completely at face value".*

Initially, the strategy worked reasonably well – particularly in 'technical terms' since the university felt relatively protected by both the 'financial security' of the BTG and the 'recruitment security' of SNC. Although, as Interviewee -201 told me, PA had long-been used to competing for students in a "quality market", the university sector had never truly been exposed to the uncertainties and risks associated with operating in a "free market" wherein the value of HE would *not* be up-held by ex-ante Government funding, and students could *choose* where they wanted to go – without the restriction of number controls. In addition, the strategy had suffered little resistance, being generally understood as "one of those virtuous circles that would, eventually, start to reinforce itself" (Interviewee, 213). A key feature of being in Selling Point had been that Palace was "not pretentious" – they didn't have "an institutional poker up [their] backside!" as Interviewee -213 put it. PA was a high-achieving university that still managed to do WP: there was absolutely no reason that they would have to become "an exclusive preserve" for "middle-class people" who were "predominantly white!" (ibid). Provided the strategy was handled "subtly... incrementally, even", then both staff and local schools would have time "to adapt" (Interviewee, 203). Just because PA wanted to take "best advantage" of its successes did not have to alter the long-term values and relations of the institution (ibid; see also 201, 202, 204, 207).

Yet, when the 2011 White Paper was released both the financial feasibility and ethical legitimacy of the strategy were called into question by numerous staff, students, local schools and other interested parties. Even local Councillors demanded meetings with the Principal to clarify PA's entry tariff intentions (Interviewee, 201). On the one

hand, replacing the BTG with a cost-covering fee that was attached to the student while setting numbers free through the AAB+ competition would surely bring the risks and uncertainties of virtually “free market” competition into a set of socio-economic relations that PA had, *specifically*, been attempting to engender. The onward economic coherence and trajectory of the university could be severely weakened (Interviewee, 206). On the other, continuing to pursue its “elitist aspirations” at a time of hitherto unequalled marketisation would surely be at the cost of PA’s WP students (Interviewees 201-to-214). Would, for example, the university still be accessible to local students if it decided to charge the full £9000 fee in order to be seen as a top-flight institution? Moreover, would the university reduce its WP activities if it continued raising its tariff entry points in order to compete for those elite AAB+ students? Surely, “as the standing and reputation of PA increase[d]”, so they would “become a more attractive destination to more able students”, and that meant “further increases in their entry requirements and fewer students from [Selling Point]” (Interviewee, 201). That was the “overriding perception” amongst those against the strategy, and...

“...statistically”, said one senior leader, “*they were right!*” (ibid).

The very foundations of PA’s local social relations of value could be severely undermined.

Faced with the choice of moving forward with its AAB+ aspirations or turning back towards its WP roots, PA chose the former. According to the most dominant set of logics that the interviewees expressed, the problem predominantly boiled down to two interrelated components: *value and survival*. Judging from the metrics of the White Paper⁵³, PA was looking at a substantial reduction in its core numbers. First, through the flexible margin competition they would lose between 500 and 1000 students. Although a percentage of these could be won back should PA take part in the bidding process, the university would never win back the full number. In addition, the fee attached to the student would have to be substantially lower than the £9000 maximum allowed by the new fee-policy, indicating a significant negative impact on PA’s bottom line (Interviewees 201, 206, 211). Second, through the AAB+ competition PA’s core would be reduced by around a further 1000 undergraduates, and these would be set free to the supply and demand vagaries of England’s “prestige market”

⁵³ For full details see: HEFCE (2012) *Recurrent Grants and Student Number Controls 2013-14*.

(Interviewee, 201). Elite universities across the country would be “fighting over those supposedly ‘brilliant’ students” (Interviewee, 210). Thus, if PA were to turn its back on its AAB+ aspirations in favour of its WP roots, there was no way that it would ever attract those ‘freed up’ AAB+ students. Taken together, the reduction in core numbers represented a potential onward financial deficit of millions of pounds, which, without ex-ante Government funding, PA simply could not afford:

“Ultimately, and this is pure pragmatism”, said Interviewee -206, “it all boils down to money, because without money there are things you simply cannot do.”

According to a second, dominant set of logics, PA’s most senior strategists simply were not prepared to give up their elitist aspirations. The university had spent the last three years constructing a new “immaculate picture” by which it could steer the evaluations, values, actions and activities of its staff towards the higher echelons of the Russell Group (Interviewees 213). They were not going to turn back now – particularly given this Government’s push towards marketisation. As one strategic leader explained in the context of setting their fee:

“There was a lot of discussion about what the fee level should be: What sort of institution are we? What would be the consequences if we didn’t charge what our competition would charge? Would it tarnish our image? And we came to the conclusion that we really needed to charge £9000 because the Principal’s immediate reaction to everything is, ‘how does that compare to the Russell Group?’ That is [his/her] benchmark. ‘Is anyone in the Russell Group not going to charge £9000?’ So it was clear from the outset that it had to be £9000. There was no option.”

(212, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic)

Given PA’s history of WP and the concerns that had been raised regarding its potential devaluation and demise, the university wanted to be careful not to ignore the groups that they had been working with over a long period of time (Interviewee, 210). However, a better balance had to be struck between its WP activities and raising tariff entry points, such that PA could still be “*representative of timeless values*” but “*without becoming irrelevant*”, as Interviewee -201 put it.

For example, a potential solution to maintaining its WP relations might have been the strategic selection of contextual data to allow certain local students access to the university with lower tariff entry points than the ‘new PA norm’. These local students

would have been identified as ‘underprivileged’ by specific indicators: e.g. socio-economic background, residence in a low-participation neighbourhood, status of school, etc. In essence, this would have enabled PA to uphold understandings of the public value of HE as expressed by the White Paper – i.e. *social mobility* – thereby, enabling the institution to hit its Government set WP targets as well as maintain its local WP relations. However, in making meaning of the use of contextual data in relation to PA’s headline strategic aim, the potential solution was rejected. Maintaining their low-tariff WP numbers would have affected PA’s position in the leagues:

“It’s unfortunate that people from disadvantaged backgrounds aren’t adequately supported”, said Interviewee -203. *“But we don’t think it’s right for a quality university like [PA] to keep low entry tariffs just to keep the WP students coming in. That doesn’t do them any favours, or us – not in the long-term”.*

A second potential solution might have been to work with local schools to help raise their students’ aspirations and achievements (Interviewees 201, 203, 204, 209, 210). In theory, this could have provided a resolution to the problem whereby every party in the relationship could “win” (Interviewee, 201). Going forward, local schools could improve their Ofsted ratings, the students could achieved higher A-Level grades, and, importantly, the university could maintain the multiple and complex value of its WP mission and identity without compromising its aspirations of being in the Top Ten (ibid). And yet, in making meaning of the strategy in relation to the White Paper there were, again, significant problems – specifically in terms of PA’s geographically grounded social relations of value. Being in ‘a-Big City’ was not like being in other large conurbations. PA was “surrounded” by “predator institutions” whose elite reputations had always made it hard for the university to compete (Interviewee, 212). Now, with the “new world of fees” emerging, PA was even more concerned that they would lose the more concretely defined “student-consumer” of the AAB+ policy to those “big-hitting organizations” (ibid). PA had no idea what their competitors’ potentials were for expanding their capacities, but there were plenty of rumours flying around that they – *like PA* – would somehow need to make up the numerical and financial shortfalls precipitated by the Government’s reductions to their core student numbers. Furthermore, those elite institutions really needed more WP students in order to hit *their* Government set targets (Interviewee, 210). As a result, if PA invested lots of time and resources into helping local students achieve AAB+, there was “no

guarantee” that they could “expect a payback in terms of recruitment”, as Interviewee - 203 underscored:

“If a local WP student does get AAB+, the likelihood that they will choose [PA] is slim. We know what will happen: [Our immediate competitors] will whip them away! They’ll offer a [generous] scholarship because they’re desperate to have some WP students! So if we nurture them to [meet] our entry standards, I bet you anything they’d get attracted to one of the Top Five!”

(203, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Thus, whilst all PA interviewees – *without exception* – expressed grave reservations and sadness that their elite aspirations would dint their local WP relations, the *value* in maintaining those, once, “bread-and-butter” relations at their historic levels quite simply was no longer there (Interviewee, 210). For sure, the university had struggled not to lose sight of their mission and to ensure that their strategy had been guided by first principles:

“That was our number one priority”, stated Interviewee 201: *“To necessarily accommodate Government policy but to ensure that we were not directed by it”.*

But, over the preceding years, that mission had already begun to change significantly. As a result, as more than one senior strategist told me, PA would certainly continue onwards with its WP activities; but in light of the White Paper’s pronounced push towards marketisation, the “incremental” shifts that PA had planned for their local WP social- and material- relations of value would have to be “accelerated” (Interviewees 203, 204, 206, 211, 212).

Given the Government’s emphasis on ‘setting value free’ to the market at the expense of upholding its collective value through ex-ante public funding, each interviewee felt that the struggle was, in many ways, futile. The Government’s valuation of HE as a public good was in direct contradiction to its valuation of market processes – as were the metrics of the leagues. As one senior strategist summarized:

“The problem is that Government is on a path that they are determined to see through... Whilst they’re saying that they would like universities to widen participation, it’s impossible to do that alongside the AAB+ competition. The two things are completely working in opposition to one another. Unless Government says they will hold some AAB+ places back and give them, solely, to universities that are allowing for

contextualized admissions, it will be impossible for us to admit a student with BBB based on their specific context because that place just won't be available with the AAB+ competition. Surely, that tells us something about the ideology behind this. I have been around higher education for a long time; and in terms of policy, this is the worst model that I have ever seen. It's frightening – really frightening!"

(209, Senior Management, Steering, WP, Project Management)

5.3 Conclusion

As the above research has demonstrated, in the initial stages of strategy formation the economic imaginary of the market as discursively set out in the HE White Paper played a central role in the Government's attempts to structure the evaluations, values, actions, activities and subjectivities of HE's strategic leaders and their universities. Indeed, as a vital element in the process of meaning making and complexity reduction, the reduced understandings that White Paper put forward in its discourses, values and metrics regarding what the Government reasoned was HE's appropriate social and economic form acted as an important and powerful set of simplified, semiotic referents that each of the strategic leaders from each HEI reflected on as they negotiated their way through this 'accelerated' push towards marketisation. Importantly, these semiotic referents were in no way accidental. In the Government's attempt to reshape HE's social relations of value, they arose from the Coalition's understanding of the basis of Value creation, which, in this case, was predominantly a neoliberally informed relational process of market-driven production, consumption and exchange.

In setting their cost-covering fees, for example, each HEI understood that given the almost wholesale removal of the BTG and the uncertainty this would bring into the sector, the universities would have to attract sufficient numbers of home undergraduate students in order to generate enough 'life-sustaining value' to ensure the HEIs' ongoing survival. As my research has illuminated, not only did this involve each HEI having to calculate their cost basis and make financial projections over the short to medium term. It meant each university understanding who their typical students were, where they came from, and their typical demands; the 'products' that the universities' were offering and their potential for generating income; who and where were their competitors; and on what basis they would need to compete for those value-generating students. In the process, each HEI began to think of themselves – *and act* – more as producers of a product that would need to be attractive to HE's more forcefully

identified student-consumers: sending out the right ‘price signals’ regarding the university’s quality and making sure that their consumers would understand that they were getting ‘good value-for-money’.

Similarly, in strategically selecting their positions regarding the AAB+ and the flexible margin competitions, my research illustrates how each HEI reflected on their existing and potential economic geographies, moving iteratively between the reductive discourses and metrics of the White Paper and certain core features of their existing socio-economic geographies, relations and practices that the universities had identified as important, useful and/or valuable to them. What number of students were they likely to lose from their core and what were the financial implications of those losses? Which of the competitions more suited the identities of the universities and their home undergraduate bodies? Which competition held most potential for income generation and enabling the universities to survive under the increased pressures, risks and uncertainties of quasi-market competition (for the flexible margin) and almost free-market competition (for the AAB+)?

When understood from the perspective of the universities’ shifting social relations of value, the ways in which the universities made meaning of the semiotic referents contained in the White Paper in relation to their own reduced understandings of their emerging economic geographies underscores just how easily policies *can* become embedded into strategy – unless those policies are resisted, of course.

However, this research has *also* demonstrated that, in their negotiation, the reductive metrics and values of the market imaginary were immediately confronted by a multiplicity of semiotically- and materially- constituted social relations of value that helped make up the HEIs’ economic geographies. In the process of complexity reduction the HEIs brought with them multiple logics, values and understandings of Value that guided their evaluations. Furthermore, multiple social and material relations offered each university both opportunities and constraints in terms of strategy formation.

Whilst GE, for example, set their headline fee at £9000 in order to attract the elite AAB+ students that traditionally made up their home undergraduate body, the

university was in no way interested in competing for more of these students than they needed for their on-going survival. In their evaluation, the additional income that they would have received from those undergraduates would have been at the expense of the viability of the HE sector overall. Rather, given their high-ranking position in both national and international league tables, GE felt that pursuing their overseas markets and relationships would offer them greater value. Furthermore, it offered them a way to escape government regulation, which the university felt had become increasingly oppressive.

Not dis-similarly – but in relation to their *own* existing socio-economic geographies and relations – FTL set their headline fee at £8500, reducing it to £7500 through fee-waivers such that they could take part in the flexible margin. For this university, embedded as they were in their local region, it was the local FE colleges with whom they would need to compete for the local and, predominantly, low-income students that traditionally had made up their core. However, although, similar to GE, FTL also felt that Government regulation was oppressive, the university was more concerned that the White Paper was undervaluing the crucial role that the university played in the region: increasing social mobility and creating economic opportunity for the benefit of the public good. As a result, the university planned on underpinning its survival by gaining as much income from Government as possible. If Government was out to ‘shaft’ universities that upheld the public value of the system, then in return, Government was going to get ‘shafted’ too!

Indeed, at the very same time as each institution selected strategies that upheld the neoliberally inspired market values of the White Paper by increasing their competitiveness, being more entrepreneurial, and considering the quality of their products in relation to student-consumer demand, they *equally* selected strategies that undermined those market values. Both DTC and FTL sat at the mid- to lower- end of the league tables, and yet both universities set their headline fees at £8500 – just £500 lower than both GE and PA who were ranked in England’s top tier. From the Government’s understandings of market behaviours, this was not the price-differentiated market that they had expected would emerge.

And yet, most interestingly, the two universities' fee strategies actually typify what Caliskan and Callon (2009a, 2009b) call "economizing behaviours". Both DTC and FTL had calculated that with the overall cap on student numbers and the fact that a majority of their typical students would not have to pay back their fees and loans, neither university (to repeat the words of one of DTC's directors who was him/herself an economist) was in immediate danger of being "*competed away*" (Interviewee, 401).

Similarly, as my research highlights, the fact that the majority of universities in the English system felt that they would be getting *more money* following the implementation of the White Paper, in part, underpinned their lack of collective resistance to the further marketization of the sector. In the universities' 'economizing' calculations, it didn't matter what the source of that Value was: the taxpayer, the student, or a combination thereof. What mattered, was their ability to invest in the provision of a higher education that they felt was valuable and, most fundamentally, to survive.

Finally, it is important to note that it was not simply the market-oriented policies of the White Paper that became varied in the process of strategy formation. The same was true for the Government's progressive policy for increasing social mobility through widening participation. PA, for example, chose to focus on increasing its competitive and reputational standing by raising its tariff entry points to the detriment of its local WP recruitment. And FTL chose to cut all of its bursaries for low-income students in favour of meeting the Government's requirements for the flexible margin competition.

Between the values and logics by which complexity was reduced by the governmental technology of the White Paper and the values and logics by which complexity was reduced by HE's actors as they made meaning of those policies, a plethora of "socio-spatial disjunctures" (Pani and Holman, 2013) existed between discourse, construal and strategy formation.

Thus, the chapter has illuminated the concomitant power of the market imaginary as discursively produced in the White Paper to shape HE's social relations of value *and* the immediate variation of that imaginary as it was interpreted and made meaningful in relation to the diversity of the universities' concrete economic geographies. Even in

the initial stages of meaning making and strategy formation, the empirical evidence presented here bears witness to political-economic power relations in which opportunities for normalisation and variation necessarily co-existed in the struggle over what is and is not value.

6 Putting Strategies into Practice: Complexity Re-introduction and the Fallacy of Dualities

6.1 Introduction

Through their in-depth development of cultural political economy (CPE), Bob Jessop, Ngai-Ling Sum and colleagues of the Lancaster School have made a substantial contribution to extending academic knowledge regarding *how* political-economic programmes and imaginaries become anchored at the level of everyday practice (Fairclough et al, 2004; Jessop, 2004, 2009; Jessop et al, 2008; Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008; Jessop and Sum, 2001, 2003, 2013; Sum, 2004, 2009). Indeed, their various integrations of Gramscian state theory with the general evolutionary mechanisms of variation, selection and retention, semiotic analysis, and governmentality have explicitly sought to provide insights into the “path-shaping potential” of the economic imaginaries that “actually come to be selected and institutionalized” and thereby “come to constitute economic subjectivities, interests, activities, organizations... and the dynamics of economic performance” (Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008: 1155-1156). However, as-much-as this body of work attempts to steer an ontological course between overly structuralist accounts of political economy and the rather loose constructivist accounts of material and subject formation, CPE is still left with something of a dilemma regarding the necessary co-existence and co-evolution of normalisation and diversity in the *Ordinary Economy* (Lee, 2006). In particular, Jessop and Oosterlynck claim that “while massive scope for variation typically exists at an individual transactional level” the medium- to long-term application of policy programmes, somehow, *narrows the scope* for variation “considerably” (ibid: 1158).

The research that I present in this chapter demonstrates that the struggle over everyday economic practice is far more complicated than that. Hence the dilemma that Jessop, himself, presents: that is, *how can the world be always complex at the same time as new political paradigms and values become hegemonic?* (2009: 338). From the evidence accumulated via fifty-five interviews conducted across four diverse HEIs, I suggest that as policy metrics get put into practice, so people need to make evaluations about what stays, what goes, what gets altered, and what new actions, activities and values become introduced. As such, policy has the potential to displace, diffuse and

possibly, even, ‘crowd out’ other practices and values due to, a) the power relations involved, b) a lack of immediate (and total) resistance, and c) the establishment of a critical mass of engagement with the ‘new’ metrics. However – and of utmost importance – there will *always* be variation of policy metrics as multiple and diverse values and understandings of Value shape economic practice.

When strategies are put into practice, they encounter a diverse range of actors who must make sense of them in relation to their social and economic relations. Strategies, therefore, inevitably become varied as they are put into practice. Although individuals go through the semiotic process of complexity reduction in order to make sense of the world (see Chapter Five, above), they immediately re-introduce complexity into economic policy initiatives. This is because economic geographies are multiple and complex, involving multiple logics, social relations, values and understandings of Value. It is simply not possible for policies to impose some pure or utopian imaginary: the utopian cannot exist in social relations; hence the original Greek etymology of utopia: *no place*⁵⁴ (Baudrillard, 2001; Clarke, 2011). However, at the same time, as strategies are put into practice, so policy metrics have the opportunity to become embedded into our social relations – at least, in part – and hence imaginaries such as the neoliberal market have the opportunity to become hegemonic – provided, that is, as I will conclude in Chapter Eight below, a critical mass of moderate compliance is achieved.

This chapter aims to illuminate these ideas through an exploration of how various core strategies of the four case study HEIs were put into practice. The chapter provides empirical evidence that supports the challenges made in Chapter Two to overly simplistic, dualistic understandings of resistance-compliance and embedding-transformation as either/or processes. Unless the values contained within policy discourses and metrics are rejected (that is, thrown out), the implementation of policy (that is, putting policy into practice) means that there will be on-going opportunities for its values to become embedded into social practice. At the same time, policy will

⁵⁴ The word Utopia, thought to be initially used by Plato and later Sir Thomas More (1516), comes from a combination of two Greek words: ού (meaning “not”) and τόπος (topos, meaning “place”). However, the English pronunciation of ‘U’ as ‘Eu’ means “good”. Hence, the combination of the two meanings, “no-place” and “good-place” underscores a vital question: can a wholly good place ever be a social reality? Baudrillard (2001) argues that only nothing is perfect, since, in opposition to itself it reflects back nothing. Thus, Utopias will always be imaginaries destined to be ‘placeless’ illusions against which the real can be merely measured and compared.

always be confronted by multiple and complex social relations and will inevitably become varied in and through diverse emerging economic geographies. Furthermore, policies themselves do not arise in a vacuum, somehow detached from social relations. They are themselves informed and influenced by the sociality and materiality of the always-emerging economy and diverse power relations, as well as reflecting (various) ideological perspectives.

The chapter will shed light on the above processes through an examination of *'the Student as Consumer'*. After setting out the context, the chapter will explore how the HEIs implemented strategies regarding: first, the Student Experience; second, Key Information Sets; and third, the Student Charter. Each of these strategies was discursively constructed in the White Paper as essential elements for driving the quality of HE forward by putting a clearly identified student-consumer and his/her demands at the heart of the system. Yet, for a variety of reasons, understanding the student as 'a consumer' of HE was often met with considerable resistance from the HEIs. Moreover, each HEI, to varying degrees and, again, for a variety and combination of reasons, found it impossible to disentangle the subjectivities of their home undergraduates into tidy 'identity silos' labelled either 'consumer' or 'non-consumer'. In so doing, the chapter will conclude that there could be no clear identification or practice of a singular student-consumer subjectivity under the increased pressures of neoliberal marketization and its constant variation.

It is through these explorations that the chapter demonstrates the complexity of emerging economic geographies in the *Ordinary Economy*. As the policies of Government and the strategies of the university are put into practice, so complexity is necessarily re-introduced in and through emerging economic geographies as the multiplicity of actors involved move from construal to construction.

6.2 The student as consumer: driving quality in a demand-led system

Since the Dearing Report of 1997, re-identifying students as consumers and HEIs as producers of HE has been a dominant discourse deployed by various Governments to help embed the market imaginary into HE's framework of action. In the White Paper, *Higher Education: Putting Students at the Heart of the System*, (BIS, 2011a), a variety of policies and strategies were deployed and suggested to help structure HEIs towards

undertaking their perceived roles as producers, and understanding and repositioning student subjectivities as consumers in a demand-led system. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, as the various tactics set out in the White Paper became translated into initial strategies, which were then put into practice, they were confronted by the complex social relations of value that help make up concrete, relational economic geographies. Multiple actors – whilst still needing to make meaning of these tactics and strategies, and therefore reduce complexity in the semiotic process of construal – held multiple values, logics and relations that ensured a diversity of evaluations and practices that would help to shape their onward trajectories as they moved from construal to construction.

Predominantly, but not entirely, and for many reasons, each interviewee in each institution was highly resistant to understanding the student as a ‘*consumer*’ of HE: especially a consumer whose demands might steer the HEIs’ actions and activities and undermine what the interviewees variously understood as the value of HE (the latter is discussed extensively in Chapter Seven, below). They were also very resistant to understanding themselves as producers of some sort of ‘product’ that could be bought and sold. In the main, universities were understood as places of study and learning while the academics that worked in them were understood as *educators* who, at most, were now providing their students with a service. Importantly, for each HEI their students needed to position themselves as *partners* in this relationship, not the purchasers of a definitive commodity like “a washing machine”, “a frozen chicken from Sainsbury’s” or “a mobile phone” (Interviewees, 105, 403, 410). HE was a *shared responsibility*, and students – “*like members of a gym*” – had to do their part if they were to realize its value to themselves as individuals (Interviewees 106, 201, 309, 402, 408).

One dominant narrative underpinning such reasoning was the desire to maintain university autonomy – a desire that had long underpinned university resistance to Government and/or market interventions (see Robins, 1963). However, this desire was not simply an “elitist” attitude as many a politician has argued as reason for breaking university autonomy down (Carswell, 1985; Shattock, 2012). Rather, keeping Government and students – or any purchaser of HE, for that matter – at ‘arms length’ in their social relations of value had enabled HEIs to maintain certain values, actions

and activities that might otherwise have been altered through a closer relationship of exchange (Robins, 1963). For many of the interviewees, allowing overly simplistic understandings of students as consumers and HEIs as producers in a close market relationship to become embedded in their social relations of value was, simply, not an option, as it would undermine certain values, practices and relations that the institutions held dear. The only way to defend these was through the maintenance of autonomy: through the *defence and maintenance of space* between the values of the HEIs and the values of their various ‘interested consumers’:

“In theory, we are autonomous institutions, which conceptually is not a trivial point. Seeing “the student as a consumer” (pauses)... It’s a ghastly phrase because it says, “you must provide a better product for the consumer, the ‘customer’”, basically... Common wisdom tells us that seeing the student as a consumer will shift the relationship between the student and the institution: that it will drive the way in which universities deliver programmes through student demand. But that may not be to the best advantage for students or institutions. Students as consumers are deeply affected by insecurity because they don’t know what they are buying, nor the value of what they are buying. If I go into Sainsbury’s I look at what I want and I buy it. The student comes here, and once they’ve signed on... they can’t just pick and choose because there are core courses they have to take. And they can’t say, “I’ll pay you a little bit more and get a first-class mark for that”: that would totally undermine what we do as universities. So that relationship – that demand relationship – has to be managed, even with the fees regime”.

(103, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

This resistance to understanding their students as consumers was often apparent as the universities’ strategies were put into practice across the institutions. *And yet*, in deploying their strategies, it was almost impossible for the HEIs *not* to think of their students as consumers, or to speak about either the students or the institutions as being involved in, or forming, various markets. For sure, many interviewees saw the imaginary of the student consumer as abhorrent, with some hankering back to a bygone age when “the economic purposes of HE were immaterial” (Interviewee, 102), “the social benefits” outweighed “personal gain” (Interviewees 201, 301), the relationship between the academic and student was perceived to be “simpler” (Interviewees 205, 213, 307) and HE was “a good thing in and of itself” (Interviewee, 412). However, the issue of the fee, the heightened competition and the uncertainty

that further marketization was bringing into the sector had *fundamentally altered* those values and relations.

For all interviewees, multiple logics shaped their understandings of their relationship to the student-consumer: what one interviewee described as an “inside/outside”, “student/consumer” understanding (Interviewee, 105). On the one hand, as potential recruits on the “outside”, the universities were far more inclined to think of their future students as consumers of an “offer” that the universities needed to market. Whilst many were still concerned about the detrimental effects that consumerization might have on HE – even at the recruitment stage – they still understood that the cost-covering fee was “a game-changer” (Interviewee, 112). Students would “want to know that they [were] getting value for money” (Interviewee, 401), and the universities *had to* respond. This was what the “new context” of HE was telling them (e.g. Interviewees, 103, 206, 302, 408). On the other hand, once students had been recruited to “the inside”, their relationship with the HEI would have to be managed such that their demands would not get out of control (e.g. Interviewees 103, 112, 204, 212, 309, 403, 405). Whilst the universities still had to deliver on the offer promised (otherwise, as one senior manager and long-time academic put it, “the word will spread” and “what they Tweet is highly influential!” (Interviewee, 203)), and whilst some interviewees truly saw *real value* in treating the student as ‘a consumer’ – even at the student stage – the relationship that the university and its staff would have with the student could not be understood in simple producer-consumer terms. Student expectations and demands could not dominate the universities’ social relations of value. If they did, at best, it could “lead along the road to litigation” (Interviewee, 405); at worst it could “undermine the value of what higher education is really all about” (Interviewee, 201).

Thus, each interviewee provided a variety of logics for both *deploying* and *varying* the tactics of government and strategies of the university. This was a complex negotiation of value and values as the market imaginary (as discursively produced by policy) was confronted by complex economic geographies and the social relations of value that shape them.

6.2.1 *Enhancing the student experience: the defence of space in the struggle over value*

Examining how the HEIs put into practice their various strategies for enhancing ‘the student experience’ provides an excellent starting point for exploring such complexity. Getting universities to reposition students as consumers and HEIs as producers in a close market relationship was a goal that the White Paper hoped to achieve, in part, by asking HEIs to reflect upon the nature, quality and value of ‘the student experience’ on offer. Since fees had been introduced in 1997, and particularly since 2006 with the introduction of differential/top-up fees and the heightened competition that they were designed to engender, the student experience had become part and parcel of mainstream HE discourse (WHEF, 2011). However, as the Browne Review underscored, according to National Student Survey statistics, students themselves were “no more satisfied” with HE than they had been ten years before (2010: 23). Employers were reporting that many graduates lacked the skills needed to improve productivity. Institutions lacked the funding needed to invest in improvements to the education they provided. And, in any case, “the incentives for them to improve the student experience” were “limited” due to Government ex-ante funding (ibid). Indeed, evidence from UUK suggested that both institutional autonomy and student choice were heavily constrained by the current funding system, with those best placed to judge the value of undertaking a higher education – that is, *the student-consumers* – having limited sight of, input into, or control over the experience they were buying due to their financial distance from it (ibid: 23-25).

The White Paper was clear that putting students in the driving seat and identifying them as the consumers of HE would help drive up the quality of the system – particularly the quality of teaching. And, of course, this was due to the closer proximity of student demand to the university providers through the process of exchange. The student-consumer, who would now be more deeply embedded into the universities social relations of value through the payment of the full-cost fee, would seek out the best quality experience that the universities could offer. Thus, their demands would increase the quality of the taught experience throughout the English HE sector (BIS: 2011a).

The market rationale underpinning the discourses of the White Paper was not lost on the HEIs – a point to which we shall return in a moment. Indeed, each institution

displayed a very clear understanding that attaching HE funding to the student would “fundamentally change the relationship between the student and the institution” because students would “inevitably want to know what extra value they were getting for the money that they [would] now be paying in fees” (Interviewee, 401). However, as indicated above, the vast majority of interviewees sought to reject the notion that the student could be understood as a consumer whose demands should shape the nature and value of the experience that the universities felt they should provide. As one senior manager involved with student recruitment put it:

“Seeing the student as a consumer is both academically and educationally faulty because what education is about is seeing a person through a progression, and that is not something that they can buy. There will be assessment at university, and not everybody is going to make it – albeit that it is our responsibility to help as many students to succeed as possible. In addition, it just puts the student in the wrong place in terms of demanding a particular experience. Even our student union is very ‘anti’ seeing a student as a consumer because they think that students will lose out from that view: they won’t appreciate the wider benefits of higher education if they simply view it as a commodity”.

(304, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Strategist)

Such an understanding that HE was so much more than a simple commodity that could, and should, be influenced by consumer demand was echoed throughout each institution, with the vast majority of interviewees underscoring the pastoral nature of the university-student relationship and/or the, almost, transcendental nature of the value of the student experience. For some, being an educator was “more of a mentoring role”: “a kind of advisory figure for the students’ troubles”, whereas “if you’re a customer and you run into personal difficulties, it’s going to be tough for you” because in a market relationship “we could end up charging more for that sort of service” (Interviewee, 206). For others, it simply wasn’t possible for the student to “grasp” or “test” the value of the student experience even in the three or four years that an undergraduate would spend with the university. Rather, the student wouldn’t “know for years to come” whether their experience would be “useful or valuable to them” because they couldn’t “put an absolute value on the broad skills that the educational experience [would] bring either educationally, socially, emotionally or so on” (Interviewee, 108). As such, it simply wasn’t possible for potential students to “put a price on [their university experience]”. The universities had “an enormous

responsibility to *educate* [their] students”, and “part of that education” was that they were “*not consumers*” (ibid).

At the same time, it was almost impossible for the interviewees to talk about enhancing the student experience *without* considering the student as a consumer – at least in part. Now that home undergraduates were entering more deeply into the universities’ social relations of value through the cost-covering fee, many felt that it was ‘only right’ to consider offering the sort of student experience that the student-consumer demanded. Indeed, each HEI took the problem of enhancing the student experience very seriously. Given the progressive expansion of HE, the increased competition and the concomitant shifts in the universities’ social relations of value, the experience that the universities had traditionally, and recently, offered students needed to be re-examined:

“Having removed the safety net of the block grant, the student experience really starts to take on a requirement to be cherished, nurtured, grown, improved and reflected on in a way that it never was in the past. Students used to be very happy to go to university, see the occasional learned professor... and then just get on with it themselves. The educational part was more about osmosis through being in a learned environment. And that was fine when you had very small numbers of universities and students. Now that we’ve got larger numbers of students going to more universities, it becomes important for competing institutions and academics looking for promotion to be thinking more about teaching because, clearly, that’s where the money is coming from. The money’s a very clear indication that we need to think about that”.

(206, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Of course, the actual strategies for enhancing the student experience that each HEI formulated were deeply influenced by their core understandings of their relational economic geographies. Since each university served a different “client group” (Interviewee, 302) and held differing material and social possibilities for moving on in the world, the strategies they selected varied substantially across each institution. But the possibilities for the inevitable variation of policy metrics did not end there. As each of their strategies was put into practice, various understandings of the value of the student experience and various logics for employing the strategy guided and shaped the actions and activities of those involved – from the strategic directors, to academics, to, in some cases, the students themselves. On the one hand, the closer proximity of the

producer-consumer relationship was impossible for the HEIs to completely distance. On the other, a plethora of values underpinned the evaluations, actions and activities for enhancing the student experience that the universities felt they wanted, or needed, to offer.

The case of GE provides an excellent, in-depth example for exploring these processes. As with each institution, GE by-and-large did not want to position the home undergraduate student as a consumer with whom they were in a close market relationship. Whilst there had been a lot of talk within the sector in recent years about students starting to behave more like consumers, the university's strategic leaders and academics with whom I spoke didn't always see it that way. Rather, HE was very much about "operating in partnership with students" with everyone involved "trying to achieve the same thing" (Interviewee, 102). Certainly, GE had a duty to provide their, largely, middle-class students with a service for which they would now be paying a substantial fee. But their students were *not* consumers of a product. Such a model, if accepted by the sector, would not only be "disastrous for the institutions", it would be "disastrous for the students" (Interviewee, 111). According to Interviewee -111, a long-time administrator who had come into HE from industry, for the institutions it implied that the autonomous universities and the academics that worked in them were simply incapable of taking the students' interests seriously without being driven by consumer demand. For the students, it implied that they knew everything that they needed to about the value of a higher education before they arrived – and they, simply, didn't. Yes, the students were "making an investment: conceptually, physically, mentally, emotionally and financially" and they would surely "want a return on that investment". But they also had to recognize that they "had to put something in, in order to get something out" (ibid). As such, GE had to be "confident enough" to "not allow consumerism to define the model of the student experience": to define what is and is not value in the field of HE (ibid; Interviewee, 106).

However, despite such reticence, enhancing the student experience had now become "decidedly more explicit" for GE (Interviewee, 109). Indeed, interviewee testimonies variously highlighted three dominant factors that, since the release of the White Paper, were engendering "a far greater sense of urgency across the institution" (ibid). First, the entire sector was being "explicitly held accountable for the student experience" by

an “enforced burden of external regulation” headed by HEFCE as the new student-consumer champion (ibid). GE had their QAA review coming up, the REF, and like every other institution they were facing a barrage of regulatory consultations that were “coming out like no tomorrow” (ibid). Just how many of those would “genuinely impact the day-to-day experience” that the university was giving their students was “unproven”. However, unlike the preceding year when the regulatory impetus simply “wasn’t there”, now, GE would “have to think tangibly” about what they were investing for the students who were coming in 2012 (ibid).

A second factor that was “really focusing” GE’s attention was “the competition brewing across the sector” (Interviewee, 102). Although the university was “comfortable” with the value of their undergraduate offer, given their position as a highly ranked university whose students were predominantly AAB+, GE had a sense that each of their competitors would be “looking very hard at what their students receive, and... investing in all kinds of projects” (ibid). For sure, such investment was designed to attract the elite home undergraduate who was now far freer to choose their ultimate destination. But it was also designed to attract the elite overseas students whose fees in a highly competitive world market would, in many departments, now need to rise in order to keep apace with home fees (Interviewee, 112). As such, GE’s Vice Chancellor had highlighted to colleagues that the whole university had “to wake up and think about the students’ expectations” in relation to “the experience on offer” (ibid). Perhaps, “in the short term” they would “have to go through the valley of doom, just like everyone else” (Interviewee, 102). But given that the long-term survival of the institution was “critically dependent” on attracting “those really elite students” (Interviewee, 112), GE “certainly [didn’t] want to be left behind” (Interviewee, 102).

Without doubt, each of these narratives found considerable weight with GE. However, for all of the interviewees a third factor – *the undergraduate fee* – was by far the most dominant social and material relation shaping the institution’s focus on the student experience. For a number of years, the university had successfully competed in a variety of markets – in particular overseas students, PGTs and MBAs. They’d invested in “new buildings, better facilities, more courses, more trips, special programmes and training activities – all the sorts of things, which [didn’t] exist at undergraduate level” (Interviewee, 103). Now that they were asking home undergraduates to pay £9000 per

year, provided the institution could “demonstrate a comparable level of excellence” in “the product” they were “selling” – “*I mean, the degrees... not selling... you know what I mean*” (Interviewee, 104) – then they could “justify having quite an entrepreneurial, business-like model in terms of a strategy” that would “make the undergraduate experience even more attractive: make those degrees, really, the very best” (ibid). As one strategic director “confessed” to me in the privacy of our interview space:

“...And you can put me in the ‘bad guys’ category for this. I think this is something to celebrate! These are markets. We’ve been told to play in these markets. We’ve won in these markets. This is good news! If you go across to the business school: that beautiful building, those wonderful rooms: it is only for postgraduates... It is the best show in the shining example of the way in which the student experience has been enhanced in particular areas. Where those markets have been developed, resources have followed to develop those markets, but it hasn’t been spread more generally. The difference now is that it is everywhere: that is what the new context to that says. The new fees regime says every department at its core is now engaged in market activity”.

(103, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Indeed, this is what the “new context” was telling GE. Just as they had needed to think about providing their postgraduate students with the “very best” experience in order to “win” in those markets, now, with the advent of the cost-covering undergraduate fee, GE *had to* be more responsive to the demands of this newly ‘subjectified’ student-consumer (Interviewee, 112). Whereas previously, the *public, ex-ante subsidization* of the home undergraduate had enabled GE to distance their demands and focus, instead, on their own sets of values⁵⁵, now, given the *private, ex-post investment* that the undergraduate would be making, the university was being told to “really think about... the currency of the student experience” (Interviewee, 107, emphasis original). “What value [would] their degree offer them for the on-going job market?” “What attributes [could GE] give to their home undergraduates that [would] allow them to talk about, in the most convincing way, what they [could] take into any stage of their life?” (ibid).

⁵⁵ The spatiality of these relations of value is quite fascinating. Having the Government purchase HE on behalf of the consumer (at least in the major part) enabled the HEIs to provide their undergraduates with, *in their own opinions*, a far lesser quality experience. This was despite the fact that their undergraduates frequented, but didn’t quite ‘share’, the same spaces with their fee-paying, overseas and postgraduate neighbours. The work that must have gone into maintaining this ‘consumer-non-consumer’ dual identity amongst the undergraduate population must have been substantial, given the proximity of a different set of social relations of value.

And yet, as one of the Deans of Faculty underscored, in putting their strategy into practice, GE needed to establish “a very clear vision” regarding the level at which the undergraduates’ demands would become “unreasonable” (Interviewee, 106). There was “an obvious downside to seeing students as consumers” (Interviewee, 101). It would mean that the university would have to comply with the students’ and Government’s emphasis on the value of teaching, and GE just had to “be honest about that” (ibid). Not every academic in the research-led institution was equally committed to teaching. Indeed, it would be “ludicrous to make out anything else” (ibid). Moreover, now that individuals were “being encouraged to measure their own value for money”, how could GE “explain to the student that, actually, their fees [didn’t] cover the full cost of the research academic, but [were] contributing towards the collective costs of the university... and the social value of higher education by paying into some sort of collective pot?” (Interviewee, 111) Those values had been “lost in the debate because it [was] all formulated around ‘I pay – I get’”. The model was “too much like a personal account where the student would just like [GE] to tick off the pounds as [they] spent them”. It was all “very worrying” (ibid).

While for some interviewees undertaking the student experience felt like “the right thing to do in *the market sense*” (Interviewee, 103), for others, it was also “right” in terms of “building a, kind of, *collective responsibility*” (Interviewee, 105). As one strategic leader involved with the student experience explained: consumerism was suggestive of a “passive model” of consumption, whereas GE’s students were “also part of operating and participating in the whole undertaking of which they [were] consumers” (ibid). As such, in attempting to establish their “very clear vision” of what GE was naming “the GE Community”, it was important that the student experience was something that the institution did “with students not to students” (Interviewee, 103, emphasis original).

In fact, over the passage of three days, the entire university was involved in “a massive, massive audit” of every course across 35 departments (Interviewee, 104). Academics, the Student’s Union, postgraduates and undergraduates alike sat across from one another trying to establish not only the students’ multiple desires in terms of facilities, experiences, and the whole of teaching and learning but, also, to provide

them with an insight into the workings of the university: to provide them a better understanding of the “*collective value*” of what a university could be (Interviewee, 105). As one senior Manager put it:

“It’s not that consumerism is necessarily a bad thing, but it comes at a price. Students start to see university as a kind of product, but it isn’t really meant to be about that. It’s about your capacity to be inventive and creative, and your ability to get on with your peers, work in a learning community, and to be a global citizen. Those imperatives start to get drowned out if you are not very careful”.

(101, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

From the above testimonies, it was evident that ensuring that the *collective values* of the university had not been drowned by the *values* of *the market* was widely held as “a rather positive outcome from this awful situation” (Interviewee, 103). So too had been the opportunity to “really engage” with the diverse expectations, experiences and *values* of both students and staff. And, rather unexpectedly, it had been *the fee* that had produced those “positive outcomes”: i.e. *the shift in their social relations of value* (Interviewees 103, 105, 108, 111). As one strategic manager and long-time academic noted, GE would have undertaken their reviews anyway as part of the QAA (Interviewee, 108). But they never would have come together as *a community*, “were it not for the increase in the fee” (ibid). Nor would they have recognized, *collectively*, just how ‘utterly committed’ to teaching the vast majority of the academics, actually, were (Interviewees 103, 106, 108, 111, 113). The “serious driver of all the excellent work” they had done had been “the external environment” and the “higher expectations” that they *knew* would come from students (Interviewee, 108). None-the-less, it was imperative that “the students should not engage in a relationship with their educators as if it were a market transaction”. And for many of the interviewees, the university had “a big responsibility to articulate those *values*” (ibid).

GE’s story underscores just how impossible it is to think about socio-economic processes such as marketization as being *either* resisted *or* not resisted; as becoming *either* embedded *or* transformed. In exploring how GE put their strategies for the student experience into practice and, thus, re-introduced complexity as they moved on in the world, the research bears witness to the concomitant resistance of, compliance with – and *valuation of* – the market *values* that the governmental technology of the White Paper sought to engender, at the same time as it bears witness to their

concomitant embedding and transformation. Multiple logics, evaluations and social relations of value shaped the way in which GE's strategy for enhancing the student experience unfolded in practice. And this was the same for all of the HEIs.

In the following section I explore the Coalition Government's attempt to induce neo-liberally informed producer-consumer relations into HE's framework of action through the embedding of a central element of a free market: i.e. *information*. In so doing, it becomes clear that the HEIs were not averse to implementing and valuing certain market relations, *per se*. Far from it. Rather, they were resistant, most particularly, to Government interference but, also, to any other 'interested party' directly dominating their social relations of value.

6.2.2 Information? Absolutely! Key Information Sets? Only because we have to!

“Whether consumers are sovereign depends, among other things, on their access to information – information, which it may or may not be in suppliers interests to provide. Real markets, embedded, regulated and characterized by imperfect and unevenly distributed information, are effectively actual or potential fields of struggle. Hence, as Elson (1988) emphasizes, markets don't have to be simply accepted on existing terms or rejected; they can be further socialized and politicized, and behaviour within them changed.”

(Sayer, 1995: 122)

Sayer's (1995) emphasis that real markets, characterized by imperfect and unevenly distributed information, are “fields of struggle”, is at the heart of my investigations. Yet, as this section on the implementation of Key Information Sets (KIS) will demonstrate, Elson's (1988) view that markets can be “further socialized and politicized, and behaviour within them changed” is, perhaps, rather too straightforward a statement, which belies the complexity and multiplicity of what may be meant by ‘socialization’, ‘politicization’ and, indeed, ‘behaviour’. As argued in Chapter Two of this thesis, political-economic programmes such as neoliberalization are “constantly confronted by social diversity” (Lee, 2006: 421). Thus, any imagined economy is “only ever partially constituted” (Jessop, 2004: 163) due to the enormous effort it would take to fully normalise and embed any single political-imagination of what economic practice – *or, what value* – should or should not be.

That said, as detailed in Chapter Four, the sense that the ‘market imaginary’ could be further embedded into HE’s framework of action via a struggle over what constitutes the socio-economic practices and value of HE, is precisely what the White Paper set out to achieve. Central to the coalition Government’s rationale was the notion that the better regulation of information that the ‘sovereign’ student-consumer could access would assure the quality of the HE sector by unleashing student demand. From September 2012, all publicly funded HEIs would have to provide KIS for each and every full- and part-time undergraduate course that came under the regulation of the QAA. This would make it easier for student-consumers to locate and compare information across diverse institutions, enabling them to take their custom to the institutions they felt were offering good value for their, now, cost-covering fees. As such, it would be much harder for institutions to avoid providing timely, accurate and salient information, which (according to the White Paper) both potential students and Government felt was *valuable*: the sort of information that would put the power to influence the shape, trajectory and value of HE directly into the hands of its consumers (BIS, 2011a: 2).

In general terms, the interviewees saw KIS as just another, classic, “bright idea” emanating from Government and Whitehall, which the vast majority doubted would ever be of use to potential students in making their decisions about which university to attend and why. KIS smacked of “the Government believing its own rhetoric” that HE was “now a market” (Interviewee, 410) or, at minimum, “a much more student-focused system” in which information *mattered* – “so let’s have KIS on everybody’s website so that people [could] compare and contrast” (Interviewee, 111). The task of gathering and compiling the data would be a “massive, massive validation and technical task” that would be “hugely expensive” because no-one collected the data required by Government – at least not all together, nor in the KIS format (Interviewee, 402). As such, KIS was seen as a largely ‘bureaucratic exercise’ that the universities would undertake, certainly: it was a requirement of the White Paper which none of the interviewees spoke about either completely or forcefully resisting. But the ‘level of interference’ that it represented was deeply resented, and most HEIs would try to circumvent or add detail to its metrics in some way, depending on what they felt was of value or had the potential to help them survive and thrive amidst the emerging uncertainty and increased competition brought about by further marketization.

The dominant narrative that framed the HEIs' desires to augment and/or re-articulate the provision of information was that KIS would be incomplete and distorted, reflecting only those values held as relevant by Government and, possibly, students. For many, the metrics that the White Paper required for KIS reflected a very narrow understanding of the value of HE: one that subjectified students as value-maximizing consumers, guided only by what Caliskan and Callon (2009a, 2009b) refer to as "economizing behaviours", which the Government believed could be enhanced both by the information provided to them through KIS and their university experience. As one senior strategic leader elaborated:

"If the context is where students are being told that you go to university to get a better job and better pay then it is perfectly reasonable to ask universities to provide the information that will justify those two, but only those two, values. What is your employment rate for graduates? What is the salary that they get? Can you justify, in very narrow metric terms, how you treat your students while they are with you with a view to maximizing their perceptions of gaining value for money?"

(201, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

As such, for each HEI, the "sort of information" that universities were being asked to provide was "incomplete to the point of being grossly misleading" (ibid; see also Interviewees 101, 301, 401).

For sure, some of the metrics required for KIS were seen as 'perfectly reasonable', providing the sort of information that the universities themselves already felt they could and should provide in order to both inform and attract potential students. However, other metrics required by KIS elicited considerable resistance from many of the participants regarding the shift this would represent in their social relations of value. This was not simply, or wholly, a resentment of bureaucracy or Government interference that the interviewees were expressing. Whilst the HEIs seemed 'reasonably comfortable' with understanding potential students as 'consumers' of HE *before* their recruitment – while they were still "*on the outside*" as one strategic director put it (Interviewee, 105) – they did not want to see their consumerization based on certain understandings of Value with which the universities most fundamentally disagreed:

“It’s perfectly reasonable that we should say what our fee is, how much our accommodation is. We do all that now. We make available NSS and employment destination survey information, which probably if you’re a family is quite difficult to know where to find. But exactly how much examination and coursework students will get is incredibly complex because it’s different on every unit. And the idea that more contact-hours means better learning, disgusts me! You can be in contact 12 hours a day and not have the kind of experience that a potential graduate should have about developing research skills, developing autonomy, setting your own targets, etc. I’m all for good information, but if you’re using it for the “moneysupermarket.com approach” – I’ve got £8,000, I want somewhere in the South East and I want to do history, what can I get? – I think it’s dangerous, really dangerous!”

(402, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Elaborating the logics behind this narrative, two primary discourses dominated interviewee testimonies. Similar to one of the narratives that framed the Student Experience (see section 6.2.1, above), the first, less dominant, of the two discourses concerned a *pastoral relationship* between the universities and their students, the value of which many felt would be undermined if the narrow values expressed through KIS were allowed to dominate the flows of information throughout the sector. As Interviewee -402, above, explained, the “fear” was that KIS would “become a substitute for real support to potential students, and that [would] be a great pity”. This loss was not simply an effect of KIS, however. The erosion of “real support” was something that had been occurring for many years under the pressure of marketization, and the “real support” – the “good information” and services – that was needed to uphold a pastoral relationship held as valuable, was something that the universities, somehow, had to regain:

“What we really need is to reinvent our connections and services and make sure that colleges and schools have got really good, up to date information to give the very best advice to quite vulnerable young people”.

(Ibid)

The second, more dominant discourse underscored a “fundamental disagreement”, not that potential recruits could be understood as consumers, *per se*: rather, that they could be understood as *rational* consumers. Without doubt, all of the universities recognized the importance of “good information” in both helping potential students to make their evaluations and in providing HEIs with the opportunity to market themselves to

potential “client groups” (Interviewee, 302). However, given the knowledge that the interviewees had of their students and the people they tended to recruit, they simply couldn’t imagine those individuals *fitting the identity* of the rational, calculating, economic actor that the neoliberally informed metrics of the White Paper were attempting to produce.

For some of the participants – predominantly from the medium-low ranked institutions – this was a reflection on the capacity and/or desire of the “average 18-year old or their parents” not to become “confused” by the vast swathe of comparisons that KIS was asking them to make (e.g. Interviewee, 412). They, the universities, could understand the legislation, but with regards to their students and their families, it smacked of “confused.com” (ibid). In part, this was because the universities’ own marketing departments would inevitably “go round trying to market alternative views” to potential students, trying to highlight what the institution thought was valuable about HE as well as what may be attractive to recruits (Interviewee, 304). Moreover, KIS was seen to favour potential students from middle-class backgrounds rather than help a different, lower class of students whose families and schools often had limited experience of HE (Interviewee, 405). In putting their information strategies into practice, each institution would need to consider the subjectivities of their typical students and put forward their message accordingly.

For other interviewees – more evenly spread across all four cases – the simplistic imaginary of the rational, economizing consumer who was largely focused on price missed out the complexity of human subjectivity and the “strange mix of intervening variables” (Interviewee, 101) – *the multiple values and logics* – that were important *and rational* to the students. For sure, the narrow set of values set out in KIS was never going to turn students into the “discerning consumers” signified in “Government rhetoric” (e.g. Interviewees 111, 212, 304, 401). As one university strategist and governor of a local secondary school explained:

“Although there is that idea of shopping around within a marketplace, the student body, those 18-year-olds who by and large make up the majority of our students, don’t necessarily make their choices in the way the rational consumer of Government rhetoric would. So although marketisation and this idea of creating a market are around, the target audience is alien to this. These ideas should only be put in place when the market demands it, when the customer demands it; and in this case that would be the students.

The students don't choose their university based on KIS data or even, I don't think, economic price: they make their choices based on a variety of things that are important to them".

(406, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic, Public Service)

Importantly, when speaking about the need for HEIs to produce information in order to attract potential students and differentiate themselves from competing institutions, it was not that the interviewees were outright rejecting the idea of the student-consumer. Nor were they outright rejecting the understanding that HE had become more of a market in which the universities needed to compete and survive. Rather, they were resisting the notion that Government should be involved in shaping the subjectivities and evaluations of, most particularly, potential students, but also the HEIs themselves, through policy metrics that directly involved their social relations of value. As a result, if the universities wanted to keep both Government and student demand 'at arms length' and maintain their autonomy, they would need to reverse their failings of the past and close down the space for Government intervention by putting forward a narrative about the university that *they* held as valuable.

For one interviewee at GE, there had been "a failure on the part of institutions to be clear what the nature of their particular experience" was and "a failure on the part of the individual to understand the system" (Interviewee, 111). If the universities were, indeed, "autonomous institutions", they "should be confident enough" to "use autonomous language" to "make it clear" what they valued and what they did not. Yet, "so many institutions" clung to "blanket terms like 'research-led' and 'teaching-led' because if they let go, suddenly they [would not be] part of that mission group" (ibid). If the sector was "full of competing institutions", then they "should be confident to describe themselves and let people choose" them "for what they were and what they were trying to do". The autonomous universities had to "be brave enough to be clear" (ibid).

Of course, as detailed in Chapter Five, in developing a "clear narrative" in the immediacy of strategy formation, the complexity of social relations and meanings that make up economic geographies is reduced, even though the values set out in Government policy are immediately varied by the diversity of economic geographies that exist. However, when the HEIs came to put their strategies into practice, they were

immediately confronted by the multiplicity of logics, values and evaluations that make up the *Ordinary Economy*.

FTL, for example, had a very clear message regarding the student fee that they wanted to market to potential recruits as part of their overall information strategy. For this university, given what they knew about their ‘typical’ students and the stories that had been circulating in the media regarding the spiralling costs of HE, it was important that potential recruits understood the ‘progressive nature’ of the loans system set out by Government. Indeed, their ‘outreach team’ spent a lot of time and effort imagining the fears that their typical students and their families might have about getting into debt and the sort of questions they might therefore raise at the university’s open days. Yet, when the open days arrived, FTL was confronted by a completely different, and unexpected, scenario:

“What we do with KIS and how we interpret it in terms of our client groups is the critical issue... You’ve got to stick really close to the needs and interests of that market and respond to it. Part of that response has to be the clarity that you give in terms of the information that you present; and if you don’t do that people will quickly tell you. For instance, the first open day that we had here after all the media hype came out around fees, we thought that we would have to answer lots of questions about how much it would cost and the levels of debt. But we got hardly any – hardly any! We’d set up all sorts of ways in which people could ask the question, and we got all sorts of literature to help them, but they didn’t ask the question! So the “right” information is what people want, need and desire, not necessarily the information that we want to give them, and that can be a real challenge”.

(302, Senior Management VCO, Medium-time Manager, Education)

Palace Aspirational faced similar complexity, only this time in asking their staff to comply with their strategy. As with FTL and the other HEIs, the presentation of information to potential students represented a complex entanglement of logics, opportunities and constraints in shaping the university’s emerging social relations of value. For PA, the fact that students would be presented with a publicly available set of information about what universities do was “definitely focusing [their] minds” on making certain that the distinctiveness and value of their offer would be visible and comprehensible amidst the metrics set out in KIS (Interviewee, 204).

As discussed in Chapter Five above, following the 2008 RAE, PA had “needed a major rebrand” (Interviewee, 203) because they felt that their identity had changed. They had climbed significantly in the league tables and, having failed to grasp the opportunity earlier, they now wanted to describe themselves in such a way that potential students would understand the quality of the student experience they could expect. As one strategic director involved with teaching and learning expounded:

“Since the last RAE we have changed; but nobody really knows... So we’re now trying to work out through committees how to make sure that the better quality students have a very easy ‘click’ that gets them to the next level of information that fleshes out the KIS numbers – employability particularly. Not only are they using material that will be quite old, it’s about students who probably came in five years ago. So for an organisation like ours, which has changed a lot in ten years and is on the up attracting higher quality students, KIS won’t do us justice.”

(203, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Although some of those committee members supported the university’s information strategy – particularly since KIS was generally understood as “onerous Government micromanaging” (Interviewee, 212) – the strategy also met with considerable resistance. For some interviewees, the very existence of KIS signified that Palace should respond using the same metrics and language as KIS because:

“...the league tables will come out and students will look at the contact hours and at how much they are paying and think, is this value for money?” explained Interviewee -212.

For others, resistance arose from the fact that PA would be moving away from certain values that stemmed from the institution’s rootedness in the local area if, suddenly, they started recruiting ‘better quality students’ from around the country on higher tariffs (e.g. Interviewees 209, 210, 212). Although high-ranking HEIs tended to be more selective, PA had risen up the league tables serving a particularly local population in an area of high deprivation and their ethic of widening access was well known throughout the sector. As such, a number of the interviewees didn’t see why the institution now wanted to adopt an information strategy that would undermine those social relations and values (ibid). Furthermore, the information required for KIS was often information that was of import to their, traditionally, ‘typical’ potential students. For those staff working “at the front face” who were regularly confronted by student

demands, it was unethical for the university to try to avoid the values of the student-consumer as discursively constructed by KIS in favour of a narrative that the university wanted to construct. The value of HE to students should not be undermined by the values of university autonomy:

“KIS will make it a lot easier for students to compare information across different universities, and it will allow them to make more informed decisions. So if universities have nothing to hide they should have nothing to fear. I think it is good because it will make us tidy up the information that we give to students and present it in a more coherent way, but it needs to be information that the students need not just what we want to tell them. Sometimes we, as an office, find it difficult to get that sort of information out of departments. But we are at the front face meeting students on a regular basis, and KIS will be useful. If students are borrowing money and having to pay fees, they want to know how much contact time they are going to get... Our students are becoming more savvy: particularly about relating where we are in league tables to what they are getting for their money.”

(209, Senior Management, Steering, WP, Project Management)

Perhaps, what is of interest about the Government’s determination to engender consumer-producer relations through *regulating* the availability of more timely, accurate and salient information regarding the value of HE is that each HEI, in one way or another, had *already* undertaken what *all* of the interviewees openly described as ‘market activity’. And this was without the impetus of direct Government intervention. By attempting to ‘pin down’ the practices and value of HE through a reduced understanding of students’ demands and desires, the Government was actually getting in the way of the plurality of values, which according to neoliberal thinkers such as Hayek (1973, 1979) and Friedman (1980) could be satisfied only through free market relations: that is, *validated through the process of exchange*.

However, and perhaps most importantly, my exploration of how the HEIs variously put their information strategies into practice has underscored the concomitant normalisation and variation of ‘governmental’ technologies, tactics and techniques (and that is ‘governmental’ in the ‘small g’ sense as elaborated by Foucault (2000), Rose and Miller (1992) and Dean (1999)). For both the strategies of the HEIs and the Government’s technology of KIS were confronted by a diversity of logics, evaluations and values, which ensured that *no single*, reduced political, economic or social

imagination could come to fully constitute or define the universities' social relations of value. As the HEIs moved from construal to construction, so complexity was necessarily re-introduced in and through their concrete, relational economic geographies. And multiple logics, values and evaluations underpinned their socio-economic practices.

6.2.3 Traversing the identity threshold: The Student Charter and the inside-outside student-consumer

The final example that I want to explore in this section is the deployment of the, so-called, 'Student Charter' by HEIs. In early-mid 2010, the Minister of State for Universities and Science, David Willetts MP, had asked the NUS, UUK and GuildHE to form a small "task and finish" working group to bring together representatives from HEIs and students to "explore best practice in the use of Student Charters and other student agreements" (SCG, 2011: 3). Since top-up fees had been introduced in 2006, Charters and similar documents, which formed a variety of loose agreements between HEIs and their students, had proliferated unevenly across the HE sector setting out a diversity of 'rights and responsibilities' for both parties. Now, given that the Browne Review into university funding was well under way, the Government wanted to rationalize their production. Thus, the Student Charter Group (SCG) was commissioned to produce "a toolkit for HEIs and Students Unions" who, working together, should, at minimum, reach "a new basic standard" by incorporating certain "key principles" for the Charters' development, design and use (ibid: 3-12).

In setting out their Final Report, the SCG was "very aware that major changes to the higher education funding system and its regulatory framework" would "greatly influence the nature of the relationship between HEIs and students" (ibid: 4-6). Given the expected increase in competition across the sector, there would be "increased pressure for HEIs to be clear about what they provide[d] and how the experience at their particular institution differ[ed] from other universities" (ibid: 4). In addition, the Coalition Government had made "specific commitments" to help improve the availability of information to both *prospective* students (so that they could "make well-informed choices when applying to higher education") and *actual* students – so that they could "know" what to expect from HEIs and what HEIs could expect of them (ibid: 3). Whilst KIS was designed, primarily, to focus on *prospective* students, the

SCG's remit was to focus on the latter: on the provision of information to students once they had crossed over to – or purchased into – *the inside* of higher education.

Importantly, in principle, the Charters were not to be seen as 'legal style, personal contracts' between the HEIs and their students. Rather, the SCG recommended that they should act as "a front page", with "clear links" and "signposting" to more detailed information in course handbooks (including assessment criteria and contact hours, etc.) and university regulations (such as complaints procedures and appeals) (ibid: 7-8). They should also "communicate the ethos of the institution" while emphasizing the "importance of belonging to a learning community" and the need for staff and students to "work in partnership" with one another (ibid: 7-8). Indeed, from their e-mail survey of all English UUK and GuildHE member institutions⁵⁶, the SCG had found that Charters would work only if there were "real partnership working" between the institutions, the students and their representatives. By establishing clear mutual expectations and helping to monitor the student experience, the student would understand the need to develop clear working relationships. Thus, each HEI had to have "a clear communication and dissemination strategy... to ensure that the whole student body and all HEI staff [would be] informed and engaged" (ibid: 7).

Given the SCG's emphasis on 'partnership working' and 'learning communities', it is, perhaps, surprising that the Student Charter was seen by many of my interviewees as an additional element of the Government's strategy to engender neoliberal market relations through the metrics of the White Paper. Indeed, in the opening lines to Section 3.3: "*Student Charter*", the White Paper echoed the SCG's sentiments stating that the student experience would be "most enriching" where such principles were fulfilled (BIS, 2011a: 33). However, as the White Paper, itself, stated with absolute clarity in its Executive Summary, the Government's intention was that the Charters, "like student feedback", would "take on a new importance to *empower* students *whilst at university*" (ibid: 6, emphasis added). For BIS, the Charters should: detail what students could expect from their institutions, particularly in terms of teaching and learning; include clear information for students on what to do if expected standards were not met; and help provide consistency of practice across subject areas (ibid: 33).

⁵⁶ In total, the SCG surveyed 105 UUK and 31 GuildHE English institutions with an 88% and 61% response rate respectively. Of those institutions, 62 had Charters or similar agreements in place, and approximately 20 institutions were either in the process of, or considering, developing a Charter.

In other words, the White Paper *left out* the responsibilities that the universities could expect from their students⁵⁷, but *left in* the responsibilities that the newly ‘empowered’ student-consumers could demand from their HEIs. Thus, with their overall sights set on creating a sector that was “freed to respond in new ways to the needs of students” (ibid: 3), the governmental technology of the Student Charter would fit very well with the values of the market as imagined by the Coalition.

Of course, in examining how the HEIs put their strategies for implementing the Student Charter into practice, again, my research bears witness to a complex negotiation of value and values as first, the semiotically reduced understandings of the market imaginary, and second, the semiotically reduced strategies of the HEIs, were met by a multiplicity of logics and social relations that give form to concrete economic geographies. For, on the one hand, although each HEI was determined to recapture the ethos of ‘partnership working’ set out by the SCG (which, of course, was informed by a diversity of experiences and values from across the HE sector) their reasons and strategies for doing so were each influenced by their particular socio-economic relations. On the other hand, although each HEI had a very clear strategy they wished to implement, a complexity of values and evaluations underpinned their eventual practice. As all of the actors moved from construal to construction, so complexity was re-introduced in and through their emerging economic geographies and the social relations of value that shape them.

As with the implementation of the student experience and KIS, the four case studies were, by-and-large, resistant to understanding the student as a consumer of HE in relation to the Student Charter. As one strategic director, whose own teenager was currently applying to a variety of universities, put it:

“We have a contract with the student, but it is that we deliver an education and they show up and work with us to help us deliver on it; and that seems the right contract. Seeing the student as a consumer, I feel, is a lose-lose situation”.

(207, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

For this interviewee, the student would lose because the majority were already quite economically “tactical” in their approach to their education, enquiring about specific personal ‘costs’ or ‘inputs’ that would be required in exchange for their degree:

⁵⁷ Indeed, the only mention of students’ responsibilities in the White Paper was that they should “actively draw on all the resources that a good university or college [could] offer” (BIS, 2011a: 33).

“‘What do I need to do to get a 2:1?’ ‘What time do I really need to spend on independent study?’ ‘How well do I need to do on this exam?’” (ibid). If the Government and students then added a *monetary value* into the exchange process then universities – indeed, the whole of society – would also lose out:

“If Government and the student consumer then add in a kind of, ‘if I add a little bit more in terms of payment, will I get more for it?’ Or, ‘how do I buy extras on top?’ then we are on a very slippery slope. This sort of thinking devalues their degrees, and it devalues universities”.

(Ibid)

Underpinning this interviewee’s narrative were two discourses that most dominated all four HEIs’ reasoning for attempting to recapture the ethos of ‘partnership working’ in their strategic implementation of the Student Charter. The first probed the nature of the ‘product’ or ‘experience’ that the student was now buying and their resultant expectations that might affect the newly rationalized ‘contracts’. Since the introduction of top-up fees in 2006, student expectations around what they were purchasing had gone up. They now expected “a brilliant three years” with the universities expected to “get them a job at the end of it”; and if the universities failed to deliver, then the students would ask “why not?” (Interviewee, 210). Students were “more savvy” about contact hours and league tables; they “shopped around” for the best bursaries and scholarships; they were “more interested” about work experience and vocational elements of courses; and they were “more discerning” regarding if higher education was right for them (see Interviewees 109, 110, 207, 210, 305, 307, 406, 408). As one interviewee explained, the students would now “look at anything” that would indicate that they were “getting value for money” (Interviewee, 210).

For many of the interviewees, most disturbing regarding this shift in the universities’ social relations of value was that, once *potential* students had traversed the ‘outside-inside’ subjectivity threshold to become *actual* students, they now perceived that they had certain *rights*: “I am paying for this, I have a right to your time. I am paying for this, I have a right to talk in your lecture” (Interviewee, 212). This was “the sort of demand culture” that was “attached to this idea of the consumer” (Interviewee, 405). There was a “mentality of entitlement brought about by consumerization”; and it was “only going to get worse” (Interviewee, 212). Indeed, a “mind set of consumerization” was “coming into higher education” – “really scaring” a variety of staff because, as

one long-time academic put it, “the students are in cloud cuckoo land! They think that as they are paying more money they have a right to all these things, and patently, that is not the case!” (ibid). Consumerization was “undermining the value of higher education”, and something *tangible* had to be done (Interviewee, 304).

The second discourse related to who was *responsible* for providing students with, or getting students through, their degree. In certain respects, students could be seen as consumers. Some chose to take rooms that were provided through the university; they ate in the universities’ cafes; they shopped in the universities’ shops; they paid for certain facilities that the universities provided. So there was “an element” wherein the students were using the universities’ “commercial services” such that “they might reasonably think of themselves as consumers” (Interviewee, 204). But in relation to education and learning, the majority of the interviewees did not accept the ‘student as consumer’ as “a helpful metaphor” (Interviewee, 204). Rather, the most appropriate relationship that described the shared nature of higher education was that of the partnership:

“I don’t think that education is possible on the basis of consumption because the consumer doesn’t have responsibility for the quality of the product in that model, whereas the student does have responsibility for the quality of their learning. So it is not an image that I find helpful. Students are partners rather than consumers, and that allows people to take responsibility for their lives in a quite significant way. That is why the partnership in learning is so key because you have to decide, as a student: ‘this is what I want to be’; ‘this is what I want to do’.”

(204, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

In attempting to describe an appropriate context for their preferred relationship, over a third of the interviewees from across each institution turned to the metaphor of ‘*the gym*’ in order to elaborate the distribution of rights and responsibilities that they felt the educational relationship entailed. Whilst many felt a “deep concern” for students who, as one interviewee put it, were “still finding themselves in this new role” (Interviewee, 105), the educational exchange relationship was “rather different” from that of the “conventional consumer” (ibid). Students couldn’t simply “come in” and “give the universities money” in exchange for their degrees (Interviewee, 412). Once the student was “at university” they were “also part of operating and participating in the whole undertaking of which they [were] consumers” (Interviewee, 105). As such,

once they had taken on the mantle of “student” by traversing the identity threshold, they were “inside its production as well as outside” (ibid). And that’s why the Student Charter was “so important to the universities” (Interviewee, 412). They had to “get that relationship across to the student” (ibid). As one senior strategic leader expounded:

“I will never use the term consumer in relation to a student. Students engage in a partnership with universities in which they are, absolutely, entitled to an education in which the institution fulfils their side of the bargain. But the university is also entitled to expect students to fulfil their half of the bargain, and if they do not, then the outcome is that they don’t receive a degree. The model that people use sometimes is that it is like a gym. Yes, you should expect all of the equipment to work and the gym instructors to know what they are talking about, but, actually, if you want to get fit you have to do that yourself; and just paying an expensive membership fee is not enough... It is not part of the bargain that the university will guarantee that the student gets a degree. The student fee is buying an opportunity: it’s for an education and it’s for a service; but it is not for buying a degree”.

(201, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

Given the ever-expanding number and diversity of institutions across the English HE sector, there would be no ‘one-size-fits-all’ strategic selection and application of the Student Charter (SCG, 2011). As one interviewee who had regular contact with the sector’s Registrars underscored: HE was “too often presented as this homogenous thing”, but in reality it was both “confusing” and “confused”; and the move to “a more marketised system” had probably “exacerbated the confusion” (Interviewee, 111). Indeed, both “the consumerization of higher education and the Charter model” were “presenting really important tests for universities” at that moment, and each institution had “to be clear” about what their obligations were, and what their students’ obligations were: what their rights were, and what their students’ rights were. But the diversity of these would be reflective of “the colour and texture of the system” (ibid).

For sure, the four HEIs reflected such diversity, with each making meaning of the Student Charter in relation to their own emerging economic geographies. Down Town Coastal, for example, was putting together their strategy for the Student Charter at the time they allowed me access for my research, and it was highly apparent that their strategy was distinctly their own. For DTC, it was important to reflect the ‘dual identities’ of the student-consumer, which an important cadre of the institution’s

strategic leaders did not feel were wholly incompatible with one another given the history, identity and core ethos of the institution, and who they felt their typical students were. Undoubtedly, the Charter had to reflect that the degree was a partnership: “the university will do this, if the student will do that: it isn’t like walking into a shop to buy a can of beans” (Interviewee, 401). The students had to put some work in order to fulfil their side of the bargain – so there was a bargain (ibid). But it was “better to express it in that big way rather than saying, ‘well you’re buying this package so you have to pay X because you’re getting that bit extra’” (interviewee, 405). That way laid “student complaints” and “the road to litigation” (ibid).

However, as detailed in Chapter Five, DTC was located in an area of high deprivation and it seemed very clear to each of its strategic leaders (a number of whom were trained economists) that HE and the onward job market were intrinsically intertwined in terms of student consumption. It was not as though the university could simply ignore the demands of their students. And although DTC felt like a “local university”, for many years they had, in fact, been marketing themselves to far more “distant” populations of home undergraduates compared to other mid-low ranked competitors in their region (Interviewees 402, 405, 410, 412). So DTC had long-understood – *and practised* – the need to balance the ‘high church’ values of HE with the ‘low church’ values of their various markets upon whom their survival now increasingly depended (Interviewees 401, 409, 415).

Thus, in putting together their Charter, a core feature of which they were naming “the Student Voice”, DTC certainly wanted to reflect that there was a bargain to be struck between the institution and their students. None-the-less, the students still had “quite significant rights” as individuals exchanging “good money” for something they desired and valued (Interviewee, 401). As one of the strategic directors involved with developing the Student Voice iterated:

“Look. If responding to student demand is being seen to be doing something appropriate then I am happy with that. But I am also happy to talk about partnerships: it’s just a different sort of language. You want to work together, and you want the students to take some responsibility in terms of their own experiences and the learning environment... But perhaps, earlier, too much of higher education was produced around the needs of the producers and their view of the world: not enough around the needs of the consumers. But these things have to exist together, and I strongly believe in that. So

these languages of demand and partnership aren't incompatible. That's why the university needs to put such an emphasis on the Student Voice in developing our Charter".

(408, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic)

Thus, for DTC it was imperative that the Charter should help communicate to both students and staff that they each needed to take ownership of the shared and individual values on both sides of the higher education bargain. The university-producer and the student-consumer had to exist together – on *the inside* of a rather fuzzy identity threshold.

In contrast to DTC, the Student Charter at FTL had just been completed and was ready for widespread dissemination amongst students and staff. Unlike DTC, for FTL rejecting the student as a consumer in relation to the Charter had, seemingly, not proved a 'fuzzy concept' – at least, not in the imaginations of the university's leaders in the process of strategy formation. As one senior leader confirmed definitively:

"We've rejected the concept of students as consumers. We talk about students being partners because this is an educational process it is not buying and selling goods. Clearly there is a contractual process, but the student as consumer creates a provider and taker type relationship... and we expect that our staff learn from our students and that our students learn from each other. They are part of the university community. So we are very clear: they are partners. They are part of the process".

(301, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

However, when it came to testing the Charter in practice, the apparent clarity with which the university's leaders had rejected consumer and producer identities was confronted by the multiplicity of evaluations, logics and values that underpin the complexity of ordinary economic relations. Once students were on *the inside* of HE in a relationship with the university and staff, it was impossible for a variety of actors from strategic directors, to staff, to students themselves, to separate undergraduate identities into clearly labelled 'subjectivity silos' marked either 'market-consumer' or 'non-market-student'.

As "part of the process" in their working partnership, FTL had repositioned their students in terms of decision-making, engagement and consultation, and had invited the Student Union to prepare the first draft of the Charter. Bearing in mind that the

Charter needed to detail a set of “shared expectations” between both students and staff, the Union had set out “a sort of matching road map” of relations, standards and values to help guide both parties throughout the students’ HE journey (Interviewee, 309), from just before their crossing the threshold of becoming *actual students* to their exit again – only this time into the world of the graduate and the onward use value of their degrees.

For the Student Union, creating the first draft of the Charter provided them the opportunity to embed some of the students’ demands and expectations regarding their university experience and what they felt HE was actually for into a tangible document. Over the preceding years, in numerous surveys, the quality of teaching and learning at Four Town and the potential for the predominantly local student population to progress into well-paid jobs had been highlighted as areas that the university needed to improve on in order to deliver better value for money. As the President of the Student Union expanded:

“I know that there is an argument that higher education shouldn’t just be about a job, that there is a social value as well. And that may be true to some people in certain areas. But for the typical student at university in [Four Town], it is about improving your knowledge in order to get a better job... They are here getting a certain career”.

(314, President Student Union)

Although, as the President continued, delivering on such values shouldn’t have had “anything to do with the student paying a fee”, now, with the three-fold increase in tuition costs, it was imperative that the university “deliver on student expectations in the same way as when they purchase goods from a shop” (Interviewee, 314). For sure, students couldn’t be understood as consumers in the sense that they couldn’t “return a dodgy education like a dodgy DVD, and get a refund” (ibid). But they were consumers in the sense that they were “consuming a service”. Students were now “buying their education and buying their tuition in the hope that it [would] give them enough skills to get a good job at the end of it” (ibid). As such, despite their “lack of control” in the university-student exchange relationship, the students of Four Town expected their education to be “high quality, fit for purpose, and last a good length of time” (ibid). They wanted the material and social relations that would deliver the onward use value of their education to be enshrined in the Charter.

Although the strategic directors seemed clear that a consumer identity for students was to be rejected in relation to the Charter, embedding an understanding that the university had a responsibility to provide their students with a high quality experience was not seen as problematic. Indeed, just after the implementation of top-up fees in 2006 a small cadre of directors had been specifically hired, at least in part, to improve on the student experience at Four Town. Back then, the media hype and academic rumour around the increased competition and marketization that top-up fees would surely initiate had driven the university to consider the quality of their offer, which up until then had not been doing their local reputation many favours (Interviewees 302, 304, 307, 309, 311, 312). As one director involved with the student experience explained:

“When tuition fees changed from £1000 to £3000, the dialogue in the sector was really starting to change and we were talking about students in a different way. When I was first here – and I’m sure we weren’t unusual about this – we would treat students like cattle! They would come, we would do something to them, and we would herd them from one space into the next. We don’t talk about them like that any more, and people that do are stoned and nailed against things!”

(309, Management, Steering, Long-time Student Representation)

Certainly, in part, FTL had wanted to improve the quality of teaching and facilities because, given the lack of life chances that their students had in relation to other, more middle-class, institutions, their students *deserved* it (Interviewee, 301). As all of the interviewees underscored, the university should invest in the student experience for *the social good*, both of their students and the local region in which they lived. However, even for those directors who vociferously rejected the notion that students could be understood as consumers, the *relational effects* of the current shift in the university’s social relations of value were inescapably real. Given the uncertainty and competition that the new funding structure was bringing into the sector, FTL could not afford to ignore a local reputation upon which it now depended in order to survive. As such, as the above director underscored, the implementation of the Charter was:

“... all about the student experience, which of course is now connected to the fee: to “the price” they are going to pay”.

(309, Management, Steering, Long-time Student Representation)

As the Charter was tested amongst staff and a variety of committees, staff resistance to embedding the effects of this shift into their social and economic relations became readily apparent. If the university was clear that they rejected consumer-producer relations, why were the strategic directors now reacting so overtly to student demands? If the student experience were to be enshrined in the Charter, then staff – as producers in this relationship – would also have to react to this shift in their social relations of value, and that would be to the detriment of the broader social contribution that FTL currently provided:

“As soon as you start to embed terms like consumer through some contract, you quickly start to pigeonhole people, and when you do that you, understandably, get a reaction from staff who say, “well, if that is what they are, then this is what I am, and therefore I have to start acting in a different way” ... If we start to pin a consumer label on whoever the student is, we then start to develop a far more narrow focus about how they should be treated within the university, and that would be an awful shame because you lose a lot of the goodwill that comes out of a staff-student relationship. That is a huge waste, in my opinion”.

(305, Senior Management VCO, Long/medium-time Academic, Industry)

What was important, then, was for FTL to attempt to ‘pin down’ the value of partnership relations by setting out clearly what the students could expect from the university against what the university could expect in return – just as the SCG had suggested in their Final Report (2010). In no way was the Charter to be understood as a contract, even with the three-fold increase in the student fee. Higher education was a “learning journey” that FTL would guide and support, but the students’ achievements would be based on *their own* efforts (Interviewees 301, 303, 309). At least, that’s what FTL hoped. As the director involved with the student experience elaborated:

“...Certainly, part of the compromise was driven by a sort of legal desire not to set the Charter out as a contract. But part of it was also based on our values, and what we would consider to be appropriate to higher education. Higher education is not a commodity, and I think that is the language that we must use with the students. But whether they are going to take any notice of that when they receive a notional bill for £8500 per year is a different matter altogether”.

(309, Management, Steering, Long-time Student Representation)

Only time would tell if the strategy could ensure the student-staff relations that the university held as valuable. There could be no absolute clarity for the student-consumer identity under the increased pressures of neoliberal marketization and its constant variation.

6.3 Conclusion

As the research presented in this chapter demonstrates, as the four case study universities put their strategies into practice they encountered a diverse range of actors who had to make sense of those strategies in relation to their social and economic relations and geographies. As can be seen from the examples of the student experience, KIS and the Student Charter, although each interviewee necessarily went through the semiotic process of complexity reduction in order to make sense of the world, they none-the-less made evaluations about what elements of the university's strategies were acceptable to them, deciding what could or *had to* stay, what could go, what could be altered, and what other actions, activities and values could be introduced as those strategies were put into practice. As a result, the values and metrics of the market imaginary – *not* as it was discursively produced in the HE White Paper but, rather, as it had *already been varied* in the process of strategy formation – were given the opportunity to displace, diffuse and 'crowd out' other practices and values that my interviewees had formerly held as useful and/or valuable to them. However, at the very same time, the values and metrics both of the Government's policies and the universities' strategies were (again) immediately varied as multiple and diverse values, notions of value, and understandings of Value shaped the universities' actual economic practices.

Thus, the chapter has underscored just how impossible it is to think about socio-economic processes such as marketization as being *either* resisted *or* not resisted; as becoming *either* embedded *or* transformed. For instance, as illustrated through each of my examples, it was impossible for my interviewees to disentangle the subjectivities of their home undergraduates into tidy 'identity silos' labelled either 'consumer' or 'non-consumer'. Likewise, it was impossible for them to separate out their own identities and practices into corresponding categories marked either 'producer' or 'non-producer'. Through their strategically selected and varied implementations of the student experience, KIS and the Student Charter – which the Government had

discursively positioned as essential elements for driving up the quality of the sector by placing consumer demand at its heart – each HEI displayed the concomitant resistance of and compliance with the market values that the White Paper sought to engender, at the same time as they demonstrated their concomitant embedding and transformation. Multiple logics, evaluations and social relations of value shaped the ways in which each university's strategies unfolded in practice – *in the situated, relational contexts of their emerging economic geographies*.

Of course, it is important to recognize, here, the power relations involved once actors and organizations have accepted the status quo of policy implementation. For as my research has demonstrated, the universities' lack of immediate and total resistance to the HE White Paper enabled its political-regulatory power – *at least in part* – to penetrate and reshape HE's social relations of value by establishing a critical mass of engagement with its 'new' metrics and values. And in turn, the power relations between the university and its staff did the same, only this time in respect of the values of the university in terms of its actual strategies. However, that is *absolutely not* to say that neoliberalization can be understood as a top-down process. Again, as my research has demonstrated, the universities' strategic leaders held multiple logics and values for implementing, excluding and altering the neoliberally inspired metrics of the White Paper, as did the multiplicity of actors who put the universities' strategies into practice. Thus far then, through the research presented both here and in Chapter Five, neoliberalization can be seen to be as much a bottom-up process as it is top-down.

Reflecting back on Jessop's dilemma regarding *how* the economy can be always-already complex at the same time as new political paradigms and values become hegemonic (2009: 338), the necessary co-existence and co-evolution of normalisation and diversity in the *Ordinary Economy* demonstrated herein suggests that this is a dilemma that *all* modern forms of Government may necessarily have to face; and in particular, those who seek to govern through the metrics and values of a neoliberally informed market where scope and intensity cannot be elided (Barnett, 2005). As the four case study universities put their already varied strategies into practice, so the actors who had to make sense of them necessarily re-introduced complexity into the reductive metrics of the White Paper. At the same time, the policy metrics had the opportunity to become embedded into HE's social relations of value – if only in part.

The implications of this necessary co-existence and co-evolution of normalisation and diversity in terms of the achievement of neoliberal hegemony will be discussed in Chapter Eight alongside the conclusions drawn from the rest of my empirical findings. In the next, and final, chapter of this empirical triptych, I explore the process of emergence.

7 Emergence: The Multiple and Complex Economic Geographies of Higher Education

7.1 Introduction

“...[E]conomic geographies are always becoming, always a product of interior and exterior influences, always fragile and always perpetually interrupted and reconfigured by the diverse relations, ethics and subjectivities of daily life in and around which value flows or is unable to flow. At the same time, social and material imperatives interrupt, reconfigure and constrain daily lives, which must come to terms with [those imperatives]...”

...It is the political and often violent negotiation of this space between variability and constraint in circuits of value that defines ‘what is and is not value’ and so shapes the trajectories of economic geographies” (Lee, 2006: 416-418).

This final empirical chapter explores the third stage of what I am calling an “iteration”: i.e. *emergence*. Following Lee’s thesis on the *Ordinary Economy*, and as indicated in his prose above, in Chapter Two of this PhD I argued that economic geographies are always in a state of emergence experiencing the constant tensions between: the various material imperatives of societal reproduction; the potentially infinite, day-to-day variability of economic practices, social relations and understandings of value; and the regulatory and calculable frame of ‘the economy’ (Lee, 2006: 413).

To be in a perpetual state of emergence signifies that reality is a constantly moving feast, in part shaped by the insistent unfolding of past trajectories, and projected into future possibilities that are in part based on previous and present material and social relations; but constantly moving – and *movable* – none-the-less. The implications, therefore, for those who seek to govern the economy are profound, for this consistently shifting landscape of material and social economic relations requires enormous and persistent work if any sort of coherent political-economic objective regarding what does or does not constitute value is to be maintained across time and space. And even then, any apparent coherence that is achieved will always be temporary, permeated as it is by inconsistencies and variation. In an ontology where normalisation and diversity necessarily co-exist with one another, this is an inescapable truth.

This chapter seeks to illuminate this ontological assertion through an exploration of how understandings of the value of HE in England began or, rather, *continued* to emerge as multiple and complex following the implementation of the policies and tactics contained in the coalition Government's White Paper, "*Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*" (BIS, 2011a). Since value emerges through the practice and performance of economic geographies, the empirical evidence presented here bears witness to a profusion of multiple and complex values and relationships – often involving considerable relationships of power – that helped shape the evaluations, values, actions and activities of the four case-study institutions as well as the individual actors that helped make up those institutions.

Similar to the evidence presented in Chapters Five (on complexity reduction) and Six (on complexity re-introduction) of this thesis, this chapter on *emergence* will underscore the concomitant processes of embedding and transformation: of the co-evolution and co-existence of normalisation and diversity in the *Ordinary Economy*. For on the one hand, as the neoliberally informed policies of marketisation were strategically selected by the Government, made meaning of by the universities' strategic leaders and put into practice in and through the complexity of their ordinary, day-to-day socio-economic relations, so the discourses, metrics and values of the market had the potential to 'crowd out' previously held values and understandings of Value and become embedded – dominate even – as the economic geographies of HE emerged. On the other hand, as the reduced and reductive signs and signifiers of the market imaginary were confronted by the plethora of values and understandings of Value that help shape the economic practices and geographies of the HEIs, so the Government's desired coherence regarding the value of HE, as set out in the White Paper, inevitably became varied in and through those emerging economic geographies. As Lee underscores, in the *Ordinary Economy* it is the shared and/or imposed understandings regarding the nature of value, Value and values – that is, the *social relations of value* – that establish the criteria through which the performance of economic geographies may be evaluated (2006: 419).

The chapter proceeds as follows: having, first, set out the discourses that dominated my interviewees' testimonies regarding both the universities' and Government's understandings of the emerging value of HE, Section 7.3 will illuminate the

multiplicity and complexity of *emergence* through an exploration of what some of my interviewees termed “market-like” or “business-like” subjectivities and behaviours. As the value of HE emerged as a ‘fuzzier’ and/or more multiple concept, so it became harder for my interviewees to disentangle their evaluations, actions and activities as either ‘market’ or ‘non-market’ having, apparently, valued one set of selected strategies over, and/or alongside, another. The overwhelming result for each HEI was that they now thought of themselves as more “market-like” and more “business-like” than they had been before the implementation of the White Paper rather than a simplistic either/or understanding of being market/business actors or non-market/non-business actors.

Section 7.4 pursues this notion through the lens of one particular market metric that every Government of Britain since 1979 had sought to implement with the aim of embedding some form of neoliberal market rationale throughout the HE sector: that is, *efficiency*. And it was through this metric of efficiency that the coalition Government was, now, attempting to impose its own, ostensibly, market-orientated definition and understanding of what the value of HE was and where its Value came from. However, as my research will demonstrate, as each HEI selected two, apparently contradictory strategies as essential to their on-going survival – i.e. the ‘*market efficient*’ rationalization of subjects and courses along side their, supposedly, ‘*collectively inefficient*’ cross-subsidization – there could be no clear separation of the universities’ market activities and valuations from their non-market activities and valuations. In the emerging economic geographies of higher education and the social relations of value that shape them, this was, indeed, a complex negotiation of value and values in the face of a, largely, politically imposed marketisation.

7.2 Signified emergence: the co-existent struggle between (confused) constraint and (complex) variation

In transcribing, reading, analysing and re-reading the testimonies of each of my interviewees, what struck me the most was the strength of a narrative put forward by fifty-five individual participants across four diverse institutions. That is: that in trying to understand the emerging value of HE, the reductive valuations of HE as articulated by Government in its policies and tactics bore little resemblance to the expansive valuations of HE as understood and experienced by those actors and universities in-and

through their real-world, concrete economic geographies. And yet, the values of the market imaginary as set out by Government were, at that very moment, ‘crowding out’ a vast array of the previously held ideals and beliefs of those HEIs – *at least, in part*.

In the broadest of terms, my interviewees felt that, whilst reductive in its articulation, the Government’s understanding of the value of HE was “confused” (Interviewees 206, 307), concocted on the back of “a lot of false starts” (Interviewee, 410) and riddled with “conflicting messages” (Interviewee, 105), which seemed to suggest that they “had[n’t], necessarily, thought it through very well” (Interviewee, 203).

“I have never in my life been as confused as I am now over the lack of clarity and direction from Government in terms of the value of higher education”, said Interviewee -406. *“I mean, they’ve stopped the White Paper, and we don’t know what is happening. What does that mean?”* he/she questioned, almost screaming. *“They can’t just stop it! ...I don’t think they have a clue!”*

Depending on which Government Minister was speaking on any given day, the message regarding HE’s value was “very mixed” (Interviewees, 105, 306), stemming, in part, from a dominant political ideology that was intent on introducing initiatives that made it “incredibly difficult to plan”, whilst also reflecting the “compromises” and “sell-outs” of “coalition politics” (Interviewee, 301). As a result, the universities would, surely, end up planning on the basis of one understanding of the value of HE, only to, then, have the Government “change their mind” and “pull the rug out from under” them (Interviewee, 206).

Quite unlike the Government’s confusion, the narratives that dominated my interviewees’ testimonies were clear. In recent years, the supposed value of HE as articulated by Government had shifted – just as it had every time there had been an economic depression (Interviewee, 106). Set within a discourse of necessary “austerity”, HE had become “a political football, which the Government [felt] it could kick because, in the end” HE was “still a minority activity”: “a luxury” that was costing the taxpayer money – and that was something the Government felt it could and should change (ibid). Indeed, aside from the confusion, and regardless of the fact that “with the fees coming in”, the Government was instigating a system that would “cost the individual more, reduce the income to universities, and certainly cost the taxpayer more” (Interviewee, 307), the “one clear message” put forward by Government was

that it was “all about money and cost: the cost of higher education” (Interviewee, 410). The “value of higher education [was] now so tied up with the fact that it cost so much”, that it had “lost that broader message” (Interviewee, 304). It was “no longer about the public benefit of higher education” nor its “transformational nature” (Interviewee, 410). It was “only being represented as a cost to the nation” and “never as an investment at the level of society” (Interviewee, 304).

While many in the sector were “still trying to work out where all the pound notes [had] fallen out of the Government’s equation” (Interviewee, 307), the “role” of the universities was, “largely being articulated through the added value [that HEIs were] giving to individuals in the market place” (Interviewee, 103):

“Oh, it’s all about the individual!” said Interviewee -405. *“It’s very much about the individual paying for their education to get the economic benefits later, and there’s very little recognition of the benefits to the country of having a skilled and thinking population, which is quite shocking!”*

“You’re getting all the utilitarian arguments that the value of higher education is because, somehow, magically, it gives you some added value on the job market”, underscored Interviewee – 207. *“The lip service they pay to the other parts of [HE] is complete lip service. They haven’t a clue about the humanitarian benefit or civilization, or any of that sort of stuff – I really don’t think they get that”.*

Indeed, in the context of the Government’s emphasis on lowering the public cost of HE, there was a growing belief that the sector needed to demonstrate “value for money” – even if there was “plenty of evidence” to demonstrate that, actually, HE’s financial burden on the public purse was about to soar (Interviewee, 412):

“And ‘employability’... is a simplistic measure of that value”, pointed out Interviewee -412. *“That agenda has just grown and grown; and Government seems to constantly have that rhetoric that we need to ‘make up’ young people who are employable... as though that is the ‘worth’ of higher education”.*

Although a handful of interviewees did point out that Messrs Cameron, Cable and Willetts had each tried to qualify that HE was “important in its own right” (Interviewees 102, 202, 404), “they’d said it too late: they’d said too much before” (Interviewee, 404). In fact, the message regarding the private gain of HE had been

increasing over the past ten to fifteen years:

“You go to university to get a good job, and if the outcomes don’t match up then, clearly, the university isn’t any good!” stressed Interviewee -101.

As a result, “the underlying message [was] very much that higher education for its own sake [was] no longer valid” (Interviewee, 102):

“For our current... and prospective intake of students”, explained one senior director (-201), “they have been told since age ten or eleven that the reason for going to university is twofold: First, you are more likely to get a good job, and second, you are more likely to earn more money. That is the sole reason that they have been told for over a decade, at least in terms of the predominant narrative.”

Private gain rather than *public good* was the “bottom line” emanating from Government (Interviewee, 404). And it was a bottom line that had been changing people’s beliefs and perceptions regarding the value of HE for quite some time – the students, their parents, members of the public, even many of the actors who made up the universities. And for many in the sector, that was “a shame” (as Interviewee -412 put it) because it was “now, overtaking a general feeling of education being a good thing in and of itself” (ibid). As one of GE’s strategic leaders elaborated:

“The first time I heard anyone say such a thing was Charles Clarke around 2000, and I was absolutely shocked that a Minister... would make that sort of statement. It was absurd to associate higher education with such economic values. That kind of thinking became more and more embedded with the previous Government’s approach to higher education, and the current Government hasn’t radically changed that, but there’s more of a sense that higher education is there to serve the economic benefit of the individual and economic development of the country. That assumption is clear”.

(102, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

That said, there was, of course, the WP agenda and the Graduate Repayment Scheme that would, through a confusing amalgamation of ex-ante and ex-post social relations of value, provide the public financial investment to underpin that particular element of the public good – the *societal* value of HE – which the White Paper articulated as being ‘worthy’ of public investment. At least, that was the Government’s theory (BIS, 2011a). The Government had, by-and-large, put its money where its mouth was in terms of the public good of university research. Now, with the cost-covering student-

fee coming in, it needed to ensure that the same was true regarding its valuation of social mobility.

And yet, for many interviewees, this was where the Government's policies had become most confusing. As one of FTL's strategic directors explained; on the one hand, there was "a leaning towards Russell Group ideals, values, and standards – both explicit and implicit within Government documentation and statements", which one could identify as "being propped up with elements of the fee proposals" (Interviewee, 302). WP, on the whole, involved the lower-ranked universities, which, according to Government tactics like the FMC, should compete for their students based on 'price'. Whereas, the higher-ranked institutions should be focused on 'making up' the best-of-the-best: on raising the aspirations and adding value to those brightest AAB+ students coming from poorer social backgrounds and state schooling (Interviewee, 304).

On the other hand, there was "a counter view", which was also being expressed by Government that did "talk about the need to, sort of, 'reach out' to the disaffected youth" of the country and "to offer them appropriate opportunities" (Interviewee, 302). Most promisingly, some of that discourse had "transcended the fairly trite vocational debate" (ibid) and had started to talk about, what a number of my interviewees referred to – often with reference to Newman's and Robbins' principles – as, "the 'true' value" of HE", which might arise from "offering some of those people the opportunity to go to university" (Interviewee, 302).

However, as one of PA's senior leaders told me, a particular concern expressed by many in the sector was that "the Government's statements about what higher education is for [had] been rather mischievously tied in with the Widening Participation objective" (Interviewee, 201). "If you were [a potential student] coming from a low-income background" then "the way to solve that problem" (i.e. the problem of being poor and lacking social mobility) was "to go to university" (ibid). As a result, the universities were finding themselves struggling to occupy the spaces between a (confusingly) constrained understanding of the value of HE emanating from Government and a more (complexly) varied understanding emanating from the universities. As he/she elaborated:

"It would be very hard to convince a member of society who is used to severe financial

pressures that they should follow the rather lofty ideals that have nothing to do with finance. So in some ways it's understandable that in the initiation of Widening Participation, ideas should be based, somewhat, on financial issues: 'It's a way to get yourself out of a financial trough'. What I feel has been lost sight of is that no attention is paid to the societal benefits or to the non-monetary [sic] benefits of gaining a higher education. If I'm honest, I find it hard to quibble with the initiation of the argument on economic terms, because those are the grounds that are 'understandable' to those who should benefit from Widening Participation. But you need a very quick follow-up with reference to more fundamental values.

(201, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

A most basic question, then, for many of my interviewees was whether or not 'the market' could provide the best mechanism – the best *form* for HE's social relations of value – through which to organize HE's framework of action: its evaluations, values, actions and activities. Based on the Government's reductive evaluation of what HE was "all about" – of "fitting people into work... the skills level of the nation... the competitiveness of national systems, etc." (Interviewee, 108) – the Government was clearly willing to "let the market decide" – at least, to an increased degree compared to HE's *form* before the White Paper (Interviewee, 307). And that fit well with a broader, more, historic Conservative agenda of "moving power away from the Local Authorities" – "*which [hadn't] always been the same shade as national Governments!*" – "to the individual and the family" (Interviewee, 310). That was "the ideology behind it: ...about moving power to the market". And it was making HE "a very powerful political tool" (ibid):

"The 'how' is the discussion that needs to be had", said Interviewee -108. "The 'how' is about 'how' you achieve that. And for this Government, the 'how' is about the different ways in which the market is used to deliver [HE]... through competitiveness, efficiency and so on... So, the impact of fees, I think, probably affects the direct relationship between [universities] and students potentially more... than 'thinking about' what the point of higher education is".

According to the majority of interviewees, the message coming from Government certainly seemed to be somewhat "schizophrenic" (Interviewee -101):

... “*British universities are world-class!*’ *The Government says that all the time. ‘But their teaching is wrong!’ ‘But if we have a market it won’t be! Then they will be even more world-class and it’ll all be all right!’*”, said Interviewee -101...

And, for sure, the Government “clearly [didn’t] accept that HE [could] be left to its own devices and be what it wants to be without having that secondary level of oversight” (Interviewee, 102):

... “*They’re constantly sticking their finger in! The Government is neither protecting institutions nor are they letting them go to the wall!*” argued Interviewee -307...

But the “*direction of travel*” was clear (Interviewee, 102), as one senior academic and strategist from PA underscored:

“*I think we’re in transition. You might think that this Government in particular would only too happily go to an entirely ‘pay your fees up front’ system, but they knew they couldn’t do it in one step!*” reasoned Interviewee -205.

As a result, no one in the sector could be sure of the Government’s continued commitment to the public good of HE – no matter how narrowly defined. Nor could they be sure of the Government’s continued commitment to undergraduate funding (ibid):

“*It’s always easy to look back to a golden age*”, said Interviewee -307. “*When the £1000 fee was first introduced we were all up in arms, and the same with the £3000 fee... So every era has its own trauma. But, I think, the collective trauma of this one is far greater because, forgetting whether it’s a true market or not – well it absolutely isn’t, but – if they’re saying ‘let the market decide’, then it’ll decide!*”

Looking back on what many of my interviewees spoke about being a ‘golden age’ or ‘era’, “at least the notion of the block-grant [had] felt like a state investment in the public good” (Interviewee, 111). And, as a result of that valuation and investment, “state priorities for higher education could very easily be sold into the system” (ibid). But now, with the Government’s focus on markets, it was not going to be as easy to “take a Government line and sell it back into an academic community when as far as they [were] concerned, it [was] the students who [would be] bringing in the income” (ibid). The social relations of value of higher education and the power relations that those carried with them were fundamentally ‘in transition’ from one era to another: from one material and social *form* to another.

Thus, it was within this period of seeing the value of HE emerging as, potentially, something quite different from its previously held valuation – both in terms of its ‘what’ and its ‘how’ – that many of my interviewees expressed a “real fear” for what the sector might look like as it emerged following this latest “treatment” by Government (Interviewee, 206). On the one hand, Government was attempting to embed “one very narrow version of social inclusion”, which was meant to represent the entire nation’s fiscal and ideal valuation of the public good (Interviewee, 301). On the other, Government was promulgating a discourse that the nation “couldn’t really afford any of this” (ibid). Thus, they were trying to promote “certain types of universities” and corresponding socio-economic relations through the mechanism and values of the market (ibid). With the sector emerging into “a position where all the funding settlements and all the policy changes tend[ed] to favour a small group of universities over the others” (ibid), then:

“...that [was] a value perception about what universities are: about what higher education is for”, underscored Interviewee -301.

As a result, “the meaning” of HE had “been shrunk to a descriptive level where it was all about taking a resource and changing it so it fit with something later”: some later understanding and utilization of HE’s value (Interviewee, 111). And “that miss[ed] the whole dimension of what happens to the *person* and the *person’s* own motivation” (ibid). Thus, as Interviewee -111 underscored, Government was attempting to discursively, materially and relationally re-construct HE as:

... “An input/output model” ...

In which:

... “The whole journey has been missed!”

And as a result, the Government had:

... “Just redefined [what is and is not] higher education!”

And yet, for each and every one of my interviewees, there could be no clear separation between the complex benefits of HE to society and its equally complex benefits to the individual. And as one of PA’s strategists (-213) told me:

“I think most people would think that’s normal”.

And that’s why he/she valued working in a university. *“I think my career’s very relevant”*, he/she said:

“Working in a university is all about the future, and even if you think about it historically, that’s about informing the future through an understanding of the past. It’s about individuals’ futures and about the future of the nation, or other nations... So that’s why I think my job is so relevant and why this issue is so important”.

(213, Management Support, Steering, Long-time Administrator)

In the continuous, iterative emergence of HE’s economic geographies and the social relations of value that shape them, the co-existence of normalisation and diversity for each HEI was an inescapable and unrelenting truth.

7.3 The fallacy of duality in ‘emergence’: the constitution of market-like and/or business-like behaviours

One particular discourse that permeated my interviewees’ testimonies helps to illuminate the multiple and complex nature of *emergence* in the *Ordinary Economy*: i.e. that HEIs were emerging from this latest Governmental policy intervention as more business or market ‘-like’ in their actions, activities and understandings of the value of HE. Rather than understanding themselves as fully fledged businesses acting, solely, in relation to the values and metrics of the market, and rather than understanding themselves as, absolutely, not market actors, my four case-study universities found it quite impossible to dis-entangle their behaviours, values and evaluations and place them into overly simplistic categories marked either ‘market’ or ‘non-market’. And this bore a direct relationship to the emergence of a ‘fuzzier’ or ‘more complex’ understanding of the value of HE emanating from their shifting social relations of value.

As previously indicated, there was a strong tendency amongst my interviewees to reflect back on a ‘golden era’ during which ex-ante public funding had offered them more security and certainty moving forward. However, there was also wide recognition and discussion that, for at least the past 25-30 years, the *longue durée* of politically imposed marketisation had increasingly instigated a discourse that HEIs “should run [them]selves as businesses” (Interviewee, 304). HE was a big employer

both nationally and locally, and, taken together, the variety of public grants to and public purchases from HEIs added up to a significant public investment in the public good of HE. Furthermore, even when the HEIs had received “very large block grants from HEFCE and, before that, the UGC”, that public investment “would, typically, have only made up about 45% of a university’s income” (ibid). As such, under the direction of myriad Governmental “drivers” (ibid), many of which were framed by a discourse of efficient and financially prudent “managerialism” (Interviewee, 405), there had long-been the expectation that HE would “wash its face financially” (Interviewee, 304): ensuring that their cost-base was efficient; exploring and competing for multiple sources of income; and carefully managing their structure and offering to ensure their long-term survival. As one strategic director of planning explained:

“I think people know that, yes, we’re a university with different values and a different culture from, say, IBM, but at the same time what they value is clear and careful financial management. You have to carefully plan your staffing and what you’re going to deliver in order to make sure you’re still here in ten years time”.

(405, Management, Steering, Long-time Strategist, Public Services)

Importantly, the distinction that Interviewee -405 was trying to draw between the different values and culture of a university as compared to a business such as IBM was widely echoed throughout my interviewees’ testimonies. Certainly from one perspective, and similar to Interviewee -405, many of my participants could not help *but* consider their university to be a business acting in relation to a HE market – even if, up until the 2011 White Paper, and perhaps even including it, what HEIs were facing could at most be described as “quasi-market” relations (Interviewee, 101).

For example, as Interviewee –207 told me in relation to PA’s projected investment in infrastructure following the Government’s massive cuts to the capital grant:

“So like any business you are trying to work out what the business climate is like. Can we afford it? Can we get another stream of income so that we can repay the loan?”

Or, as Interviewee -305 elaborated in relation to FTL’s generation of roughly £23million annually from its ‘knowledge transfer’ work with local industry:

“One of the strengths of this university has been in how it exploits its intellectual capital for the benefit of its business... My role is to continue to see how we can develop and further increase those sums of money”.

Still further, as Interviewee -408 said in relation to DTC’s students having to “commit so much money” in order to gain a higher education:

“Seeing people take on such a financial burden... is a crying shame, I think. But if you have been in a business for as long as I have, and it is a business after all... we have to wrestle with that.”

And by way of a final example, as Interviewee -106 proffered nostalgically, harkening back to when GE was considered “a bunch of gifted amateurs” rather than the “corporate enterprise” it was now considered to be:

“There’s no way you can operate like that anymore...”

From another perspective, however, every one of my interviewees was adamant that universities were *not* businesses; as the above Interviewee, -106, underscored with some agitation when he/she recognized what he/she was actually saying:

“...No business... Oh no!” he/she cried, almost shrieking. *“You see! I’m using the term ‘business’! We’re not businesses! But...”* he/she continued, struggling for words. *“No ‘business’ operates like that anymore. I mean: we could go bust! You don’t have protection against that in this country, not like universities in Europe.”*

Another strategic director (-203), this time from PA, emphasized the point with the greatest of clarity:

“We’re not a business. We’re clear that we’re not a business. We’re not here to make a profit. Yes, we’re here to run things in a way that allows us to invest in whatever. And, yes, we’ve got to have good management and the finances must be done properly, etc. But we’re not a business with a load of shareholders”.

Indeed, for each of the interviewees, England’s public universities were by no means businesses acting in a market for home undergraduates – at least, “not in any sense of the word ‘market’ that the vast majority understand” (Interviewee, 101). They were still largely publicly funded, even though their social relations of value in terms of the undergraduate fee was now incredibly complicated (see Chapter Four above). They were registered charities, not private companies, and operated on a not-for-profit basis

rather than answering to shareholder value. And whilst each of the HEIs had responded to the distinct acceleration in marketization brought about by the HE White Paper by adopting “common business practices” (Interviewee, 201) – such as increasing their competitiveness, increasing internal efficiencies, and spreading the risks of market uncertainty through the diversification of income streams – that didn’t mean that they were “suddenly going to privatize or become for-profit institutions” (ibid).

The dominant reason that each HEI put forward for taking this position was, as one strategic director put it, that “they [had] this underlying commitment to the value of the public good” (ibid). As such, by far the best description that seemed to fit the emerging identity of the HEIs was that they were “business-like” rather than businesses (e.g. Interviewees 108, 201, 304, 405). Although the universities were now acting under conditions that were increasingly expanding the market relations that they *did* have – such as overseas and PGT students – into hitherto decidedly non-market relations – i.e. their home/EU undergraduates – it was “absolutely *not* the case” that they were businesses operating under the “market rationale” of the profit motive (Interviewee, 201).

There was, however, one very large qualification to this position that a number of interviewees elaborated – and it was a qualification that would impact the emerging value of HE to a significant degree. With the Government’s continued undermining of university autonomy through the metrics and values of the White Paper, and with the uncertainty surrounding the Government’s continued commitment to funding HE into the future, the universities in general wanted to distance themselves as-far-as possible from the public purse in order to mitigate those risks. And the most readily accessible alternative was to expand their market relations. As Interviewee -201 expounded:

“A business would respond to this shifting policy environment by saying that we must not put all our eggs into one basket. If there is uncertainty over Government funding – over funding from the UK public purse – we must reduce our reliance on that... You don’t just say, ‘let’s backpedal... and only do what is completely safe’. There’s nothing left that is completely safe! ...So you mitigate the overall risk by becoming more expansive. Now that, of course, is a lesson learned directly from the market... in a way that any good business would. Which reminds me to point out that we are absolutely not a business. But that doesn’t mean that we can’t be ‘business-like’ in our approach”.

(201, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

7.4 Efficient plurality or inefficient collectivity? Course rationalization v cross-subsidization

The example I want to explore, which helps to illuminate the complexity of the emerging value of HE alongside the emerging ‘business-like’ or ‘market-like’ character of the HEIs and their social relations of value, involves the market metric and valuation of *efficiency*.

In neoclassical economic theory, which underpins the neoliberal political-economic rationale, efficiency can be broadly understood as producing the maximum value of outputs for the optimum value of inputs⁵⁸. Thus, aside from the internal efficiencies that help a producer to minimise costs, in relation to the market system it is the ratio between the cost of all the producer’s inputs against the *value* that the consumer places upon the producer’s outputs that matters (Lindblom, 2001). Indeed, it is through the efficiency of the supply-demand relationship in markets that the ‘Wealth of Nations’ is to be found (Adam Smith, 1776). Thus, market efficiency that is driven by the supply-demand relationship is an important source of Value.

In terms of the HE White Paper, one of the most dominant efficiencies that the Government was trying to ‘drive’ HEIs to achieve was the efficient allocation of resources towards courses that the newly, more forcefully, identified consumers of HE – i.e. its cost-covering fee-paying undergraduates – would value for their use and economic utility in their on-going lives. As discussed in Section 7.2 above, since a great deal of Governmental effort had been made over the past decade or so at embedding a discourse of “employability” as the “worth” of gaining a higher education (Interviewee, 412), the HEIs would, thus, be compelled to examine the courses they offered in relation to their student-consumers’ demands – particularly in relation to the on-going job-market.

⁵⁸ Lindblom (2001) notes that whilst there are a variety of understandings around efficiency, the most relevant in terms of the market relationship between supply and demand is that of the ratio of valued inputs to valued outputs. Put another way, in neo-classical economics, a market is efficient if a given level of resources is producing the maximum possible amount of goods and services, where no additional output can be achieved without the input of additional resources. Thus, the optimum use of resources is ensured in efficient markets by allowing prices to motivate independent producers and consumers in the economy. If both parties are free to choose how to allocate their resources, prices will direct those resources towards the independent actors who value them the most and can utilize them most effectively.

In essence, this meant that, regardless of the source of Value that the universities understood as the basis for their educational provision, each HEI should examine the cost-basis of each of their courses and measure the inputs required to furnish them against the level of student demand for them. If the ratio was found wanting, and there seemed to be inadequate potential for future, more profitable growth, then the HEIs should consider culling those courses in favour of allocating their scarce and, now, hard-won resources to more profitable enterprises: enterprises for which the market consumer was willing to exchange that valuable and (potentially) life-sustaining commodity – *money*.

“There are always matters where you’re steering a philosophical course for the university based on what type of institution you want to be”, said Interviewee -402. *“The trouble is, what you want to deliver is now so integrated with money, because student numbers mean money, money means viability, and you can’t do without it”.*

For each HEI, the notion of efficiency had become almost “second-nature”: a “financial understanding” that had become “internalized into every activity” following years of incessant Government regulation (Interviewee, 103). As detailed in Chapter Four above, but beyond the professional experiences of most of my interviewees, the Governmental ‘drive’ for university efficiency had been taken up by the CVCP as early as 1966 following pressure from the UGC and the Treasury. What my interviewees *had* experienced for decades, however, was being “audited to death”, wherein every year the Government’s auditors had added “yet more checking processes” to an already cumbersome list of efficiency measures (Interviewee, 404). Furthermore, what they *had* come to understand through “innumerable efficiency metrics built into the HEFCE grant” (Interviewee, 204); through Government efficiency “reward schemes” such as HEFCE’s University Modernization Fund (Interviewee, 405); and through the unceasing “drip, drip” of the efficiency system known as “Track” – which basically checked that university staff were not engaged in “doing bugger all!” (Interviewee, 403) – what they *had* come to understand was that the universities were “*not to be trusted*” by Government regarding the efficient allocation of resources (Interviewee, 410). Given the tactics and techniques employed by Government, the universities clearly needed to be “regulated and bureaucratized” to the point that gaining efficiency was no longer about “dealing with people”; it was “all

about ticking boxes” (ibid). Central Government had long-been attempting to remove any social complexity around the production of Value through efficiency and instead reduce its understanding and practice to a narrow set of technical indicators.

Thus, the notion of efficiency was by “no means unique to this particular policy period” (Interviewee, 205). However, as one strategic director and dean pointed out, although previous efficiency measures could definitively be seen as a Government breach of university autonomy, when coupled with this most recent push towards marketization, university autonomy was being even further undermined by the social relations of the market (ibid). The fact was that during the ‘golden era’ of the BTG, the “financial wellbeing” which that had provided had at least offered the universities the opportunity to “sacrifice some efficiency” in favour of “giving some autonomy to departments” to “innovate” and provide courses that *they* felt were of value (ibid). Now that “times [were] about to get a lot harder”, the universities simply couldn’t “afford that luxury” (ibid). They’d need to “re-centralize” their own evaluations and relate them to *student-consumer demand*. They’d need to “eliminate waste” in favour of Value creation (ibid).

7.4.1 Efficient plurality: course rationalization

Keeping, very much, in line with the market logic of supply and demand as articulated by the HE White Paper, my interviewees set the discursive context for the efficient rationalization of their undergraduate courses. If the Governmental implementation of the cost-covering fee indicated “the conversion of students into something much more like a customer” (Interviewee, 112), then it was clear that the students would be “far more demanding” now that “most of them” would be “paying for their degrees” (Interviewee, 106). And unlike during the “golden years” of largely ex-ante public funding – which had obfuscated the student-consumer aspect of the demand-supply relationship embodied in the process of validation through exchange – now, the universities would have to respond to their undergraduate consumers “far more than they had in the past” (Interviewee, 112). What people “had to remember” was that “universities [were] massively financially marginal institutions” – thus, there was “always going to be that imperative” for them “*to chase money*” (Interviewee, 101). As a result, now that HE’s actors were “more ‘literate’ about metrics like efficiency”,

there was “far more *willingness* to accept the ideals of marketization” (Interviewee, 112). As one strategic director contextualized:

“In other words, people understand that, ultimately, we’re all on the payroll at this organisation and if it doesn’t manage to get enough resources to keep going then the natural result is: it shrinks. So there’s a realism that we have to pay our way as an outfit, and people, therefore, understand that we need to be efficient in what we supply and do”.

(112, Management, Steering, Long-time Administrator, Public Service)

Each of the case-study universities had long-since centralized some of their processes for examining the input-output ratios of their courses in order to establish their cost-basis in relation to demand. In fact, just as “any good business” acting in a market would consider taking action to increase the production of a financial surplus, the HEIs had long-been ‘willing’ to consider culling certain courses where the cost-to-demand ratio was found to be too high (Interviewee, 301). The difference, now, following the removal of the BTG in favour of the cost-covering fee was that the uncertainty of student demand was being placed at the heart of the universities’ social relations of value. If the universities failed to respond, the financial consequences could be catastrophic:

“We’re going to lose something like £50million of HEFCE teaching grant over the next three years”, explained one of DTC’s directors of planning (-405). “It is just going to vanish! Well, it’s just huge isn’t it? And what happens if people aren’t willing to pay? How many of our courses, how many of our universities, will be sacrificed in this kind of experiment?”

Indeed, for many faculties across the country – in particular the Humanities – the removal of the BTG meant that they would be getting “virtually no funding from HEFCE” (Interviewee, 408). Thus, whether or not a department could “survive financially” now depended “predominantly on student approval” (ibid). And heads of departments across the country would “now be confronting such issues all the time” (Interviewee, 108):

“So, they’ll have their eye on the bottom line of their finances”, underscored Interviewee -108. “They will be thinking, ‘can I get more students in? How can I get more income? What do their courses look like? How attractive will they be to

students? And how can they demonstrate that it leads to a job, etc.?’ So all of these external factors impact the bottom line of departments, and they’ll be trying to make the most of their positions”.

Although my research indicates both qualitative and quantitative differences between the two higher-ranked case-studies and their two lower-ranked counterparts, each university had recently been doing just that: “think[ing] about the centrality of recruitment to [the institution’s] survival”; and “think[ing] about the demands of the markets” from which their various students came (Interviewee, 103). Indeed, for each university there was no doubt amongst their strategic directors that particular disciplines within their institutions would be feeling “particularly vulnerable” due to, what one of GE’s strategic leaders described as, “*the in-securitization*” brought about by “marketisation as a function of the neoliberal order” (Interviewee, 103, emphasis added).

GE, the highest-ranked case study, had needed to cull very few of its courses following the release of the White Paper. Importantly, the university explained its position by underscoring the fact that they had long-since implemented extremely stringent efficiency processes which, according to one senior director (-101), stemmed from the “business-like mentality” they had adopted following the financial pressures they’d suffered under Thatcher. That is not to say that the White Paper didn’t make GE reflect on the courses and programmes that they offered. It did. Rather, the university was by-and-large satisfied through its introspections that it was *already* furnishing its products efficiently because they had long-since considered their offer in relation to a variety of markets. Through its ‘rigorous internal monitoring’, GE “really [couldn’t] waste money” (Interviewee, 104):

“The fact is we were already used to thinking in economic terms about our activities, and that has enabled us to adapt pretty quickly. We operate an accounting system that allows us to know exactly how much our different activities cost... So if we suddenly see a shift in our income from HEFCE towards a fee-based, student-driven system, we can quickly calculate what it would mean for our sustainability and how we would have to adapt our activities in order to cope... We operate in a very market aware way”.

(102, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

PA, however, the second highest-ranked institution, was undergoing significant internal struggles as its leaders sought to gain control of any perceived inefficiencies that the values and metrics of this ‘technology of Government’ had brought to light. To begin with, the university was looking to amalgamate some of its undergraduate courses where low consumer demand coupled with the inefficient duplication of modules both within and across departments was impacting their capacity to generate a surplus. And this efficiency evaluation was occurring across the whole institution:

“Sometimes the faculties are providing things in triplicate to a finite bunch of students, and its bonkers!” explained Interviewee -212.

Moreover, one particular department was facing major cutbacks and restructuring due, in part, to an already-known lack of demand for its primary subject: chemistry. According to the interviewees, the university had calculated that, given the “practical” nature of the degree, some modules required around sixty hours of contact time to deliver; and according to a number of PA’s strategic leaders, that was simply “too costly” (Interviewee, 212). The department was small, and was not paying its way in other income-generating areas such as the REF (Interviewee, 203) – so both modules and staff were “very vulnerable” to rationalization (Interviewee, 212). Prior to the removal of the BTG, “every bum on every seat” in chemistry “was worth about £10,500 to the university”, which included “the student top-up fee, the HEFCE STEM Grant, and their strategic investment in vulnerable subjects”. And yet, “every single chemistry degree in the country [was] making a loss on its teaching” (ibid). Now, PA was moving to a situation where *the student* would need to be ‘willing’ to pay a £9000 fee; and who knew “how much the Government [was] going to support vulnerable subjects?” (ibid). Already, the department relied on ‘clearing’ to make up its student numbers, so demand was low. And, already, they were “losing money!” So, now, what with the university asking for a return of £1700 per student to invest in their Government enforced WP programme, the department was looking at “a £3000 drop in funding per student!” (ibid):

“...And that is not a good place to be”, cautioned Interviewee -212. *“It can be very stressful. And it’s certainly not a good way to run a business, which in effect is what we are.”*

The testimonies provided by DTC and FTL were not dis-similar from those of the high-ranked case studies. However, the cull in courses that they described

demonstrated a more profound shift in their understandings of the value of their 'products' in relation to an emerging demand-driven market.

According to one of DTC's strategic leaders – who apart from overseeing the university's marketing strategy had recently been involved in a Government-instigated exercise for the “market assurance” of new courses – “one-in-two courses, nationally, [did] not recruit enough students” (Interviewee, 410). As such, many of England's universities were now looking to cull what he/she referred to as “vanity courses”, which had often been “developed to suit the desires of the academic involved rather than the students” (ibid). For example, up until the HE White Paper, DTC had itself “still been developing courses that had no market” (ibid) because too many academics had “a bee in their bonnet about what would make a good course!” (Interviewee, 406).

“Why can't we go on teaching 'nuclear needlework'?” declared Interviewee -410, mimicking an imagined reaction from his/her colleagues as they were told that such 'vanity courses' needed to be cut. “There is a very strong resentment from some people. There is still that element that doesn't realize that you actually need students in order to run a course!”

The costs of such inefficiency had been extraordinarily high to the university, not just in financial terms but also in terms of academic time and processes (ibid). As a result, DTC's strategic leaders were, also, considering culling the sorts of courses and programmes that the Government had been discursively constructing – particularly through the media – as “Mickey Mouse degrees”, which wouldn't be valued by potential student-consumers for their use in the on-going job-market (Interviewee, 409). As such, there was widespread feeling amongst DTC's leaders that “if marketisation” could “get rid of some of that sort of waste” then, overall, “it wouldn't be such bad thing!” (Interviewee, 410).

Sports Science, for instance, had seen a recent drop in its applications, so “clearly the Government's message” was “quickly getting across” to potential students that the degree did not provide “good value for money” (Interviewee, 409). Certainly, the university didn't want to “disrupt its funding models” until they had “the evidence” to suggest that the “huge fall” in demand represented an “onward trend” (ibid). However,

Sports Science would have to consider “reducing the size of [their] undergraduate programme”, which would “clearly have an impact going forward” (ibid).

Furthermore, was it really efficient for the university to have “three departments all teaching basic biochemistry? Couldn’t [they] bring those all together?” And did they really need “innumerable courses” that each taught statistics? “Couldn’t those be brought together too?” (ibid). At the end of the day, the students would “probably get a better experience” if those courses were rationalized because “the teaching would be fresh”. Moreover, with the efficiency savings made, the university could provide “extra demonstrators” and more “personal attention” (ibid). Whilst it was imperative for the university to have “an overall vision”, which did “say something about what they believed in” (ibid), they were currently in a position where the decision-making factors were inextricably entangled with their students’ valuation of the use of DTC’s products. And that had implications for the university’s on-going survival:

“The fact is that the money is important,” stressed Interviewee -409. “Some of the cuts to do with efficiency savings... some of the big decisions; I just can’t make as Dean... I have bigger people over me, and they control part of our expenditure. So the money side is right there. Money drives a lot of things”.

Similarly, FTL had just undertaken a substantial cull of courses just prior to my research with them.

“We’ve just had to reduce our undergraduate portfolio by over sixty courses for our ‘Learning Works’ exercise”, explained one senior director involved in marketing (-311). “I had to stand up and be booed by the School of Applied Sciences!”

However, as the above Interviewee explained to his/her academic colleagues, FTL’s internal audit of courses had revealed that there were no-less-than “seventy-eight courses with less than five students on them”; and in terms of their efficiency measures, that simply wasn’t “economically viable” (ibid). There was “a business reality” that the university “had to face up to” because, ultimately, “the market [didn’t] care if [FTL] provided a BA in Military History. The market only care[d] if they had ‘a use’ for their degrees!” (ibid):

“It is all about the market”, stressed my interviewee. “And this university has to be market orientated. Sure, I want the university to have 300 undergraduate products; but

in five years time if it only has 250 because it is serving the market that has developed, then that is what it needs to have.”

Of course, “the academics involved [wouldn’t] like it”, because it was “*their* subject area”, and *they* wanted to decide what subjects were of value. But the university’s leaders “just [had] to break down those barriers” (ibid):

“All of this is based on the premise that the university needs to have a sustainable balance sheet”, reasoned Interviewee -311. *“Income versus expenditure has to balance, and marketers like myself have to continue playing that game until someone realizes that the [alternative] is unsustainable... These courses have to be economically viable!”*

Very clearly, the interviewees’ testimonies demonstrate that the emerging social relations of value into which the HE sector was, *politically*, being immersed were directly impacting the HEIs’ understandings of where the Value of their provision lay. Put another way, the shift in their social relations of value towards a regulatory frame for the economy which emphasized the values, metrics and relations of the market, was having a direct impact on the HEIs evaluations, values, actions and activities – and indeed, their *subjectivities* as they became far more “business-like” in their behaviours.

And yet, at the very same time as the four universities were efficiently rationalizing their undergraduate offerings in line with the Government’s highly reduced understanding of the value of HE – *which, in turn, could be seen as undermining the plurality of values that a neoliberally informed market is meant to satisfy!* (see Chapter 2 above) – they were, concomitantly, involved in ‘pinning down’ their own ‘collective valuations’ of their undergraduate offers through the internal process of ‘cross-subsidization’.

7.4.2 Inefficient collectivity: cross-subsidization

According to my interviewees, the ideal of cross-subsidization between, what one strategic director described as, “surplus departments” and “deficit departments” was nothing new to the universities (Interviewee, 108). In the ‘golden years’ of the BTG, the internal distribution of public funds between courses, programmes, and faculties was understood by the HEIs as a core function of their status – their *identification* – as not-for-profit, public service organizations, whose value to society was largely

articulated in terms of their public good contribution. Indeed, the HEIs were used to following and adapting HEFCE's funding distribution model, which, in keeping with the Government's valuation of the universities, enabled two things: a) the Government to "sell in" to the system its public good priorities, and b) the universities' to uphold the fundamental principle of their "broad church offer" (e.g. Interviewees 111, 201, 301, 404). The difference now, of course, was that the Government had redefined its valuation of the public good of HE – idealistically, monetarily and relationally. Thus, in line with the neoliberal economic rationale that underpinned this political push towards marketisation, in theory, the HEIs' valuations *should have been* largely governed by the demands of its newly marketised undergraduate student-consumers.

The Government was still intending on offering some public financial support for particular subjects: the STEMs and the SIVS. However, as far as the universities knew, this was to be a vastly reduced *per-capita* subsidy, which, as a result, would be allocated in line with demand. As such, as both the Browne Review and the HE White Paper had so clearly articulated, those courses, programmes, faculties and, indeed, universities that were popular – *and, thus, financially sustainable* – should be encouraged to flourish. Those for which demand was consistently low – *and were, therefore, economically untenable* – should be allowed to fail (see Chapter Four above).

This breach of the universities' autonomy to embed into their provision a more multiple and complex valuation of HE as they understood it, was not something that any of the HEIs was completely willing to bear. To a greater-or-lesser degree, each had been willing to examine their offers in accordance with some neoliberal, economic understanding of efficiency, but they were not willing to allow either Government or the market to alter the value of what the universities believed HE was for. As one of PA's senior directors explained in terms that were typical for each HEI:

"There is a genuine feeling that we – collectively – want to be part of a broad-based institution both academically and intellectually speaking. And the correlation to that is that you cross-subsidize... We cross-subsidize courses all the time, and we cross subsidize between departments; and the rationale is very clear and fundamental: this is an institution that celebrates its academic breadth and the benefits that this breadth brings to the university and society".

(201, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

As a result, both Government and the market needed to be kept ‘at arms length’ in terms of the universities’ internal valuation of their broad provision of courses.

Indeed, each of the case studies provided specific examples of cross-subsidization, elaborating their internal processes, flows of monies, multiple logics, and the complexity of values upon which it was based. In so doing, their testimonies underscored the inescapable co-existence of normalisation and diversity in their emerging economic geographies and the social relations of value that shape them.

For example, although PA had undertaken the efficient rationalization of its Chemistry provision – in part due to its high cost-to-demand ratio, and in part due to broader efficiencies required for the REF – the university’s strategic leaders were concomitantly prepared to continue its cross-subsidization due to the value PA placed on the subject’s provision. At the time of interview, the faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences was “taking a huge hit in order to prop up Chemical Sciences” whose faculty of Science and Engineering had “just gone from being £600,000 in surplus to being £300,000 in deficit” – the latter having surfaced through the faculty’s failure to recruit enough international students whose high fees invariably helped to cross-subsidize their home-undergraduate provision (Interviewee, 212). Although Chemistry was clearly “not paying for itself”, PA wanted to continue its cross-subsidization because of the subject’s “contribution to the university as a whole” (Interviewee, 203). Just because Government had “set an arbitrary fee and there [were] people who didn’t have the resources to pay for it”, didn’t mean that PA should “stop offering programmes... that help[ed] to maintain a breadth of subject areas” (ibid). And the reasons for this were all to do with the university’s understanding of the value of HE. As one long-time academic elaborated:

“So we justify cross-subsidy on the grounds that money isn’t actually the way of valuing things... We do it because we think that it’s in the public good to have universities that have a broad range of subjects... Each time we relook at the big issues like ‘do we want to have a broad based university?’ the answer is ‘yes’. So we’re not going to suddenly home in just on the profitable areas. We are very clear about maintaining certain subjects despite the fact that they are not self-funding. If you never cross-subsidized things you’d close things down!”

(203, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

In fact, each interviewee's testimony across each of the HEIs demonstrated a similar set of discourses and values to those which underpinned PA's cross-subsidization of Chemistry. For a start, each institution had long-since begun to diversify their income streams in order to relieve the financial and regulatory pressures, risks and uncertainties they'd suffered under the incremental 'drip, drip' of politically imposed marketisation:

"We've had no choice but to manage the risks that have arisen from policy", explained one senior strategist from FTL (-306), "And we are! In this university it is very live! It can't be one of those things where we develop a response like diversifying income streams and then put it on the shelf... We've had to go for the market, whatever that market that might be and whatever that market looks like".

And it was the profits from these markets that were now helping the universities to financially uphold their understandings and valuations of what did and did not constitute the value of HE.

Profits from specific subject areas such as Business that were highly saleable in a variety of markets, and profits from specific groups of students such as international and PGT – who by-and-large constituted the 'paying customers' in those subject markets – were utilized internally by the universities to cross-subsidize both deficit-producing-subjects and deficit-producing-students.

For example, in terms of deficit producing subjects, as with each HEI, GE underscored the importance of both their international and PGT students to maintaining the financial sustainability of the institution and its autonomy to uphold its broad base offering:

"If we're honest, our PGT and overseas students are important, largely, from the point of view of the fees", explained one strategic director (-106). "Like many universities, the difference between a department breaking even and going bust is that fee component. It's one of the few elements of money that comes in that is completely free for the university to do what it likes with. Everybody knows that's the case in higher education".

Although, as evidenced throughout my research, GE had long-thought of itself as a, somewhat, ‘footloose’, ‘commercial enterprise’ that was used to acting competitively in relation to a variety of markets, the cross-subsidization of departments was considered a core feature of its value as a university. As Interviewee -106 continued:

“There is very much a sense in the university that higher education is really valuable for its own sake. I mean, we support loss-making departments!” he/she exclaimed with, almost, disbelief. *“Subjects that have no immediate economic value! And we are very happy to do that because they are just fantastically interesting and valuable subjects”*.

For sure, some interviewees expressed discomfort that the universities were charging overseas and PGT students whatever the institutions thought they “could get away with” – “just to balance the books” (Interviewee, 309):

“...But that is the reason we are doing it”, reasoned one of FTL’s strategists (-309). *“We are creating a surplus in one area to subsidize other areas”*.

And for sure, the universities had to establish some sort of criteria for continuing to support a subject – or not as the case may be:

“Clearly if demand dropped radically, you’d have see whether it is worthwhile keeping”, emphasized another of GE’s directors (-104). *“But you don’t make a snapshot decision. You look at each subject strategically and ask: ‘what is the importance of the subject to the university and society? What is the prognosis in the long-term? Are we doing something wrong that can be altered, or could it be a national or international trend?’ There are lots of factors you would look at.”*

However, provided the universities could put the profits to some ‘higher purpose’ – “to the good of the Academy”, as another of GE’s strategic directors (-112) put it – then “ethically” the universities could “think about the value of keeping a particular subject as set against the huge surplus made in another department” or by “another set of students” (Interviewee, 108). The universities were “not in it to make a profit” (Interviewee, 112). The “generation of resources” was “*not a good in its own right!*” (ibid).

Indeed, as one of DTC's leaders told me, almost every university was having to cross-subsidize at least one of its STEM or SIV subjects: "collecting the money in, then re-distributing it internally in a way that match[ed] cost to delivery" (Interviewee, 402). So even here, where the Government was, supposedly, valuing the provision of subjects *it* deemed strategically important to the economic good of the nation, *the universities* were having to step in to prevent market failure by 'propping up' that valuation:

"If you're going to a demand-led system, then you'll never produce enough STEM or Language graduates unless there's some form of incentive for the student", said Interviewee -402. *"The market doesn't work like that. We're not selling soap powder, you know. We're not selling food. People have to eat, but people don't have to sell you French or Mathematics. So the Government hasn't really got it right."*

Furthermore, in terms of deficit producing students, the surpluses from profitable students and profitable subjects were being internally re-distributed by the universities to 'prop up' the Government's under-valuation of its WP agenda. Thus, what with the White Paper's most recent push towards marketization, any emerging understanding of the value of HE was only going to become more complex, as one of PA's senior strategists explained:

"We are trying to expand our PGT and international student bodies because that's where we make the money. They will help finance the bursaries that we can give to our local WP students. So there is a close relationship between these student bodies. Rather than see those markets as contradictory to the public good, you can actually marketise some bits of the university product whilst utilizing those profits internally. So you can argue whether or not some degrees, like Business, are a public or private good; but done the right way, they are both. Getting a Business degree, which gets you a very high paying job, actually helps pay for our ability to look after students at the other end".

(207, Senior Management VCO, Long-time Academic)

The enormous complexity of the emerging value of HE really hit home when another of PA's senior directors (-201) explained that the university's *home* undergraduates were also enmeshed as 'creditors' in these complex circuits of value. And to a greater-or-lesser degree, this would be true for every university across the land. Because of the Government's push towards marketisation, its under-valuation of HE as a public good, and the complexity of the Graduate Repayment Scheme – which removed a previously

‘known value’ of public investment from HE’s ex-ante relations, and displaced it to the ‘unknown valuations’ and vagaries of the ex-post job market – the universities had been obliged by Government to build the upfront costs of their WP programmes (such as their bursaries and various outreach programmes) into their undergraduate fee. As a result, some home undergraduate students would be “cross-subsidizing someone else’s education”, and depending on the individual’s private gain through the on-going job market, any one of them could be “cross-subsidizing WP in general!” (ibid).

According to Interviewee -201, pragmatically speaking, in order to function, the country needed doctors, geographers, lawyers and artists; and ethically, *all* young people from *all* social backgrounds should be offered the opportunity to gain a higher education and “contribute to social life in all these different ways” – provided they were qualified to do so, of course. And that was “a societal value that [went] beyond personal benefits.”

However, when the multiple and complex social relations of cross-subsidization were taken into account, there was no way for the universities, the Government or the students to know exactly which student, from what social background, or from what country would end up cross-subsidizing the English public purse for that ‘societal value’ – be that of subjects or students. As a result, according to a number of interviewees from each HEI, if the universities wanted to uphold what they considered to be the public good of their “broad-base provision”, then the only “economically efficient” way of doing so was to “consider its value *collectively*” (Interviewee, 304). As one strategic leader from DTC underscored:

“So I prefer to think of universities as a single entity: a single community. And our PGT, PGR, overseas and undergraduates are all component parts of that community and our broad base offer. In some ways to differentiate between them seems to destroy that notion. I think it would entirely change the nature of the way in which universities operate and the values that the university stands for. So although I recognize that we operate differently in different markets because we have to generate the stable financial base that we need to survive, we clearly need to differentiate between that need to generate income to maintain the institution and the sort of collective community that we would wish the institution to be”.

(409, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic)

When I asked one strategic director from GE as the ‘most market-oriented’ of the case studies, what enabled them to not, simply, act like market actors in the face of an increasingly neoliberalized policy framework, he/she replied laughing:

“Because we are not businesses! That’s what makes you act not like a business in a market! We are an educational institution; you know? We aren’t businesses. That’s not to say that you’re not mindful of all those economies and the financial implications of things. But we are not a business.”

(108, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic)

In the emerging economic geographies of higher education, this was, indeed, a complex negotiation of value and values in the face of an attempted normalisation of a particularly neoliberal understanding of value.

7.5 Conclusion

I began this chapter by reflecting on Lee’s (2006, 2011) assertion that economic geographies are always emerging, always a product of both interior and exterior influences, and always already fragile and variable at the same time as they are constrained, both socially and materially. I, thus, argued that the implications of this constantly moving landscape are profound, for not only does it underscore the enormous and persistent work that is required to maintain any sort of coherent political-economic objective regarding what does or does not constitute value, it concomitantly emphasizes that even when any apparent coherence is achieved it will always be temporary due to the inconsistencies and variation of *actual, situated* economic practices. Importantly, this was not to suggest that the power relations involved in the practice and performance of economic geographies are not relevant or constraining. They are. Rather, it was to underscore the inherent *impossibility* of exerting an all-pervading neoliberal market rationale *from* the ‘top-down’ *onto* social-economic practice.

As this chapter has demonstrated, given the ontological complexity and diversity of the *Ordinary Economy*, it was simply not possible for the governmental technology of the HE White Paper to wholly control the evaluations, values, actions, activities and subjectivities of the HEIs directly in line with the metrics and values of the market as put forward in its discourses and policies. Nor was it possible for Government to

wholly control the emerging value of HE. Indeed, and as demonstrated, since value emerges through the practice and performance of economic geographies – *which are themselves shaped by multiple and complex social relations of value* – these ‘objects of government’ were inextricably intertwined.

Certainly the aims of the Government seemed reasonably clear to the universities – even if its overall message was somewhat confused. By emphasizing the private value of HE in terms of its eventual utility in gaining graduates a well-paying job, and by identifying and placing those graduates more forcefully as fee-paying student-consumers who sat at the heart of the system, their value-maximizing demands would drive HE’s universities to think and behave as businesses in a competitive market, thereby optimizing their fiscal inputs by becoming more efficient. ‘Adding value’ to the student in the form of ‘employability’ alongside ‘maximizing value’ in the form of market-efficient resource allocation were the dominant discourses of HE’s ‘worth’ emanating from Government.

However, as my research has illuminated, these governmental aims and discourses were only partially achieved and successful. Each HEI definitely set about streamlining and culling certain courses where inefficiencies were high and/or demand was low: their overlapping provisions, their poorest recruiting subjects, their ‘vanity courses’ and their so-called ‘Mickey Mouse’ degrees. And ‘cost’ – that most forcefully emphasized Government mantra – alongside ‘survival’ – that more imminently uncertain material imperative – underpinned each HEI’s calculations of its bottom line. *And yet*, each university concomitantly continued their long-established practices of cross-subsidization both between surplus-producing subjects and deficit-producing subjects *and* surplus-producing students and deficit-producing students. Indeed, even where Government was purportedly investing in HE for the value of what it understood as HE’s public good, the universities were independently reallocating resources internally to shore up the Government’s under-(e)valuations and investments. And this cross-subsidization was inextricably tied to both the HEIs’ own understandings of the public value of HE – its broad base offer and its multifaceted contribution to society, the economy and civilization – and, indeed, to their self-identification as absolutely *not* businesses acting in a market. Yet, at the very same time, the majority of the surpluses that the universities felt ‘free’ to reallocate as *self-*

identified collectives came from their actions and activities in a variety of full fee-paying and, often, very long-standing markets, leading a number of my interviewees to declare that they *were* businesses after all!

As complex as my research has demonstrated HE's social relations of value to be, there is, however, one inescapable truth that each of my interviewees' testimonies underscored in one-way or another. Whilst their evaluations, values, actions, activities and subjectivities most definitively displayed or embodied *market-like* and/or *business-like* attributes and values *before* the implementation of the HE White Paper, each HEI emerged as *more* *market-like* and/or *more* *business-like* following its application. And whilst each HEI continued to display a deep commitment to investing in a collective ethos of the university following the White Paper, the material imperatives of making a living were becoming more imminent due to the uncertainty of their shifting economic social and material relations.

Thus, in the context of an attempted normalisation of a particular understanding of value in the face of a diversity of values, the metrics and values of the market imaginary as set out by Government were succeeding in 'crowding out' a vast array of the previously held ideals and beliefs of those HEIs – *at least, in part*.

In the next, and final, chapter of this PhD, I will pull together the arguments set out in this thesis in order to draw conclusions.

8 Conclusion

The overarching aim of this thesis was to resolve the complex interplay between neoliberally informed policy programmes of marketisation, which are themselves geographically diverse, and the diversity of ordinary socio-economic contexts into which those policy programmes are inserted or imposed. In order to achieve this aim, I argued that rather than attempting to bolster the explanatory capacity of political economy and/or governmentality approaches by combining them with additional lenses, theories and concepts, an approach that took the multifarious interactions between socio-spatially constructed political-economic relations and the diversity of the *Ordinary Economy* as its starting point might provide deeper insights into neoliberalization's processual nature. That is, *how* neoliberal processes of marketisation emerge in time and place.

Without doubt, scholars of both political economy and governmentality who have emphasized the centrality of context as an inescapable concrete necessity in neoliberalization's progress have made an enormous contribution to academic and scholarly knowledge (e.g. Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Brenner et al, 2010; Harvey, 2007; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Jessop, 2004, 2009; Jessop and Sum, 2001, 2003; Lerner, 1997, 2000a, 2000b; Ong, 2007, 2008; Peck, 2010; Peck and Tickel, 2002; Peck et al, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2005; Watts, 2003). Not only have such scholars underscored the need to culturally- and/or geographically- ground the analytical rudiments and theories of these widely implemented approaches. They have also underscored that, if the actually existing manifestations of political-economic projects like neoliberalization are to be revealed, then the articulation between the economic and political – and, importantly, their embedding in broader sets of social relations – must be considered.

However, as the arguments that I set out in Chapter Two demonstrated, some such studies have been criticized for still presenting neoliberalization as an inescapably “hegemonic” project by which a clearly defined neoliberal logic of capital has been perfectly capable of dominating social relations by subordinating public values to those of the market. As a result, the complex social contexts in and through which political programmes must necessarily operate have all too often been treated as a

“residual effect” of such programmes (Barnett, 2005). Thus, a broad range of political economy- and governmentality- inspired theories of hegemony have failed to provide adequate insights into the complex interplay between society and polity in the seeming re-production of neoliberal domination (e.g. Brenner et al, 2010; Dean, 1999; Jessop and Sum, 2003; Peck, 2013; Peck et al, 2012; Sum, 2004, 2009).

As my arguments have demonstrated, neoliberalization most centrally seeks to change the way that the economy is normally practised in time and place; and other scholars have undoubtedly sought to overcome the perceived weaknesses of both political economy and governmentality through a variety of approaches that have taken normal everyday economic practices and relations seriously (e.g. Boudreau et al, 2009; Clarke, 2004; Keil, 2002; Smith and Rochovska, 2007; Tilly, 1999, 2000, 2002; Wilshusen, 2010). In this thesis, however, I adapted and re-posed the work of Roger Lee (2006, 2011) arguing that it is in and through the emerging economic geographies of the *Ordinary Economy* that *any* political attempt at restructuring the economy must necessarily unfold. Importantly, central to this attempted political economic restructuring would be the semiotic and material re-shaping and re-forming of what Lee calls, *social relations of value*, involving both understandings and practices of value, Value and values. I, therefore, suggested that through this novel conceptual lens, the political process of neoliberalization would be understood to connote *the (attempted) transformation of socio-economic spatial relations into emerging economic geographies, more-or-less governed by the metrics and values of the market.*

Of central importance in applying this analytical proposition, was the recognition and articulation of the ontological necessity for normalisation and diversity to co-exist with one another in the *Ordinary Economy*. The circuits of value that make up economic geographies are foundational to the sustenance of social life and are comprised of certain necessary processes involving the establishment of socio-economic relations and the material practices of production, consumption and exchange. At the same time, the specific circumstances in and through which these processes necessarily take place are not only geographically, temporally and socially variable, they are deeply influential and the consequence of political and social struggles. As such, I argued that economic practice is at once structured/constrained *and* variable. For, on the one hand, it is comprised of relations of power, institutions, norms, and certain material and

social imperatives, dynamics and tendencies, whilst on the other it is subject to multiple and complex interpretations, evaluations, values, logics, beliefs, dilemmas, and relations. And all of these factors – *just like the economic geographies to which they are intrinsic* – emerge relationally in time and place in the struggle to define what is and is not value.

Certainly, the marketisation of HE in England has provided an interesting, timely and valuable case study through which to pursue the overarching aim of this thesis as well as its precise research questions. Firstly, the historic discourse analysis presented in Chapter Four has underscored the extent to which a neoliberally informed market imaginary has come to penetrate HE policy in England, particularly since the late 1970s onwards with the political ascendance of the ‘New’ or ‘centre-’ right. Yet, having analysed the development of English HE funding policy from the turn of the 20th Century, my research has highlighted that its emergence alongside the pattern, size and makeup of the sector has been far from straightforward. For instance, the political emphasis on who should pay for HE and the ‘machinery’ and/or ‘relations’ through which it should be funded and coordinated has definitively shifted. However, it simply isn’t possible to understand the complex political and social struggles, negotiations and compromises that have made up HE funding policy’s actual existences over the course of a century as simply a political movement from Left to Right; from Keynesian demand-side economics to neo-classical supply-side principles; from an emphasis on the public value of HE to an emphasis on individual gain; or from a belief in the efficiency of central co-ordination to a conviction that the efficient organization of economy and society is best achieved through the practices and values of the ‘free’ market. As my discursive analysis of the 2011 HE White Paper and a variety of supporting documents has indicated, the coalition Government’s intentions to shape the evaluations, actions and activities of HE’s actors via a neoliberally informed market imaginary were clearly manifest in the White Paper’s texts. And the metrics or ‘tactics’ designed to engender market subjectivities and values were, as the White Paper itself suggested, “*radical*” and very plain to see (BIS, 2011a: 74). Yet, this cannot belie the just-as-apparent metrics or ‘tactics’ that continued to support, what the White Paper discursively constructed as, the public value of HE – most specifically its contribution to social mobility and employment. As Chapter Four demonstrated, the deeper penetration of the market imaginary into HE policy has been incremental and

complex, having emerged – not necessarily uniformly or lineally – from previous iterations of inescapably contextual political economy.

Secondly, the careful selection of four very different universities through which to pursue my empirical investigations has provided an invaluable representation of the diversity and complexity of the HE sector in and on which the White Paper was attempting to intervene in order to shape HE's framework of action. As my research has demonstrated, the varying histories, identities, geographies and, hence, path-dependencies of the four case study HEIs decisively shaped their evaluations and negotiations of the metrics and values that the White Paper was discursively and politically attempting to reinforce. Thus, the *situated* socialities and materialities of the universities were central in helping to shape the economic geographies of HE that *continued* to emerge following the White Paper's implementation. And importantly, at a more generalized level of political economy, this would be true across the diversity of ordinary socio-economic contexts into which relations of neoliberalization are inserted or imposed.

Analytically, my emphasis throughout this PhD on both the situated nature of economic geographies and their continuous emergence has been vital. These characteristics reveal both the concomitant power of the policies put forward in the White Paper – be they 'market' or 'non market' (Peck, 2013a, 2013b following Polanyi) – to shape HE's socio-economic relations, values and practices *and* the immediate variation of its metrics and values as they were interpreted, made meaningful and put into practice in and through the diversity of concrete economic geographies of the HEIs. As evidenced throughout my empirical investigations, the circuits and networks of value of which economic geographies are comprised are constantly subject to evaluation and contestation through the social relations of value that shape them, which are themselves foundational to, and inseparable from, the everyday practices and performances of the *Ordinary Economy*. Hence, in this light, my articulation of the ontological necessity for normalisation and diversity to co-exist with one another in the *Ordinary Economy* is less about illuminating this crucial academic argument. Rather, it is more that without its foundational incorporation into research, the complexities of neoliberalization's processual nature – *its actual, situated and constantly emerging existences* – may be lost.

What I hope the reader has found helpful, here, has been my illumination of the complex interplay between geographically diverse relations of neoliberalization and the diverse contexts of the universities through the three stages of what I have called an '*iterative emergence*'. Although, as an analytic, the stages are somewhat stylized, they none-the-less arose from – and thus represent in a grounded form – the iterative and reflexive evaluations and processes that my interviewees described in terms of their movement from 'construal to construction'. From the initial stages of meaning making and complexity reduction as each HEI selected a preliminary set of strategies for moving on in the world; through the apparent re-introduction of complexity as the universities put those strategies into action; to the emergence of a partially modified, re-formed and re-defined HE sector – *and its value* – my research has demonstrated that it was in the transition from imagination to practice that the concomitant embedding and transformation of the White Paper's policy metrics and values literally began to *take place*. And central to this temporal and spatial concretization of neoliberalization was the practice and performance of the HEIs' diverse emerging economic geographies and the inescapable social relations of value that shape them.

Indeed, throughout each stage of the HEIs' iterative emergence, the semiotically reductive understandings and metrics of the White Paper played a vital and powerful role in the Government's attempts to structure the evaluations, values, actions, activities and subjectivities of HE's strategic leaders and their universities. As each of my interviewees underscored, the replacement of ex-ante public funding with a cost-covering fee that followed the student, alongside the instigation of both the AAB+ and flexible margin competitions, introduced a great deal of uncertainty into the universities' social relations of value, thereby forcing them to consider how they would need to adapt in order to survive. As a result of their evaluations, and without their immediate and total collective resistance to the 'new policy context' (a point to which I shall return in a moment), each university emerged as more competitive, more efficient, more entrepreneurial and more market-*like* and/or business-*like* than they had been *before* the implementation of the White Paper.

However, at the very same time, as each HEI reflected on their own identities (their histories, missions, wealth, statuses and reputations), their geographies (both in terms

of their locations and national and international spatial reach), their competitors (who and where were they and what threat might they pose to their on-going survival), and the socio-economic makeup and geographies of their student bodies (most specifically, their home undergraduates), they each chose to vary those same policy metrics in accordance with factors that *they* held as being valuable and/or useful to them. For instance, whilst each HEI rationally calculated how much life-sustaining value they would need to derive from the undergraduate fee, both DTC and FTL (the two low/mid-ranked institutions) pitched their headline fees at just £500 lower than the highest-ranking institutions in the sector. This was despite Government efforts to induce a price-differentiated market, which – in theory – should have related reputation and ranking to cost. However, in DTC’s and FTL’s evaluations, given their situated relational socio-economic contexts and the fact that the *quasi*-market metrics of the White Paper did not, actually, introduce the (potentially) structuring forces of ‘full-blown’ market competition, the HEIs simply couldn’t be ‘competed out of existence’ by their local, lower-cost competitors.

Further, whilst each HEI calculated the costs of *not* competing in either the AAB+ or flexible margin competitions, they each based their actual strategies on multiple logics and values. GE, for instance, *would* go after its ‘natural market’, but decided not to compete with other nationally selective universities for those valuable AAB+ students. Instead, it would focus on reaping the potential of their well-established international economic geographies, thereby avoiding competing with their English rivals (which GE felt would be to the detriment of the sector) while simultaneously escaping what GE saw as the increasing constraints of Government regulation. Similarly, although FTL decided that it *would* compete in the flexible margin competition given the local rootedness of their undergraduate students and the makeup of their local competitors, they decided that they would *also* seek to gain as much public funding as they could – primarily through the recruitment of part-time students, the market for which was not capped. In FTL’s evaluations, their typical students would end up re-paying very little of their loans *as graduates*. As such, given that Government was clearly out to “shaft” (Interviewee, 301) the local, lower-ranked institutions – which, in FTL’s opinion, were now the primary providers of HE as a public good – there was no reason that they shouldn’t get the most out of the British public purse in return.

Such variation of policy was also readily apparent as the universities put other governmentally induced strategies into practice. As demonstrated, although each university recognized the complex discourses underpinning both the White Paper's articulation and the universities' understandings of the student experience, KIS and the Student Charter, they ardently emphasised that the policies were becoming increasingly significant components of an emerging home undergraduate market, particularly in terms of the universities' heightened needs to: a) demonstrate 'value for money'; b) compete for their, now, more demanding, fee-paying students, and c) most fundamentally, *to survive*. Yet, both in formulating their strategies and in putting them into practice, the universities and the individual actors who made up those institutions all, variously, refused to see themselves simply as producers, or their students as consumers, of a product that could be bought and sold in a demand-supply market relationship. Instead, other values and logics – such as university autonomy, the pastoral nature of the teaching relationship, the importance of research in some institutions, and the fact that HE was a shared responsibility with students having to work hard in order to realize its value to themselves as individuals – variously guided their evaluations and practices. Thus, as the semiotically reduced metrics and values of both Government policy and the universities' strategies were confronted by a diversity of values, complexity was re-introduced as the HEIs moved from construal to construction.

Indeed, as my elucidation of the HEIs emerging economic geographies has underscored, it simply was not possible for the metrics and values of the HE White Paper to control wholly the evaluations, behaviours, values, and subjectivities of the HEIs directly in line with the reduced understandings of the market imaginary as put forward in its discourses and policies. Nor was it possible for Government to control wholly the emerging value of HE, which was, of course, inextricably intertwined with the universities' material and social economic practices, values and relations – as well as their non-economic practices, values and relations.

While each HEI took on the Government mantle of market-based efficiency by rationally choosing to cull some of their low-demand and financially, under-productive courses – thereby helping to normalise the basis of one particular market-based understanding of Value – they concomitantly chose to eschew such an understanding

by financially shoring up other loss-making subjects and students. As a result, the HEIs stressed that their practices and subjectivities reflected both business *and* non-business attributes and values, making them at most market-like in their overall situated socio-economic performances.

Further, although each HEI was willing to recognize the private value of HE to the individual – particularly where the home (under)-graduate would end up re-paying a substantial fee – they concomitantly rejected the notion that ‘adding value’ to the student through some metric of ‘employability’ was *the* basis of HE’s ‘worth’. By the same token, whilst each HEI was willing to recognize the public value of HE to the country, they concomitantly rejected the idea that social mobility and/or the economic development of the nation were the only public goods that were ‘worthy’ of public funding. Instead, in addition to these narrow Government articulations of HE’s value, each university stressed the much broader benefits of HE both to the individual and the country: its transformative nature to the individual; its general betterment of society through having a generally skilled and thinking population; its humanitarian and civilizing aspects; and the importance of learning and gaining knowledge as an end in itself.

Undoubtedly, the particular situated contexts of the HEIs variously shaped their understandings of HE’s private and public value. However, every one of the interviewees – *without exception* – underscored that the value of HE to the individual and society was so much more than the Government’s articulation of either its ‘private utility’ in gaining the graduate a well-paying job or its ‘public utility’ in promoting social mobility and/or strengthening the economy. As such, just like their economic geographies and the social relations of value that shape them, both the subjectivities of the HEIs – *the performance of which reflected their multiple ways of being human* – and the value of HE – *the multiplicity and practice of which defied its prescription by some iron Law of Value* – emerged as more multiple and complex than either the neoliberally-informed discourses, metrics and values embodied in the Government’s HE White Paper or its understandings of the social value of HE. And yet, as each of the examples presented in this thesis has demonstrated, the values of the market imaginary as set out by Government were definitively succeeding – *at least, in part* – in ‘crowding out’ a vast array of the previously held ideals and beliefs of the HEIs.

Thus, in light of the evidence presented, the argument of this thesis is that neoliberalization – with the emphasis on its processual nature – is a bottom-up as well as top-down process, which is constructed *in practice* in the context of an attempted normalisation of a particular understanding of value in the face of a diversity of values. For, in answer to Barnett’s (2005) question regarding *how* so-called hegemonic political economic projects become anchored at the level of everyday: *it is through the practice and performance of emerging economic geographies and the social relations of value which shape them*.

As analytically trivial as this assertion may seem, it really isn’t; for it literally *places* the social practice of economy right at the heart of political economy. The resolution of the relationship between politics and economy is not to residualise socio-economic practice because of its multiplicity and complexity. Rather, it is to accept its centrality in the production of political-economic relations, which are – *therefore* – always already geographically diverse. In the ontology of the *Ordinary Economy* in which normalisation and diversity necessarily co-exist with one another, this is an inescapable truth. And in this light, the interpretive openness of, so-called, ‘weak theory’ (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Lee, 2006; Larner, 2012) can be understood as a substantial methodological strength.

So what does this research contribute to understandings of neoliberal hegemony, and why is this important? Far from being, as some approaches to political economy have implied, a ‘directive ideology’ which is perfectly capable of dominating social relations by subordinating public values to those of the market; and far from being, as some governmentality studies have suggested, a comprehensive ‘rule regime’ through which their desired subject effects are *either* ‘automatically realized’ *or* ‘more or less successfully contested and resisted’, the research detailed in this PhD suggests a different perspective. That is: given the processual nature of neoliberalization that I have demonstrated, *neoliberal hegemony is best understood as a critical mass of moderate compliance*⁵⁹ *with the prevailing values and metrics of the market. But this*

⁵⁹ My use of the word “compliance”, here, is in its fullest sense: i.e. agreement, amenability, obedience, submission, fulfilment, observance, accordance etc. And each of these meanings may be multiply present at once.

critical mass is part of a much broader spectrum of evaluations, values, understandings of Value, and practices of value that is more diffuse.

Again, this may seem like an analytically trivial point, but again it isn't; for it underscores the inherently relational nature of neoliberal hegemony, as well as its evident contingency upon socio-economic practice for its actual, situated constitution. If, as evidenced in this PhD, economic geographies are always emerging and always open to perpetual interruptions and re-configuration by the diverse social and material relations, values and subjectivities of ordinary socio-economic practice, *then so too is the constitution of neoliberal hegemony*. As I have illustrated, the multiple and complex emergence of value requires enormous and persistent work if neoliberally informed market objectives regarding its constitution are to be maintained across time and space. As such, the practice and performance of value in the *Ordinary Economy* is not only inherently diverse; *it is full of political possibilities*.

Returning, then, to my arguments regarding the HEIs' failure to reject the further marketization of HE through the implementation of the 2011 White Paper. When I asked the interviewees to account for the lack of a collective and coherent voice, their dominant reasons were two-fold. Firstly, the diversity of institutions within the HE sector made some of my interviewees question the possibility of the universities finding adequate common ground for consensus. With so many different histories, identities, geographies and, hence, path dependencies, the universities were choosing to react to policy in their own self interests and/or those of their mission groups rather than examine their common understandings and values as a basis for acting in the interests of the sector as a whole. Secondly, the incremental imposition of policies of marketisation over the course of some thirty-five years or so meant that the HEIs were less likely to resist wholeheartedly the metrics and values of the 2011 White Paper. Certainly, my interviewees all spoke about the damage caused to HE through the increased competition, the need to seek-out diverse income streams, the adoption of other 'market-like' subjectivities and practices, and, most recently, the implementation of the undergraduate cost-covering fee. However, they also underscored that the HEIs and the actors that made up those institutions had variously come to *value* those very attributes and practices.

As my research has demonstrated, successive Governments from the late 1970s had implemented a variety of neoliberally informed tactics and techniques in order to regulate the sector towards a market-based framework of activity from which there had been definitive payoffs to the HEIs in adopting a whole host of, apparently, market-based practices and values. And for a multitude of reasons, these were payoffs that the HEIs were, now, loath to relinquish. Palace Aspirational, for example, had been raising its tariff entry points since 2009/10 in order to increase the university's ranking in the league tables and its reputation as an elite institution. Now, even though the university recognised that to continue the strategy at a time of increased competition and substantially higher undergraduate fees could severely impact its recruitment of WP students, they decided, not merely, to press on with the strategy as it stood, but to extend it. The value of competing in a, now, much freer reputational/prestige market far outweighed the value of upholding their local WP relations. Similarly, even though all four case studies recognised that their various outreach programmes were not, in essence, opportunities to market the universities to a WP audience, since the instigation of the 'top-up fee' in 2006, each HEI had steadily been increasing the crossover between its marketing and outreach activities. Now, given that the full value of the cost-covering fee was attached to the student, each HEI was not merely continuing this strategy: they were actually amalgamating some of their marketing and WP activities *and staff*. The value of marketing the university to a, now, more forcefully identified group of consumers was increasingly outweighing the value of outreach as an end in itself.

Importantly, this is not to suggest that attributes such as competitiveness, the desire to do well, and a whole host of other behaviours and activities – such as the drive for efficiency examined in Chapter Seven – are in any way 'essentially' market-based or driven. As Clark (2008: 135) underscores, an "impressive list" of multiple and complex practices, processes, sites and institutions have too often been narrowly "identified" as neoliberal, thereby leaving the critical and reflexive researcher to question "what is and is not neoliberal?" Rather, the point is to highlight that given the perceived lack of a common ground for consensus, the perceived utility and value of certain attributes and practices, and, most fundamentally, the constraints imposed by Government in terms of the available sources of life-sustaining value, the HEIs questioned what choice they had *but* to by-and-large implement the new policy regime

in their own ways given the sustained political push towards marketization together with the on-going imperative to, as the Browne Review (2010) so succinctly put it, *secure a sustainable future*.

And yet, as my research has clearly highlighted, the HEIs' practice of this one very narrow understanding of value, whilst critical in terms of its mass and the re-production of a neoliberal hegemony, was subject to a much broader spectrum of evaluations, values, practices and subjectivities. As a result, there were in fact innumerable commonalities in the HEIs framework of action around which they could have come together in order to achieve a collective consensus. Not least of which was their conviction that the material and social *form* by which HE should be funded and co-ordinated ought to both *reflect and protect* the multiple and complex value of HE as both a private and public good. As one strategic director and long-time academic from GE expounded when I asked what he/she might change regarding the direction of HE if given the opportunity:

“I would steer it to be more robustly and unapologetically value centred. Instead of apologizing for being what it is, we should say what it is... because we know! ...At the same time, I would try and translate that message into something that the other sectors can understand, and address their concerns. We have to have an identity – a core identity – that we feel proud of. And the core should be the bit... when all else fails, that you cannot chip away at; you cannot change. But one of the things you get with competition and running around trying to win the game and beat the other institutions all the time is the feeling that the core can be so easily dismantled through divide and rule. So, I would like us to stop, so nakedly, trying to win every single game that comes along. Whatever the rules, we should have some values that we hold onto.... That's what I would change”.

(106, Management, Steering, Long-time Academic)

In order to understand more about *how* quasi-public sectors like HE and their composite organizations can come together on the basis of their shared interests, a notion of the common good of the sector, and its relationship to the wider society, further research into their marketization still remains to be undertaken using the Emerging Economic Geographies and the *Ordinary Economy* approach. However, given the evidence presented in this PhD, it seems apparent that the necessarily partial constitution of neoliberal socio-economic relations in the *Ordinary Economy*, and the

fact that neoliberalization is constructed in practice from the bottom-up as much as the top-down, implies that any such political and social possibilities for neoliberalization's successful re-negotiation will be similarly embedded in the practice and performance of emerging economic geographies and their social and material relations of value.

This is an important insight, for it reveals with absolute clarity the formative significance of geography and the ways in which the *Ordinary Economy* is played out through that geography. Geography introduces not merely spatiality into the economy but in so doing, points to the inherency of the social, the cultural and the political within what is too often seen as a separate and autonomous field of economy (Lee, 2006; Mitchell, 1998). Thus, the outcomes of these geographically embedded processes of change – *which, necessarily, must take place* – can never be pre-given: they can never be predicted or pre-formed in advance of actual, situated socio-economic practice.

It is precisely because the market is neither functionally autonomous – *there can be no such thing as a 'free' market* – nor pure – *economy is always a complex mix of material and immaterial processes and relations* – that state intervention and regulation are necessary both to discipline and constrain economic interpretations and practices (via their attempted normalisation) and to achieve certain goals – whether ideologically driven or driven by limited understandings of economy. Neither a neoliberally informed capitalism nor any other kind of social relations of value are 'natural'. They are *always* socially constructed and so need constant work, re-enforcement and promotion in order to achieve the particular objectives and states of political-economic existence, which are seen as desirable by those who hold power.

When seen in this light, an approach that focuses on the *Ordinary Economy* to examine these issues can contribute significantly to wider debates taking place in economic geography regarding the necessity to move beyond (simply) studies of neoliberalization or critiques of neoliberalism per se (e.g. Barnett, 2005, 2008; Castree, 2006; Clark, 2008; Collier, 2005; Ferguson, 2010; Lerner, 2003, 2012; Peck, 2008, 2010, 2013c; Peck et al, 2010; Pollard et al, 2015; Storper, 2015; Venugopal, 2015). By ontologically and epistemologically placing value and its inescapable social relations at the heart of political-economic activity the approach set out in this PhD provides a theoretically grounded method for exploring, what Pollard et al refer to as,

“the development of a positive conception of what should come next” (2015: 1). If, as Ferguson (2010) suggests, understanding what a more sustainable, balanced and progressive economy might look like beyond neoliberalism’s “antis” – anti-privatisation, anti-deregulation, anti-marketization etc. – involves asking the difficult question, “what do we want?” Then, exploring the complex ideals, beliefs, norms and values that underpin our actual, situated socio-economic practices and performances must surely be central to illuminating the presence and progressive potential of the diverse actors, organisations and strategies around which *a new* critical mass of moderate compliance can be formed.

In its necessity to take place, government policy is inescapably mediated by local, social relations of value that are always, already multiple and complex and full of political possibilities. And the emerging economic geographies of HE in England that this PhD has illuminated provide a very clear explication of this. The practice and performance of emerging economic geographies in light of new policy metrics offers both opportunities and constraints for actors to move on in the world. And it is the practice and performance of socio-spatial economic relations that determines what is and is not value.

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PhD Interview Schedule: Sample. Spring 2012.

Introduction

First of all, thank you again for agreeing to take part in my research. I really appreciate that your time is valuable and I am very grateful to you for meeting with me today.

I understand that you know a little bit about my research already, but if I could give you a brief overview whilst we are setting up, that might be helpful.

So, I am really interested in how different universities are negotiating their way through the current changes that are taking place in higher education with a specific focus on current policy – primarily the Higher Education White Paper and its supporting documents/policies coming from HEFCE and BIS.

We seem to have heard quite a lot about higher education increasingly becoming marketised – particularly in the press, but also from students and perhaps, even, colleagues – but perhaps we have also heard quite a lot about the need to maintain the ‘public good’ of higher education and its benefits to wider society... I don’t know. The important thing is that my aim here, today, is to explore your views and experiences regarding what is happening in the HE sector and how the university is negotiating its way through that.

So the interview will be structured around three core topics. The first involves the notion that HE is becoming increasingly marketised. So, we’ll be exploring various aspects of the White Paper – some that, purportedly, are introducing market or quasi-market relations into the HE sector, and others that seem to be more focused on widening participation. Again, what is important to me, here, is exploring YOUR views and experiences.

Secondly, and relatedly, we’ll be discussing the value of higher education and how that value arises. So, for example, that may involve exploring what you feel HE is for and where you feel your views come from; it may involve exploring what you feel Government believes about the value of HE and why you think that is; or it may

involve considering any other interested parties that you feel are important in terms of the value of HE.

Finally, as a geographer, I'm really interested in how the existing socio-economic geographies and identity of the university help to shape your emerging strategies. So, for example, we'll be exploring the socio-economic makeup and geographies of your different student bodies and how they may influence the ways in which current policy is being understood and implemented by the university.

So those are the primary topics that we'll be exploring together.

*Please remember that I am not trying to arrive at any pre-conceived ideas or answers to any of this. It is your views and experiences that we are exploring, so please do say exactly what you want from your own perspective. And, perhaps, in some ways you may even enjoy it. Hopefully it'll feel more like a conversation than an interrogation.

*If you feel uncomfortable or want a break at any time, please just say, and we'll either pause or stop – it'll be entirely up to you.

*And, of course, if you need me to re-phrase a question, please do say.

*So, here is your information sheet, which re-states the intentions of my research which we discussed by e-mail. It also has my contact details and those of my supervisors should you have any questions or concerns.

*With your permission, I'd like to record the interview; but as an alternative I can take notes if you prefer.

*So, if you feel happy to proceed, you just need to sign off on the consent form and we can press on. (Go through form if needed).

Opening Questions

If we open with a nice easy question to get us started...

Can you tell me a little bit about your position at the university and the sort of role you play in helping to steer the university forward?

- How long at this institution?
- How long in this position?
- What did you do before this?
- How long in academia in total?
- Life just before academia?

What made you interested in taking on your current (steering) role? What drew you to it?

So, just thinking about (name of university), how would you characterize the university?

- Listen/prompt for – History, Geographies, Student identities...

What factors do you feel are most influencing the university's direction, currently?

- Listen/prompt for – History, Students, VC, Government Policy, Academic values (teaching/research/autonomy).

Value of HE

So, just starting to think about the value of HE: what do you feel that HE is for?

- Listen/prompt for – Public good/social, economic... Private good/individual gain

Where do you feel you get that sense of value from? For example, is it personal experience; being here at this university; wider debates regarding HE's value?

- Is your understanding broadly in line with that of the institution? Tell me about that.

What messages do you feel are coming from Government at the moment regarding the value of HE?

- And what prompts you to say that? In what ways do those Government discourses show themselves?
- Possible prompt – Have those message shifted over the years? Tell me about that.

Optional Question – So, how would you describe (the realm of HE/the HE sector) currently?

- And has HE always been like this? If not, in what ways is it different from the past? And what factors have influenced the changes (if any)?
- So how would you describe HE before these changes? Why do you feel it was different

Current Policy – Marketisation (?)

OK, so I'd like to start thinking about current policy – particularly the HE White Paper and its supporting documents – and this idea that HE may or may not be becoming more marketised, depending on your perspective.

What elements of current policy are most influencing/impacting the direction of the university at the moment and in what ways?

- Listen/prompt for – Changes to funding (removal of the BTG) (Increase in the student fee), Emphasis on student demand, AAB+ and/or FMC, Income diversification, WP/WA agenda

On a very practical level, I imagine that the university has had to look at its funding and financial status and how this might shift going forward. Can you tell me about this?

- Listen/prompt for – Internal processes, Calculations, Removal of the BTG, Strategies (see below)

There are some really interesting policies in the White Paper that I'd like to explore with you.

The first involves the introduction of the cost-covering fee for home/EU undergraduates. I'd like to start quite broadly, here.

- What are the implications of the full-cost fee for the institution?
- Do you feel that it will impact the relationship between the institution and the student? If so, in what ways and why?
- What about academic staff? Will the new fee regime impact the student teacher relationship? If so, in what ways and why?

OK, so being a bit more specific about your fees. I see that the university has implemented (state the fee structure). Can you tell me what your rationale was for doing this?

- Listen/prompt for – Basic function of cost, How courses and subjects are valued, Student identity (socio-economic status), What other universities are doing

I see that you have/have not differentiated the fee across different subjects. Can you tell me about your rationale for this?

Have you thought about what you might need to do with your fee structure in the future should demand for certain subjects fall or rise? Tell me about this?

- Listen/prompt for – Differentiation of income streams, Price rationales, Competition.

At the moment, does the university cross-subsidise from one course to another? Either way, what is your rationale for this?

Would you consider dropping any courses or subjects if demand was particularly low? Can you explain your rationale here?

OK. So the second policy I'd like to explore involves the implementation of the AAB+ Competition.

- What do you think about the competition?
- Can you tell me how it may impact the university?
- What strategies have you put in place in terms of the AAB+ Competition?
- What impact do you feel it will have on the HE sector overall?

The third involves the implementation of the Flexible Margin Competition.

- What do you think about the competition?
- Can you tell me how it may impact the university?
- What strategies have you put in place in terms of the FMC?
- What impact do you feel it will have on the HE sector overall?

The Government would also like to see universities produce timely and relevant information for students in the form of KIS.

- In principle, what do you think about the idea of providing good information about the university and the university experience for students?
- How has the university responded to the Government's policy?
- How do you feel about the sort of information that you are being asked to provide through KIS?
- Imagining the Government's perspective, what do you think has prompted the sort of information that they would like to see universities provide?
- What do you feel is KEY for a student to know about the university?
- Tell me about any strategies that the university is implementing other than KIS regarding its provision of information.

Another aspect of the White Paper that is quite interesting is its emphasis on the student experience.

- What is the general stance of the university towards the student experience?
- Please tell me about any specific strategies you have regarding the SE
- What are your personal views regarding the SE and how do you see it relating to policy?

Are there any other aspects of current policy that you would like to discuss before we move onto Widening Participation?

THROUGHOUT ALL OF THE ABOVE, LISTEN OUT FOR DISCOURSES REGARDING COMPETITION, EFFICIENCY, DEMAND AND VALUES. LISTEN ALSO FOR OTHER DISCOURSES ARISING FROM INTERVIEWEE TESTIMONIES – ALTERNATIVE REASONS AND MOTIVATIONS, INTERVIEWEE AND UNIVERSITY SPECIFIC PERSPECTIVES.

Widening Participation

OK, so I'd like to explore the notion of widening participation or widening access. I know that the university has had to produce an access agreement in relation to your proposed fee structure, and this has been submitted to HEFCE.

Firstly, tell me a bit about your access agreement – particularly in relation to bursaries and fee waivers. What does it involve and what was your rationale for structuring it in the way you have?

- Listen/prompt for – What factors influenced the way it is structured (students, competitors, institutional values, university location/geographies, Government policies)

Tell me a bit about your outreach programmes.

- Listen/prompt for – Do they target specific areas, Are they local or further afield, Are they about recruitment and/or raising aspirations?

What does it mean to the university to be involved in WP?

- Listen/prompt for – The broad value of WP, Student identity, University values, actions and activities.

Do you feel that there are any tensions or conflicts between the new funding structures for HE and the notion of WP? Either way, can you elaborate?

OK. So you'll be pleased to know that we are coming to the end of the interview now, so I'd just like to explore a couple of rounding off questions with you.

So, just thinking about what we've discussed, what room do you feel you have to actually steer a course – decide a course – for the university given recent trends?

Final Question from me. If you had a magic wand and could change HE in whatever way you wished, what would you do?

Is there anything else you would like to add to what we've discussed today?

Thanks for participation.

What happens next in the research process.

Would the interviewee like to see interview transcript or context of quotes?

Keeping in touch – details on Information Sheet.