

**Higher and Degree Apprenticeships in English
Higher Education: a Policy Implementation study**

Sue Graham, BA (Hons), MSc

May 2019

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of Educational Research,
Lancaster University, UK.

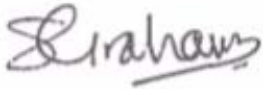
Higher and Degree Apprenticeships in English Higher Education: a Policy Implementation study

Sue Graham, BA (Hons), MSc

This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

I confirm that the word-length conforms to the permitted maximum.

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Graham', written in a cursive style.

Susan Frances Graham

May 2019

Sue Graham, BA (Hons), MSc
Doctor of Philosophy,
May 2019

Abstract

The period 2010-19, which is the focus of this research saw several key policy developments in the skills and education arena which were to have a considerable impact on the higher education sector in England. These included an expansion of the apprenticeship programme to include higher (level 4 +), and then degree apprenticeships, a new employer-led method for designing the content and assessment and a major shift in the way the whole programme was funded.

This research set out to identify the drivers, tensions and opportunities presented by government policy on higher/degree apprenticeships and how this affected universities in England. This was prompted by the increasing number of universities that decided to register and deliver apprenticeships – something that would have been unheard of at the start of 2010. As of 31st December 2018, 97 English universities had registered to deliver apprenticeships.

The approach taken in this work was a qualitative study that used thematic analysis of relevant policy documentation triangulated with semi-structured interviews with policy informants (individuals holding a role related to policy production) and participants working in higher education responsible for delivering the policy.

The themes that were identified related to policy intention and implementation, policy levers, programme design, learning, teaching and assessment and finally perceptions and attitudes.

These themes were analysed drawing upon policy implementation theoretical frameworks including top-down and bottom-up implementation (Sabatier, 1986, Trowler, 2014a), policy networks and principal-agent theory (Gunn, 2015), change management (Fullan, 2003) and Saunders' policy implementation staircase (Saunders and Reynolds, 1987, Saunders and Sin, 2014). The research found that tensions existed around the increasing role of neoliberalism, the purpose of HE in the 21st century, academic identity and resistance and cultural and systemic clashes. Opportunities and benefits identified included market opportunities for higher education, pedagogic and curriculum innovations and improved civic engagement and business partnerships.

Publications derived from this work

Chapter commissioned for forthcoming book, which will draw upon this research:

Graham, S. and Minton, A. 'Assessment Matters in Work-based Learning (working title)' in: R. Helyer (ed.) (forthcoming). *The Work-based Learning Student Handbook*, Third edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Malcolm Tight who has encouraged and guided me throughout, even when I thought I couldn't do it. Also to Alison Sedgwick and Ann-Marie Houghton in the Department of Education Research at Lancaster University for their constant positivity. Thanks too to the library staff at Lancaster whose support has been excellent.

I would also like to put on record my thanks to Northumbria University who have supported me in undertaking this PhD both financially and in other practical ways. Particular thanks to Steph, Steven, Ben and Joe and to all my wonderful colleagues past and present. Special thanks to Guy Brown for your support and critical encouragement.

I would also like to acknowledge the many people who agreed to give their time and to be interviewed for this research. I hope that this work may be of use to some of you in the future. I would particularly like to acknowledge my friend and mentor, Professor Ruth Helyer who sadly passed away as I was completing this work.

Special thanks go to my proof-reading team – Diane Balsillie, Sally Ellis, Sarah Gwilliam, Caroline Parkin, Lesley Sherrin and my Mum, Betty Gaston – you all helped me so much and gave up your time so willingly – I really appreciate it. Thanks too to Angus Graham for checking (and re-checking) the references with such patience and good humour!

There is a group of people out there that have been through this with me –Cohort 20. Thank you one and all. So many times have you been there when I needed you. See you on the WhatsApp chat!

Thank you to all that have provided emotional and practical support throughout this process – to my good friends who have kept me going and picked me up. To Janet and Gordon and to my parents Maurice and Betty – thank you for *all* you do.

Huge thanks to Alistair and Nicholas – for always believing in me and for giving me those much needed hugs. And finally to Angus – I couldn't have done this without you - thank you for never giving up on me and encouraging me all the way and in so many ways. This is for you.

List of abbreviations

AELP	Association of Education and Learning Providers
AoC	Association of Colleges
BEIS	(Govt) Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
BaME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
DfE	(Government) Department for Education
DBIS	(Govt) Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2009-16)
DA	Degree Apprenticeship
ELQ	Equal or Lower Qualification
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency (2017-)
EPA	End Point Assessment
EPAO	End Point Assessment Organisation
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England (ceased in 2018)
HA	Higher Apprenticeship
HDA	Higher/Degree Apprenticeship
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IfA	Institute for Apprenticeships (2017-18)
IfATE	Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (2018-)
IFS	Institute for Fiscal Studies
ILR	Individual Learner Return
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NIACE	National Institute for Adult Continuing Education
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills
OfS	Office for Students (replaced HEFCE 2018)
OfQUAL	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
ROATP	Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers
REPAO	Register of End Point Assessment Organisations
SFA	Skills Funding Agency (2010-17)
SIC	Standard Industry Classification
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
UUK	Universities UK
UVAC	Universities Vocational Awards Council
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background	1
1.1 Introduction to the topic and focus of the research	1
1.2 Aim of Proposed Research	1
1.3 Research Questions.....	2
1.4 Research Design.....	2
1.5 Scope of Research.....	4
1.6 Placing the Research in Context: Skills and HE Policy	4
1.7 Apprenticeships – an overview of key aspects and terminology	5
1.8 Structure of the Thesis	8
1.9 Contribution to knowledge.....	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review	10
2.1 Introduction.....	10
2.2 Methodology.....	10
2.3 Policy Implementation Studies	11
2.4 Policy in Context: Higher Education and Economic Considerations	20
2.5 Higher and Degree apprenticeships – disruptors or same old?	22
Chapter 3: Methodology	31
3.1 Introduction.....	31
3.2 Research Design.....	32
3.3 Research Method.....	36
3.4 Data Analysis	40
3.5 Ethics.....	44
3.6 Researcher Positioning & Reflexivity	44
3.7 Generalisability, Validity, Reliability and Credibility	45
3.8 Potential pitfalls and limitations	46
Chapter 4: Findings	48
4.1 Introduction and Central themes	48
4.2 Policy: intention and implementation.....	48

4.3	Policy Levers	62
4.4	Programme Design	67
4.5	Learning, Teaching and Assessment	80
4.6	Perceptions and attitudes	91
4.7	Conclusion.....	96
	Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis	97
5.1	Introduction.....	97
5.2	Overall Policy Intention.....	97
5.3	Economic Considerations.....	99
5.4	Institutional Strategy.....	100
5.5	Policy Levers	104
5.6	Learning, Teaching and Assessment	112
5.7	Perceptions and Attitudes	115
5.8	Summary	119
	Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	120
6.1	Purpose and aims of Research	120
6.2	Originality and Contribution to knowledge.....	120
6.3	Research Questions Revisited	120
6.4	Reflection and impact.....	124
6.5	Next steps and possible areas for future research.....	124

List of Figures and Tables

Tables:

		Section
Table 1:	Crotty's Table applied to Research	3.2
Table 2:	Overview of Research Participants	3.3.2
Table 3:	Sabatier's Policy implementation Criteria	5.2

Figures:

Figure 1:	Apprenticeship Typology—a brief overview	1.7.2
Figure 2:	Implementation Staircase Model	5.4
Figure 3:	Vignette – Senior Leader Master's DA	5.5

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

“Degree Apprenticeships ... will bring the world of business and the world of education closer together, and let us build the high-level technical skills needed for the jobs of the future. I want to see many more businesses and universities begin to offer them”. David Cameron, Prime Minister (Prime Minister's Office, 2015).

1.1 Introduction to the topic and focus of the research

The period 2010-19, which is the focus of this research, saw several key policy developments in the skills and education arena which were to have a considerable impact on the higher education sector in England. These included an expansion of the apprenticeship programme to include higher and then degree apprenticeships, a new employer-led method for designing the content and assessment and a major shift in the way the whole programme was funded. The apprenticeship levy is the first legislation (United Kingdom Parliament, 2016a) that essentially compels employers either to invest in a programme of skills development or to write off considerable sums of money (Bravenboer, 2016, WonkHE, 2019a, WonkHE, 2019b). Powell and Walsh (2018) identify the introduction of apprenticeships into the HE system as a third ‘radical shift in recent times’ (after massification and introduction of higher fees), thus providing some context for the importance of this research at this time.

1.2 Aim of Proposed Research

Gunn (2015) identifies three ways that policy can be used in researching higher education:

- to provide a context or backdrop
- to provide a focus of an implementation study, i.e. to look at a policy in order to understand how this has played out in practice
- where the policy provides the primary focus of the research and where the object of the research is to understand the policy cycle and process.

Certainly there is a link between the second and third points and this piece of work is located somewhere between these latter two categories in that it seeks to understand the third element (i.e. how this policy has developed) and also how this is being understood and enacted at meso and micro levels (see 1.5):

A research project can effectively bridge this divide by combining an analysis of the processes by which policies are made and implemented with an evaluation of the substantive content of these policies. (Gunn, 2015; p.33)

This research seeks to unpack some of the drivers, tensions and opportunities presented by this policy for the university sector in England and to understand the approach and responses to the policy implementation from key stakeholders in a range of settings & locations, focusing on the period 2010 to 2018. (N.B. Education is a devolved policy area and therefore different policy approaches have been experienced in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). The research was prompted by the increasing number of universities registered to deliver apprenticeships – something that would have been unheard of at the start of 2010. As of 31st Dec 2018, 106 UK universities (of which 97 were located in England) had been successfully added to the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (ROATP) (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2018).

Relevant policy drivers include the increasing importance of employer engagement in HE and the focus on the knowledge economy. In addition to economic factors there is increasing pressure on how higher level skills and technical and vocational education can address social inequalities, although this has also engendered debates as to whether this type of education is seen as second-rate or only for certain types of learners (Doel, 2017, Strike, 2017, Hordern, 2015a). This study will seek to understand these contested areas and underlying attitudes and perceptions around higher and degree apprenticeships, and investigate the ‘*snobbish attitude*’ (Havergal, 2016, Matthews, 2016) in describing how institutions of higher education have seen the implementation of higher and degree apprenticeships.

1.3 Research Questions

In developing these research questions I have attempted to frame them to meet the criteria set out by Trowler (2015b) i.e. that they are ‘answerable... specific, analytical... operational and significant’.

The aim of this research is to answer the following research questions:

- a) What was the intention of government policy for English Higher Education (HE) with regard to higher and degree apprenticeships?
- b) How was this policy implemented and enacted at macro and meso levels?
- c) What tensions and benefits were experienced at micro level by those responsible for implementation and delivery within HEIs?

1.4 Research Design

This piece of work takes an interpretivist epistemology aligned with a constructivist ontology. An inductive approach to theory generation has been taken through this work; no specific theory is posed at the outset to be proven or disproved. Instead, the work will

be presented within a conceptual framework relating to policy implementation and enactment theory.

In order to understand what issues, tensions, attitudes and positive outcomes are being experienced by stakeholders as a result of the introduction and implementation of this policy, a qualitative study was undertaken. A qualitative methods approach was utilised, combining documentary analysis of policy texts alongside semi-structured interviews with policy informants and participants working at the micro level in an English university setting. Both data sets were subjected to a thematic analysis and then interpreted within policy implementation theoretical frameworks. This enabled me to address some of the gaps identified in the literature review and to provide some answers to the above research questions.

This thesis takes a policy implementation framework as its lens through which to understand and analyse the findings of this research within a 'policy trajectory study' (Lingard and Garrick, 1997; p.157). The findings are analysed drawing on a range of these theories in line with the policy 'toolbox' proposed by Ball and include his policy trajectory framework (Ball, 2006; p.43 & p.51).

The analysis draws upon the wider policy implementation literature and locates aspects within relevant theoretical models including top-down and bottom-up implementation, policy networks, principal-agent theory, change management and the implementation staircase. It will also consider the relevance of Matland's (1995) 'Ambiguity-Conflict Matrix'.

1.5 Macro, Meso and Micro – Defining the Terms

This would be a good point at which to clarify the meaning being attached to terms macro, meso, and micro in this thesis. While such designations are inevitably open to debate and criticism, a case for developing research into policy implementation at the meso and micro level of higher education institutions has been made in earlier works (Trowler, 2014a, Tight, 2018; p.118).

The thesis will consider different positions on this including Gunn's views on neo-institutionalism – the idea that while institutions deliver smooth rules of engagement at the senior management (meso for the purposes of this study) level, alongside this there is a more fluid and messy understanding of norms and cultures at micro levels – described by Gunn as the 'inter-play between structure and agency' (2015; 35). Jacob (2009) draws attention to the role of the university as an organisational actor at the meso

level, often required by government to act to develop and implement policy; a good example of which is the development and delivery of higher and degree apprenticeships.

Trowler views the terms differently applying macro, meso and micro to the institution as a whole with the macro referring to senior management, the meso to departmental management and micro to the individual delivering the policy or change in question (See 5.7.1).

What is important is to be clear on how the terms are used here and the designations applied in this thesis are as follows:

- ‘Macro’ refers to Government/national/official policy bodies
- ‘Meso’ refers to university senior management/decision-making level e.g. governing body or university executive/board
- ‘Micro’ refers to individual units, departments and individual members of staff

See Figure 2 ‘The Implementation Staircase’ for a diagrammatic representation of this.

1.6 Scope of Research

The scope of this research is the implementation of policy relating to higher and degree apprenticeships within English higher education in the period 2010-18. This is not a quantitative review of specific programmes, disciplines, numbers of apprentices etc. Much of this quantitative data is in the public domain and would provide a useful basis for a different type of study (see Chapter 6).

1.7 Placing the Research in Context: Skills and HE Policy

The Leitch Review of Skills (2005, 2006) focused on the fact that those already in the workforce needed to ‘upskill’ to level 4 and above (level 4 being the equivalent of the first year of an undergraduate degree). Leitch set a bold challenge to address skills deficits within the workforce, with a target of 40% of the workforce achieving at least a level 4 qualification (equivalent to first year degree level). This fundamental and wide scale review set the tone for skills policies in the years to come – both under the final years of the Labour government and for the subsequent Coalition (2010-15) and Conservative governments (2015-17) which are the focus of this research.

The Richard Review (2012) set out the importance and potential of the apprenticeship system to transform and address skills shortages in the UK. Importantly this report set the challenge to government and employers which resulted in many of the key policies such as the trailblazer groups (Riley, 2017), more robust apprenticeship standards, the legal protection of the term ‘apprentice’ and the policy of employers funding themselves through what has become the levy (Keep, 2015). The Richard Review did not, however,

propose any role for universities in this space, referring only to them as an ‘alternative to apprenticeships’ – a far cry from the expansion that subsequently resulted.

One of the fundamental reforms proposed by Richard was the removal of the old apprenticeships frameworks (which were typically a combination of work-based learning and an embedded competency-based vocational qualification) and to replace these with a new set of supposedly more rigorous apprenticeship standards. These had the aim that *‘for each category of occupation, there should be a standard that clearly describes the level of skill and competency required to do the job well and to operate confidently in the sector’* (Richard, 2012; p.51).

In the Coalition government’s Autumn Statement (HM Treasury, 2014) *‘...in order to ensure all young people can compete in the global economy’*, the Chancellor stated that the government would:

- ‘remove the cap on university places so more people can go into higher education – it is estimated this will allow 60,000 more young people to go to university every year and
- provide an extra £40 million to increase the number of people starting higher apprenticeships by 20,000’

This was followed by the Conservative government launching degree apprenticeships in March 2015 and then in the Budget of July 2015 setting the target of 3m new apprenticeships and protecting the term in law (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015b).

It is no coincidence that many of these announcements have been made in the context of *economic* rather than *education* policy; apprenticeships are seen as playing a major part in building economic growth through higher skills and through contributing to the lag in national productivity (HM Treasury, 2015c). This is provided as evidence for the rise of prominence of degree and higher apprenticeships (Riley, 2017). More recently there has been the publication of the Industrial Strategy (HM Government, 2017a, HM Government, 2017b).

1.8 Apprenticeships – an overview of key aspects and terminology

The following sections give some background to specific policy areas that are discussed in later chapters. Some of the elements described below are contested and this will be presented and analysed in more depth in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

1.9 National Registers

There are three relevant registers to be aware of:

- The Office for Students (OfS) Register: The Register lists all the English higher education providers officially registered by the OfS. It is a single, authoritative reference about a provider's regulatory status and all providers of degree apprenticeships must be on this register
- The Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (ROATP): all providers, including universities, must also go through a rigorous approval process if they wish to deliver apprenticeships.
- The Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations (REPAO): all organisations wishing to act as end-point assessors must register including universities awarding integrated degree apprenticeships (see below).

1.9.1 Types of apprenticeship

Apprenticeship Frameworks (to be withdrawn by 2020)

These include a technical and knowledge element and see an academic qualification combined with workplace learning. There is no specific end-point assessment built in and it was these types of programmes that were seen as low quality in many cases –see the government-commissioned review of apprenticeships by Doug Richard (2012).

Apprenticeship Standards

The Richard Review (2012) heralded a new era of apprenticeship standards which are seen as a higher quality, employer driven model. The standards have to be designed by groups of large and small employers known as trailblazers. These can be from Level 2 to 7 and can incorporate a qualification in line with the three mandatory qualification tests:

- a) a regulatory requirement in the occupational area to which the standard relates;
- b) qualification is required for professional registration;
- c) qualification is used as a 'hard sift' i.e. an absolute requirement when applying for jobs in the occupation related to the standard'. (Department for Education, 2017; p.18).

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships –understanding the difference

Higher apprenticeships can either be:

- Old-style Frameworks (now phasing out) (levels 4-7) include a qualification as the 'knowledge' element (e.g. a foundation degree at level 5). Examples include Construction Management (Level 6)
- Newer-style Standards (levels 4-7) designed by an employer-led trailblazer. They *can* include a qualification (and this *can* be a degree) but if this does not meet the three tests the qualification registration should be costed/charged for separately. Examples include Solicitor or Professional Accountant.

Degree apprenticeships (levels 6 or 7) are only available under the newer trailblazer-designed Standards and must currently include an undergraduate or postgraduate degree (which should now meet one of the three mandatory qualification tests). Examples include Registered Nurse or Chartered Surveyor.

Both higher and degree apprenticeships can align with professional and regulatory body requirements and can result in a designated professional accreditation. The full list of standards is on the Institute for Apprenticeships website (Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, 2019).

Figure 1: Apprenticeship Typology, a brief overview

It would be fair to say some confusion remains about the exact definitions of the different types of programmes (Mulkeen et al., 2019; 5). Figure.1 provides an overview.

1.9.2 Trailblazers and standards

Apprenticeship standards are employer- (as opposed to education/training provider-) led and are designed by employer groups known as ‘trailblazers’, conceived as a competitive process by Richard. The review and subsequent government response made it clear that it was important to avoid one or two employers designing programmes to meet their own specific requirements, rather than that of the wider sector. Interestingly the response to the review was jointly produced by two government departments and stated that the new style of apprenticeships should ‘*include skills which are relevant and valuable beyond just the current job, supporting progression within the sector*’ (Department for Business Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2013; p.12)

Once they have completed the design, trailblazers submit their proposals to the Department for Education (until 2017) and since then to the Institute for Apprenticeships, which then reviews them (often over an extended time period) via the 15 vocational ‘route panels’. Standards are set at specific levels – based on occupational competency level descriptors rather than the more common qualification levels (although interestingly they align exactly). The standards follow a two-page template and detail the skills, knowledge and behaviours required to undertake the specified occupation and do not normally include a qualification. Critically all apprenticeships must have a duration of at least 12 months and must include 20% of ‘off the job’ training.

1.9.3 End-point assessment

Each standard also has to submit an assessment plan as part of the approval process. All standards must include a final ‘end-point assessment’, where apprentices are assessed by an independent and suitably qualified person who will ‘sign-off’ their ability to do the role. Degree apprenticeships are unique in that they can be *integrated* (i.e. the degree award is also the end-point assessment) or *non-integrated* – whereby a third party assessor will assess occupational competence – normally after the award of the degree. Failure to complete end-point assessment can result in financial penalties to the university and risk removal from the ROATP.

1.9.4 Apprenticeship Levy and Non-Levy payers – a new funding mechanism

2017 saw the implementation of a flagship piece of government policy – the new apprenticeship levy and associated funding rules (HM Government, 2015). The levy means that all employers with an annual payroll bill of over £3m have to pay 0.5% into

an apprenticeship account. Smaller employers do not pay the levy and are able to recoup at least 90% (95% since April 2019) of training costs. Non-levy funding is allocated by the ESFA and is subject to a competitive procurement exercise in which providers bid for an allocation of funding in order to be able to offer apprenticeships to non-levy paying employers.

This policy has the dual aim of incentivising employers to put new (and existing staff) onto apprenticeship programmes which include higher apprenticeships (HAs) and, for the first time, degree apprenticeships (DAs) delivered by the HE sector in England. This policy is leading to a shift in the way many undergraduate and postgraduate professional and vocational programmes are funded, designed and delivered.

1.9.5 Equal and Lower Qualifications

Another major policy lever at play here is that the Equal and Lower Qualification (ELQ) rules that apply in the rest of HE (which preclude anyone receiving funding twice for study at the same or lower levels than already achieved) do not apply in apprenticeships as long as it can be proved that new skills are being ‘taught’ (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2017; para 67). This opens up the scenario whereby already highly skilled employees (including graduates) can be funded through to do a second degree in a new occupational or professional area, where this is prohibited in the mainstream HE funding environment.

1.9.6 Funding bands

Each apprenticeship standard is awarded a funding band by the Institute for Apprenticeships which sets the maximum that can be funded (either via the levy or via the non-levy funding allocations). Employers can negotiate lower fees or agree to pay higher fees (but anything over the allocated funding band must be paid by the employer outside any levy / non-levy funding).

1.10 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 presents the literature relevant to the thesis and the research questions. It surveys peer reviewed literature in relation to the theoretical framework (policy implementation and enactment) and provides a synthesis of literature relevant to the topic of degree and higher apprenticeships. Chapter 3 describes the methodology in more detail – including epistemological and ontological positioning, method, theoretical and conceptual framework, ethical considerations, researcher positioning and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research. The analysis of the policy documents and semi-structured interviews identified the following key themes:

-
- Policy intention and implementation
 - Policy Levers
 - Programme Design
 - Learning, Teaching and Assessment
 - Perceptions and Attitudes

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of findings of the research and considers them against a policy implementation theoretical framework. Some of the contested areas and debates centre around neoliberalism, culture, change, hegemonies, attitudes and perceptions. Chapter 6 draws conclusions from this work, revisiting and responding to the original research questions. It also provides a reflection on the contribution of this work and recommends areas ripe for future research.

1.11 Contribution to knowledge

Considering some the factors listed above, this work explores what the UK's **current** higher skills policy on higher and degree apprenticeships means in practice for people working in a range of roles in English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). As this is a recent phenomenon, this is a relatively under-researched area and this work will therefore make a contribution to the body of knowledge. In addition it will add to the growing work in the area of policy implementation in HE more widely. Taken together this research informs the sector on how the policy is being implemented, enacted and experienced and what lessons can be learnt and shared more widely.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter provides a discussion framed around contemporary literature. The theoretical framework for this study has emerged by bringing together several perspectives to help understand the context of this piece of research. The chapter starts with a brief overview of the purpose and methodology of literature review in both general and specific terms. It then moves on to synthesise literature on policy implementation, enactment and mediation, considering the merits and influence of various concepts including the top-down/bottom-up policy debate, critical policy studies and management of change models. The literature review aims to provide a balance of context alongside a historical and contemporary analysis of theoretical arguments. The chapter then goes on to bring the topic of the research, skills policy and the HE sector into focus in order to understand current research and to identify a gap into which this piece of work fits.

2.2 Methodology

Harlen and Schapp (1998) identify several reasons why it is useful to undertake a critical review of existing literature at the outset of one's research. This chapter seeks to address the first three of their reasons; i.e.: *'To clarify what is already known and what theoretical frameworks already exist, to clarify what has already been done and to avoid 're-inventing the wheel' and to identify gaps in existing knowledge and where further study is required.'* (Adapted from Harlen and Schlapp (1998))

They go on to describe different models of literature reviews; that of the traditional approach, secondly that of 'meta-analysis' as developed by Glass, whereby each study is analysed for the calibrated effect of the research intervention and thirdly 'best evidence synthesis', which combines systematic and narrative approaches. This literature review uses a traditional approach, i.e. relevant texts have been collected and analysed in a narrative format, but it is useful to be aware of other methods. It is also relevant to consider here Cooper's Taxonomy of Literature Reviews (Cooper, 1988), which helped me to clarify the focus, perspective and positioning of the literature within this piece of research.

In order to make the review of literature as thorough as possible, reference was made to Kirk et al. (2002; 46-48) who highlight the importance of constructing a well-defined search strategy and set out key stages, which were followed in the development of the review of the literature. This resulted in a wide list of references, from which the irrelevant were discarded and the most useful texts identified through a concept mapping process as described by Hart (1998; 142).

For the policy implementation section, a search was done on relevant books and journal articles focused on public policy enactment and implementation. As this section was aimed at gaining an overview of the theoretical and conceptual framework, the search went back to the seminal work of Pressman and Wildavsky in 1973 and developed from there with professional librarian support. This was complemented with a database search on Scopus and Academic Search Complete for a series of relevant terms including ‘policy implementation’, ‘policy enactment’ and ‘policy analyses’ combined with ‘Higher Education’ and ‘University’.

For the section on degree and higher apprenticeships a Boolean search methodology was used with the following search terms – searching within the title or the abstract of peer-reviewed literature written in the English language between January 2010 and March 2019:

- “Higher education” OR “HE level” OR “degree level” OR “University/ies”
- AND “degree apprenticeship” OR “higher apprenticeship”

These were entered into established academic databases including ‘British Education Index’ and ‘Scopus’. Inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed quantitative, qualitative, mixed method research and scholarly discussion articles that focused on the subject of higher and degree apprenticeships.

Additional sources were also found by analysing known and prolific authors in the field, by analysing contents of relevant journals and by following up on citations and bibliographies. Lastly, the findings of the search were evaluated and fine-tuned using author knowledge of key authors and relevant publications and associations.

This paper will seek to synthesise the main findings of the literature reviewed to establish what gaps in knowledge and areas of dissent are emerging that may require further research to be undertaken in the future.

2.3 Policy Implementation Studies

In theory policy is made by government making a clear choice of the most effective response to a known problem, but in practice it emerges from struggles between powerful interests pursuing different agendas and is marked by contest and uncertainty. (Colebatch, 2002; p.104).

This quote from Colebatch summarises neatly the thinking behind this piece of work; i.e. to explore the ‘struggles’ and contested positions which sit within this area of policy making and implementation. As stated in Chapter 1 this thesis will take a policy implementation framework as its lens through which to understand and analyse the findings of this research within what Lingard and Garrick might call a ‘policy trajectory study’ (1997; p.157).

Ozga’s view of educational policy as a contested terrain (Ozga, 2000) also provides a useful conceptual approach for this work. That she considers there is often no clear demarcation between education and other aspects of policy is relevant here – should ‘skills’ be classed as an education or economic or social policy agenda? There is a case for developing research into policy implementation at the meso and micro level of higher education institutions (Trowler, 2014a, Tight, 2018; p.118). Vidovich (2013), and later Yorke and Vidovich (2016), provide a useful discussion of different theoretical approaches utilised in higher education policy research including policy trajectory and policy networks. A more globalised perspective is offered by Rizvi and Lingard (2010) who compare different approaches and differentiate symbolic and material policy and Ball (2012a), who considers the impact on education policy of neoliberalism and the private-public hybridisation.

The following section provides an overview of relevant policy implementation literature and introduces some of the key concepts and thinking on this subject following a detailed and thorough literature search process.

There are six strategies of policy production identified by Gale (2003; p.229-232); these describe the ‘how’ of policy production and he helpfully relates them to the development of HE policy in Australia and identifies which actors are most likely to use which technique (Table 13.2). They are: trading, bargaining, arguing, stalling, manoeuvring and lobbying.

2.3.1 Factors affecting successful implementation and enactment

The seminal work on this area, ‘Implementation’ by Pressman and Wildavsky was first published in 1973 and later updated (1984). This introduced the idea that policy includes not only the front-end element (i.e. the formulation/conception and design), but also the ongoing implementation and associated evaluation that is crucial to the success of a policy – also described by Colebatch (2002; p.58-60) as the ‘vertical’ (structured) and ‘horizontal’ (agentic) approaches to policy-making. ‘*The separation of policy design from implementation is fatal*’ is stated by Pressman and Wildavsky (1984p. xxv), although this is countered by Sabatier (1986; p.31), for whom the blurring of the lines between

formulation and implementation undermines democratic process and weakens the ability to evaluate policy.

The classical rational 'planning and control model of implementation' (Hill and Hupe, 2002; p.9) whereby the plan is logically followed by the desired policy outcome, contrasts with the interaction model (which focuses on the achievement of consensus and commitment on the part of those who are charged with carrying out the policy (see Bardach (1977)). Saunders (2006b) invokes a helpful image of the implementation staircase, which seeks to illustrate how policy is conceived, communicated, received and refracted through the process of implementation. Trowler also compares the straight line of vision and solution – which he refers to as the rational-purposive model – with a 'more organic and complex' model, where social practice and process are in play (Trowler, 2014a; p.15). This is further developed by Sin, who proposes the *policy object* as a new perspective – which focuses on what a policy becomes through the process of enactment – 'enacted ontology' (2014; p.437).

Pressman and Wildavsky move on to a debate as to how policy decisions and implementation are connected, concluding that 'if perfect policy ideas can be compatible with good implementation, it must be possible for *implementation* to alter *policy*' (author's emphasis) (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984; p.179).

The agentic model is developed by Lipsky (1980) who looked at the role of street-level bureaucrats (i.e. those charged with implementation in the 'real world'). His view is that while such individuals have some discretion (agency) in the carrying out of their professional role, they do so within a framework determined by the policy elite and by cultural norms (structure). This can lead to scenarios whereby those on the ground are not in agreement with the policy intention and can resist implementation, either through overt methods (absenteeism, unionisation) or through more covert discretionary, unsanctioned behaviours. This can be done by undertaking work in a way which aligns with their own preferences and which enables them to focus on what they see as priority. They will 'circumvent reforms which limit their discretion' (Lipsky, 1980; p. 21) and hold 'autonomous power bases' (Bardach, 1977; p. 45). Lipsky describes how workers often hold knowledge, expertise and other factors, giving them some power over managers seeking to implement a policy or change and that often their routines and simplifications will in fact influence policy from the bottom-up. He concludes that 'policy implementation analysis must question assumptions that influence flows with authority from higher to lower levels...' (Lipsky, 1980; p. 25).

Trowler presents an agentic perspective (2014a; p. 24) describing the 'role of actors in the policy process, including their ability to contest, negotiate and reconstruct' both policy and its surrounding discourse. Bardach attempts to conceptualise policy implementation and explores the idea of 'leakage of authority' (Bardach, 1977; p. 44); whereby original policy intentions are lost and refracted as they move down the chain of command. He refers to the resistance to change and the failure of management to lead and implement changes successfully. The many players (stakeholders) 'all capable of articulating their fears and anxieties' and the inter-organisational nature of policy implementation is highlighted by him as central to the policy implementation process. Heimans (2012) develops this in his Bourdieusian-framed discussion of power relations embedded within and between policy and practice. A critical stance is provided by John (1998; p.27-30) who also focuses on 'policy drift' and the 'bargaining games and networked relationships within policy subsystems' (p.30).

Bardach (1977) concludes his conceptualisation of policy implementation as a 'game' system. Using this frame, he directs readers to consider the players (and those that refuse to play), the stakes, the strategies and tactics, the resources, the rules (and those who insist on changing the rules as they play) and finally the degree of uncertainty of the outcome. He goes on to identify four policy implementation 'game types': diversion of resources, deflection of policy goals, resistance to efforts to control behaviours and dissipation of energy away from constructive action. He also introduces the phenomenon of the 'outraged competitor' whereby certain stakeholders feel they have been disadvantaged by the policy; either in its conception or its execution. This provides a useful metaphor to reconsider when reviewing the findings of this piece of research below. Three key questions are posed by Weimer and Vining (2005) to understand policy enactment. Is the theory and proposal reasonable? Who has the essential elements? Who will 'do' the implementation? These are also reconsidered below.

2.3.2 The wider context

Policy implementation is linked to change management and organisational change and Fullan provides a useful framework (Fullan, 1999b, Fullan, 2003). Van Meter and Van Horn (1975; p.45-48) also made this connection to organisational change theory, relating success to amount of change required and levels of consensus amongst policy-makers.

Lingard and Garrick (1997) state that policy implementation cannot be considered without considering the wider external policy environment, i.e. what is the current ideology underpinning the government and what are the socio-economic conditions? Gale (2007, 2003) interrogates the link between politics and policy (which is often the same word in

other languages) but which often implies a positioning in the former and a focus on outcomes in the latter. He describes the hegemonic status quo which privileges experts over citizen participation and also tends to foreground economic considerations (Gale, 2007; p.223), provides a useful overview of the key actors involved in each stage of policy-making and implementation and describes how a change of government can result in a major repositioning of a policy already underway. This is further contextualised by Evans et al. (2019) who consider how policy enactment (in this case with respect to widening access) can cement innate power hierarchies within the HE sector as universities consider the implications to their league table positions and reputation if they respond to policy directives to broaden access through different types of provision.

A critical overview of the move towards the 'scarily capitalised' (Tight, 2019) concept of New Public Management (NPM); (i.e. the result of an underlying neoliberal ideology) is provided by Dibben and Higgens (2004; p.26). This ideology has informed much policy-making under both New Labour and the Coalition and Conservative Governments and has seen a shift toward a more private-sector, entrepreneurial and performance measured approach within the public sector environment in general and in higher education in particular (Tight, 2019). This is built on plausible chains of hypothesis, i.e. the factors that policy-makers assume to be true. If the policy gives legal authority to the actors this may influence its success, as will the political support for its putative goals (Weimer and Vining, 2005; p.275).

2.3.3 The Intrusion of Values and Interests

So what are we talking about here? At its most simple a well-conceived and designed policy is that the passing of a law or a bill or Act of Parliament will result in immediate and universal adoption and implementation of that policy (from action to desired outcome) (Weimer and Vining, 2005). Trowler (2014) takes a broader view of policy as including institutional and managerial strategies and plans which result in a change of goals, process, values or use of resource. Inevitably the process is complex. As Weimer and Vining (2005; p.262) put it, it is necessary to 'prepare ourselves for the intrusion of values and interests' through the entire process and therefore it is not possible to separate out the policy design and adoption from the implementation and enactment phase. John (1998; p.30) also draws attention to the fact that ideology and values are tightly bound up in the policy decisions and that it is worth considering what options have been rejected/not been considered as well as the ones that have been progressed.

Colebatch (2002; p.63) introduces the idea of empirical vs normative statements in policy-making; the former referring to an instrumental, neutral description of the policy, while the latter sets out a value-laden approach.

2.3.4 'Top-down or Bottom-up'?

A useful comparison of the merits and demerits of the 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to policy implementation is provided by Sabatier (1986). This synthesises some of the key proponents of the 'bottom-up' approach, which focuses on the many actors and stakeholders interacting with the policy at an operational level, finding that in many cases 'local actors often deflect centrally-mandated programs to their own ends' (Sabatier, 1986; p.22). Sabatier himself identifies as a proponent of the 'top-down' approach and sets out the conditions for effective policy implementation (23-25), summarised here:

- i. Clear and consistent objectives (although later in the paper he acknowledges that this is unlikely to be met and most policies see 'a multitude of partially-conflicting objectives' (p.29))
- ii. Adequacy of causal theory i.e. with the right levers and legislation then it can be assumed that policy x will result in desired impact y
- iii. Policy needs to be within a legal framework (sanctions and incentives). This is also picked up by Hill and Hupe (2002; p.23) who focus on the 'rule of law'
- iv. Officials charged with implementation must have required commitment and skill
- v. Support of interest groups and executive sponsors ('sovereigns')
- vi. No major changes to socio-economic conditions

In his view if these conditions are met this will result in a more successful 'top-down' implementation and reduce the likelihood of 'street-level' / micro adaptation – thus making a case for structure over agency. The other key points that can be drawn from this important paper in the policy implementation arena are the importance of building in a review and reformulation process to respond to emerging deficiencies and failings and that a longer timescale may be required for review of policy implementation. Policies often contain contradictions and, in order to succeed, they have to locate themselves within an acceptable middle ground (i.e. not too incremental and not too radical). The paper goes on to provide a critique of 'top-down' approaches by 'bottom-up' protagonists on the ground that they are too focused on decision-makers and thus neglect others; thus potentially ignoring the strategies used by actors at a micro level to divert or adapt policy to their own purposes.

Bottom-up approaches emphasise the objectives, strategies, activities and formal and informal relationships between actors tasked with implementing the policy. Bottom-up theorists Hjern and Hull (1982) and Lipsky (1980) argue that in order for a policy to

succeed it has to interact with the micro-implementation level and localised contextual and cultural factors will influence how it plays out in reality and will determine its likely success. Rosli and Rossi (2014) outline some of the merits and demerits of the two approaches while Matland (1995) suggests that the levels of ambiguity and conflict inherent within a policy will determine which approach will be most successful and proposes an ‘Ambiguity-Conflict Matrix’ (Matland, 1995; p.160). Another useful comparison of top-down and bottom-up approaches is provided by Gaus (2019) who builds on Matland’s ideas in calling for a more dialectical approach, suggesting that:

a hybrid model of policy implementation can foster a harmony between governments (as policy makers) and academics (as street level bureaucrats) in the process of implementation and interpretation of policy imperatives for the policy implementation to be successful (Gaus, 2019; p.97)

2.3.5 A Critical Approach

Critical policy studies has developed as a field to understand policy ‘not only in terms of apparent inputs and outputs, but more importantly in terms of the *interests, values and normative assumptions* – political and social – that shape and inform these processes’ (author’s emphasis) (Fischer et al., 2015; p.1). Critical policy theory ‘uncovers economic and political interests’ and ‘scrutinises the status quo... to expose dominant ideologies and hegemonic power’ (Vidovich, 2013; p.25). This is relevant to this piece of work as it seeks to understand what interests and norms are at stake and how these are being enacted, especially given the increasingly large role expected of HE in relation to contributing to economic development and the knowledge economy (Gunn, 2015; p.30-31).

Three theoretical approaches for considering policy in higher education research are discussed by Gunn (2015). These are policy networks, neo-institutionalism and agency or principal-agent theory. Policy networks consider the people responsible for policy formulation and poses questions as to what networks and power relations are in play around decision-making. Gunn states that those responsible for the decisions are not necessarily the most influential in policy-making and often multiple agencies (think-tanks, lobbyists, special interest groups) are involved, not just government departments, which leads to debates about power and who ‘yields the greater leverage’ (Gunn, 2015; p.34). This theme is also considered by Padure and Jones who describe policy networks as the

informal relations in policy-making and are created in the “gray” area between state and civil society in response to new or failed governmental policies. (Padure and Jones, 2009; p.108).

while Vidovich conceptualises them as a '*hybridisation of bureaucratic hierarchies and markets (public and private spheres)*' (Vidovich, 2013; p.34) and goes on to stress the importance of considering underlying hegemonies within putative 'warm and fuzzy' policy communities.

Gunn then looks at neo-institutionalism, linked to the theory of institutionalism; while institutions deliver smooth or formal rules of engagement, alongside this there is a more fluid and messy understanding of norms and cultures – what Gunn describes as the 'inter-play between structure and agency' (2015; 35). This can be applied in the context of this research as understanding how the policy is understood and interpreted at an institutional structural (meso) level – the 'logic of appropriateness' and then at departmental and disciplinary levels (micro level) where agency, vested interests, resistance and goal conflict may appear – referred to here as the 'logic of expected returns'.

Finally he turns to 'principal-agent theory' – which is concerned with hierarchy and structure and is similar to Trowler's rational-purposive model. The thinking here is that if the 'principal', e.g. government department or minister says something 'will' or 'should' happen then the agent (in this context the university executive management or frontline staff) has to respond. This can involve long chains of command and hierarchies and is usually based on a system of sanctions and incentives. This aligns with the implementation staircase model (Saunders, 2006).

Where the agent resists the directive from the principal in some way this can result in what Gunn terms:

- 'agency slack', i.e. behaving in a way more suited to the interests of the agent or
- 'agency shirking', in other words reducing the effort put into delivering the requirements or
- 'agency slippage', where the agent subtly shifts to different behaviours (Gunn, 2015; p.41)

Agency theory is further developed by Kivistö (2008), who is interested in how principal agents (e.g. governments) mitigate for the fact that agents (e.g. HEIs) do not always implement tasks or policies as required. In order to consider the government–HE relationship in this manner, Kivistö identifies three elements. These are the delegated tasks that a university performs, the required resources and the government interest in the accomplishment of said tasks. The place where the power shifts is within the knowledge and understanding and this potentially gives the agent an upper hand in resisting certain policies through what he calls 'informational asymmetries', i.e. where the agent (i.e. the university) knows more about the task in hand than the principal. This is

reminiscent of the 'street-level bureaucracy' debate (Hudson, 1993, Lipsky, 1980, Heimans, 2012) which considers how policy is refracted and mediated at micro level.

Olssen and Peters (2005; p.320) make a connection between neoliberalism and agency theory in various contexts, including the higher education sector, '*as a means of exacting the accountability and performance of employees where market incentives and sanctions did not operate*'. There are, however, some weaknesses to agency theory. Kivistö argues, for example, that it is too narrow in focus and doesn't consider the wider context, offering:

only a limited view by focusing on the bilateral interaction between the government and a university in the context that is, in reality, often surrounded by multilateral networks... This inability to structure and incorporate the existence of multiple principals and stakeholders creates a danger that can reduce the theoretical and empirical usefulness of the theory (2008; p.347).

This is relevant to this work as it seeks to explain the multi-layered approaches at play in implementation of this high-level skills policy. Ball (2013; p.7) focuses on how policy discourses privilege certain ideas, topics, voices and speakers (and exclude others). He makes the points that policy discourse 'constitutes (rather than reflects) social reality' and that 'policy language is slippery and should be subject to critical examination'. This aligns with many of the views expressed by Fischer et al above on critical policy studies. Ball (2013) goes on to describe how neoliberalism prevails through the marketisation of education – expressed through the language of consumer 'choice', league tables and private/profit-led providers.

Heimans (2012) considers the importance of the space between policy production and policy implementation. Taking a Bourdieusian view, he poses the question as to how different types of capitals relate to the policy process and discusses the embedding of power relations in each stage of the policy cycle and how this can produce 'possibilities and constraints' (Heimans, 2012; p.374). Finally, he turns to the conditions of constitution, i.e. not just the policy document/text itself but its underlying discourse – why was it produced, what problem it is addressing, how these problems were conceived, how they are mediated and how they are enacted, given the underlying hegemonies.

2.3.6 All change

One of the first lessons of change Fullan (1999b, 2003, 1999a) presents is that the pace of change is inexorable. This clearly applies to much of modern life and the higher education (HE) sector is no different. An increasingly competitive environment exists,

where league tables, positioning based on reputation, research and income (alongside external research assessment and quality assurance frameworks) have led to an increasingly pressurised situation (Leathwood and Read, 2013). The result has been major change in the sector.

Many struggle with the imposition of this change and Fullan (2003; p.35) makes an interesting point when he says that '*we will need to redefine our approach to resistance so that we draw on the valid critiques and energy of those sceptical of given new directions*'. He comments that a way to turn the regressive, negative narratives to a more positive embracing of change is required by paying attention to and addressing the concerns of those affected.

Another lesson for change Fullan sets out is the need to win the hearts and minds of those at ground level so that transformation can be enacted successfully. Trowler (2015a; p.3) conceptualises this differently; by drawing on social practice theory located in the space between structure and agency. His argument is that change is not imposed on a blank canvas; rather '*existing sets of social practices condition responses and fundamentally affect the implementation process*'.

This review of policy implementation and enactment literature has provided an overview of some of the theoretical frameworks for considering policy production and implementation and change management. Policies are problematic at many levels. Clearly there is a more complex process in policy-making than simply one bodfulay decreeing how another should act and, as the above overview demonstrates, policies are often contested, interpreted, inflected, mediated, resisted and misunderstood. The chapters to follow will revisit the concepts and themes discussed here within the context and through the analysis of the research findings. They will seek to apply these to understand the ideologies and interests at play in the development and presentation of the policy.

2.4 Policy in Context: Higher Education and Economic Considerations

The link between Higher Education (HE), economic productivity and workforce development is not new and there has been an increasing shift from a public university sector towards one that is much more closely linked to economic and market conditions. Brown (2009; p.134), for example, cites the 1985 Green Paper (Department for Education and Science; paras 1.2-1.3):

The Government believes that it is vital for our higher education to contribute more effectively to the improvement of the performance of the

economy . . . and is particularly concerned by the evidence that the societies of our competitors are producing, and plan in the future to produce, more qualified scientists, engineers, technologists and technicians than the United Kingdom.

George (2006) charts the rise of the knowledge economy and makes an interesting comparison between the relative benefits of a state-driven model compared to a neo-liberal model which she defines as concentrating ‘on reducing the role of government in higher education and creating a market for individual institutions to compete against each other’ (2006; p.598). The tension of achieving the Humboldtian ideal of researching and teaching within this context is described well by Rhoades and Sporn (2002) and Jacob (2009), who also points to certain disciplines carrying more instrumental and thus commercially-applicable knowledge.

The rise of managerialism and ‘private sector language and culture’ is highlighted by Cribb and Gerwitz (2013; p.340) and Vidovich and Currie (2009), as well as the growing influence of university and business engagement. This is all relevant to the debates below on the implementation of apprenticeships within a university setting. The idea that ‘knowledge is increasingly becoming a privatized commodity’ is introduced by Harland (2009; p.514) who goes on to debate the ideas of audit and accountability. He also questions whether HE exists to provide training for employers in order to meet their workforce development needs or if this is anathema to the traditional idea of a university as a foundation for knowledge and developing the capacity for critical thought.

Jacob (2009) draws attention to the role of the university as an organisational actor at the meso level, often required by government to act to develop and implement policy; a good example of which is the development and delivery of higher and degree apprenticeships. These dynamic changes and the impact of ‘new managerialism’ are also described by Powell (2018) and Martin et al. (2018) who both highlight the impact that the introduction of degree apprenticeships has had on the academy and, in the latter case, academic identity. Gray (2016) provides an interesting perspective on confused student identity which, while focused on HE students in the FE sector, nevertheless presents some useful parallels for apprentices finding themselves in the realm of HE.

2.4.1 Universities: a strong tradition of meeting workforce development needs

Universities are uniquely placed to deliver high-quality, flexible work-based learning and indeed many of them did so under programmes delivered under the Labour government (1997-2010) through such programmes as the High Level Skills Pathfinders and HEFCE Workforce Development projects (Anderson et al., 2012, Keep, 2015; p.12, Hordern,

2017). It seems that the Coalition government focused more on creating a division between HE and FE with a shift from the tone imbued in the previous government's 'Higher Ambitions' policy paper (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2009). Bravenboer and Anderson (2012) describe how the curriculum innovation brought in through the inclusion of the Level 5 Foundation Degree qualification was enhanced, bringing co-investment", "employer leadership", "transformation" and "innovation" and end with a plea for universities to bring their work-based learning expertise to bear to improve the higher apprenticeship offer. An overview of the evolution of higher and degree apprenticeships is provided by Bravenboer and Lester (2016).

Issues raised by Anderson et al. (2012) are around why, despite experience and expertise in the development and delivery of HE level flexible work-based learning programmes in the period 2000-2011 (Leitch, HEFCE Employer Engagement projects, Foundation Degrees and Higher Level Skills pathways), there was a dip in interest in taking this agenda forward in 2012. This was the period that saw the change of government from a Labour government, which had made HE's engagement with the workplace central to many policies (Johnson, 2007, Department for Innovation Universities and Skills, 2009, Hordern, 2017). The Conservative-led Coalition government seemed to view HE in a more traditional role of delivering to full-time school-leaver students, with little or no recognition of the role that HE could play in addressing national skills shortages. Fuller goes further questioning whether the:

*the core identity of apprenticeship as a model of learning (is) being replaced by that of **a policy instrument that can be endlessly tuned and retuned** to deliver the numbers and fulfill diverse goals' (Fuller, 2016; p.429)(researcher emphasis).*

The Skills White Paper (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016a) identified little role for HE in the national skills debate and is symptomatic of the divide that we see between Higher Education and Skills Policy, despite the introduction of Degree Apprenticeships which was designed to bridge this gap in some way.

2.5 Higher and Degree apprenticeships – disruptors or same old?

Given their recent launch, there is only a relatively small set of peer-reviewed work on Degree Apprenticeships per se. Some fundamental issues are raised by Lee (2012) in an article published at the early phase of implementation of higher apprenticeships (and before the introduction of degree apprenticeships). These include the image of and attitudes to apprenticeships – many saw them as poor-quality, poorly-paid and lacking a rigorous quality assurance framework. In addition, she refers to the lack of progression for lower level apprentices wishing to access HE level qualifications and the impact of

the bifurcation between academic and vocational routes – suggesting that Higher Apprenticeships could be a way to bridge that divide. The government policy has increasingly seen these programmes as a way to address social inequalities but there is limited evidence to date on the impact this is having (Taylor-Smith, 2018). The link between apprenticeships and earning potential are made by Kirby (2015), who shows how higher apprenticeships can provide greater lifetime earnings than some other forms of more traditional higher education.

Despite this, Anderson et al. (2012) predicted (correctly as it turned out) that universities could, should and would have a major role to play in higher apprenticeships at undergraduate and potentially postgraduate levels. Their paper was written before the concept of degree apprenticeships came into being but it shows prescience of what was to unfold. In particular, it identified likely tensions around systems integration, in particular around merging the funding and quality assurance landscapes as well as discussing more fundamental issues around pedagogy and perceptions of knowledge versus competency. A similar vein is taken by Hordern (2017) and Keep (2015; p. 2-3), with the latter identifying four potential policy challenges: the stretching target, the required quality improvement, the ability of the sector to manage change and a new funding regime.

Bravenboer and Lester (2016) provide an analysis of how both academic qualifications and professional competence can be integrated through degree and higher apprenticeship programmes to achieve Barnett's (1994) concept of meta-learning, whereby an individual reaches a state of constant evaluation and reflection on their professional practice. An interesting perspective is provided by Gambin and Hogarth (2016) who focus on higher apprenticeships in accounting which can be delivered without recourse to a university and debate the relative merits of employers offering this route as opposed to a more traditional route into the profession.

Saraswat's research (2016) is possibly the most closely aligned to the research presented here. In her paper, she looks at some of the drivers and challenges experienced by Further Education (FE) colleges in the early phases of the policy implementation of higher apprenticeships. She identifies several issues including employer buy-in at the early stages, perceived low status of apprenticeships by employers and would-be apprentices, organisational readiness and the potential for collaboration and competition between FE and HE providers. While there are clearly some similarities, the research presented below provides a novel and original contribution as it focuses on the university/higher (as opposed to further) education

sector and takes place later on in the cycle when the degree apprenticeship policy has had more impact and the new funding regime is in place.

The introduction of apprenticeships into the HE system is identified as a third 'radical shift' in recent times (after massification and introduction of higher fees) by Walsh and Powell (2018), thus providing some context for the importance of this research at this time. This is echoed by Rowe et al. (2016) who also describe this as one of the 'biggest changes in higher education for decades'. Riley (2017) draws attention to the threat of cannibalisation; i.e. whereby an apprenticeship programme replaces an existing traditional part-time (or even full-time) degree offer, thus creating internal competition within institutions. On the other hand David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science at the time of the development of this policy, shows little awareness of the impact this would have on the sector, describing apprenticeships in his book in traditional terms, i.e. as an 'alternative to going to university' (Willetts, 2017; p.246).

Linking to some of the ideas above, Felce (2017) shows how apprenticeships align with institutional strategy and within HE coalesce around several interlinked policy drivers including addressing regional skills shortages, progression opportunities for learners and contributing to economic growth. This is developed by McKnight et al. (2019) who describe a case study of a social mobility pipeline to degree apprenticeships. A set of possible models for a more vocationally focused higher Education sector are proposed by Venkatraman et al. (2018). They comment that while the UK (and England in particular) are leading the way in higher level work-based learning through the degree apprenticeship programme there are still many challenges to address although they do not elucidate these in detail. It is these challenges that this piece of work seeks to identify and understand through the analysis of the data provided by the participants based in English universities.

2.5.1 Knowledge, Curriculum and Pedagogic Approaches

Hordern (2015a) delivers a Bernsteinian approach, looking at the way that knowledge is classified within higher apprenticeships from academic discipline to vocational knowledge to vocational pedagogy, and develops this theme of the '*knowledge region*' as a '*socio-epistemic entity*' (Hordern, 2015a; p.21). He poses some questions about who should determine the knowledge areas to be covered in vocational curricula – educators, single employers (who may take a very narrow, instrumental view) or a broader voice representing the sector (such as a professional or regulatory body)? This links to the debate about the currency and longevity of very specific vocationally-oriented training, questioning whether a narrow approach reduces broader disciplinary '*epistemic access*'

(Wheelahan, 2009) required for other parts of life (Hordern, 2017). Keep (2015) also raises queries about transferability and currency. The employer perspective is provided by Antcliff et al. (2016), who detail the influence of the employer in curriculum design of specific degree apprenticeship programmes. Hordern (2016) considers the differentiation of knowledge typologies, comparing conceptual and contextualised knowledge and their relative merits in academic and/or workplace/practice-based environments and compares the roles of situated vocational knowledge with systematic academic knowledge (Hordern, 2018b). A Bernsteinian perspective is also applied by Stavrou who likens the increasing involvement of other economic and policy actors in curriculum design as an extension of Bernstein's 'recontextualising field' (Stavrou, 2016; p.794).

There is a fear that some disciplines could 'suffer from a manipulation of content and lack objectivity' given the involvement of a small group of large and powerful employers in the design of the standards through the trailblazer scheme (Rowe et al., 2016). There is a danger of some employers gaming this system to their advantage to develop programmes that meet their specific needs rather than the wider sector, or even economy (Keep, 2015). This is developed by King et al. (2016) who provide a comparison of Australian and English approaches within the Technical and FE sector and make the point that there is a strong focus on academic and research norms rather than vocational and technical knowledge in these contexts; referred to as the 'gravitational pull of the academic' on higher technical education by Doel (2017). Is this the academy seeking to reassert its position in a shifting environment?

The boundaries of professional and academic competence are explored by Bravenboer and Lester (2016) while many authors (Rowe et al., 2016, Bravenboer, 2016, Powell and Walsh, 2018) extol the benefits of drawing upon the existing expertise in work-based learning pedagogy, which already sits within many higher education institutions, in the development of degree apprenticeships (Daley et al., 2016). An interesting perspective is provided by Carter and Dubbs (2019) who make the case of the inclusion of a liberal arts tradition within a degree apprenticeship – giving prominence to the idea that a degree is more than just knowledge being transmitted from knower to learner and should also encompass a sense of self-knowledge and awareness. This is reminiscent of Frank Coffield's plea that 'electricians have souls too' (Coffield, 2008; p.43).

Mazenod (2016), while focusing on lower level apprenticeships, makes the case for a more 'expansive' curriculum (Fuller and Unwin, 2004, Fuller et al., 2015), while Keep (2015) also makes the case for support for employers to develop an expansive learning environment for apprentices. The positive impact on the wider learning (problem-solving,

teamwork, inter-personal skills) offered by degree apprenticeships is identified by Brinia et al. (2018), albeit in a Greek context, while Griffiths (2018) draws on some wider lessons from the flipped classroom for degree apprenticeships.

Many of the positive aspects of how work-based pedagogy or andragogy (Knowles, 1983), can be brought to enhance a degree apprenticeship are described by Riley (2017). He details how apprentices' learning is scaffolded from the beginning of a programme, where they are given considerable guidance, to the final year which sees them undertaking a self-directed project within the company. Lillis (2018) contextualises this further, making the case for how work-integrated learning within degree apprenticeships can transform many public sector professions. Minton and Lowe (2019) provide an overview of ways that universities can support the process of workplace learning on apprenticeships through strong engagement, training of workplace mentors and monitoring the 'on-the-job' learning as much as the 'off-the job' elements – ideas that are also supported by Hughes and Saieva (2019). A more detailed study of the role and importance of workplace mentors in degree apprenticeships is provided by Roberts et al. (2019), culminating with a set of guiding principles.

An exposé of some of the challenges and opportunities posed by the required curriculum innovation for degree apprenticeships is provided by Martin et al. (2016) which is located in two theoretical fields; that of educational development and also that of cross-sectoral collaboration. They also considered how the degree apprenticeship mapped against existing pedagogical approaches and what it brought that was new and of higher esteem:

This was also linked to apprentices redefining themselves through the process by going through an "identity reframe" while the degree also reframed apprenticeships – work based learning may be seen as being at a lower level of achievement "but the degree apprenticeship has recalibrated that." (Martin et al. 2015 p.12)

Walsh and Powell (2018) point to the danger that traditional academic knowledge and standing may be hollowed out by the onset of degree apprenticeships within the academy, especially given that the private (teaching-only, lower budget) institutions are likely to move quickly into this arena, and the challenge this presents to quality assurance arrangements. The latter aspect is rebutted by Felce (2019), who synthesises and reassures in relation to the multi-layered approaches. Considering a different, albeit related, context of policy implementation of assessment of prior learning Price (2019; p.513) raises similar concerns about a possible move of academic activity to outside the academy.

Martin et al. (2018) describe the impact of the relatively rapid roll-out of degree apprenticeships on academic identity. They identify three areas of tension experienced by academic staff: pressure on their work role; power and autonomy and '*juggling hats*', by which they mean the many roles that an academic is supposed to have. The research uncovered deep feelings of unease from some of the academics being asked to teach on apprenticeship programmes as they felt that this would be judged as less academic than 'proper activities' (e.g. research and publications). It also uncovered concern about the 'effort required to establish and retain legitimacy as an academic in the context of new apprenticeship delivery'. This theme of multiple pressures resurfaces in the data to be analysed later in this piece of work. In a Bourdieusian-framed look at work-based learning as a field of study, Nottingham (2017) points to apprenticeships as the latest in a long line of policy interventions and describes some of the pedagogic innovations which have ensued and some of the challenges of operating outside a disciplinary framework.

2.5.2 End-point assessment

Unwin (2017) considers the change that has taken place under the new apprenticeship standards with regard to the implementation of the new synoptic end-point assessment and links this to the debate on pedagogic autonomy and design. In her view, apprenticeships have traditionally embraced the concept of assessment for learning where learning and assessment take place in a cycle – with feedback on performance used to improve performance over time. Unwin expresses some concerns that by placing the assessment at the end of the apprenticeship there is a danger of losing this important loop. This is also picked up by Mulkeen et al. (2019) who point to potential bifurcation between the teaching and end-point assessments, while Rowe et al. (2016) are worried that the end point assessment arrangements are not fit for purpose, which could undermine the entire programme. While focusing specifically on the healthcare sector, Baker (2018; p.13) makes an interesting observation about the danger of a disconnect where an apprentice may pass the degree but not the apprenticeship element – which could equally apply in other disciplines.

2.5.3 The System and Process

The concept that that the 'market decides' is not helpful – a free market does not address national skills shortage areas, and therefore Keep (2014; 254) feels some state-led intervention is required, referring to the 'byzantine and un-coordinated set of structures that fund, direct and inform skills provision at various levels' in England. He goes on to lament the complicated skills landscape in England – with multiple agencies and boundaries involved with little mapping or alignment with government priorities (e.g. the eight great technologies, smart specialisation, Catapult centres, Sector Skills Councils).

A succinct overview of some of the complex issues at play at the boundaries of the academy and the workplace are brought to the fore by Gambin and Hogarth (2016), including arguments relating to human capital, social mobility and corporate responsibility.

Bravenboer describes a 'fluctuating, divergent, illogical and schizophrenic policy environment' (Bravenboer, 2016). Nevertheless, he sees that degree apprenticeships present a major opportunity for HEIs, especially those with experience and expertise in work-based learning working alongside employers and professional bodies in a tri-partite agreement. His paper goes on to stress that developing these 'trust relationships' could be 'truly transformational' for the HE sector. Martin posits that there is a danger is that HE expertise will be excluded from the development of higher apprenticeships, which do not require the specific input of a university or provider of higher education.

The differences in culture, working practices, timetabling approaches etc. across faculties will present challenges which will require not only the formal memoranda signed by Deans but also significant support from heads of departments to ensure shared understanding of what is required. This will need overall monitoring to address dissonance between delivery partners but this has been recognised by each partner and a mixture of formal and informal systems has resulted. (Martin, 2016; p.4)

Two contrasting strategies for cross-sectoral collaboration are posited by Dienhart and Ludescher (2010) – the traditional approach where one institution/sector holds power and dominates resources and decision-making and another more egalitarian approach which sees joint working and collaboration to pursue shared interests. Bryson et al. (2015), in updating their 2006 work, identify some of the challenges and opportunities arising from cross-sectoral collaborations in a variety of public policy and administration settings. Some of the tensions arising from the accountability frameworks are predicted by Lambert (2016), especially with regard to quality assurance and performance management; again these themes will be developed below in light of the knowledge now available through the implementation and roll-out of the policy.

Several learning points are presented that are relevant to this context: the importance of collaborative advantage for all parties and the need to make use of 'windows of opportunity' to influence; the need to design process and structure and interactions with the ends in mind, the need to involve champions and sponsors and the importance of flexible governance structures. The description of the apprenticeship 'Hub in a Pub' by Felce (2017) demonstrates the many voices and stakeholders that are present in this arena, while Rowe et al. (2016) draw attention to some of the systemic and bureaucratic

challenges of this policy implementation. Many parallels could be drawn with Bandias et al.'s (2011; p.590) description of '*rigidities, inflexibilities and obstacles*' leading to systemic clashes between academic and vocational sectors in Australia. These themes will be explored further in the research below in the context of the implementation of higher and degree apprenticeships.

2.5.4 Power and positioning

Martin et al. (2016) draw attention to the different actors involved in the design, development and delivery of a degree apprenticeship (employers, academics, professional support, learners). They question where the power and competing interests lie and how (and indeed whether) these can be overcome to develop a more egalitarian collaborative approach to such developments. They also refer to the difficulties of achieving academic buy-in and the need to overcome scepticism of those expected to implement the change through clear communication and leadership (Trowler, 2008, Fullan, 2003). An interesting perspective on the power relations embedded in the workplace mentor/ mentee (apprentice) relationship is explored by Roberts et al. (2019).

The application of stakeholder salience theory as developed by Mitchell et al. (1997) is an interesting approach taken by Powell and Walsh (2018). In this paper they identify power as one of the three relationship attributes (the others being legitimacy and urgency). This is overlaid with key HE policy developments since 2011, focusing in particular on the introduction of degree apprenticeships. Some of the risks they identify include the impact of alternative, private sector HE providers, the potential imbalance and unfairness of the apprenticeship funding models and the shifting locus of control with regard to curriculum design and delivery:

With the introduction of Degree Apprenticeships, Higher Education Institutions have lost their dominant position with regards to determining curriculum content (Powell and Walsh, 2018; p.101)

2.5.5 Conclusion

The literature review illustrates that the focus of this research has received considerable and growing interest, particularly over recent years indicating its relevance and increasing importance to the sector. Several areas of contestation and debate have arisen with respect to the implementation of this policy; namely around neoliberalism, pedagogy, curriculum, academic identities and hegemonies. Keep (2015; p.2-3) identifies some key policy challenges but no study to date appears to have undertaken a similar approach to the research as set out below and therefore this literature review gives

further credence to the relevance and worth of this work, focusing as it does on the policy implementation and enactment of higher and degree apprenticeship within the HE sector.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis is current higher level skills policy in England, particularly what the implementation of higher (and more recently degree) apprenticeships means in practice for people working in a range of roles in English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

In order to understand what issues, tensions, attitudes and positive outcomes are being experienced by stakeholders as a result of this policy, a qualitative study was undertaken. A mixed qualitative methods approach was utilised, combining documentary analysis of policy texts alongside semi-structured interviews to address the gaps identified in the literature review and to provide some answers to the research questions that have arisen out of this. The findings are considered and analysed using a policy implementation and enactment conceptual framework in the subsequent chapters.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain in more detail the strategy and decision-making that underpins this piece of work and will encompass the 'big picture' – as well as the detail of the processes and approaches taken to identify, collect and analyse the data which will answer the research questions. It will also consider some key considerations around ethics, researcher positioning, validity and credibility and limitations. By the end of this chapter I will have endeavoured to answer the 'Kipling questions' (Trafford, 2008; p.91) i.e. the what, why, when, how, where and who.

In a similar vein, Mason's important questions (Mason, 2018; p. 4-17) provide a useful framework for the outset of research design to ensure that the research objective, research questions and methodology are coherent and aligned. Mason identifies important questions that should be considered when designing research relating to ontological perspective, epistemological position, identification of broad research area, specific intellectual puzzle (i.e. the research questions) and finally, what is the purpose or point of undertaking the work in the first place? These five questions have been considered here:

1. *Ontological perspective i.e. what social realities are being investigated?* The research will consider the following ontologies: organisational hegemonies and hierarchies, power relations, social structures, policies, attitudes (views, snobbishness), language and terminology and cultures and identity (apprentice, learner, student) (training provider, institute of higher education, university).

-
2. Epistemological position i.e. how the social realities/phenomena listed above can be known? If so how can we know them? This research takes an interpretive, socially constructed view – see section below.
 3. *What is the broad research area?* This is the impact of government higher-level skills (especially higher and degree apprenticeships) policy 2010-19 on English Higher Education.
 4. *What is the intellectual puzzle, i.e. what are the research questions?* As set out in the research questions in Chapter 1 this piece of research seeks to understand the intention of the UK government policy for HE with regard higher and degree apprenticeships, to understand how this policy has been implemented and enacted in HE and to identify tensions and benefits experienced by those responsible for implementation and delivery within HEIs.
 5. What is the purpose/point of the research? So what?
The onset of degree apprenticeships and their radical funding methodology is a major development in UK HE and has the potential to be a real game-changer. Since 2016 106 Universities have joined the UK Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (ROATP) in order to position themselves to deliver degree-level apprenticeships. The HEFCE Degree Apprenticeship Development Funds (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2016) were significantly overbid. This research will help us to understand how this policy is being implemented and enacted in the sector. It identifies any significant blockers and enablers at macro, meso and micro levels, which may be of relevance to policy-makers, university managers and those at ground level charged with delivering the policy.

3.2 Research Design

The research design set out here encompasses all four elements identified by Crotty (1998; 4-5); namely epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods (See Table 1). However it would be untrue to state that the starting point for this thesis is from the left-hand side of his table; as is the case with many researchers, the research topic was the starting point and focus and the design was 'built' from there.

3.2.1 Epistemology, ontology and theoretical perspective

The decisions on the focus of my research and the broad methods selected for use led me to identify as having an interpretivist epistemology. This is based on my view that the social world (or reality) is subjective and is 'constructed and interpreted by people' (Denscombe, 2010b; 18). Post modernists would argue that social reality is a shifting and contradictory thing – and is not researchable – but with some of the techniques described below, I am of the view that this can result in a valid and trustworthy research project.

The second of Crotty's elements is that of theoretical perspective, which he defines as 'the philosophical stance that lies behind our chosen methodology' (1998; 7). He goes on to imply that this incorporates both the epistemological and ontological positioning underpinning the research. Given the epistemological position already set out above, the ontological positioning being taken here is constructivism (also referred to as constructionism) (Creswell, 2018; p.7-9, Braun and Clarke, 2013) i.e. that there are *knowledges* rather than one single version of truth or knowledge. Crotty (1998; 42) summarises the approach neatly in the following:

All knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.

What is being proposed here is that 'meaning' is not discovered (as might be the proposition in more objectivist research) but that it is constructed. Some pure constructionists will apply this thinking to all areas. Humphrey (1992; p.39), refers to a pre-human age that consisted of 'worldstuff' – '*but the properties of this worldstuff had yet to be represented by a mind*'. Crotty states that social meanings and infrastructures precede us. We all see the world through the lenses of our own milieu – some things have more meaning, others are ignored. Some social constructionists believe that all reality is socially constructed.

3.2.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the critical theory of interpretation. Originally located in the study of the bible and other religious texts, hermeneutics in the social sciences seeks to interpret human action, to understand beyond immediate semantics and to look at how text is located historically and culturally. The process seeks to 'interpret meanings and intentions... hidden in the text' (Crotty, 1998; p.91) that go beyond even what the author intended. The hermeneutic circle is the concept of understanding the whole by initially starting with parts and then building on this through returning to the starting point and developing and enlarging one's grasp.

Social scientists have to deal with double hermeneutics – they have to operate at both the layman's level who will describe their view of social meaning and the social world, while at the same time overlaying this with a framing in a more technical or conceptual way. There is an argument that this has occurred in the documentary analysis described below – by selecting and segmenting certain policy documents there is a possibility that the research has introduced an element of mediation and '*thus adds a further dimension*

of construction as well as reflexivity' (Mason, 2018; p.110). This makes social research more complicated than say a natural scientist studying ants or trees, which will not necessarily be aware of the fact that they are the object of research – known as single hermeneutics. Constructivists believe that the social world is already constructed and that we all exist in a pre-interpreted world and we all carry our baggage of culture and assumptions.

Research in the constructivist vein... requires that we not remain straitjacketed by the conventional meanings we have been taught to associate with the object. Instead such research invites us to approach the object in a radical spirit of openness to its potential for new or richer meaning. (Crotty, 1998; p.51).

An inductive approach to theory generation has been taken through this work; i.e. no specific theory is posed at the outset to be proven or disproved. Instead the work will be presented within a conceptual framework relating to policy implementation; whereby 'theory is the outcome of the research, which involves drawing generalisable inferences out of observations' (Bryman, 2016; p.22) and which is often seen in qualitative studies of this nature.

3.2.3 Policy implementation and change – a conceptual framework

In theory policy is made by government making a clear choice of the most effective response to a known problem, but in practice it emerges from struggles between powerful interests pursuing different agendas and is marked by contest and uncertainty. (Colebatch, 2002; p.104)

There is a case for developing research into policy implementation at the meso and micro level of higher education institutions (Trowler, 2014b; p.118, Tight, 2018) and the intention is that this work will contribute to this body of work.

This thesis takes a policy implementation framework as its lens through which to understand and analyse the findings of this research within a 'policy trajectory study' (Lingard and Garrick, 1997; p.157). This piece of work has sought to do this and considers the process of policy enactment and implementation. It aligns with Ozga's (2000) view that policy research should take a critical, problematised stance in order to scrutinise policy.

As stated above this thesis takes an interpretivist epistemology and thus a constructivist ontological stance; by that it is meant that the meanings and findings of this research are interpreted based on opinion and reported experiences of the policy enactment process.

This has led to a rejection of a rational-purposive approach to policy analysis and to the use frameworks that recognise the socio-situational context in order to analyse the findings.

The work is cognisant of the American school of policy implementation studies dating from the 1970s onwards; in particular the debate between the top-down and bottom-up protagonists. These include Sabatier as a proponent of the former approach with Lipsky, then Hull & Hjern and Trowler proposing a more agentic, social practice approach.

The thesis draws on a range of these theories in line with the policy 'toolbox' proposed by Ball and include his policy trajectory framework (Ball, 2006; p.43 & p.51). His model provides a conceptual structure which involves an analysis of the policy process through a policy cycle and identifies five contexts: the context of influence; the context of policy text production; the context of practice, the context of outcomes and the context of political strategy. In line with the more recent work developed by Yorke and Vidovich (2016) the last two have been combined to a single 'policy outcome' context.

Heimans (2012; p.375) states that policy research should be concerned with

not only the actual policy documents but also, for example, their conditions of constitution (why the policy was written in the first place in response to what set of problems and how these problems were "produced") to looking at the mediatization of the policy and to the (potentially messy and uneven) enactment of the policy.

Thus the analysis will draw upon the wider policy implementation literature and seek to locate aspects within relevant theoretical models including top-down and bottom-up implementation, policy networks, principal-agent theory, change management and the implementation staircase. It will also consider the relevance of Matland's (1995) 'Ambiguity-Conflict Matrix'. These are described in more detail in section 2.3-2.3.6

3.2.4 Methodology and Method

Developing his model further Crotty introduces the idea of methodology and provides a useful dismantling of the argument (he refers to 'The Great Divide') that all objectivist, positivist research must be quantitative, while all constructionist, interpretivist work is best served by qualitative research. The piece of work in question applies a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2018; p.3-4). As the focus of this thesis is on the experience of those enacting a policy I have taken an approach (Creswell, 2018), which 'requires us to engage with phenomena in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately' (Crotty, 1998; 79) through understanding and unpacking lived experiences of key actors.

This is applied in this context by analysing what the policy documentation stated and alongside questions on the experience of people directly involved in the implementation and enactment of this policy. Therefore a combination of documentary analysis and interviews were undertaken with a view to undertaking a thematic analysis to identify recurrent and connected ideas (Gomm, 2004; p.189-197) and to consider these within a policy implementation studies theoretical framework. This is unpacked in more detail below.

Epistemology	Theoretical Perspective	Methodology	Methods
Constructivism	Interpretivist	Qualitative	Thematic analysis of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key policy documents • Interviews with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ policy informants (macro level) ○ those working in HEIs (micro level)

Table 1: Crotty's (1998; p.5) Table 1 as applied to this research

3.3 Research Method

Following the literature review that was undertaken to establish what was already known and where there are gaps, a mixed qualitative methods approach was taken which combines documentary analysis of policy texts alongside semi-structured interviews. Denscombe (2010a) identifies stages for qualitative data analysis and these have been addressed for the data corpus, which comprise two main data sets (i.e. documents and interviews) – these terms are used as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

3.3.1 Key Policy Documents – Data Sampling and Collection

Recent government policy and related documents focusing on high-level skills policy and specifically higher and degree apprenticeships were selected for this element of the data corpus. This also included wider documents on the role of higher education and the link to economic and social aspects such as productivity, employability etc.

The document data set selected includes publications from and/or commissioned by key bodies and stakeholders such as UK Government, UK Parliament, Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (now Office for Students (OfS)), the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Institute for Apprenticeships and education sector representative organisations such as UVAC and the Association of Education and Learning Providers (AELP).

3.3.2 Interviews: Data Sampling and Collection

The interview subjects are divided into two sub-sections; those of policy informants and those of HEI participants. Policy informants are defined here as representatives of national government, funding or other agencies which have played a role in the formulation of the policy. In the context of this study they represent the 'macro' level. Higher Education (HEI) participants are those representing individual universities and the intention was that they would represent the voice of both the 'meso' and the 'micro' level. However in practice no 'meso' (University senior managers') responded to the invitation to interview and therefore the 'meso' voice is reported through the views of both sets of participants.

- a) Policy informants (n=9) from the following organisations/agencies: Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (now Office for Students), Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)/Department for Education (DfE), UK Parliament Education Select Committee, Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA), Universities UK (UUK), Universities Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) and Association of Education and Learning Providers (AELP). In the description and analysis of the findings the exact organisations of some have been replaced with '*Higher Education Sector umbrella body*' to preserve anonymity – see Table 2 below.

These participants were selected through purposive sampling (Denscombe, 2014, Bryman, 2016) as they held specific knowledge or positions. They were invited to participate, either directly to the named individual where this was known or through an open invitation to the organisation in question. All organisations which were approached provided an interviewee with the exception of one business-university organisation. This latter was not deemed to be critical to this study as the focus was on the experience in the university sector as opposed to within business. The interviews focused on high-level skills policy intention, policy development, implementation and enactment.

- b) Higher Education participants (n=15) which included a mix of senior managers, middle managers and ground level delivery (academic staff, business units) and with a focus on policy implementation and enactment. They were selected following an open call requesting participation which went out to universities appearing on the national Register of Apprentice Training Providers (ROATP) – a publicly available record. The original intention was to seek participants from a range of type of HEI (Russell Group, Pre 92 Chartered Institutions, Post-92 statutory institutions. In the end 13 of the 15

HEI participants were from post-92 institutions which resulted in an adjustment to the research questions as this data set would not enable analysis of any differences experienced due to the type of institution. The self-selected sample is in many ways unsurprising as the post-92 universities (many ex polytechnics) may be more likely to be engaging in this kind of applied, vocational, technical and professional higher education than more research intensive universities. However it is important to note the somewhat opportunistic or random nature of this approach to selection which did result in the lack of representation from the meso (senior university manager) level.

Policy Informants				No. of interviews	Phone/Face to face?
Code	Organisation	Role			
PI 1	<i>HE Sector Umbrella Body</i>	Exact roles not being provided for policy informants due to protection of anonymity		1	Phone
PI 2	House of Commons Education Select Committee, (Civil Service staff)			1	Phone
PI 3	Association Education and Learning Providers (AELP) (FE and independent training sector)			1	Phone
PI 4	Department for Education (DfE)			1	Phone
PI 5	<i>HE Sector Umbrella Body</i>			1	Phone
PI 6	Institute for Apprenticeships/Department for Education			1	Phone
PI 7	Institute for Apprenticeships			1	Phone
PI 8	Office for Students (Previously HEFCE)			1	Phone
PI 9	<i>HE Sector Umbrella Body</i>			1	Phone
HEI Participants				No. of interviews	Phone/Face to face?
Code	Type of institution	Organisational locus	Seniority		
HEI 1	Post-1992 Statutory University	Central Business Unit	Director	1	Phone
HEI 2	Post-1992 Statutory University	Central Business Unit	Director	1	Phone
HEI 3	Post-1992 Statutory University	Faculty	Lecturer	1	Phone
HEI 4	Post-1992 Statutory University	Faculty	Senior Lecturer	1	Phone
HEI 5	Post-1992 Statutory University	Central Business Unit	Director	1	Phone
HEI 6	Post-1992 Statutory University	Faculty	Professor	1	Phone
HEI 7	Post-1992 Statutory University	Central Business Unit	Delivery team	1	Phone
HEI 8	Post-1992 Statutory University	Faculty	Principal Lecturer	1	Face to face

HEI 9	Post-1992 Statutory University	Central Business Unit	Delivery team	1	Phone
HEI 10	Post-1992 Statutory University	Central Business Unit	Director	1	Phone
HEI 11	Post-1992 Statutory University	Faculty	Principal Lecturer	2	Face to face
HEI 12	Post-1992 Statutory University	Central Business Unit	Director	1	Phone
HEI 13	Pre-1992 University	Central Business Unit	Director	1	Phone
HEI 14	Post-1992 Statutory University	Central Business Unit	Director	1	Phone
HEI 15	Pre-1992 research intensive University	Faculty	Senior Lecturer	1	Phone

Table 2: Overview of research participants divided into Policy Informants (PI) and Higher Education Institution Participants (HEI)

The interviews were semi-structured; i.e. there were a set of planned question prompts (see Box 1) which were asked to all participants but there was also scope to follow up with further questions (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, Bryman, 2016, Creswell, 2018, Denscombe, 2014) linked to the direction taken by the research participant. Each interview lasted around 45-60 minutes. A typical structure of interviews prompts was developed although the exact wording changed each time. This is outlined below.

Box 1: Interview Design

Preamble: (both data sets) were asked to reconfirm understanding of research aims, consent and to agree how the individual can be referred to in the research e.g. as a representative of x or y organisation. The structure of interviews then covered the following areas:

Policy informants:

- a) Outline your role in relation to this area.
- b) Explain your understanding of the government high-level skills policy in the period in question?
- c) Focusing on your role / the role of your organisation, what does this policy mean for Higher Education in England?
- d) What is your view of how the policy has been put in place / implemented?
- e) What tensions/issues/problems have you experienced/observed/encountered?
- f) What opportunities/positives have you experienced/observed/encountered?
- g) Any other issues/relevant points you wish to refer to?

HEI Participants:

- a) Outline your role in relation to this area.
- b) Explain your understanding of the government high-level skills policy in the period in question?
- c) What do you think are the drivers/motivation behind this?
- d) Thinking about your own university as an example what does this policy mean for Higher Education in England?
- e) What is your view of how the policy has been put in place / implemented?
- f) What tensions/issues/problems have you experienced/observed/encountered in your university setting?
- g) What opportunities/positives experienced/observed/encountered in your university setting?
- h) Any other issues/relevant points you wish to refer to?

Two pilot interviews were undertaken at the start of the process and as a result of these some additional steps were added in; e.g. participants were asked to explain what they

understood the policy to be at the start of the interview. Some of the responses were followed up by additional questions to probe more detailed explanations. It is important to remain mindful of the potential for participants to give misleading or inaccurate accounts but as the focus of this element of the research is to capture respondents' attitudes and opinions, this justifies the use of the semi-structured method.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed and these transcriptions provide the record of the qualitative data¹. A thematic analysis was then undertaken and overlaid with the data generated by the documentary analysis (see above) with those from the interviews. From this, the key areas of dissent and agreement were identified and this provided the rich data towards answering the above research questions.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is defined by Holliday as a 'process of making sense of, sifting, organizing, cataloguing, selecting, determining themes – processing the data' (2006; p.99). The importance of data analysis is to move from the raw data through a process of exploration and familiarisation to a deeper level of understanding and meaning-making. By its nature qualitative data analysis is a 'messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process...it is not neat' (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; 207).

Qualitative data analysis includes 'among other matters, organizing, describing, understanding, accounting for, and explaining data, making sense of data ... noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities' (Cohen and Manion, 2018; 643). It is impossible to include all data within a qualitative study such as this and therefore there is an element of researcher interference, choice and bias in the data and ultimately the findings that are presented.

3.4.1 Key Policy Documents: Data Analysis

A documentary analysis (Ashwin and Smith, 2015) of policy texts was undertaken. Policy documents come with their own underlying ideologies and biases (Bryman, 2016; 553) and documents 'do not simply reflect, but also construct social reality..' (May, 2011). McCulloch (2011) states the importance of understanding the broader context (e.g. educational, social, political and economic) that may help to explain the meaning of policy documents. The intention here was to consider all these aspects using a thematic analytical approach in order to try and understand the assumptions behind the face-value

¹ All recordings and transcriptions are stored in line with the University's data management and retention regulations and are available for examination if required (e.g. by PhD supervisor, examiners and University administration).

text (Fischer et al., 2015; p.208-218, May and Perry, 2011). This aimed to elucidate some of the power and ideologies at play through analysis of recurrent themes and discourses.

These authentic documents fall into what Boulton and Hammersley (1996) refer to as unstructured data; i.e. data which has not been coded with field notes or similar by the researcher. The first stage was to identify and secure access to the relevant and definitive versions of the texts, some of which had been archived as a result of governmental changes. Others were transcripts of oral evidence given during parliamentary select committee hearings. All sources were carefully checked for authenticity and credibility (May, 2011; p.208) The documents were then read and re-read closely with the aim of looking for recurrent themes and issues, which were annotated, catalogued and indexed in a logical and retrievable way. All the documents were uploaded into NVivo™ for the purpose of thematic analysis.

This then led into a more detailed content analysis in order to unearth ‘hidden aspects of what is being communicated’ (Denscombe, 2014; 284, Rubin and Rubin, 2012, Mason, 2018). The approach involved coding the data using a systematic, complete coding approach (Braun and Clarke, 2013; p.206), grouping into categories and themes, then looking for more abstract categories to try and understand the underlying concepts being expressed through the text and finally to place these within the context of policy enactment and implementation.

The final stage was to undertake a written interpretation to bring all of this together. An ‘illustrative style’ (May, 2011; p.214) is employed, whereby data are selected to illustrate themes, supported by quotations where relevant. This of course raises questions about researcher choice and bias in terms of which sections are selected and which are not. The approach taken here has been to choose sections which clearly link to the themes – see also section below on researcher positionality.

3.4.2 Interviews – Data Analysis

The first stage of the process was to ensure the preparation of the interview data in readiness for analysis. This required uploading and secure back-up of the original sound recordings, along with an initial listen back to all recordings to check for clarity and seek clarification from research participants if necessary.

The next phase entailed transcribing all or relevant sections of text to provide a written record, bearing in mind issues around transcriptions Denscombe (2010a; 308-309). All transcripts were uploaded to NIVIVO – a computer assisted qualitative data analysis

software (Edhlund, 2011, Bryman, 2016) which provided a useful digital framework in which to store and analyse data.

As was the case for the documents, a process of thematic analysis was utilised (Braun and Clarke, 2006, Bryman, 2016, Flick, 2018) which sought to identify recurrent themes, analogies, metaphors as well as similarities and differences when discussing specific topics. Braun and Clark state that thematic analysis has been described as a 'tool' or a 'process' which sits within qualitative research; however they go on to argue that it should be seen as a method in its own right and can be seen as atheoretical; i.e. 'independent of theory and epistemology' (Braun and Clarke, 2006; p.5).

Despite this Braun and Clarke (2006) state the importance of making explicit the choices that have been made and the researcher has considered the following questions:

- i. *What counts as a theme?* Clearly this is largely reliant on researcher decision-making and judgement and there is no scientific formula to determine what can be classed as theme. Nevertheless, two criteria were used in a consistent way: these were 'prevalence' (i.e. the number of times an idea was mentioned) and 'relevance' (i.e. how closely the data related to the research questions).
- ii. *Is an inductive (bottom-up) or deductive approach (top-down) approach being used?* This relates to the decision as to whether 'you code as you go' or whether the researcher specifically relates coding to a theoretical approach? In this piece of work an inductive approach was taken; i.e. the coding was done through reading and re-reading the data to identify 'emerging' and recurrent themes which were later analysed using a policy implementation framework. It is worth pointing out here that the researcher agrees with Braun and Clark's (2013; p.225) objection to the idea of themes 'emerging' from the data – rather that they are created or developed following an active process.
- iii. *Are semantic or latent themes being drawn out?* This is the level at which the data will be analysed. Latent analysis 'goes beyond the semantic meaning (or data-driven codes) of the content and starts to examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations – also referred to as researcher-derived codes. Both have been applied here as the research seeks to understand the intention and decisions behind the policy and how this has been understood and applied on the ground. It would be very hard to carry out a piece of thematic analysis on a purely semantic basis as Braun and Clarke (ibid) concede.
- iv. *Realist or constructionist?* As set out above, a constructionist epistemology is being applied to this work, in that the view is the meanings and experiences being researched are socially constructed and situated within a socio-cultural paradigm.

Once these 'choices' have been made, Braun and Clark set out six phases of analysis, which were followed during the analysis of the data set. These are:

- i. Familiarise self with data

-
- ii. Generate codes
 - iii. Search for themes
 - iv. Review themes
 - v. Define and name themes
 - vi. Produce the report (i.e. write up in form of thesis or publication)

As with the documentary analysis, the process was followed to identify recurrent themes and issues, to catalogue and index these and to annotate transcripts with any obvious themes. The process followed a standard approach to content analysis; grouping into categories and themes, breaking down into smaller units and coding the data using a systematic approach, as emphasised by Miles and Huberman (1994; p.65). While this sounds simple in theory it can be problematic to revisit data with a new perspective as Holliday sets out as he described moving from a chronological to a thematic analysis (Holliday, 2006; p.106).

Coding was followed by a frequency analysis and a process to identify linkages and relationships in order to explain what is being stated, using a framework matrix to 'present information systematically so the user can draw valid conclusions and take needed action' (Miles and Huberman, 1994; p.91). This led to a description of what was implied/inferred. Gillham provides a useful checklist for this process and highlights the importance of ensuring that the 'the basis for inferences must be made explicit' (2004; p.70).

As with the documents, a written account seeks to bring all of this together, illustrated with quotations where relevant. These have been 'data-cleansed' so that many hesitations and false-starts have been edited out and in some cases quotations have been shortened, using an ellipsis (...). It was important to consider some of the issues around decontextualized extracts and quotation (Denscombe, 2010a) and each quote has been given some descriptive commentary in order to provide context. Where specific identifying details were included, these have been replaced by non-italicised square bracketed insertions e.g. [name of company] or [name of university].

Validation of findings is provided through a data triangulation exercise, cross-referencing to the findings of the documentary analysis (Mason, 2018; p.108). Again drawing upon Braun and Clarke (2013; p.261), exact numbers of respondents who commented on a particular theme are not provided, as the nature of the semi-structured interviews means that each one took on a different pattern and therefore cannot be used as directly comparative. However it may be where a theme was commonly identified by many participants this will be indicated in a non-numeric yet quantifiable way such as 'many' or 'most' when referring to the research participants. Finally an interpretative discussion

locates these findings with relevant concepts and theories and draws upon scholarly literature, with a clear focus on the original research questions.

3.5 Ethics

Prior to commencement the proposed research was subjected to a full check from an ethical dimension which considered key aspects such as who the participants are and how they were selected and contacted. A clear process was set out in relation to the obtaining of consent, the protection of participant confidentiality and anonymity and finally the secure storage of data². All researcher-generated data (interview notes, audio recordings and transcripts) is stored on a secure, password protected university server. At the completion of the doctorate, anonymised interview transcript data will be deposited in Lancaster University's institutional data repository for access by future researchers. All audio recordings will be deleted/destroyed at this point.

3.6 Researcher Positioning & Reflexivity

In a piece of qualitative, interpretive research such as this one it is important to remain aware of one's own positioning, and associated 'biases, values and personal background...that shape their interpretations' (Creswell, 2018, Creswell and Creswell, 2013). Yorke and Vidovich (2016; p.76) identify three positionalities of any researcher which could be summarised as theoretical stance, professional role and relative privilege i.e. location of the research in relation to globalised and geo-political standpoints.

My professional role is tightly bound up with this piece of research. I have led institution-wide projects around employer engagement and on the implementation of degree apprenticeships in my own employing University. What is the implication of this for my research? I (successfully) led our own institutional bid to HEFCE for Degree Apprenticeship (DA) Development Funding. I am fairly well connected on a national level and know five of the policy informants interviewed on a professional level. The issue I have is how much of an issue is this? In the Lancaster University ethics proforma it poses the following question: *'Do you anticipate any ethical constraints relating to power imbalances or dependent relationships, either with participants or with or within the research team? If yes, please explain how you intend to address these?'*

My first inclination was to brush over this but more detailed consideration has led me to the view that I need to think about the effects on my position of knowing some of my interviewees. I am concerned that because some of them know me that they may have said what they think I want to hear (see also 3.8.3). The research put me in an interesting

² All completed consent forms / responses are available for inspection if required.

position; while I was largely interviewing people from organisations other than my home institution there is an element of 'insiderness' (Trowler, 2016) as we have all been engaged in taking forward this policy implementation and therefore are part of a wider collegial community. There have been instances within the interviews where there was a reference to shared experience and confidences. I endeavoured to address this by keeping my comments and questions/prompts as neutral as possible and not to engage in a cosy discussion. At all times I sought to remain mindful of this as my research unfolded while not allowing it to hold up progress and 'induce catharsis' (Pillow, 2003).

Therefore, as part of this research it was important to consider issues of reflexivity and positioning as well as conscious and unconscious bias. This was done by the posing (and re-posing) of what Mason (2002) calls 'difficult questions' which become 'reflexive acts'... 'thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see' (Mason, 2002; 5). I appreciate however the danger of becoming what Pillow (2003) calls 'self-indulgent, narcissistic and tiresome' and will seek to keep this element of my research balanced and proportionate.

In summary, and moving away from some of the somewhat esoteric arguments above, I will be taking what Marshall and Rossman (1995) refer to as a 'traditional' approach to qualitative research; i.e. that knowledge is subjective. Charmaz puts it well indicating the need to '*take the researcher's position, privileges, perspective and interactions into account as an inherent part of the research reality.*' (2014; p.12). As I worked through the interviews as part of the data analysis I endeavoured to remain mindful of my positioning.

3.7 Generalisability, Validity, Reliability and Credibility

Quantitative, scientific research has clear views on reliability, standardisation and generalisability. For instance, if you measure the same thing with the same instrument under the same conditions, you should get the same, repeatable result. Applying this to a qualitative setting does not lead to the same standardised and repeatable results (Mason, 2002) and the issue being addressed here is how to achieve results that are still valid and therefore useful beyond the particular instance from which they are generated.

Bryman (2016) develops the themes of reliability and suggests an alternative way of looking at this; via Guba and Lincoln's criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Trustworthiness is of particular relevance to this research project and they propose four sub-headings of *credibility, transferability, dependability and*

confirmability. The first two are most pertinent and will be addressed in this research project as follows:

- **Credibility:** Mixed methods have been used (documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews) to triangulate results.
- **Transferability:** Section 3.8 provides what Geertz (cited in Bryman, 384) calls 'thick description' i.e. who participated, role, location, type of HE setting, data collection techniques etc. This means recreation of the study would be feasible enabling findings to be transferred and verified to some extent.

I believe that qualitative research can still lead to accurate and more widely generalisable results through accurate and well thought out approaches to data generation and analysis. However in order to achieve this it is important to achieve 'conceptual and ontological clarity' (Mason, 2002; 188) i.e. alignment between what you claim you are researching with your actual research plans. The research design seeks to enable this.

3.8 Potential pitfalls and limitations

3.8.1 Thematic analysis

The use of thematic analysis can lead to several potential pitfalls as identified by Braun and Clarke (2006). These include the *failure to actually analyse the data* – there needs to be a process to understand and interpret the data in a way to communicate meanings and connections. I have addressed this through seeking to provide evidence of rich data with selected extracts and examples – which have been selected to be representative rather than anecdotal or idiosyncratic. This point is also picked up by Silverman (2004) and Cohen et al. (2011; p.551), while Bryman (2016; p.583) also identifies losing context of what is being said as a potential problem with thematic analysis – 'a decontextualized quote from an interview or document can lose its social setting'. This is harder to address but in the presentation of findings I have attempted to provide some context and connection with the wider policy landscape.

3.8.2 Use of Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)

(Braun and Clarke, 2013; p.219) identify several potential issues here including 'usability frustration', technologically-mediated distancing and procrastination. There is a need to remain mindful and use any software in a 'critical and thoughtful way' (Braun and Clarke, 2013; p.220). This proved to be a valid concern and the decision was taken to use NVivo™ more as a repository of data, codes and themes, with much of the analysis and connecting done outside the software in a more cerebral way.

Other potential dangers are that it can lead to a fragmentation of data, which they say has led to a resurgence in narrative analysis, too many codes and a failure to identify

how codes (and then themes) were identified. This was addressed by remaining mindful of the process and keeping detailed field notes which show how the nodes and codes developed as the data sets grew.

3.8.3 Interviews

Marshall and Rossman (2011) identify some of the potential limitations of interviewing; namely that interviewees may be uncomfortable or unwilling to share; that the interviewer has insufficient skills to probe and draw out responses, that the volume of data to be analysed is overwhelming and may not be of the required quality for the purpose of the study.

Creswell (2018) also develops similar themes and notes that the researcher's presence may result in biased responses; what Denscombe (2014) calls the 'interviewer effect'. He also mentions lack of consistency in his list of limitations of this kind of study. This was certainly an issue and a concern for me. This was addressed in a variety of ways – my view is that semi-structured interviews can produce data that is valid and authentic and allow for unanticipated areas and issues to be explored (Cohen et al., 2011; p.205). I endeavoured to present a professional manner and develop a rapport with the interviewees. Two pilot interviews were undertaken to refine the process.

3.8.4 Policy informants – retaining anonymity?

The final issue I have identified is around retaining anonymity of policy informants. Many of the people I interviewed in this category are in unique (and therefore potentially identifiable) roles. An issue here is around power and vested interests as some of the policy informant interviewees are in a position of power – to influence policy, to influence grant making, and potentially to support my future career development which means that I have a 'vested' interest in what they say and how this is reported and framed. I was careful to ensure that they understood the context of the interview (PhD research) and that their anonymity and confidentiality was assured throughout the process.

3.8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the approach I have taken to research design, methodology and method. It aims to clarify epistemological positioning and how this has informed the design and approach taken to the study. It describes the process of data collection, analysis and conceptual framework used to analyse the findings. The final sections illustrate the consideration given to some of the ethical and positional aspects of the research and briefly sets out limitations and how these have been considered.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction and Central themes

This chapter sets out the key findings following the thematic analysis of the data. As set out in Chapter 3, the process of thematic analysis has been used to identify and interpret themes. An 'illustrative style' (May, 2011; p.214) is employed, whereby data are selected to illustrate themes, supported by quotations where relevant. With both policy texts and interviews quotations have been given some descriptive commentary in order to provide context.

Each theme and sub-theme is structured in the same way; that is that firstly the policy texts are analysed, followed by the interviews with policy informants (PIx) and then lastly with HEI (HEIy) representatives (See Table 2). The idea here is to broadly follow the policy implementation staircase from top to bottom to exemplify how policy formulation elides with implementation for each theme. In this way the reader is taken through the key findings identified by the researcher for each theme and sub-theme.

The major themes and sub-themes which were identified from both data sets are as follows:

- Policy intention and implementation
 - Productivity and Economic considerations
 - Social Mobility
 - Institutional Strategy and implementation
- Policy Levers
 - Funding
 - Targets
- Programme Design
 - Trailblazers and Standards
 - Mandatory Qualifications
 - Upskilling existing employees or developing new talent?
 - Levels
- Learning, Teaching and Assessment
 - Pedagogy
 - End-Point Assessment
 - Quality, Quality Assurance and Systems & Processes
- Perceptions and Attitudes

4.2 Policy: intention and implementation

In 2010, the Coalition Government set out to improve national skills and to address apprenticeship quality. This was approached through three key policy documents: The Skills for Sustainable Growth Strategy (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2010), the Wolf Report into Vocational Education (Wolf, 2011) and the Richard Review of Apprenticeships (Richard, 2012). The initial government strategy focused on improving

the quality of lower level apprenticeships (Levels 2 and 3) and to ensure these were a foundation for the next stage of learning:

we will reshape Apprenticeships so ... Level 3 becomes the level to which learners and employers aspire... there will be clear progression routes... to... Level 4 Apprenticeships or higher education' (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2010; para 13)

Despite this veiled mention of Level 4 apprenticeships, the strategy did little to introduce the idea of higher and degree level apprenticeships and herald the new developments to follow. In 2011 the Wolf Report (2011) called English vocational education '*extraordinarily complex and opaque by European and international standards*' and criticised the government for '*complex, expensive and counterproductive structures*' (Wolf, 2011; p.9).

Wolf's report gave academic rigour and independence to the idea of reform of the wider system and led to the commissioning of the Richard Review. The subsequent government response disrupted the English apprenticeship system with radical shifts in the design and funding of apprenticeships. The result was a new system, which included the shifting of power (from training providers to employers), the creation of a new regulator, major reform of apprenticeship programmes (from qualification-led frameworks to employer-designed standards), independent end-point assessment of apprenticeships and a new employer-funded system (later to become the apprenticeship levy). Again little or no mention of higher or degree apprenticeships was made and the usual rhetoric of apprenticeship as an alternative to HE was delivered:

It is inappropriate for [apprenticeship] to be viewed as a lower-status alternative to a purely academic path through university to adulthood'. (Richard, 2012; p.5-6)

In what Wolf might call 'repeated, overlapping directives' (2011; p.9), higher apprenticeships were introduced simultaneously through the Higher Apprenticeship Fund which saw development funding made available to providers and employers to develop programmes up to level 6 equivalent. Many of these used qualifications (including foundation and bachelor degrees) to deliver the 'knowledge' element. This was the first time that apprenticeships were seen as *part of* the HE offer instead of an alternative to university. Vice-chancellors could be excused for paying little attention, unaware then of the major impact the ensuing reforms would have on the Higher Education sector (Matthews, 2016).

Degree apprenticeships were launched in 2015 with great fanfare from the government on their likely economic impact to address skills shortages in key sectors and to drive up

productivity (Prime Minister's Office, 2015). Little thought appeared to have been given as to the consequence for the HE sector given their different '*history, cultures and imperatives*' (Hordern, 2017; p.89) when compared to the wider vocational educational training sector. These new programmes were to be in line with the Richard reforms (employer-led standards) but with a requirement that a full under- or post-graduate degree would be a mandatory element.

From the outset the government made it clear that these reforms were to be 'employer-led' and required supporting input from government/agencies alongside 'training providers'. This umbrella term encompasses all organisations approved to deliver apprenticeships whether from the FE/Skills sector (colleges, private providers), the HE sector (Universities and other organisations with Degree-awarding powers) plus employer-providers.

Governance arose as a theme, with responsibility for policy residing with the Minister for Skills and Apprenticeships – with seemingly little input from the Minister for Universities despite the wide-ranging impact on their sector. There was scant recognition of the requirement for major institutional adaptation that ensued – the White Paper understating this: '*apprenticeships **may** involve changes to the way universities design and deliver courses to meet the standard*' (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016b; para 23) (researcher emphasis).

The Government and HEFCE later acknowledged the significant changes required and funding through the Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund was made available to '*pump-prime a new HE market for degree apprenticeships; establish capacity and expertise to deliver degree apprenticeships; and to secure the **cultural and behavioural changes** among universities and colleges needed to embed degree apprenticeships*'. (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2016; para 12). (Researcher emphasis).

The interviews with policy informant policy informants sought to revisit the formal policy through the eyes of people that had been engaged in the implementation. All stressed the importance of both economic and social considerations. The DfE representative mentioned the thinking behind bringing in higher education sector:

We hadn't brought in HE expertise into technical and work-based education before. And I think there's been some really valuable insights by bringing... traditional higher education... and kind of combining those two things. (PI4)

This was however later countered with the following, which sets the tone of a rational-purposive implementation being imposed onto the sector:

I think from our side we've been really clear to say this is what the program looks like. We can't change it and have a completely separate product for a certain level [i.e. HE]...ultimately if you don't want to do it in that way then that's your decision to make (P14).

PI 9, from one of the HE sector organisations felt that the HE Sector had largely been brought in in order to shore up the wider reputation of apprenticeships:

There was a bit of a feeling that degree apprenticeships were available as a ministerial 'go to' to answer any questions about the quality of existing apprenticeships... So it was kind of felt a little bit like it was a... shield ...quality shield. (P19)

This was backed up by PI 6, who had held a role in the DfE from 2015-17, stating:

everything I've picked up is that it was sort of just grabbed on to as a potential way of improving the status of apprenticeships by linking them to degrees...

There was a view from all the policy informants that the policy was focused on delivering the skills needed immediately by employers and the economy, while the focus on specific occupations was a concern for some:

I can understand that academics would say "ah, but you know ...you might be competent in a job... but you haven't got the breadth of learning that you would get in an undergraduate degree. (P18)

while others could see the advantages to apprentices in terms of widening access to professional roles and improving employability more generally:

The policy is about widening participation and making sure that there's... adequate progression routes for individuals who want to go on the work-based route so that they're not kind of curtailed at level 4. (P14)

Several interviewees felt that the policy intention was flawed, as it was supposed to be purely led by employer requirements but was also subjected to policy levers:

...apprenticeships should be an employer-led program where employers not only develop the standards... the government wants a set number of starts but it's also said that employers are in the driving seat in terms of purchasing ...a contradiction (P11)

Several, especially those representing HE, commended the sector on adaptability to the new policy:

we've done something amazing in raising the aspiration... perception of what universities can bring to what has traditionally been seen as a vocational space and universities have responded very, very well... very quickly. (PI4)

While the DfE could see all round benefits to the programme stating that it:

...is going to benefit everybody... it's going to benefit us [DfE] from a perception point of view in terms of the programme and getting more people involved... to benefit them [apprentices and employers] obviously from the skills point of view. It's going to benefit [HE] as well ... So it's a win-win all around.' (PI4)

The overriding views of the HEI participants on the policy intention were positive – they linked it to addressing workforce skills shortages, enabling more people to access higher education from diverse backgrounds and one saw it as accidentally enabling lifelong learning:

HEI11: I put it in a lifelong learning agenda. And I think it has been a first real opportunity we've had to actually put anything behind the rhetoric.

Int: And do you think that's what the government intended?

HEI11: I don't. Well they don't talk about lifelong learning at all. So they talk about it in terms of you know competitiveness and productivity and yes social mobility

Concerns were expressed around the communication and implementation of the policy – in particular a feeling of lack of long-term government commitment to the policy:

this is just seen as an additional project and there's some feeling of "yeah the government will change something tomorrow... so what is the point of changing our internal policies to align with that?" (HE11)

and

even my own PVC said "Oh well obviously they are a great opportunity but ...you know nobody's sure whether they're here to stay". So everyone's still saying well you know we don't know whether it's going to last... it just needs a change of government. (HE11)

This sense of shifting sands also related to the implementation of the policy:

It's a completely fluid moving picture... it's not viable having to pump hours and hours into working out how to do something and then that's not an ongoing operation'. (HE13)

while the speed of policy changes is not familiar within the HE sector.

... they're too quick to review policy and amend things... it's like, "Oh, ok, I don't think the 10% contribution from small employers is working, so we're gonna change it to 5%". This sudden announcement, you just think, you have not given this policy enough time to bed in.... (HE15)

Finally, several of the HEI participants referred to mixed messages coming from different parts of government:

Sometimes it's like one part of the government appears to be stacked up against another... if you got Anne Milton and Robert Halfon in a room they would have very different things to say about the value of degree apprenticeships.

while another referred to the changes of policy direction that come with ministerial changes with the following showing some of the frustration felt:

I think as ministers have changed I think there have been changes ... "they are about productivity", "they are about social inclusion", "they are about both"... "we actually have too many degree apprenticeships now" "actually apprenticeships were really for a different category of people"... it has been quite confusing position' (HE110)

The following sections unpack in some more detail the key themes identified through analysis of the policy texts and interview transcripts.

4.2.1 Productivity and Economic Considerations

The link between apprenticeships and economic development comes through from all the government-produced documentation. It flows through the rhetoric:

*'I am determined that this government should be the most pro-business there has been, with one purpose: creating jobs and growth... the skills in this country that our businesses need and... fuel long term growth. That is why... we are increasing the number of apprenticeships to record levels'.
David Cameron, Prime Minister's Office (2015)*

More recently, the focus was on the productivity gap and how apprenticeships contribute to the industrial strategy. The Productivity Plan (HM Treasury, 2015c) identifies that 'a critical need for high numbers of new technical and professional skilled workers to enter the workforce in the coming years presents a strong case for a high quality apprenticeship system in the UK'. The Industrial Strategy (HM Government, 2017b) links poor management skills to lower productivity and the message is that apprenticeship

programmes will need to be linked to the country/economy's identified areas of 'skills gaps'. This feeds directly into the policy directive provided by the government to the Institute for Apprenticeships:

'We [the DfE] would expect the Institute to prioritise the development of standards in sectors where Government, the Institute and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) have evidence of skills gaps... priorities for the industrial strategy'. (Department for Education, 2018)

The strong message that comes through from the policy documents is one of employer-led reform that emphasises:

*'the importance of employers... playing a major role in improving the quality of apprenticeships', 'a new model of apprenticeship funding, **which puts employers in the lead, maximises value for money and encourages growth**'. (Department for Education, 2018) (researcher emphasis).*

Apprehension was expressed around giving design control to employers, especially concerning what is approved and in whose interests. The Richard Review *'cautioned against tailoring apprenticeships to individual employer needs'* to *'ensure that the skills and training ... are sufficiently general and relevant across the industry'* (Richard, 2012; p.46).

All the policy informants made a link between the policy and the need to address the UK productivity puzzle by driving up skills:

'I think initially there was a lot of enthusiasm about the degree apprenticeships... it was about a very strong productivity agenda'. (P19)

with some seeing the two as directly related:

'The rationale for that was UK productivity was... something like 60 percent lower than the OECD average 2016. The key reason was employers failing to invest in staff development. So that was the rationale'. (P1)

Others raised concerns that the policy intention was becoming unclear with a newer focus on providing lower-level training for those who had left education with few qualifications. This was seen to be in direct contradiction of the original policy intention:

'it's not about, you know... adjusting for the failing of the school system for young people, but actually doing what it set out to do back in 2010, which is to radically reform our economy and give us the higher level skills that the economy needs. (P15)

while another informant also drew attention to what s/he perceived as policy confusion:

‘So you’ve got a very confused set of policy objectives out there in terms of apprenticeship... If apprenticeship was there to support productivity ...was about employers choosing ... it’s a really good story. But... these other issues that are almost distracting... if we don’t... focus on... productivity it will fail to deliver in terms of raising skills of addressing skills gaps and shortages’. (PI1)

Another linked the policy to the impact of public spending cuts since 2010:

‘I think that the original policy intention was a response to austerity, in that “we’ve got no public finance available, we’ve got no money. We desperately need to ramp up our skills. We’re going to have to force employers to pay for it”... So this pot (the levy) has been created’. (PI 8)

Several of the HEI participants raised the issue of the wider environment (including Brexit) and the link to UK’s economic performance:

‘in the light of the Brexit vote I think it’s taken on a whole new resonance because effectively... we may be losing elements of our existing workforce ... it will have implications on our existing workforce development particularly’. (HEI11)

Others saw this as an opportunity for HEIs to engage with business and industry to work with them to address their skill shortages:

Employers are more willing to have conversations with the universities, because of this agenda... those who perhaps wouldn’t normally consider this university’. (HEI12)

while others thought that the onus of the policy was to push previously recalcitrant employers to invest in high level skills for their workforce:

‘I think the driver behind it is obviously to get employers to invest in training to improve, specifically on the Degree Apprenticeships, for them to improve higher level skills ... deliver the industrial strategy’. (KI6)

4.2.2 Social Mobility (includes opportunity and progression)

This has been presented as a key plank of policy by recent government through David Cameron’s and Nick Clegg’s promise of ‘a Britain where social mobility is unlocked’ to Theresa May’s pledge to support those ‘just managing’ (May, 2016).

Attempts to improve social mobility have underpinned much public policy intention in the 2010, 2015 and 2017 governments. This has appeared in skills policy: *'We will also make sure there are clear routes into Apprenticeships to widen access to the programme'* and a recognition that all stakeholders would need to provide *'ladders of progression' through more 'flexible provision'* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2010; para. 21).

The Conservative government view was very much on the opportunity presented by apprenticeships for (mainly young) people to pull themselves up to improve their life chances – in a similar vein to their mainstream (yet narrow) approach to higher education which focused on enabling bright youngsters to access the most selective universities and elite professions (Lane, 2015). The BEIS/Education Joint Select Committee report of 2017 (Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, 2017) queried the success of the implementation of this policy intention. Despite the Minister telling the Committee 'that a key aim of the apprenticeship programme was "helping the socially disadvantaged" and creating a "ladder of opportunity" ' (United Kingdom Parliament, 2016b), a number of structural and systemic barriers were identified particularly for those coming from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, for young people leaving the care system and those without family support.

Nevertheless, many of the Higher Education bodies and institutions which gave evidence to the 2018 Education Select Committee report into apprenticeships were enthusiastic about the ability of higher and degree apprenticeships to address social disadvantage:

'...the development of Higher and Degree Apprenticeship should have a particular focus on meeting the needs and aspirations of individuals who do not currently benefit from higher education.' (Universities UK, 2017b)

A particular aspect that HEIs drew attention to was the potential offered by Higher and Degree apprenticeships to open up the professions, including those in the public sector through new standards leading to police constable, registered nurse, social worker or teacher. Middlesex University referred to this as the 'transformative potential' and called for 'parity of esteem with traditional degrees'. (Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, 2017).

A later Select Committee report also called for better information, advice and guidance to potential and current apprentices:

'on the academic route [...] everything is signposted, you get supported at transition points. [In apprenticeships] there are lots of dead ends... pitfalls. Sometimes it is a very confusing route.' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; para 37)

lamenting the lack of support when compared to the system for applying to higher education, which would particularly hinder those applying from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Generally, much was made of the opportunity offered by apprenticeships to achieve a degree debt-free. Interestingly, it was not clear if this in itself was enough to widen access to programmes with the Minister for Skills stating:

'The fear of a middle-class grab on these apprenticeships is valid. So I am watching and waiting' Ann Milton, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, 2018).

One of the policy informants from the Office for Students (formerly HEFCE) had observed a shift in the policy focus in 2017:

'we had a change in the top level of leadership at policy level, so Sajid Javid kicked this off, and then, Theresa May's government came into power and Jo Johnson took over the reins of the [HEFCE Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund] ... he'd been given a new focus alongside productivity... of social justice... social mobility' (P18)

This description was verified up by another HE sector body representative:

'a shift to the idea of social mobility has become as important as productivity. I think that's partly in response to the Brexit vote and supporting those who have been left behind'. (P19)

One of the main areas of contestation to arise in this area related to the purpose of apprenticeship – to raise productivity through enhancing higher-level skills or to alleviate the failings of secondary education. This was not met enthusiastically by the HE sector representatives:

'historically apprenticeships have been different than addressing skills shortages and productivity. It's largely been to support individuals and the labour market as is and as an option for many individuals who didn't want to or couldn't stay on at school...' (P11)

a description which would meet many people's idea of what an apprentice should be but which does not align with the reformed policy of higher level, more academically-inclined programmes. The FE sector representative felt the balance had shifted too far towards higher levels:

One of the biggest change in the reforms has been a lack of support for young apprentices which we have... raised on numerous occasions... our kind of, argument is there needs to be a balance. (P13)

The comments from the Minister about the so-called middle-class grab were not missed, and the following alluded to some of the hostility felt in the sector.

I think the social mobility tag is being linked to apprenticeships more broadly and it's as much something to beat degree apprenticeships with as to support them. Because of this accusation that its only rich, able, informed savvy middle-class families that are going to realise they can get a free degree from a degree apprenticeship... There are various things thrown at degree apprenticeships that don't really have a basis but... seem to influence... the current Minister [Milton]. (P19)

The DfE interviewee pointed out the positive and transformational nature of the higher and degree apprenticeship programme:

[Previously] 'apprenticeship stopped at level 4. But all of these new routes have been opened up and there'll be people that have never thought about going to university before because they had to work so university was cut off for them.' (P14)

Several areas were covered by the HEI participants; what was interesting was the diversity of what was described – whether it was aimed at young people:

given our location as well, a lot of the local community is coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, first in family [to enter HE] and a lot of them are interested in a job more than anything. So we're promoting apprenticeships... there's a lot of interest. (HEI1)

or at the more mature learner who may never have considered entering higher education, such as HEI8 who described the Registered Nurse apprenticeship offering a route into the profession for healthcare assistants; people (often women) who could not afford to give up work to study full-time. HEI2 describes it as:

we do very much believe that degree apprenticeships provide opportunities for a wide array of learners to access higher education. I mean if you think particularly about the public sector you know the nursing associate groups... we are widening the roots into becoming professionals through Degree Apprenticeships... has massive transformative potential.

One or two mentioned the concerns raised above that the middle-class parents would seek to use their social capital to source places for their children thus potentially denying others:

I do feel conscious that [social mobility agenda] has been slightly side-tracked because people have got so excited about the no student loan etc. so obviously, the middle class parent is all over this agenda... (HEI6)

4.2.3 Institutional strategy and implementation

This theme linked to how the policy was being interpreted and enacted with the HE sector at a strategic level. There is little indication of the likely impact in the early documents which focus largely on the opportunity this offers to universities. This comes in the form of (prime) ministerial and government announcements, press releases, speeches and forewords to reports which tend to be uncritical:

Our vision is that in ten years' time this country will be recognised as an international leader across the whole of tertiary education... There will be a strong offer across both further and higher education sectors of both academic higher education and of higher level vocational education (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015a; para 42).

and largely spun towards the positive:

Degree Apprenticeships will bring together the very best of higher and vocational education, and allow apprentices to achieve a full bachelor's or master's degree, whilst training on the job... Backed by industry and our top education institutions, they will help ensure we meet the skills gap and give people across the country the chance of a great start to their working lives'. Vince Cable, Prime Minister's Office (2015)

There was an equally unproblematised response from the University Alliance, a mission group which represents universities delivering professional, technical and vocational education at the launch of degree apprenticeships, stating their member institutions were:

well placed to help develop and implement degree apprenticeships due to their strengths in subject areas closely linked to the needs of the economy such as engineering, design and digital industries. Prime Minister's Office (2015)

Over time the policy documents and texts (Universities UK, 2016, Universities UK, 2017a) demonstrate how this policy played out with universities shifting their institutional strategies to adapt to these new types of provision. They saw it as a way of driving up growth and accessing new markets, as well as meeting wider obligations in relation to business and civic engagement and widening access to higher education. They also show how these new programmes, combined with a radical shift in apprenticeship funding, oversight and processes have resulted in some concerns. Many Universities have found the process unusually complex, for example with the University of Essex stating that:

in order to enable us to upscale our current provision it is vital that the complex operating frameworks surrounding apprenticeships are made

more accessible to the university sector and take due account of our expertise.(House of Commons Education Committee, 2018)

Much of this was highlighted in the final report of the Education Committee:

Universities told us that the Institute does not understand their sector and that this is hurting the development and growth of degree apprenticeships. (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018)

The Office for Students had been surprised by how quickly universities had adapted in order to embrace the opportunities presented by this new policy agenda:

I think that the... for me, the rapidity with which the universities have come... joined.. in any other higher education, kind of, change, there's no way that we'd have this number of institutions and this range of new courses and this hive of new entrants and employer relationships within two years... it's absolutely amazing...' (PI8)

and noted a range of strategic drivers behind this behaviour (income diversification, market growth and protection, employer and civic engagement, widening access and employability). The same interviewee went on to acknowledge that this process had led to innovation in the sector:

the Degree Apprenticeships has opened up formats and modes of study... So, the rapid way, in which universities have had to adapt... has thrown all kinds of things on the table... all universities to have to confront things that they just weren't choosing to diversify before. (PI8)

The IfA representative was of the view that HEIs were only engaging in this for financial reasons – and warned that it was not necessarily the money-spinner that some had implied. There was surprise from a range of participants that the Russell Group had come on board with 16 of 24 members now on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (ROATP), which had been well received by the (Conservative) Chair of the Education Select Committee:

it seems to us that an increasing number of providers are offering degree apprenticeship and... the Russell Group and some of the traditional research intensive universities seem to be more interested. We went up to [place] and spoke to [name of Russell Group university] about the degree apprenticeship they were offering with [names of two large, well-known manufacturing companies] and there certainly seemed to be a move in those kinds of universities to offering them and becoming more part of the HE offer'. (PI2)

The Select Committee representative did acknowledge that there was not a universal move towards this type of delivery:

the other thing is that there seems to be a little bit of tension between the kinds of universities that were offering degree apprenticeship so I think still some of the more traditional universities were really a bit reluctant compared to the newer ones. (P12)

This theme encompassed a range of opinions. HEI participants described how senior university leaders were approaching this new policy direction. Institutions which had recently had a change of Vice-Chancellor were seeing a high level of enthusiasm with the development of a university apprenticeship strategy well under way or in place.

The drivers were generally market-led and this ranged from substitution activity i.e. to make up a shortfall where full-time undergraduate recruitment had fallen:

I guess like many universities, it wasn't so much choice, we really needed to respond to an urgent demand from our changed student profile, so we had to have a different offer that sat alongside our kind of, more traditional, academic provision' (HEI13)

or to replacement of part-time programmes that employers were wanting to convert to apprenticeships (cannibalisation) in order to utilise their levy or to access non-levy funding:

It provides us an opportunity to... address some of the issues of part-time participation, because we did have a strong part-time market and post-Browne the bottom has fallen out of that of the entire sector. (HEI12)

One or two HEI participants expressed concern that the costs of delivery were higher than the projected income and management were looking for exponential growth to drive up income. There were several participants who described how the strategy aligned with other institutional priorities – employability, civic and regional engagement and business and industry partnerships. Vice-Chancellors were especially keen to see blue-chip/household names signing up for apprenticeships as this could then be used as part of wider brand promotion activity.

Some universities had put in place infrastructure around apprenticeship hubs/centres and this was generally felt to be working well, although others reported a lack of engagement e.g. from some Heads of Schools and Departments who were not keen on developing such programmes but were increasingly seeing them as critical to their ongoing business sustainability.

Heads of school... bit more mixed partly because their staff are really under pressure and there isn't a lot of space in the workload... academic teams – really mixed – some of them have taken to them and thought that apprenticeships are the best thing since sliced bread whereas others have been absolutely dreadful and have put up every barrier that they have been able to not to do apprenticeships. (HEI10)

Academic staff were reported to have mixed opinions too – with some reporting a lack of willingness to engage due to workload while others indicated that resistance might be more linked to fear of the unknown, not wishing to undertake employer visits or finally because of a worry that their industry or professional knowledge might be exposed as out of date. This was seen to be changing as apprenticeships became more widely understood:

I would say I've seen...I have seen a shift in attitude over the last eighteen months, twelve to eighteen months in terms of a kind of... "it's not for us, we don't need to do that" to more people actually now coming forward to say "right, I really need to look at how I can offer this as an apprenticeship". (HEI13)

4.3 Policy Levers

4.3.1 Funding (Levy, non-levy, funding rules and funding bands)

In order to expand and improve the quality of the offer, the Richard Review called for a new way to fund apprenticeships. Following a detailed consultation process the apprenticeship levy was announced in the summer 2015 Budget (HM Treasury, 2015b), initially as an apprenticeship voucher and then, in the Autumn Statement (HM Treasury, 2015a; para 7.3) as the apprenticeship 'levy'. This was announced very much in the tone of putting '*employers in control*,' employers having the '*purchasing power*' (HM Treasury, 2015b; para 1.180) or as putting '*employers at the heart of paying for and choosing apprenticeship training*' (HM Treasury, 2015c; para 3.10)). Employers were given reassurances that they would be able to recoup the outlay – '*In England, any firm will be able get back more than it puts in by training sufficient apprentices*' (HM Treasury, 2015c; para 3.11). In practice the levy was to be a game-changer in the way that apprenticeships were perceived and implemented prior to and following its launch. The flipside of the policy was that the 98% of employers that didn't come within the scope of the levy.

Some of the points which emerged from analysing the policy documents related to calls for flexibility of the use of levy; many employers wanted to be able to broaden its usage beyond simply apprenticeships and use it for other forms of training and workforce development. Claire Callender, in her evidence to the House of Lords (House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, 2018; para 6) mooted that more flexibility of the use of the levy could in part address the decline in part-time undergraduate education.

Funding formulae and allocations for education and skills in general (and higher education in particular) is never without contention but it is rare to encounter as much vitriol and claim and counter-claim as has been seen with the introduction of this policy.

In my view the whole levy system has been sold to employers on a collection of lies. The first lie is that it is an employer-led system. Very few employers I know that think that. The second lie is the levy money that comes back to an employer is the employer's but it isn't... then the third lie is that the funding bands cover the costs of apprenticeships. (PI9)

The general view is that the implications of the levy for HEIs were not fully considered. KI4 (DfE) accused the HE sector of wanting special arrangements:

[HEIs were all saying] 'well you know 'we don't want the funding to work like that in the HE space. That's not how we work'. (PI4).

The main concern of the others was that employers were incentivised to utilise as much of their levy as possible and the easiest way to do this was through investing in higher and degree apprenticeship programmes; regardless of whether this was the most appropriate use of funding:

'because of the levy particularly, employers have got a very definite vested interest, I mean ... you would think that employer motivation would be to maximise a number of apprentices they can train with their levy ... but at the moment, most employers in today's motivation is to maximise the price because they're trying ...to [spend], to use up their levy to get it all back.' (PI6).

Others (representing traditional FE and private providers of apprenticeships) accused the universities of making a land-grab for the majority of the funding:

'obviously, the more higher-level programs, the higher rates, obviously consumes the levy faster. So, that's our concern really, is that if we have too much at higher level, it eats through the budget faster so there needs to be a balance' (PI3)

and called for specific levers to be put in place to redress the balance towards the traditional apprentice (=lower level, younger age group). HE representatives reminded critics that the levy was supposedly an employer-led process, yet when they acted in their own interest there were cries of foul play:

Employers decide to invest substantially in those [degree] apprenticeships and then you get this huge great row going on about employers misusing their levy. (PI1)

The issue of non-levy funding was also contentious. The HE sector informants felt that the procurement process had been skewed towards the interest of the FE/private sector and that the final allocations of funding had left several cold-spots (PI 1) with no provision for smaller employers wishing to put people through higher level programmes.

We wrote to the minister recently talking about funding bands and sustainability of provision and talking about cold spots. And she basically wrote back to us and basically just [expletive deleted = 'gave us short shrift']. (PI9)

Funding bands were also a deeply contested area. There was a general view that they were misunderstood with the IfA pushing them as the maximum amount that can be funded (via levy or non-levy funding). Employers (the client) would rationally be expected to try and negotiate the price down but in fact they were acting counter-intuitively and seeking to pay the full amount of the funding band as this used up their levy and enabled them to purchase the best quality of provision from the highest provider. Universities were accused of overblowing costs of delivery by the FE sector, who also felt that the recent review and subsequent reduction of funding bands had been partly driven by a wish to send a message to the HE sector. (PI1, PI3, PI9).

The HE representatives were all largely agreed that the the levy had been the game-changer and was driving employer behaviour:

overlying all of this, in that this all sounds so worthy and marvellous that, you know, we're letting knowledge develop and form and all the rest of it, there is still the levy and the money thing driving it...it ... You get the people..., the employer, who is wanting their levy back... it's another commercially driven thing, it is, without a doubt. (HEI6)

Others reported that employers were almost blind to the specifics of the programme as they had been instructed by head office or their executive to place people on programmes:

Int: Do you think this is linked to this move to professionalise the public sector?

HEI5: Well, I..I actually don't. I'd love to say I did, but I don't think it is. I think it's linked to... it's linked to a climate of fiscal austerity, all of their training budgets have gone; they're all being forced to pay an apprenticeship levy, and... because there is money sitting in a pot... In some cases, I think most don't care and... you know, a large levy manager from the public sector has basically said to me, "I don't even care who I put onto apprenticeships. Give me anything you can", you know?'

This was backed up by one of only two pre-1992 HEIs when asked how the levy has affected behaviours:

I'm not sure whether for something like this if it would be as forthcoming – there is definitely an incentive there for [name of blue chip] to spend the levy money'. (HE115)

Concerns about the non-levy allocations and associated process were also raised. Some HEIs reported that they had withdrawn after the first procurement was abandoned. Others were frustrated that their allocations had not been sufficient to work with smaller employers, SMEs and charities which they saw as a critical way of developing local economies and widening access:

we, we just found it bizarre that, you know, institutions are being then encouraged to embrace the agenda and then to not be given the opportunity to cater for... what constitutes about ninety-nine percent of the businesses in [name of disadvantaged region]. (HE12)

Some had entered into sub-contracting arrangements with FE providers in what was effectively a role reversal of typical HE-FE partnership power dynamics, for example:

the [FE] college is taking the numbers so we're entering as subcontractors to a college where obviously we contribute – but it's a very bizarre situation. (HE114)

With regard to the funding bands, concerns were raised about the recent reductions in amounts. Some saw this as an opportunity to develop different kinds of pedagogical innovation through different delivery models:

These really low funding bands that's another interesting challenge, because you could only be profitable using work-based learning. We can't have somebody for three years sitting with us for twenty-one grand. We'd lose money. But [if] they do a lot at a distance – that could work. HE16)

Others also mentioned using technology-enhanced and work-based learning approaches to reduce delivery costs and keep the programmes financially viable – as the funding was not covering costs, especially given restrictions on eligible costs (HE13, HE12).

4.3.2 Targets

...the Government will increase the quality and quantity of apprenticeships in England, reaching three million starts in 2020 (HM Government, 2015; Foreword)

Despite this confident assertion it transpired that the conception of the 3 million target was designed on the back of the proverbial envelope:

Well, we had delivered two million apprenticeships in the 2010–15 Parliament. So in the manifesto process, there was a classic exercise in “Well, okay, what are we going to promise for the next Parliament?” There was this feeling that you can’t say two and a half million, that sounds a bit tame, nobody would be excited by that, so we’re going to say three million. Then three million is really a lot of apprenticeships, it’s big growth. (Boles, 2017).

The Minister for Skills (2018-) Anne Milton stated she had ‘*absolutely no idea*’ (House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, 2018; para 215) how the three million target was arrived at. Further scepticism about the target was raised by Fuller and Unwin in their evidence to the Education Select Committee: ‘*Chasing arbitrary numerical targets and diverting resources to manage a levy will only exacerbate the ‘anything goes’ approach, which has created a highly inconsistent and confusing array of provision*’ (Fuller and Unwin, 2017). Alison Wolf called it an ‘*abomination*’ that would be reached easily ‘*by sending half the senior managers in this country on MBA courses and ticking it off*’. House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee (2018; para 213).

This ‘arbitrary’ target was also questioned in the evidence provided by London South Bank University to the joint Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee (2017; APP0048), who were surprised at the lack of granularity:

‘targets regarding the number of apprenticeships at each Level within the 3m target. Nor is there any focus on those sectors where skills needs are the greatest and could have the greatest impact on productivity despite the evidence that apprenticeships have different impact on productivity sector by sector’.

The other relevant policy intervention here is the passing into law of an apprenticeship target; i.e. through the Enterprise Act 2016 (HM Government, 2016) which stated that all public sector employers must employ 2.3% of their workforce as apprentices (either newly recruited or converted existing staff).

There was an acknowledgement from the DfE interviewee that the target was not likely to be reached and that it might soon be dropped with minimal fanfare, (which turned out to be the case (Burke, 2018)). The HEI sector representatives were fairly scathing about the target as they had calculated that there was simply not going to be enough funding to deliver higher and degree level apprenticeships as required by employers and set out in the industrial strategy. The FE and independent sector representative was more

positive as it was felt this would give those providers more opportunities to gain market share:

So, I suppose, our kind of, argument is there needs to be a balance. So, the government had a commitment. Just three million apprenticeships starts by 2020 and there wasn't necessarily the young people to fill those. So, there definitely needs to be a mixture' (P13)

The HEI participants were largely sceptical about the target 3 million starts, as they could see a fundamental contradiction in promoting an employer-led system on one hand and an 'arbitrary' target on the other. It was clear to many that both were not possible.

It just..it just seems like it was created on the back of a fag packet in one way – you know ..yeah, but when they set a three million start target... I don't think they had a flipping clue really! (HE17)

Some reported that the public sector targets were driving behaviour, with local authorities and NHS Trusts coming to universities to explore ways that they could drive up numbers, with one describing a recent conversation with an NHS manager:

They said "I am under so much pressure to show that we have used this [levy]... all anybody wants to see is it being used"... and then you've got these 2.3% of workforce being apprentices in target and I just think, you've got that perfect storm of the client, of fiscal austerity and then, you've got, you've got the public sector target. (HE15)

4.4 Programme Design

4.4.1 Trailblazers and Standards

One of the fundamental reforms proposed by Richard was the removal of the old apprenticeships frameworks (which were typically a combination of work-based learning and an embedded competency-based vocational qualifications) and to replace these with a new set of supposedly more rigorous apprenticeship standards with the aim that:

for each category of occupation, there should be a standard that clearly describes the level of skill and competency required to do the job well and to operate confidently in the sector. (Richard, 2012; p.51)

This was originally conceived as a competitive process by Richard:

The solution lies in shifting the power over designing and developing apprenticeship qualifications to employers in a far more direct and transparent way than at present... I believe that a contest for the 'best' qualification will best achieve this outcome. (Richard, 2012; p.7)

The implementation plan softened this slightly with the recognition that there was a role for ‘professional bodies and others’ in the design of standards (HM Government, 2013; para 29). The Richard Review and government response also made it clear that it was important to avoid one or two employers designing programmes rather than that of the wider sector. The response to the Richard Review stated that the new style of apprenticeships should ‘*include skills which are relevant and valuable beyond just the current job, supporting progression within the sector*’ (Department for Business Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2013; p.12). The policy was designed for the full gamut of apprenticeships, from level 2 to level 7. While there was recognition of the positive influence of increased employer engagement in the development of the standards, analysis of the policy texts has shown there to be concerns raised on a number of fronts. These include that the process of transition from frameworks to standards was not handled well.

the move from frameworks to standards has been mismanaged by successive Governments, resulting in delay after delay and frustrating employers who invested much effort and enthusiasm. (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; para 35).

The process of approving standards was taken over from the Department for Education by the newly formed Institute for Apprenticeships in 2017 which inherited a considerable backlog of work. Other issues identified from the texts were that trailblazer employers did make the focus too narrow and that other expert bodies (professional associations, education providers could be marginalised (Professional Associations Research Association, 2015), the length of time it takes for approval to take place (Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, 2017; para 34) and the lack of engagement of SMEs (Professional Associations Research Association, 2015; p.23), leading the Committee to conclude:

it has often appeared somewhat haphazard, with no clear picture of how a final system would look and confusion between trailblazer groups and standards approvers. (Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, 2017; para 77)

For some HEIs, the narrow designation of occupation was also problematic, given the fast-moving developments within the workplace, as is the use of what is perceived to be divisive terminology:

In the twenty-first century, it makes no sense, but the distinctions between ‘academic’ and ‘technical’ between ‘knowledge’ and ‘skills’ continue to bedevil policy-making across the political spectrum. (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; QUA0042)

The Department for Education interviewee focused back to the original intention of the new standards i.e. that they focused on the 'output':

...the standard was ... moving away from the input kind of approach to what the person should look like at the end ...So what knowledge skills and behaviours they should be able to demonstrate to somebody. So it was less about the qualifications but about the kind of training that seemed to enable them to become occupationally competent. (PI4)

This raises some questions about the fundamental purpose of higher education and whether the apprenticeship model narrowly focused on occupational competence is a good fit. It also ties into a key debate (see below) about whether qualifications can or should be included within apprenticeship standards – highly relevant when considering 'degree apprenticeship' as a concept. The same DfE interviewee goes on to acknowledge the challenge this presents:

I'm not really sure what direction we're going in because I think the employers are saying we don't want to lose the qualifications ... because we've had a period where there were some standards that didn't have qualifications and employers are not as comfortable with that as maybe they thought they would be.

One of the DfE/IfA representatives hinted at an HE 'stitch-up' in the early days of trailblazer development:

Occupations were cropping up... where a degree was nowhere near being normal, or universally required... because a group of employers and one or two HEIs wanted to... deliver I [it], and the problem was that it would end up creating occupations where a degree was mandatory ...where the labour market didn't demand that. (PI6)

The implication here is that universities were taking advantage of new markets offered by this and were influencing the trailblazer process to identify occupational areas that would align with their offer. PI7, also from the Institute for Apprenticeships:

You know, we quite often get [trailblazers] saying... "No, I understand it would professionalise the occupation but actually... we want to keep this relatively broad. We wanna bring in people from all sorts of different backgrounds, without necessarily... the focus on the academic, theoretical"... it isn't true that just everyone wants a degree' (PI7)

making the point that a degree qualification is not necessarily the most appropriate outcome for all and employers might prefer a shorter programme with a wider reach in

terms of intake. The Office for Students representative also recognised this as a potentially contested area:

I think if you're asking an employer to pay for it, you can't also crowbar your values on to it completely....you know it's a bit of give and take isn't it? It's a difficult one... I think that when you look at what's come out of the standards... employers have invested their time... in the things that are massive talent shortages for them. So, you can sort of, complain about a few bits and pieces of employer behaviour... but when you look at the occupations that have come forward, they actually match the skills gaps. (PI 8)

Although they concluded that what had been developed at HE level was appropriate for university delivery and in line with employer requirements.

The HEI representatives could also see benefits and tensions of employers being involved in the development of standards. The latter fell into four main areas; the first being perceived lack of employer expertise in curriculum and assessment design. HEI 11 described how a trailblazer chair had said of universities:

"They're very useful when you get to actually doing assessment plans because they know all that stuff"

and went on to make the (self-interested) case for HE involvement due to the expertise in underpinning knowledge and theories:

so it was really the depths to which they [trailblazers] wanted to keep HEIs particularly at arm's length and to really reinforce the idea that this was around competence and not about qualification really missing the point that you know you can't have competent practice without underpinning knowledge and understanding. (HEI11)

Secondly there was also concern about the slowness and unpredictability of the process:

so, we can put forward plans and proposals and we are developing Degree Apprenticeships... so you have to start early if you've got any intention of doing that, and all the way through, you work with your employers... and then suddenly, something goes wrong, and, oh it's still not approved, or its not gonna happen, and you just think, ... you feel your own credibility just being chipped away at a little bit each time. (HEI5)

These delays had a negative impact on both external and internal reputation and relationships, with HEI5 describing the development of an internal qualification in tandem with a standard going through national approval via the IfA as a 'torturous process'.

Other HEI representatives alluded to an anti-HE sentiment within the IfA claiming that employers were being ‘warned off’ working with universities in the development of new standards. HEI2 recounted the experience of a trailblazer themselves being told that they could not develop their standard as a degree apprenticeship, despite this being the express wish of the employers represented:

Oh the trailblazer group wanted it to be a degree but they're being told no by the IFA and the DfE. Clearly... I was there. I've been at meetings. Yeah they all say they want it to be [a degree apprenticeship]. The way to be transformative in [name of occupation] is to widen routes into it. Yeah. The way you do that is by having an undergraduate route to becoming a qualified [name of occupation]. (HEI2)

Another had also encountered an element of antipathy towards the sector, this time from a trailblazer group:

...and the chair of a trailblazer [speaking at a public event]... his key message to other trailblazers was to say: "For God's sake don't get too many HEIs on your board/steering group because they've got too loud a voice and you'll feel overpowered" (HEI5)

This aligns with the claim made by the PI6 above, which claimed that it was HEIs that were pushing for degrees to be included in standards outwith the wishes of the employers. Finally, there was a concern that here were still larger employers dominating trailblazers to design programmes to suit their specific requirements:

There should have been a bit more pre-planning and thinking about how to get some parity, because things like the [name of large employer] one, that was just... a closed shop when you look at the membership... they don't reflect the sector, they are just a few powerful people, who have got in a room together. (HEI6).

4.4.2 Mandatory Qualifications

The new standards required that apprenticeships would be outcome-, rather than input-based. The proposal, readily accepted by the government in its response was that there should be a single assessment at the end that would confer the ‘award’ of an apprenticeship certificate confirming competency. This would replace the old system of frameworks designed around vocational (and in some higher apprenticeships, academic) qualifications.

Under the new standards, there were no mandatory qualifications built into apprenticeships, unless there was a legal/health and safety requirement. The launch of degree apprenticeships did not align with this approach.

*Higher Apprentices are already able study to degree level as part of their apprenticeship but Degree Apprenticeships will go further. They will involve a **degree as an integral part of the apprenticeship**, co-designed by employers to make sure it is relevant for the skills industry is looking for. (Prime Minister's Office, 2015) (researcher emphasis).*

This combination and the forthcoming levy were the game-changers for the Higher Education sector as they saw the opportunity to adapt existing programmes and develop new ones in order to benefit from this new market and revenue, although their public statements on the subject were more focused on altruistic motives around civic and business engagement and strengthening regional economies:

Working effectively with partners is part of our universities' DNA and we have dynamic and strong relationships with a wide range of education providers and employers'. Maddalaine Ansell, Chief Exec of University Alliance (Prime Minister's Office, 2015)

Many HEIs invested considerable resource in order to advise trailblazer groups on the new standards, to become registered as providers, to bid for non-levy funding, to develop new compliant degree apprenticeship programmes and to seek out employers to work with them. As set out in Chapter 1 the Institute for Apprenticeships is now strictly applying the rules on when a qualification can be mandated (Department for Education, 2017; p.18) and hence funded, as part of an apprenticeship

This has thus put universities and the government on a collision course, since the above criteria do not apply in some of the most popular degree apprenticeships; namely Digital and Technology Solutions (level 6, currently under review), Chartered Manager (Level 6) and Senior Leader (Level 7). A robust response to this was provided by Sir Gerry Berragan, Chief Executive of the IfA:

*All that has happened with degree apprenticeships recently is that we have applied the same policy on qualifications to degree apprenticeships as we have to all others. **There has not been a policy change here. We have simply removed a concession** that previously existed for degree apprenticeships in terms of consistency of approach (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; Question 307) (Researcher emphasis)*

This position has been met with considerable consternation and concern from the universities that have invested in programmes. Universities UK are warning '*that removing the degree element from these apprenticeships will make them less attractive to potential applicants and employers*' (Universities UK, 2019), while the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Exeter University has made a public case for 'the retention of the "degree" in degree apprenticeships rather than lose these distinctive qualities in "degree-level"

apprenticeship: *'It is clear that students value the global, portable qualification that a degree offers'*. (Quine, 2019).

The IfA interviewees were fully supportive of the revised '3 tests' policy:

the degree being built in as a mandatory qualification is fine, as long as it complies with the same rules as any other mandatory qualification and... that's now been brought into line in policy terms, so no problem with that at all. It's the title, I don't think it was necessary for the title to call it a Degree Apprenticeship. (PI6)

It is hard to know if this is a straight up semantic argument or if there is latency here; i.e. they are advocating this policy as it effectively weakens HE's grip on the development of standards including a degree (see section on trailblazers and standards above). Their colleague (PI7) was also keen to see the new rules applied strongly with regard to whether a degree should be mandated as part of the qualification, despite agreeing that this was a contested area:

Obviously in the case of Degree Apprenticeships... that distinction was a bit blurrier and that was desirable for a whole load of reasons, you know, kind of bringing some of the strengths of HE into a sector previously dominated by FE and all that kind of stuff, but..but..but led to a slightly different kind of policy tension (PI7)

PI 8 (OfS) drew attention to the lack of transparency in the decision-making process about the inclusion or not of a degree:

the way the structures have been set up is that if a trailblazer has said it wants a degree in it and then the route panel may take a view on that. So, how much influence is the trailblazer having against the other group of employers who are the route panel and how much say does the Institute for Apprenticeships have... That bit is entirely un-transparent.

There would appear to have been some elements of discretion in the early process. PI 5, representing the HE sector, referred to how DAs had been treated as exceptions to the rule at the outset of the policy:

Well, the option to have a Degree Apprenticeship was always one for the employers. It wasn't pegged to the traditional...or the usual criteria for every other level provision [i.e. the 3 tests] ...Degree Apprenticeships were the exception. They were always the exception to that rule. (PI5)

and how the application of this policy was hardening in light of the Institute coming into being, which she/he implied was dominated by the FE/private training sector.

Contradicting this, PI7 (from the Institute) went on to indicate that the 'marketplace' might still have some kind of bearing, thus:

I would say that I think a lot of this will come down to how well the degree as a kind of product is worth... people buying into, you know, then my hope would be that as with all other aspects of this system that is set up to kind of create a marketplace. (PI7)

The data set here is showing two contested positions, with the HE Sector representatives all strongly advocating the inclusion of a degree for a number of reasons including the global recognition of a UK degree as a high quality, gold standard (PI9, PI8), that employers like qualifications they understand and recognise (PI4) and that the inclusion of the degree qualification attracts a wider social demographic:

the prestige of this degree has won over a number of BaME participants who saw apprenticeships as poor quality and not prestigious. That's been kind of, a number of BaME communities, who couldn't see their children doing an apprenticeship at all, but with the inclusion of the degree, this appeared to have changed their minds (PI8)

The opposite viewpoints include the ideas that HE should not be allowed any discretion in the application of the rules (PI7, PI6) and that the inclusion of a degree is potentially a self-fulfilling prophecy in that it leads to inflation of entry standards to certain occupations (PI7). The non HE informants were also of the view that the focus should be on the competence of the individual to undertake the specific occupation rather than the achievement of a qualification per se (PI 3, PI 6) and that universities were only interested in delivering these qualifications for their own ends and to pull in a new source of revenue:

'there is talk from the Institute about trying to take some degrees out of degree apprenticeships, because they're concerned that it's a vehicle for universities to access funding for a qualification as opposed to an apprenticeship in its own right' (PI3)

Unsurprisingly, the HEI participants were all largely supportive of retaining degree qualification within existing and new apprenticeship standards at levels 6 and 7. There was recognition that some higher apprenticeships at those levels, for example Solicitor and Accountant did not necessarily require a degree qualification. Generally, the respondents were of the view that the degree qualification from a UK HEI offered something additional to both the apprentice and the employer in the form of a high quality, recognised credential with global transferability:

I think their interests and their opportunity to be able to evidence they're learning through a qualification and to use that as a stepping stone/bridge to other things is how best to describe it. (HEI11)

Others felt the inclusion of a mandatory degree offered ‘academic rigour’ (HEI4), while the opportunity to receive a degree debt-free was also cited (HEI14), which meant employers felt they could attract ‘high-calibre’ candidates (HEI13). There was generally a negative view of the strict application of the ‘3 tests’ rule by the IfA (HEI2, HEI12), with one commenting that it was not as simple with high level occupations to apply a simple employer hard sift test:

the hard sift one, is just so inappropriate, how, and especially in this kind of, fast moving digital and you know, the world we operate in, it’s really difficult to say isn’t it? HEI12

and another commenting on the difficult regulatory environment:

I found the work I’ve done latterly with Institute for Apprenticeships really really confusing and difficult to the point that I would question whether the qualification ... were actually something the government wanted to see as they have made it very difficult. (HEI10)

Only one HEI participant countered the alternative view, conceding that the critics of HEIs may have some merit to their views that there is an element of ‘gaming’ taking place.

I think this is an unfair view, but I don’t think it’s entirely without substance, the view that providers are converting employer-led qualifications into apprenticeships. You know, I don’t think that’s without substance (HEI12)

4.4.3 Upskilling existing employees or developing new talent?

Improving the skills of someone already doing a job (or ‘upskilling’) is valuable and may well be something the Government wishes to support in other ways. Accreditation, for individuals who want their existing skills recognised, is also beneficial. But these activities are not apprenticeships. (Richard, 2012; p.33)

This theme arose out of debates within the policy documents around who the apprenticeship target audience really is. It is worth revisiting a striking statistic from the Leitch Review of Skills, which was commissioned by the preceding Labour government. This found that in 2006 ‘70% of the 2020 English workforce has already left compulsory education’ (Leitch, 2006; p.1), thus clearly focusing efforts to upskill the *existing* workforce as much as provide training for those entering the workforce.

While the policy intention is clear that the levy and the Richard reforms are for apprentices ‘irrespective of age’, this has become a point of contestation with some finding that there is too much delivery of the level 6 and 7 higher and degree apprenticeships for those

already in employment (upskilling) with a view that while this may be acceptable within the letter of the law, it is not true to its spirit.

Richard talks about how *'the success of our society is, in part, measured on its capacity to shepherd our young people from childhood to meaningful employment'*. (Richard, 2012; p.3), while the government's initial position was that existing employees should only be able to access apprenticeships 'where substantial training is required to achieve competency in their occupation' (HM Government, 2013; p.25). This has led to a number of contested positions. Some involved in the policy consultation wished apprenticeships to be focused only on younger school-leavers at lower levels, while others more focused on lifelong learning, such as NIACE, argued that apprenticeship can be appropriate 'at any age when people move into a new role, sector or change career entirely' (Richard, 2012; p.105).

Many see universities offering high level programmes under the apprenticeship scheme as simply rebadged professional development, especially in relation to leadership and management programmes. The justification put forward for this is a lack of leadership and management skills which has been identified as affecting productivity in UK with poor management skills potentially accounting 'for a quarter of the productivity gap between the UK and the US' (HM Government, 2017b; p.169). This has opened a debate as to whether this should be addressed through apprenticeships or another mechanism.

Levy-paying employers have been accused of laundering their levy by using it to fund programmes that would have been funded by them anyway, with Fuller and Unwin expressing concern that 'the introduction of the apprenticeship levy could exacerbate the 'conversion' and deadweight problems as levy-paying employers seek ways of maximising their ability to recoup their levy spend' (House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, 2018; para 208). This has led to fears that the levy has meant that other training budgets have been reduced/diverted to cover the costs of paying the levy (Camden, 2018), a point made by the HM Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman:

We have seen examples where existing graduate schemes are in essence being rebadged as apprenticeships. This might meet the rules of the levy policy, but it falls well short of its spirit. We hope that government will give greater thought as to how levy money can be better directed at addressing skills shortages. (OFSTED, 2018)

The issue of whether apprenticeship should be used to develop the skills of existing employees was one of the more contentious themes to arise. The topic is charged with professional jealousies relating to what is perceived by some as less than ethical usage

of both levy and non-levy funds. The accusation is that many companies are using the levy (or in the case of non-levy employers, accessing a 90% government subsidy) to place higher-ranking employees on undergraduate and particularly postgraduate degree apprenticeships, with the lightning rods being the Chartered Manager and Senior Leader programmes. These programmes are proving popular and because they are set at higher funding bands, there are concerns they will absorb all of the available funding to the detriment of lower level programmes.

The Equal and Lower Qualification (ELQ) rules (see 1.7.6) do not apply in apprenticeships as long as it can be proved that **new** skills are being ‘taught’. This opens up the scenario whereby the IfA indicated discomfort about the policy direction (PI6) and hinted that a change in direction might be forthcoming:

you could just as easily say that that [i.e. leadership and management programmes] isn't really what apprenticeships are all about, you know, it doesn't sit quite comfortably in terms of the occupational kind of precision that we talk about...in some ways, the apprenticeship landscapes has trespassed into continuing professional development. (PI7)

Unsurprisingly this view was echoed by the representative of the FE/private training sector who accused universities (albeit indirectly) for going for the ‘low-hanging fruit’ that upskilling existing managers presented:

...our argument is there needs to be a balance. It's a lot easier for providers to recruit somebody who's already employed and up-skill them, than helping an employer recruit an apprentice, ensure they stick in that role. So there have been some providers who looked to the... (low hanging fruit) (PI3)

The HE Sector body representatives reported encountering significant negativity in public meetings towards the management programmes with reported comments as follows:

“How dare companies address their leadership management skills deficits by doing apprenticeships?” So I think... you know... there's a huge challenge... about you know “companies are just rebadging management training universities, just rebadging MBA... it's all a con... that they're taking away proper apprenticeships” (PI9)

When challenged as to whether there was an element of truth in this criticism the response was that the leadership apprenticeship standards had been approved through the trailblazer system like any others and also that the Industrial Strategy had highlighted weak leadership as being one of the reasons for the UK’s productivity lag. The Office for Students could see that this was an issue under scrutiny and indicated that this ‘policy lever’ could soon be reviewed or even removed:

so, if you end up in a policy position where the ELQ rule means that you are starting to question whether you can afford all... all the people coming forward,... I think there's some of the ELQ... levers that could be pulled, and we'll have to see what happens (PI8).

There were mixed reports on the types of apprentices that HEIs were seeing; some reported a high proportion of existing employees being put on programmes i.e. 'upskillers', while others were seeing a mix and increasingly a move towards those being recruited specifically as apprentices:

our CMDA we've got pretty much a 50/50 split between people... recruited as apprentice managers and people already working within a company looking to move up to a departmental manager (HEI7)

The HEI participants were unconcerned by this, feeling there was room for both and that this potentially offered a route for all types and ages. As was the case with the policy informants, there was considerable reflection on the management programmes (Chartered Manager, Level 6 & Senior Leader Level 7) with some seeing this as falling within the definition of occupation and therefore entirely appropriate as an apprenticeship:

I think the upskilling is an unintended side... And I know there's a lot of controversy... and in particular in regards to management apprenticeships so that employers are using levy to upskill existing workforce rather than actually investing in younger people, invest in new jobs and new workforce. But I think there's room for both. (HEI7).

Others did express some qualms that the Senior Leader MBA route was not entirely within the spirit of the policy, and that there was an element of 'rebadging' of existing programmes:

I think [Senior Leader] should be the pinnacle of credibility for apprenticeships... we should absolutely embrace it... trumpet it... On the other hand, there is a little bit of me of me that can't help but be worried because... I think that... it is a classic re-badging. (HEI5)

The upskilling debate was also linked to employers putting the 'wrong' sort of people on programmes to utilise their levy, particularly in the context of social mobility:

We are also finding a lot of people doing a second degree and you know that opportunity...great but do they really need another degree in management if you have got a degree in biochemistry for example? We have one student who's a biochemist level, one with an engineering degree and so on and so forth. (HEI3)

while another could see a real opportunity for lifelong learning and social mobility talking about how the policy relates to the entire workforce, for example describing a healthcare assistant who was now on a Registered Nurse apprenticeship at the age of 56. Nevertheless, the feeling was that the policy was still focused on younger people and lower levels with references to the mixed policy messages coming from government:

I mean it's not gonna stop us from promoting leadership and management. Given that the leadership and management is one of the largest skills deficits across the country and certainly, in [name of region]... but I think it just illustrates the, you know, the conflicts and the tensions that there are sort of further up the government ladder. (HE14)

One linked it back to the policy rhetoric around improving national productivity and competitiveness (HE111).

4.4.4 Levels

Initially the policy focus on levels related to providing a clear progression from level 3 programmes with the 2010 Skills Strategy promising to '*ensure there are clear routes from Apprenticeships to higher level training including, but not exclusively, Level 4 Apprenticeships*'. The Wolf Review also drew attention to the low level focus of UK apprenticeships which '*severely constrain the numbers who can plausibly progress from apprenticeship to higher education*' (Wolf, 2011; p.167).

The rhetoric of higher education being more than an alternative to, or a progression from University was first presented in the launch of the Higher Apprenticeship Fund (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011) which aimed '*to support the expansion of apprenticeships up to degree equivalent in companies, particularly SMEs*'.

The ensuing debate has led to a contested space in relation to apprenticeship levels. Should they be linked to levels at all? '*The categorisation of apprenticeships by level (Level 2, 3, Higher and now 'degree' apprenticeships) undermines the powerful concept of apprenticeship as an integrated approach to developing occupational expertise*' (Fuller and Unwin, 2017; para 2.6) and '*it is important that levels should not drive the process. The skill level of the standard and qualification should be driven by what is required to do a real and specific job well, not by a desire to fit with level definitions*' (Richard, 2012; p.54). The government position is to be 'agnostic' on levels and not to privilege one over another (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018) although again this is belied by ministerial comments indicating preference for lower level apprenticeships (Merrick, 2018).

Many of the same points were raised in the interviews with proponents of the HE sector arguing that the level of delivery should be determined by employer need and that apprenticeships were not to compensate for failings of the school system. This argument supported employers using the funding for staff undertaking high-level leadership/management programmes. The FE/independent training sector representative described lobbying for a policy change to redress the funding support toward lower level/younger age-band apprentices to achieve what PI 3 called 'getting the balance right'.

The HEI representatives reported that they perceived the FE/independent training sector as negative towards the university-led provision and that provision should be determined by the needs of the employers and the industrial strategy, pointing to a fundamental contradiction in the policy between ambition and the stated target.

But the point is that you know the industrial strategy is saying that you actually need high quality managers... a chartered manager [DA] would be a good place to start or senior leader. But it is more expensive...and if that's what employers want to meet their needs. But that won't meet the target you know. So you can see that there are competing things going on. Yeah... the policy is not aligned. (HEI2)

A similar point was made by HEI 11 that previous governments had focused effort on lower level skills rather than what was actually required by the economy per se:

there's some...distinctive different policy strands. And I think it was Baroness Wolf's apprenticeship paper that really challenged that... the government's support was going to very low-level skills.... Usually level twos... very rarely done above a level three...

Other points made related to the need to work in partnership with the FE sector in particular to deliver a range of levels in the form of a progression pathway:

we are working closely with the colleges and... developing a sort of progression pathway across the various apprenticeship routes, to be able to offer to employers a clear way through from Level 2 right through to Levels 6 and 7. (HEI14)

4.5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment

4.5.1 Pedagogy

Pedagogy refers here to learning, teaching and assessment approaches within the policy documents. Some of the key concepts which arise include flexible learning, expansive/restrictive learning, lifelong learning, curriculum innovation, work-based

learning, accreditation of prior (experiential) learning (AP(E)L) and formative vs. summative learning.

Richard envisaged apprenticeships which included flexible learning in terms of the content, the balance between 'on' and 'off the job' learning, mode, location and duration of delivery and methods of assessment. He was keen to see Unwin and Fuller's 'expansive apprenticeship model' (Richard, 2012; p.89-90) embedded within the reforms which encourages reflection on learning and time away from the workplace. He recommended that some of the training take place away from the '*burden of day to day work*' which was behind the recommendation subsequently adopted that at least 20% of time should be spent on 'off the job learning'.

There seemed to be little detail of the learning journey itself with '*different packages of work and learning as equally valid pathways to getting an apprentice to become competent...*' (Richard, 2012; p.49). Apprenticeship standards were to be short: '*the new standards will be easy to understand documents that describe the level of skill, knowledge and competency required to undertake a specific occupation*' (HM Government, 2013; para 27). This would appear to be the case regardless of the level or complexity so the same format would apply to a level 2 retail assistant as to a postgraduate level 7 engineer.

The focus of the reforms was clearly on the end game with an outcomes/competency-based approach to learning envisaged. – '*I do not believe that it is in the interest of the apprentice to have on-going tests and exams throughout, with accreditation of small bite-sized chunks. This takes the focus away from genuine learning*'. (Richard, 2012; p.55). This statement contrasts with higher education structures – it would be unthinkable to deliver a degree without dividing it into manageable modules and without formative assessment embedded throughout. This was picked up in the Education Select Committee with the Open University calling for '*more flexibility in the structure of individual apprenticeships... a more modular structure, tailoring to specific employer needs, a credit transfer system and stronger progression pathways*'. Unwin and Fuller called for 'provision that is primarily assessment-led and that falls short for both apprentices and their employers' to be 'rooted out'. (Fuller and Unwin, 2017).

The Office for Students representative was evangelical about the benefits for the sector:

I think that knowledge exchange is coming back into the academy from those students... Academics say they love teaching these students, because they come with things they don't have... (P18)

PI5, also from the HE sector, felt that universities were moving ahead on pedagogical innovation more quickly than the regulators:

I think government haven't kept pace with those changes, and even its own section within DfE responsible for HE, haven't recognised that universities are moving at such a pace to ensure that actions, workplace or vocational (learning), are properly integrated, and that they're not, sort of, you know on a parallel track.

The theme of an outcomes-based approach was again raised by the DfE, with some recognition of the dichotomy of 'on' and 'off-the-job' learning is not such a simple concept at higher and degree levels and that the levy was possibly skewing behaviours:

'Employers say "but I can't afford to release". Well then you could ask the question should they be doing an apprenticeship? Because if they don't need that substantial upskilling then actually an apprenticeship isn't the right program but a lot of the large employers particularly have this push from their finance people that they've paid into this levy and they've got to use it... "just put anybody on"' (PI4)

4.5.1.1 HEI participants

There was generally a lot of enthusiasm and positivity about the pedagogical innovation that had resulted. Many of the HEI participants spoke about how their institutions already had a strong tradition of work-based/flexible pedagogy which included self-audit, learning contracts, shell frameworks and critical reflection. It was felt by HEIs that rich learning could take place at the nexus of the workplace and the academy, although this would challenge some in universities:

It's meant to be uncomfortable and messy... it's not meant to be neat... I think the fact that stuff that is forming in the workplace horrifies some people. For some [academic staff]... who have always taught in very traditional programs this is quite a different skill set for them and some are not comfortable talking to employers...' (HE11)

The arrival of the apprenticeship programmes had strengthened and in some cases mainstreamed these WBL/WIL approaches:

HEI2: 'employers don't want people to leave the workplace and go and sit in a lecture hall on a regular basis ... we need to rethink traditional models of delivery so that the place where somebody is interacting with learning is not necessarily so closely aligned with a campus. It forces you to think about different ways of doing it. And that that drives innovation...'

Interviewer: 'Have you seen the welcoming of your thinking into the mainstream?'

HEI2: 'Yes. Well let's put it this way... [I have seen] less resistance!'

Many of the respondents were exercised by needing to demonstrate the requirement for the 20% 'off the job learning' writ large in the funding rules, but also to consider how they can support the 80% 'on the job' learning which happens in the workplace:

There are lots of different, creative, innovative ways that you can ensure that there's twenty percent across the entire programme' (HE12)

what universities are doing is designing the academic program that fills that 20 percent and not actually thinking about what happens in the 80%. (HE17)

Another unique aspect that was challenging for some universities was non-standard approaches including the use of e-learning/mobile technologies to deliver seamless, work-integrated and bespoke programmes on atypical start dates both synchronously and asynchronously in multi-site locations. Others mentioned working with others on co-creation/delivery of programmes, the quarterly visits to employers and the new roles of work-based mentors (employer-provided) and work-based coaches (employed by the universities). Some had specifically recruited staff from alternative HE providers.

Some participants commented that the pedagogical innovation was impacting positively on other parts of the university:

so, it's provided the impetus to look at alternative delivery models, rather than traditional release, you know... block...digital learning etc., it's acted as a catalyst for a number of innovative changes to core systems, processes, across the university. (HE13)

There were some tensions in this area – some were conscious that academic colleagues were 'rebadging' part-time provision without really considering the specific aspects required by an apprenticeship and this was laying HEIs open to criticisms from the wider sector:

because everyone wants to jump onto the levy bandwagon, let's design an academic programme and put some work-based assessment in and call it an apprenticeship. (HE17)

we've seen that with some of the programmes... a bit of the lift and shift from old part-time programmes and they've converted to degree apprenticeships but I don't think [they] have been as innovative. (HE12)

Other areas of concern related to employers' concerns about their responsibilities:

we talked to them about the role of the mentor, the opportunity for employers to influence/enrich the curriculum, but I had another

employer... say, "can't we just have the old part-time moved back"... they are nervous, or they think this is... onerous. (HE14)

The issue of accreditation/recognition of prior (experiential) learning (A/RP(E)L) was discussed and how this could be embedded in apprenticeship programmes. There were some tensions about whether prior learning was relevant as apprenticeships should deliver *new skills* but most HEIs had ways of exempting learners from elements of programmes in which they were already competent.

we get people who were really keen to see if they could get direct entry to level 6. They would have the degree and the apprenticeship and everything tied up in a year... and I think that's a really problematic idea. The question of whether you can bring someone in... with recognition of prior learning and get them through the whole process of portfolio development to get them to an end point... is it feasible to do? (HE13)

4.5.2 End Point Assessment

Richard criticised the old assessment system as too prone to corruption: '*assessment today is conducted by the same people who provide the training, who have a strong interest in the individual passing*'. Under the reforms each apprentice has to undergo a synoptic assessment. This test '*will need to be primarily practical and involve directly observing whether the apprentice can do their job well, in different and novel circumstances*' (Richard, 2012; p.54).

The policy envisages clear space between those responsible for the delivery of the training against those who undertake the assessment with a clear role for employers requiring workplace mentors to be resourced/trained. Tensions are evidenced with Manchester Metropolitan University referring to '*barriers in place for universities to deliver end point assessments within an integrated Degree Apprenticeship and a confused picture relating to how these are implemented*' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; QUA0015). Sheffield Hallam University state that the addition of a separate EPA for these programmes is '*at odds with the current autonomy afforded to HEIs. It adds further complexity and cost to an already robust process*' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; QUA0042).

This has been identified as a particular issue for the Registered Nurse DA which has been designated as 'non-integrated'. The Deans for Health have publicly stated they favour an integrated EPA: '*separate EPA seems unnecessary for our already heavily regulated professions but also introduces the possibility of **awkward** scenarios*' (Council of Deans of Health, 2017) (researcher emphasis) which include '*an apprentice completing a degree, registering with the regulator... working as a registered professional*

but failing EPA' and 'an apprentice completing a degree but failing to undertake EPA ... exposing HEIs to a loss of 20%'.

While there is a strong tradition of the higher education sector working with professional bodies to deliver programmes that meet academic and professional requirements, the QAA acknowledges that academic '*subject' expertise may not be sufficient to demonstrate that assessors are equipped to assess the professional competence of apprentices*'. (Quality Assurance Agency, 2018a; p.31)

There was a general view from participants aligned with the HE sector that the integrated model of assessment is favourable:

It works. The IfA... should encourage it because it works. It delivers. (PI3)

This approach enables HEIs to retain control of the award and reduces the risk of non-completion which carries a financial and reputational risk to the institution. There was also some concern that assessment approaches designated by the Institute do not align culturally with HE WBL pedagogies:

they don't think that, for example, reflection, in assessment at end point, is something that can be judged and marked consistently... What they say is things like, observation is really good (big tick)... that that can be marked well. Again scenarios, projects, reports, they like those and presentations, vivas, multiple choice tests, exams, but reflection? No. (PI5)

The DfE representative was not sure where the decision had been made that had determined the implementation of integrated end point assessment for degree apprenticeships:

I don't know what the rationale was for why those few apprenticeships were released as integrated... or who came up with the idea and the background to that but I don't really know if we'll see more of them. (PI4).

What was clear was that the FE/private sector saw it as more special pleading by the HE sector, with some evidence of resentment:

what's been quite controversial has been the integrated End Point Assessment which kind of goes against the ethos of the standards... universities... they can... kind of mark their own homework' (PI3)

The theme of resentment and insecurity also appeared from the HEI participants, who were all largely inclined towards the integrated model:

I think there's a level of insecurity in [IfA's] knowledge base... A lot of their people were involved in old apprenticeships where knowledge and competence were two separate things that wouldn't mix. And what they don't get is this integration thing... they're suspicious of the fact that universities can understand and know about accrediting competence in the workplace. (HEI2)

Other universities which were delivering non-integrated standards could, despite the challenges, see some benefits to bringing in a neutral party to assess competence in addition to the award of the academic qualification:

For me, it's about bringing two strands together of academic knowledge, theoretical knowledge... then, the application and the skills, the knowledge skills and behaviours in the workplace... I think by having the two ... it just enriches what we're trying to do. It's the right thing to do. (HEI8)

The representative from the most traditional, pre-1992 HEI, indicated that their university would not have considered a model were they not able to deliver and assess it themselves. Several others feared that apprentices might not complete the assessment once they had received the degree:

It's possible [they] will get to the end of their degree and say thank you very much. I've got my degree. I'm not going to bother with my end point assessment. (HEI3)

Others admitted that they were 'in denial' or had not yet given it their full attention as it was not an immediate concern:

we're not really sort of thinking about it... we've got our noses so close to the chalk face that we're... just concentrating on what needs to be done now... but the preference would be for integrated Degree Apprenticeships. (HEI14)

Some could see that it was driving assessment innovation, while others were concerned it was not fully being considered in the design of the degree qualification or that what was being prepared for the end-point portfolio would not pass muster:

the body that we're working with. It's quite vague as to exactly what they want the end point to look like... whether they want academic content in it or not... and that rubs off on the students... and makes them anxious. (HEI3)

while others were worried that the requirements were unrealistic, e.g. requiring individuals to provide evidence that they had implemented a major change in their workplace which might not be feasible within their role. The role of the work-based coaches and mentors in providing constructive alignment (Walsh, 2007) between the workplace and the academy came up in several interviews.

We've got a clear golden thread that goes from the teaching and that includes activities in the learning plans... to ensure that they get the evidence at work and if not the coach will sit with the mentor... that's part of this quarterly review meetings so they know how they can get [the evidence for the portfolio]. (HE111)

4.5.3 Quality, Quality Assurance and Systems & Processes

One of the key starting points of the reforms was a perceived lack of rigour and quality in apprenticeship delivery, referred to as a '*low quality educational experience*' by Richard (2012) and this was used as a key rationale for bringing in the higher education sector. Importantly Richard envisaged a clear link '*to any recognised certification within the sector – rather than being separate from or falling too short of these*' as a way of independently assuring a quality and relevant product.

The government, in its response stated that it would rely on the SFA and Ofsted to assure the standard of delivery, although it seems little thought was given to how higher and eventually apprenticeships at degree level would be quality assured. Again the message of *employer-led* assurance was indicated in the White Paper Success as a Knowledge Economy stating that degree apprenticeships would be 'of the highest quality and meet employers' needs through the Institute for Apprenticeships, a new independent body **led by employers**' (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016b; para 25) (researcher emphasis).

Despite universities being encouraged to enter this new type of delivery, little guidance was provided to them on the associated quality assurance regime in what was to become one of the clear fault lines of the worlds of HE and FE colliding. It appeared that the approach was that the same quality assurance regimes that apply in level 2 and 3 apprenticeships would simply be 'copied and pasted' onto higher levels. In 2017 the QAA finally produced an interim statement on apprenticeships which was fairly uninformative about the nuances of the provision and merely stated that they had '*begun a process of engagement and consultation with the higher education sector and other key stakeholders ... to develop a national-level statement about the characteristics of Degree Apprenticeships*' (Quality Assurance Agency, 2016). The final position (Quality Assurance Agency, 2018a) was not provided until later the following year – a long time after the launch of these complex programmes, and again this 'clarification' left questions unanswered, such as who oversees quality of level 6 and 7 higher apprenticeships that do not contain a mandatory higher education qualification?

The Education Select Committee reported Alison Fuller and Lorna Unwin's concerns that 'despite the wide-ranging nature of the Government's reforms there has been surprisingly little discussion about the role of inspection in driving quality improvement'. (Fuller and Unwin, 2017; para 132). They also question the overarching focus on an assessment and outcomes based approach, while Birkbeck worry that '*there will be too many bodies involved in monitoring the quality of apprenticeships... We wish to avoid having multi-agency scenarios for quality assurance*' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; QUA0081). Brighton University referred to '*the lack of understanding about existing HE quality mechanisms by the bodies that are responsible for overseeing apprenticeship quality*' which was leading to '*increased burden and duplication of processes without adding benefit*' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; QUA0073). The roll-out of the quality assurance arrangements has been confusing and skewed in favour of the FE and skills sector. HE as a sector was considered late in the day by policy makers with a bolt-on solution and the HE bodies (e.g. HEFCE/OfS/QAA) were slow to respond and address this.

The reforms launched under the Richard Review aimed to overhaul the system, criticising the previous skills system as making employers '*undertake paperwork gymnastics to pigeonhole their system into a pre-defined set of curricular approaches*' (Richard, 2012; p.10). The SFA did produce a 'fact-sheet' to explain how the reforms would be applied in the HE sector although the promised follow-up 'advice documents' were never made available. There was recognition of some of the issues:

administrative and reporting processes surrounding... higher and degree apprenticeships is time-consuming, cumbersome and aligned to the reporting processes of further education colleges and private training providers' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; Q305)

There was a general acknowledgement that the systems and processes for delivering apprenticeships were challenging for the HE sector including audit-readiness, complex evidence packs, data returns (ILRs) and ensuring all candidates evidence or retake Level 2 Maths and English. The DfE were adamant that there could be no flexibility in the application of the rules for HEIs:

we can't go that one step further which is what HE want in terms of designing completely different programmes and funding rules, different way of funding and ILR requirements just for that one level of the apprenticeship program.' (PI4)

This was reiterated by the FE/Independent sector who also saw HE as trying to flex the system to their advantage:

the rules are the rules... you need to prove that you've got the evidence... that's what a lot of universities are trying to get their heads around.. if they want to operate in this space, they've got to operate within the rules... if they're gonna access the funding. (PI3)

The main concern from the HE sector was the length of time it had taken for clarity to emerge about the quality assurance and also about the proposed solution of Ofsted inspecting provision at level 4 and 5 and OfS at levels 6 and 7.

Quality assurance is a total mess. At level 2 and 3 it's Ofsted. Then there's nobody else involved in it. At 6 and 7 it's OfS. Then at 4 and 5 Ofsted is starting to undertake inspections. Duplicating the role of the HE regulator OfS. (PI1)

Some felt that this would deter HEIs from entering the level 4 and 5 market as they would not want to be subject to the Ofsted inspection regime. As might be expected the FE sector felt again that HE should be subject to the same inspection regime as all other providers:

but certainly we think that Ofsted should inspect all providers of apprenticeships, Level 2 to Level 7 – obviously, they don't have to look at the degree awarding aspect. That's the role of QAA, but if it sits under the apprenticeship family... then we think that there should be consistency across the board. (PI3)

Processes were raised consistently by all HEI participants. All had found the complexity and the difference of the systems required to operate in this space challenging:

Int: *So where do you see the main problem areas?*

HEI7: *Systems and infrastructure... accounting for all the ESFA Requirements and because it does not fit neatly within a standard university system'*

and that the guidance was often unhelpful:

we've had challenges around trying to get our internal process to match up with this new type of student... I think the funding rules as well are in places extremely specific and you know in places are incredibly vague and offer no real guidance as to what they even mean... (HEI15)

HEIs commented on the need for universities to flex their own systems to meet the demand of this new kind of provision – from start dates and multiple intakes, to entry points and admissions which were often being negotiated between employers and admissions tutors.

They want, to start twice or more a year so you've got to crank up the whole infrastructure, because they're trying to start something in January and I'm trying to push it into February, because I'm thinking, you know, people are not back around really until the second week of January and having people on an empty campus isn't ideal' (HEI6)

Some of the academic participants mentioned that the different rules were off-putting to other colleagues:

So, educating staff has been difficult... the majority of staff haven't wanted to get involved. I think there's been an issue around... the governance and the university. Just trying to think about how agile the system and procedures can become. I think though, there's also taking seriously the contractual relationship we have with employers. (HEI4)

The specific aspect of quality assurance was raised by the majority of respondents with some strong feelings expressed about what was seen as Ofsted taking a lead in an area that should be led by the HE regulator:

I think the way that the OfS has abrogated its responsibility you know in this area is terrible. I think the way they've rolled over... Ofsted don't want to inspect universities delivering level five apprenticeships. Universities don't want it. Nobody wants it. And it's... it's crazy. I think QAA sat on their hands... for about two years... (HEI2)

Others felt that the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework was not appropriate for inspection of HE provision and that there was a fundamental mismatch between the UK Quality Code (Quality Assurance Agency, 2018b) and the ESFA rules around working in partnerships with others.

There's a direct clash between them. You know an Apprenticeship expects that you will have a partner working with you and that you'll be delivering this with a lot of learning happening in the workplace and B10 [QAA Code of Practice] has never really kind of got to grips with what we mean by collaborative work. (HEI7).

Other points raised were feelings of anxiety around the quality assurance arrangements (HEI 13), a lack of willingness to engage with levels 4 & 5 in order to avoid the potential of an Ofsted inspection (HEI 3, HEI 1) and a move to employ and bring in expertise from the FE and independent training sectors to advise on achieving institutional readiness (HEI1). One academic was positive about Ofsted involvement:

Int: And as a higher education practitioner, how would you feel if an OFSTED inspector walks into your learning space?

HEI8: I would welcome it. There's absolutely nothing to hide. We should be very transparent in relation to what we actually offer...

4.6 Perceptions and attitudes

In Europe and beyond, apprenticeships are held in very high regard. This is a very different world from England where all the prestige is tied to a university education and all alternatives are considered second class (Richard, 2012; p.15)

The questions of attitudes to apprenticeships arose in nearly all the policy documents. Most strongly was the view that apprenticeships have traditionally been seen as of lower value to parents than other routes with Richard (2012; p.5) stating that they should not be seen as '*lower-status alternative to a purely academic path through university to adulthood*'. In launching higher apprenticeships, the government sought to place '*vocational learning on a par with academic study*' (UK Government, 2011)

This trope of apprenticeship as an alternative *option to* university has been questioned by the higher education sector, who wish to see degree apprenticeships presented as an alternative *route to* a university qualification:

There is some tendency to see them as an alternative... This would be foolish, and would replicate a historic failing of training/employment policy in the UK which has for over a century enforced early and sharp decisions between 'academic' and 'vocational' routes. Sheffield Hallam University written evidence, (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; QUA0042)

and

apprenticeships are not positioned as 'an alternative to university' but rather that degree apprenticeships are delivered by universities in the workplace and offer the best of both worlds' Middlesex University written evidence. (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; QUA0055)

Negative attitudes to apprenticeships are alleged to be displayed by several stakeholders: by universities with Sajid Javid as the then Minister for Business apparently accusing The Russell Group of holding "snobbish" attitudes and fearing that they would "devalue" their brand (Matthews, 2016); by parents who are 'hostile to non-university routes'; by young people themselves who view them as '*old-fashioned and non-aspirational*' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; para 49) and finally by some professional bodies: '*those professions where traditionally the route to membership has always been through academic degrees appear less likely to consider apprenticeships as holding equivalence to higher education qualifications*'. (Professional Associations Research Association, 2015; p.22).

This begs the question who apprenticeships are for and how much consideration was given to this prior to the policy being expanded to include higher and degree apprenticeships. While Richard heard evidence that they 'should be exclusively for young people' his recommendation was that '*workers of all ages should have the opportunity to achieve their career goals through an apprenticeship. Older as well as the younger workers will find themselves starting new jobs or roles*' (Richard, 2012; p.33)

Another sub-theme which emerged from the analysis of the policy documentation relates to cultures and mind-sets embedded in structures and systems. Many in the HE sector have drawn attention to the fact that the funding and regulatory environment were born of the Further Education/Skills sector with Sheffield Hallam University accusing the ESFA of requiring '*reform to be fit for purpose and move away from being a further education organisation with a further education ethos and focus*'. (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018)

The Education Select Committee reported that the HE sector had told them that '*the Institute does not understand their sector and that this is hurting the development and growth of degree apprenticeships*' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018; QUA0042). This criticism appears to have been accepted by the government with the Institute being instructed to ensure that the changing landscape and the interest in higher and degree apprenticeship '*are reflected in how it operates, including being aware of and engaging with structures and organisations that are part of the development, delivery and quality assurance of apprenticeships at these higher levels*' (Department for Education, 2018; para 19)

While the HE sector has accused the apprenticeship structures of not being cognisant of their specific needs and requirements, the same could be said of HE itself with university sector seeming to expect special pleading in this policy arena. Sir Gerry Berragan (CEO of Institute for Apprenticeships) refused to '*acknowledge that we are making it harder for degrees*'. When requested to prioritise the case of universities and degree apprenticeships he was adamant that there would be no privileging over other provision, stating that he was '*agnostic about degree apprenticeships*'. (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018)

The current Minister for Skills and Apprenticeships has made clear, on more than one occasion, her preference for the vocational route into and through the workplace stating '*I did an apprenticeship and did not go to university*' (House of Lords Economic Affairs

Committee, 2018) almost as a badge of honour. She has also publicly declared her concern that the middle-classes are going to monopolise the opportunities they present.

The HE sector informants pick up on cultural and systemic differences and spoke of how they felt that they were not considered adequately in the approach taken by government and its agencies:

the challenge is we (HE are late to the party. And the party has already got their own networks that their sympathizers in the DfE ...yeah because we're kind of playing in a... in a field that's defined for the FE and skills sector that was predefined if you like for them. (PI9)

It was felt that this division was baked in, especially as the responsibility comes under the remit of the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, which had been queried by the Select Committee:

when the committee have wanted to speak to ministers about higher and particularly degree apprenticeship it's not always been clear whose responsibility they are. So when we had the previous universities minister in Sam Gyimah a few months ago and we asked him about degree apprenticeship he said it wasn't his area and it seems this is a bit of a grey area in government about whose responsibility it is. (PI12)

There was some evidence of jealousy of the HE sector from other parties, reverting to the argument that they had received special treatment in the form of DADF (PI7, PI13) and had somehow engineered the system to include a degree where there was no requirement for one:

There were quite a lot of incentives provided by government for universities to actually get involved in the development of Degree Apprenticeships... irrespective at that time, of whether there was any evidence that a degree was necessarily needed to... to carry out a particular occupation (PI7)

This reverts to the argument about the tight link between an apprenticeship and an occupation which is challenging for the HE sector:

I can understand that academics would say "ah, but you know, you might be competent in a job, a professional job especially, you know a (SIC) code one to three job, but you haven't got the breadth of learning that you would get in an undergraduate degree". (PI8)

or

and it's hard to say what a digital specialist cyber specialist needs. That's not an occupation such as it. It's a set of skills and knowledge and all the

rest of it that a person needs and you don't go out and think about that say I've done that I know how to be what I am and that's the end of it. (PI9)

This puts HE potentially on a collision course as some of the apprenticeship programmes could be classed as professional development as much as new occupational skills:

people who are not occupationally competent, enter apprenticeships. People who are already occupationally competent, don't need an apprenticeship. [The Institute] have got to try and codify those philosophical points into policies and rules... so we either have to change the definition, or we have to take [some standards] out of the apprenticeship scheme.' (PI6)

Other perceptions expressed were that HEIs were not as autonomous as they thought:

things are changing despite what universities like to think of as "We are autonomous", you know, "We have great autonomy in determining the things that we do" and then to take a government-regulated market... and then having to accept that there are going to be some shifts. (PI5)

or would like:

what we've seen a lot of over the last twelve months is universities thinking that they are exempt from certain rules and certain requirements. (PI4)

Another commentator saw them as effectively parking their tanks on the lawns of traditional apprenticeship providers:

some of that challenge is around actually, experienced by FE colleges... ... questioning what's left for them to deliver, if universities are rolling out... long programmes that are actually seeing an individual go from potentially Level 3 right through to Level 7. (PI5)

HEI participants perceived an inherent cultural clash with a system designed for lower level programmes and FE/independent providers was being imposed on them with no recognition of the uniqueness of the sector.

I think, from my personal level... the government and other bodies responsible... have kind of looked at degree apprenticeships as just like, another iteration of apprenticeships.. without an understanding of ... how it's different. You know, bit of a kind of square peg, round hole approach, and it's been really frustrating on a national level in terms of that lack of understanding and a willingness to understand. (HEI13)

Others referred to a 'them and us' environment (HEI8), to a lack of 'power and control' (HEI7) and a fear of 'being hung out to dry' by the auditors (HEI10). Other negative perceptions and attitudes linked to the themes set above with regard to snobbishness.

Some had encountered comments from colleagues that HE should not be engaging with apprenticeships as they were perceived as lower quality and lower level programmes:

The programme director had some emails from a couple of professors to say “why are we doing this? It’s devaluing the programme reputation”. (HEI11)

Or

“Oh god, that’s FE isn’t it?”...all the same old stuff comes trotting out like “it’s not proper higher education” (HEI6)

Some reported colleagues as saying it has ‘*nothing to do with us [HE]*’, queried whether it would lead to a ‘*lesser degree*’ (HEI15) or mentioned that the word ‘apprenticeship’ carried a ‘*stigma*’ (HEI4). Others felt that colleagues were fearful that close engagement with the workplace would expose lack of understanding of work-based pedagogies (HEI1) or current knowledge of industry practice:

I think they’re happy in their little bubble aren’t they... and they deliver it in the same way every year and they use the same handouts and they don’t want anybody rocking the boat! They don’t want any students coming into class and going, “Actually, that’s not... we don’t do it like that in real life” really. That would absolutely horrify them! (HEI12)

There were some views that this was simply the wrong solution to the skills problems and that rather than seeking to merge the vocational, academic and professional, the gulf should be widened. One commented on the public perception of this:

People will ask “Should police officers be doing a degree?” and I can see there being a lot of debate and discussion when it all kind of finally happens. You can see the politics playing out there with “Police officers don’t need a degree... they just need a bit of common sense” – we will be in the front line of that debate when it happens!’ (HEI10)

As might be expected, given the roles of the selected participants there was also much in the way of positive perceptions with some seeing this as shifting attitudes of the student body more widely towards apprenticeships (HEI1) as well as academic staff coming on board, either driven by interest or market realities (HEI13). Others describe them as a ‘*great product, fun to teach*’ (HEI10) and as a way of improving the standing of higher education and also invoking the realities of the HE marketplace:

I was able to respond “but yes but you had 15 students last year [on regular programme]. Now you’ve got 56 with another 15 booked... really good calibre students from [blue chip companies]”. And... they really didn’t have a leg to stand on! (HEI11)

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to bring to life and evidence the main findings which were identified from thematic analysis of relevant policy texts and interviews with policy informants and those responsible for delivery of the policy on the ground. The research identified a set of themes in relation to the policy formation, intention, implementation and enactment of the policy around higher and degree apprenticeships.

Analysis of the policy texts and interviews revealed the overarching aim of the policy at formation was to address workforce skills shortages and gaps affecting UK economic productivity and this could be seen as largely an economic project rather than an educational one. The policy reforms, delivered initially by a Conservative-led Coalition and then a Conservative Government, focused on market- and employer-led delivery. This was done in a wider context of post-recession austerity, public-sector spending cuts, low productivity, social disadvantage and latterly Brexit.

The main findings showed that there is an important distinction to be made between policy formation and formulation and implementation and that the situational context cannot be overlooked. While certainly focused on addressing the skills and productivity deficits, this policy was not necessarily refined for implementation in the HE sectoral context. This included impacts on funding mechanisms, HE systems and processes and design of apprenticeship standards and learning programmes. There were positive outcomes in many cases with some universities using this as an opportunity to reach out to businesses and employers and to innovate with pedagogies and programme design. Areas of contestation arose with the policy around the impact of the levy on institutions, the removal of mandatory qualifications, upskilling, processes of third-party assessment and for quality assurance.

The most telling findings related to culture and attitudes – with different voices (government/related agencies, the FE/independent training sector and the HE sector) making accusations of vested interest, special pleading, snobbery, lobbying and even gaming of the system.

These themes will be unpacked and analysed in more detail in the next chapter which will further evaluate these findings, of both policy and narratives, in relation to some of the policy implementation conceptual frameworks.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter set out the findings of the research structured under the key themes that were identified through the thematic analysis process. This chapter seeks to locate and elucidate these findings within the policy implementation and enactment theories as explored in the literature review and as set out in the methodology chapters.

The complexity and scope of policy analysis...precludes the possibility of successful single theory explanations. What we need in policy analysis is a toolbox of diverse concepts and theories. (Ball, 2006; p.43)

There is an important distinction to be made between policy formation and formulation and implementation and that the situational context cannot be overlooked. This chapter interrogates each of the themes taking Ball's toolbox approach, see also Bailey (2016). Vidovich proposes that '*theoretical eclecticism potentially offers more comprehensive insights into dynamic policy processes than single theories alone*' (Vidovich, 2013; abstract). In particular, it draws upon policy implementation theories and models including top-down vs bottom-up approaches (Sabatier, 1986, Trowler, 2002), principal-agent theory (Gunn, 2015), Matland's conflict-ambiguity matrix (1995) and the implementation staircase (Saunders and Reynolds, 1987). It considers the traditions of critical policy studies e.g. Ozga's position that policy is a '*contested terrain*' (Ozga, 2000) and that matters of '*interest, conflict and power*' are embedded within. This work has also attempted to follow her position with regard to policy analysis and '*to bring together structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro-level investigation, especially that which takes account of people's perception and experiences*' (Ozga, 1990). The final chapter will synthesise the findings and analysis and seek to provide answers to the stated research questions.

The focus of this study could be summarised as the vocationalisation of higher education and includes discussions around neoliberalism, marketisation, resistance and commodification. There is also relevance in the work of Trowler (2008, 2014a) on socio-economic contexts and higher education cultures. Several areas of tension and opportunity were identified through this research around the process and substance of the policy implementation – these relate to institutional approach, economic and funding considerations, policy levers, pedagogy, and perceptions and attitudes.

5.2 Overall Policy Intention

While the policy in question here relates to the skills strategy developed by the Coalition government elected in 2010, nothing occurs in isolation and no policy is developed from

a blank page or imposed on a fresh or neutral landscape (Ball, 2006, Lingard and Ozga, 2007, Lingard and Garrick, 1997). However the research showed that the overriding aim of the policy was to address the skills shortages and skills gaps identified within the current and future workforce, with a secondary aim to improve the quality and standing of apprenticeships, in particular by bringing universities into the frame. The Wolf report (2011) had identified many weaknesses in the vocational educational system for 14-19 year olds which gave academic rigour and independence to the idea of reform of the wider system, and led to the appointment of entrepreneur Doug Richard to review the apprenticeship system.

The proposed reforms and subsequent policy which followed led to radical shifts in the design, development and funding of apprenticeships at all levels and were to have a significant impact on sections of a largely unsuspecting higher education sector. It is worth reposing Gunn's (2015) questions here about policy networks: what are the hidden hegemonies and who '*yields the greater leverage*'? Analysis of the policy texts above shows that for Ball's (2006) policy influence and production contexts, while the Liberal Democrats held some sway, the Coalition policies were dominated by the Conservatives with a clear predisposition towards an employer-led, pro-business, neoliberal ideology. The government did undertake widespread consultation on the development of the policy identifying a wide policy network (Gunn, 2015) of actors including private and public sector employers, employer umbrella organisations, training providers (including private sector and FE Colleges), education and skills sector umbrella bodies and trades unions. This supports Vidovich's hybridisation of bureaucratic hierarchies and markets, with '*public and private spheres*' of influence on show (Vidovich, 2013; p.34). Interestingly Universities were not included on the list of categories (Department for Business Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2013; p.39).

The policy rhetoric initially framed apprenticeship as an alternative *to* higher education (HE) (i.e. instead of going to university), but as higher apprenticeships were introduced (2011) there was a subtle shift (not embraced by all) towards apprenticeships as an alternative route *through* HE. This was further strengthened with the launch of degree apprenticeships in 2015, which were presented unproblematically as a bringing together of two worlds – apprenticeships and higher education in a classic rational-purposive model of top-down implementation (Trowler, 2014b, Sabatier, 1986). On paper, it met the tests as set out by Sabatier as illustrated in Table 3.

Conditions for effective policy implementation (Sabatier, 1986)	Applied to specific policy context: Introduction of Higher and Degree Apprenticeships	Commentary
-----------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------

Clear and consistent objectives	Government set out a clear objective for apprenticeship policy following Richard Review	The reality was more 'a multitude of <i>partially-conflicting objectives</i> ' (Sabatier, 1986; p.29) which had not considered the particularities of the HE sector
Adequacy of causal theory	In theory the trailblazers would design programmes required by employers, the levy would enable the funding of them and together this would result in a highly skilled workforce and improved productivity	The reality was a more complex chain of events due to delays to new programmes, tensions over who should engage with the process and who it was aimed at, the inclusion of qualifications and cultural and systemic issues and a botched funding process
Policy needs to be within a legal framework (sanctions and incentives).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trailblazer approval • Funding band allocation and review • Non-levy allocation • Annual Funding Rules published with sanctions and incentives included 	Problematic for the HE sector as diverged from many standard HE processes and introduced a performance-based management, funding upon results culture
Support of interest groups and executive sponsors	Widespread consultation on the reforms did not include HE sector	HE lobby groups late and therefore had less influence
No major changes to socio-economic conditions	Reforms implemented against background of post-recession public sector spending cuts/austerity, increased university tuition fees and latterly Brexit.	Ability of public sector bodies to use levy effectively impacted by budget restrictions

Table 3: Application of Sabatier's Policy Implementation criteria

However little thought appeared to be given to how this performative and commodified model of education would play out in a supposedly autonomous but increasingly marketised higher education sector. The result is a new type of higher education in terms of process and pedagogy – not so much a binary of academic *or* vocational but a merging of the two and leading in some cases to a clash of cultures – and a policy implementation in which the agentic and bottom-up approach would be evident in many places.

5.3 Economic Considerations

From the outset this policy was presented at macro level as an economic policy as much as an education one, with a clear link made between apprenticeships as a solution to skills shortages and skills gaps. The underlying policy rhetoric aligns with human capital theory (Tight, 2018; p.97-8) addressing both the productivity gap and latterly contributing to the industrial strategy. Some specific wider socio-economic contexts emerged including localism and devolution agendas, austerity and public spending cuts and more recently the impact of Brexit and immigration policy on the shape of the UK workforce. Trowler summarises this complexity well:

Policy-making and policy implementation are more likely to be the result of negotiation, compromise and conflict than of rational decisions and technical solutions, of complex social and political processes than careful planning and the incremental realisation of coherent strategy. (Trowler, 2002; p.5)

Despite the underlying complex socio-economic contexts the policy presents through the documents as a rational-purposive model, i.e. by following the proposed course of action the required results will ensue. This '*planning and control*' model is described by (Hill and Hupe, 2002; p.9) and relies on adequate causal theory (Sabatier, 1986; p.23-5) whereby, the right levers and legislation will result in an improved and funded apprenticeship programme and a suitably skilled and available workforce. However this does not account for the many other factors in between which may subvert – Trowler's (2014b; p.15) '*organic and complex*' policy model.

What comes through from the policy reforms is a neoliberal ideology driving this policy production context (Ball, 2015, Ball, 2006) in terms of the privileged role given to employers (the private sphere) and the decreased role of educators (the public sphere) in the design of programmes – -although some protections were included to prevent domination of single large employers. This also supports Gale's and Yeatman's descriptions of the hegemonic status quo which tends to foreground economic considerations in policy production (Gale, 2007; p.223, Yeatman, 1998). The policy has raised concerns about the purpose and place of apprenticeships within the higher education context which aligns with Pilbeam (2009), who debates the wider context of an increasing utilitarianism in the higher education sector. Tight (2019) describes a '*neoliberal turn*' in higher education which privileges a market-led environment and which is difficult (and indeed perhaps futile) for any institution to evade, so all-encompassing is its influence.

The interviewees showed a general appreciation and understanding of the policy thrust and were all of the view that there was some role for higher education in addressing national skills shortages and a potential positive impact on productivity. HEI respondents could also see positive benefits for their own institutions and personal profiles as the programme enabled them to engage with businesses and employers in new ways.

5.4 Institutional Strategy

This section will explore in more detail the implications of the implementation of higher and then degree apprenticeship policy at a meso level on institutions of higher education, specifically English universities which are the focus of this study, moving to Ball's policy practice context (Ball, 2006). It is worth considering here the implementation staircase

model which ‘provides an illustration of the systemic positions held by particular ‘layers’ within higher education systems’ (Saunders and Sin, 2014; p.139). An ideographic view of policy accepts that policy is not implemented in a vacuum and is a complex process that sees policy made and remade as it moves up and down the implementation staircase. Figure 2 below shows (some) of the key players in the implementation process and is relevant to this section which considers how universities received, refracted, and enacted this policy internally.

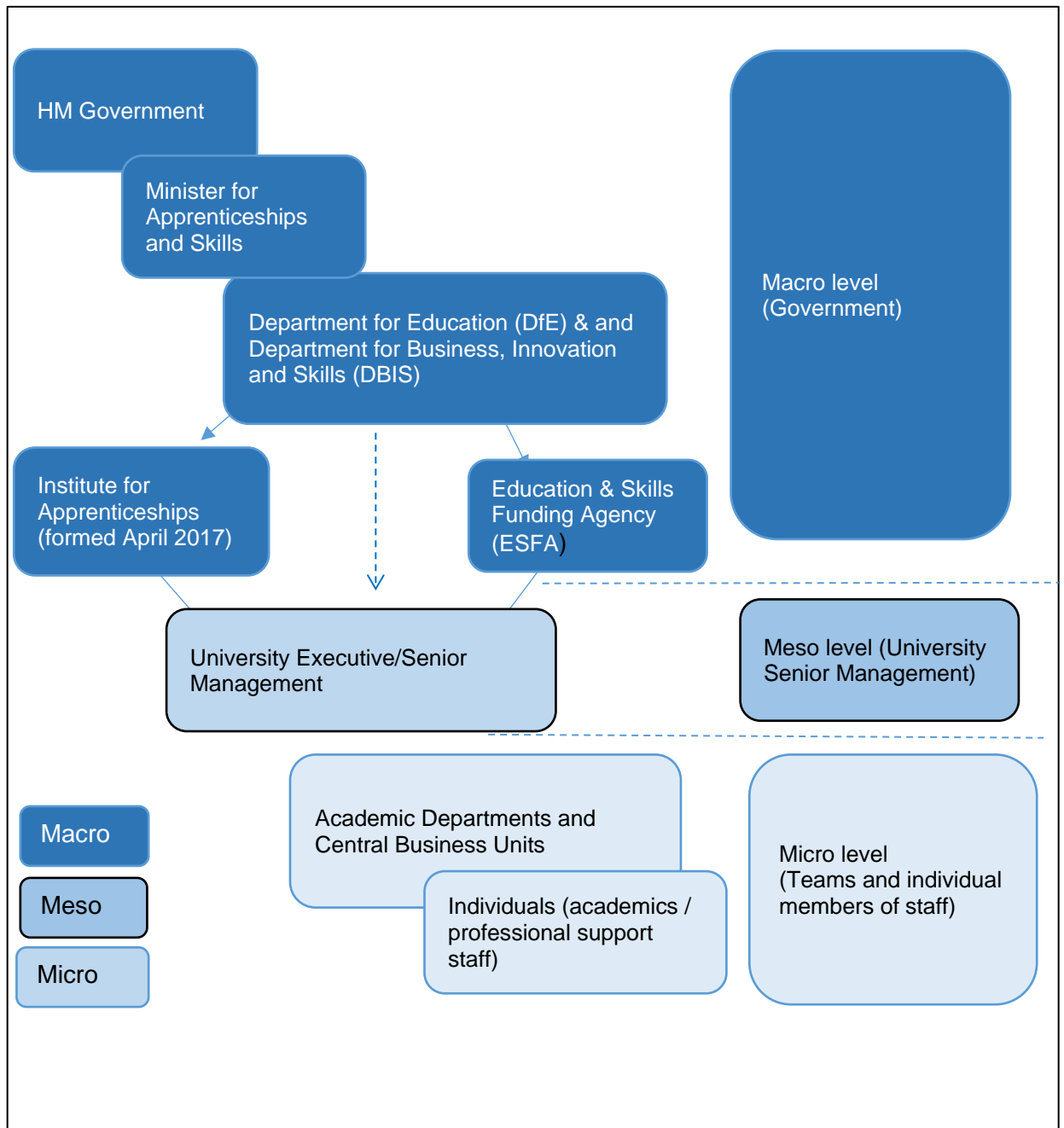


Figure 2: Higher and Degree Apprenticeship Policy Implementation Staircase (after Saunders and Reynolds (1987) and Saunders and Sin (2014)).

The first thing that is worth noticing is that this policy is managed and implemented by different ministers and agencies than those typically involved with higher education. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (replaced in 2018 with the Office for Students (OfS)) did not have a formal role to play although it took on a role of ‘influencer’ through its management of the Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund (DADF). This is symptomatic of the systemic, structural and cultural repositioning that this policy represents for higher education. Also worthy of note is the layering of the ‘staircase’ which shows the splitting of roles (funding and registration policy mediated by the Education and Skills Funding Agency) while programme content (trailblazers, standards, assessment plans, funding bands) were managed by the Department for Education and latterly the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education).

The top-down policy implied an unproblematic implementation process – that the new rules and approaches which had largely been designed with the Further Education and private training provider sector could be equally applied to higher education with little adaptation required. Figure 2 shows the constituents at the three levels of macro (Government), meso (University Executive / Governing Body) and micro (individual units, departments and members of staff).

However taking an ideographic, agentic perspective, it is worth revisiting the principal-agent theoretical model here. Kivistö puts it neatly when he contends that principals (i.e. government) are likely to impose monitoring and incentives on agents (in this scenario training providers which include universities), stating:

‘According to agency theory, governments do not trust universities, simply because universities are likely to behave opportunistically if they are not held accountable for the resources they receive’ (Kivistö, 2008; p.340).

This aligns with wider neoliberal approaches which see accountability and audit as control mechanisms with which to manage performance and behaviours. Dougherty and Natow (2019), provide an alternative view of the model of universities being beholden to their political masters, i.e. questioning the *‘narrative that it is simply a case of political “principals” imposing it on largely recalcitrant “agents”’* and suggest that they (in this case the university management) *‘may actually see benefit in neoliberal policies and, in any cases, are potent political actors pursuing interests of their own’* (p.7). This is demonstrated in the findings of this research which see many universities embracing and welcoming the policy, particularly at this meso level where a *‘managerialist culture’* is likely to be in place which *‘emphasise ‘outward-facing concerns’ in response to external*

stakeholders' expectations of institutional performance and accountability' (Saunders and Sin, 2014; p.147). The university managers were positive about various aspects seeing it as contributing to institutional strategic aims around business and enterprise activity, knowledge exchange, reputation enhancement, civic engagement, employability, widening access and most relevant, market growth and protection. The latter two, of course, would be entirely in line with a rational free-market ideology and is understandable in the context of an increasingly competitive environment and a demography of a shrinking number of eighteen-year-olds (Office for National Statistics, 2018).

Another way to view this is that universities have now fully bought into the neoliberal agenda to the extent that they cannot see beyond its realms and have become instruments *'of the state that largely serve the needs of business and the economy'* (Harland, 2009; p.514). Harland goes on to argue that neoliberalism has become so embedded that *'it remains largely unchallenged in the academy'* (p.517) and for Tight *'neoliberalism would appear to be the only 'game' in town for running our universities and colleges'* (2019; p.8). Pilbeam supports this and argues that university senior managers are increasingly *'more inclined to embrace the knowledge economy and the corporatisation of the academy'* (Pilbeam, 2009; p.353).

Many of the university interviewees reported that senior managers were positive about the opportunities for business engagement that apprenticeships afforded their institutions, especially where these related to reputation-enhancing new clients (household names, blue-chip corporates). Inevitably such a marketised HE sector impacts at micro level on academic lives, identities and workloads as described here by Ball:

UK universities are involved in complex 'border-crossing' relationships with the private sector, state agencies, international consortia and other national states. Partnerships, linkages and networks 'join up' state organisations with commercial ones and create discursive capillaries through which the sensibilities and dispositions of enterprise, competition and profit flow and the ontology of neoliberalism is generalised' (Ball, 2012b; p.24)

The reality is that much of the impact of this disruptive new type of higher education has been felt at micro level by both academic and professional support staff in HE. The research findings identifies several narratives in this respect, with some seeing the policy being implemented in universities very much in 'top-down' manner. Staff in some universities felt supported by management and that they were contributing to a new and innovative area of work that had potential to strengthen and secure the future of the

institution, given the wider challenging contexts (decline of 18-year-old applicants, decline in part-time programmes, increased sector competition as new providers come on stream).

Others experienced a more complex bottom-up approach to implementation and this had been led either by university business units who had identified this as a potential new market and had initiated this, or by an academic department where the apprenticeship model offered a way of increasing recruitment or replacing another type of (in some cases struggling to recruit) programme.

Perhaps inevitably, this policy innovation and change imposed on academic staff led to some resistance and a number of reasons for this were suggested by the data. Some business unit staff expressed frustration with the lack of acceptance by academic colleagues of what they saw as a new reality, i.e. that in order to survive and grow, new types of higher education were needed – including a closer relationship with industry, employers and workforce development. The interviews demonstrated business-facing staff accusing some academic staff of resisting this due to a range of factors; these were suggested as existing workload, lack of confidence in the relevance and currency of their knowledge or being unwilling to change their day-to-day practice and challenge the status quo. Kelsey suggests that this type of resistance might be more philosophical:

When critics accuse us of professional and individual self-interest, nostalgic self-delusion and resistance to change, they have a point. But they also ignore a deep seated and authentic conviction about, and sense of responsibility to maintain the power of knowledge to liberate the individual and the collectivity (Kelsey, 2006)

This aligns to what Harland (2009) calls the '*liberal educational ideal*' (as opposed to a neoliberal ideology). It also supports the findings of Martin et al. (2018) who describe academics holding multiple roles and '*juggling hats*'.

5.5 Policy Levers

5.5.1 Funding (Levy, non-levy, funding rules and funding bands)

It is perhaps helpful at this point to return to Keep's (2015) third predicted policy challenge relating to the implementation of a radical new funding methodology: the introduction of the apprenticeship levy (and its flipside – the allocation of non-levy funding to employers with a payroll below £3m) (See Chapter 1). This was lauded by the government, and the agencies just below it on the implementation staircase at the macro level, as being the radical funding method that would complete the reform of apprenticeships in England.

Launched in April 2017, the estimated annual value of the levy was around £2.3bn – much of this new income to the training provider sector. Universities (to their greater or lesser liking) were now deemed to also be part of this sector and were driven into a new and competitive environment to secure employer contracts to deliver programmes and thus secure a new source of income and new markets. It is not without exaggeration to state that the research findings systematically point to the funding reform as the game-changer for the sector and without its arrival it is unlikely that the other reforms would have had such an impact.

It is useful to consider this within Matland's (1995) policy implementation conflict-ambiguity matrix. Given the areas of tension identified thus far it would seem reasonable to place apprenticeship policy as low on the ambiguity spectrum and fairly high on the conflict axis – thereby classifying it in Matland's terms as within the '*political implementation*' paradigm which typically results in the policy implementation process seeing the use of power hierarchies or resources to drive behaviours. Since the government cannot *force* universities to deliver its higher level apprenticeship policy, it can use remunerative incentives to drive behaviour – through its pump-priming programmes and through new funding formulae (levy and non-levy funding) – what Trowler (2014a; p.184) might call the '*tell and sell*' model. The HEFCE-run Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund (DADF) (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2016) supports Matland in that it provides '*remunerative incentives for essential actors to join*' (1995; p.157).

Contested areas which arose from the research related to competing interests (Seddon et al., 2004) and accusations (from FE competitors) of HEIs unfairly siphoning off what was perceived to be the traditional apprenticeship market, despite the policy supposedly being led by employers. This led to calls for new levers and controls to be put in place to shift the funding back towards lower level apprenticeships in traditional occupations (as opposed to what they perceived as professional development). This could be seen as a bottom-up movement to game and redirect the policy towards a different stakeholder group – '*it has long been known that direct and indirect financial incentives **produce** rather than **prevent** gaming behaviour in all kinds of organisations where such incentives are implemented*' (Johansson, 2015; p.161) (researcher emphasis). At the time of writing this was appearing to gain some traction with the current minister: '*I will always look at whether we are absolutely sure this (i.e. higher and degree apprenticeships) is where public subsidy should go*' Anne Milton, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Linford, 2019).

While larger employers were required to pay into the levy, smaller employers were able to access non-levy funding to cover the 90% (and since April 2019, 95%) of the training and assessment costs. This is funded through the unused levy funding which levy payers lose access to after 24 months. Unease from some stakeholders was uncovered by the research – about redirection of levy funds towards high cost management programmes (as this was perceived as focusing on the wrong kind of skills) and reducing the funds available for these smaller employers, supporting Bardach's (1977) diversion of resources and deflection of policy goals .

The research also showed that the policy has led to several areas of conflict. These included concern that the procurement process was bungled – with the first round cancelled after long delays and some HEIs so disheartened by the process that they chose not to enter the second round. There were views from the HE sector that the application process favoured those providers already in the system, which disadvantaged HEIs who were new to apprenticeship delivery. Finally, several universities were unsuccessful in their application for non-levy funding which led to charges of unfair allocations and the creation of 'cold-spots' where no HE non-levy provision was available. This in turn was felt to have the effect of disadvantaging small businesses and potential apprentices – particularly those from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds, thus hindering social mobility and access to higher-level skills.

This situation led to frustration from the HE sector and some of the HEIs who felt that the policy was geared towards the existing funding norms and systems and that they were somehow being penalised as newcomers. One of the interesting findings of the research was that HEIs were not able to work with smaller employers unless they did so with the support of an FE College or private training provider. This demonstrated a reversal of the usual HE-FE franchising hegemonies (Ingleby, 2019, Creasy, 2013) and an indication that at an institutional level there was less antagonism than appeared to be the case at sectoral level.

The other area of contestation related to the funding bands attached to each of the standards. The final stage in the approval process is for the DfE (and since April 2017 the Institute for Apprenticeships) to allocate the funding band for each standard. This amount then represents the maximum amount of levy funding that can be used – if an employer and provider agree a higher price, this must be funded from the employers' own funds. The degree and higher apprenticeships have typically been awarded at the higher end of the funding spectrum, with most of the early DAs allocated the highest funding band of £27,000. Tensions arose around the process of allocation of the funding

bands which was felt to be opaque and also the review process which had seen the most popular DA (Chartered Manager) have its funding band reduced to £22,000 in 2018. Combined with the strengthened application of the mandatory qualification rules (see below), this led some of the HE respondents to feel that the process was being run in the interests of others.

The research also uncovered tensions around the process of allocating funding bands, which was felt to be opaque, inconsistent and also increasingly subject to political pressure to bring the bands down in order to increase the number of apprenticeships that could be purchased from the fixed amount of available funding. While the setting of funding bands is consistent with a top-down approach of putting sanctions and incentives in place (Sabatier, 1986), the reviews and associated uncertainty increased ambiguity aligning with Matland (1995) and Rosli and Rossi (2014). Interestingly, the HE sector informants and representatives reported that many employers would prefer to see the funding bands raised to increase the amount of eligible levy they can spend on what they perceive would be a higher quality product. The move from government is in direct conflict with this – seeking to reduce the band to increase national affordability (presumably as the increased unlikelihood of them reaching their target of 3m starts became more apparent). This is also linked to the restrictive list of what activity is fundable (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2017) – worryingly for the HE sector this does not include student services or capital costs, which may be a reason to turn the sector away in time.

Finally there was a largely positive view from all parties that this funding methodology offered a ‘debt-free’ route through higher education – potentially opening up opportunities to those from disadvantaged and debt-averse backgrounds. It also raises questions for future research around whether an apprenticeship route is way of widening access to HE and whether an apprentice at this level is in a more advantageous position than a traditional full-time HE student.

Figure 3 below brings together some of the opportunities and contested areas through a vignette of the Senior Leader Degree apprenticeship standard.

5.5.2 Mandatory Qualifications

The data collection for this research was undertaken in a context of a hardening of the government’s position (enacted by the Institute for Apprenticeships) in relation to the inclusion of mandatory qualifications within the new apprenticeship standards. This has had the effect of putting into question the viability of some programmes. Some from the HE sector referred to an existential crisis questioning how something could be called a

'degree apprenticeship' if the degree is no longer a mandatory requirement. The higher apprenticeship is more aligned with the three tests (Figure 1), as HAs do not *have to* have a degree included – but *can* include one.

The background to this is that in the first wave of standard approvals the three tests around the inclusion of qualifications was not strictly applied, leading to (further) claims from the FE and private training sector of preferential treatment for the HE sector and in some cases the simple tinkering with or rebadging of existing degree programmes. The challenge for the university sector was to meet the strict (and in many cases entirely understandable and reasonable) criteria as set out in the regulations but to deliver them within a university context that it seems had not necessarily been considered when they were written.

This comes back to the quote from Kivistö (2008) that universities will '*behave opportunistically*' and supports Gunn's notion of '*agency slack*' where agents '*pursue policy outputs that reflect their own interests and preferences*'. The HE sector were thus unsurprisingly found to be positive about the wider benefits of including an undergraduate or postgraduate degree within an apprenticeship, believing this adds international standing, recognition, transferability and academic rigour and have used the policy as a springboard to develop a raft of new programmes, often in partnership with employers. This is countered by the FE/private providers who saw this constant attachment to the inclusion of a degree as intellectual credentialism and academic snobbery – a view which seems to also be held by the Minister.

This could be identified as another example of the FE / traditional apprenticeship 'culture' being applied to HE – it is rarer for a hard sift requirement of a specific qualification in HE outside regulated professions. What is more likely is what Tight refers to as a '*screening hypothesis*' (Tight, 2018; p.98) i.e. employer requirement for a relevant degree. Employers look for a degree as much for its recognition of softer skills (such as high level critical thinking and analysis) as much as specific knowledge (Tholen et al., 2016). Nevertheless, as Eraut states there is also an expectation that professionals will hold a qualification:

by social convention and common consent there are points on this continuum of professional learning at which individual professionals become qualified in a formal, publicly-recognized manner. Qualification is in every sense a rite de passage, which affects people's status in society, a landmark in the process of professional socialization. The public expects that a qualified professional will be competent in the discharge of normal professional tasks and duties. (Eraut, 1994; p.159).

What appears to be in play now is a debate between the relative strengths of the apprenticeship certificate awarded upon successful completion of the end-point assessment against a university undergraduate or postgraduate degree. The HE sector argued that learners, employers and providers are keen to see the degree qualification retained within and that HE has a duty to remain mindful of the wider context in which it operates. This relates to the fundamental question posed by Willetts (2017) and so many others of whether the role of higher education is to train for an immediate occupation or educate for a lifetime, a debate particularly relevant in the fast-changing and dynamic employment context of the 21st century.

5.5.3 Upskilling vs New Talent

Writing in the Financial Times, Moules states:

British business schools cannot believe their good fortune as companies look to use the levy to send the executives on MBA courses' (2017).

The debate about 'upskilling' is an old one that being rerun here in a new context. Tight talks about 'St Matthew's law of access and participation' (1998; p.258) in the context of lifelong learning and education – i.e. that more learning opportunities shall be awarded to those who are already in a position of advantage and some would argue that higher, and particularly degree apprenticeships have been a further example of this. Apprenticeship policy allows for those already in employment to access programmes but a view was expressed by those outside the HE sector that this is not within the spirit of the policy. Universities – like other rational economic organisations and actors – will act in their own interests. These concerns were mirrored by the (supposedly neutral) Ofsted Chief Inspector, implying that the increase of management apprenticeships were indicative of universities jumping onto the latest funding opportunity bandwagon, rather than truly meeting employer skills needs (OFSTED, 2018). While the rules may *permit* a senior member of staff to be funded as an apprentice through a management development programme (Cranfield School of Management, 2019) this led to conflict between traditional providers of apprenticeships and educational innovators – or more prosaically, those taking advantage of market opportunity (See also Vignette 1). Interestingly some of the more prestigious providers of MBAs are not offering a levy-funded route – perhaps concerned that this will dilute the standing of their product (see below on perceptions).

This has led to a clear area of tension – while the lack of leadership and management skills are identified as affecting productivity in the UK, should these be addressed through

apprenticeships or other mechanisms? In a similar vein, Fuller et al. refer to '*deadweight*' training (House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, 2018) i.e. using funding to pay for training that would have happened anyway. This would support the principal-agent theory and could be classed as an example of '*agency slack*' or '*agency slippage*', i.e. HEI sector acting in its own interest/deploying the policy to its own ends (Gunn, 2015). There is also an element of bottom-up manipulation here – with actors seeing a way to negotiate or 'game' to meet their ends (Bardach, 1977, Gale, 2003). It is possible that this area of contestation will result in a redefining of what an apprenticeship is for the new era, which will take time, or may result in a retrenchment by government away from programmes which could be classed as largely in the scope of professional development.

Linked to this debate is the concept of Accreditation or Recognition of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L/RP(E)L. This is process which is well embedded in the HE sector and the research shows has potential to be integrated into apprenticeship programmes. It can recognise current and existing skills, knowledge and behaviours to offer exemptions against parts of programmes and thus reduce the cost and time commitment. Universities' experience in this process could be applied across the spectrum of levels and this could be an important quality intervention to counter some earlier criticism of the older style apprenticeships which accredited existing skills rather than building on these

(Fuller et al., 2015) and remaining mindful of the criticisms, for example from Price (2019) that it can be a way of educating on the cheap.

The Senior Leader Master's Degree Apprenticeship (SLMDA) provides an illustrative case study of many of the features and resulting policy tensions and opportunities as described in this chapter.

This programme:

- has a high funding band of £18,000
- contains a mandatory qualification that might not meet the mandatory qualification rules –it must include a Master's degree in management - either MA, MSc or MBA
- was designed by a trailblazer group of employers who have identified this as a skill priority area
- is seen by universities (including the Russell Group) as a relatively low risk entry to the apprenticeship market as may will already have a similar part-time MBA or other postgraduate management programme
- is non-integrated so requires a third party assessor i.e. the apprenticeship element cannot be awarded by the HEI
- has seen significant growth
- is largely used by employers (large corporate and public sector) to use their levy – HE is accused by the traditional apprenticeship sector as gaming the system and offering an MBA 'on the cheap' (equating to £1,800 (and since April 2019, £900) for an entire MBA)
- HEIs also accused of unfairly taking large proportion of the levy and non-levy funding with the FE/private sector taking the role of Bardach's (1977) '*outraged competitor*'
- has apprentices on which are generally existing mid-level or senior employees who would have already had access to professional development and training and thus incongruous with the social mobility policy aims (and who are likely to be benefiting from the relaxing of the ELQ rule)
- is under scrutiny as to whether meets the true criteria of apprenticeship –i.e. does it really deliver new skills required for a new role?
- is justified by supporters as addressing the UK productivity challenge as cited in the Industrial Strategy White Paper (2017b) although questions were raised by the minister as to the inherent vested interests of this: '*The trouble is that a lot of research comes out from organisations **that have an interest in the result, but if it is to be believed that in order to improve productivity in this country, management and leadership skills are very important***' Anne Milton, Minister for Apprenticeships (House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee Oral Evidence, 2018; Q.169) (researcher emphasis)

Figure 3: A vignette of the Senior Leader Master's Degree Apprenticeship (SLMDA)

One other factor which arose in the research is that, unlike in standard HE, Equal and Lower Qualification (ELQ) funding rules do not apply in apprenticeships – meaning it is possible to be a graduate in one discipline and to be funded to do an apprenticeship in a different area. This again is contested as potentially allows the already privileged to be funded or it could be argued that in relation to social mobility and adult education it opens doors to those returning to education and the workplace (UPP Foundation Civic University Commission, 2019). This is a question worthy of further investigation.

5.6 Learning, Teaching and Assessment

5.6.1 Trailblazers and Standards

Trailblazers were conceived as part of the neoliberal reforms put in place following the Richard Review and put employers in the centre of the process of designing the new apprenticeship standards. This led to the HE respondents feeling largely excluded and disempowered from this policy network – typically HE is a powerful and autonomous player, while this new approach privileged the private sphere and challenged historical hegemonies. Others from the FE/PTP sector contested this and accused HE of trying to influence the process to their own ends by pushing to have degree qualifications included in standards that they felt did not require them.

Some HEIs and professional bodies felt marginalised by the process and concerned about the potential for certain employers to dominate the design of standards, supporting Hordern (2015b; p.189). This aligns with the predictions made by Keep (2015) that the reliance on a small group of trailblazer employers may not be representative or sustainable and may in some case see examples of commercial competition and protection of intellectual property in what should be an open education process (Keep, 2015; p.7). This is relevant to the debate opened up by Bishop and Hordern (2017) about where degree apprenticeships, in particular, fit within the educational spectrum – are they higher technical (i.e. part of the VET system) or technical higher – i.e. part of the HE system? It could be argued that they were conceived as the former but have become part of the latter; hence some of the systemic and cultural clashes encountered.

Questions were raised by the HE sector as to whether there was too much focus on the outcome rather than the input with a concern whether these programmes were too narrow to qualify as higher education. Hordern's (2016, 2017) work is relevant here calling for differentiation between specialised forms of occupational knowledge and practice and a recognition that there has been a tendency towards the generic (horizontal in Bernsteinian terms) and away from the specialised, vertical knowledge required for many technical and specific occupations. Knowledge typologies for purer academic study (history, mathematics) must necessarily differ from those specific occupational competences which *'must assemble its knowledge base from a range of sources, and take account of a wider range of 'stakeholder' demands while also recognising how technological and practice-based developments are affecting the occupation'* (Hordern, 2016; p.456).

The research found that some HEI representatives and informants were concerned about the appropriateness of linking to a very specific occupation, given the 21st century fluid and dynamic employment contexts where occupational competency may swiftly lose its currency. Hordern (2015a) set out the argument for apprenticeships to cover a broader foundation and allow for some specialisation and this is now starting to occur. For example the Chartered Surveyor and Digital and Technology Solutions Professional both require a common or core set of knowledge with specialist pathways built in.

5.6.2 Pedagogy

There is little guidance on learning and teaching approaches within the 'Funding Rules' which determine what is and is not eligible for funding as part of an apprenticeship programme. What is clear is that no distinction is made between a level 2 customer service apprenticeship and a Level 7 management programme, which includes a master's degree in the Funding Rule – in what Keep (2015; p.1) calls a 'one-size-fits-all policy'. The formula of a minimum of 20% off-the-job learning is applied regardless of level, length and complexity of programme:

***Off-the-job training** must be **directly relevant** to the apprenticeship framework or standard, teaching **new** knowledge, skills and behaviours required to **reach competence** in the **particular occupation**. It can include... the following: the teaching of theory (for example, lectures, role playing, simulation exercises, online learning, and manufacturer training). (Skills Funding Agency, 2017; para. 28) (researcher emphasis)*

What would appear to be described here is a very narrow focus of how an apprenticeship is defined and how it should be 'taught'. There are a number of binary concepts at play here:

- 'Off-the-job' (as opposed to 'on-the-job')
- 'training' (as opposed to education, learning and exchange)
- 'new' (as opposed to 'old' or 'prior')
- 'competence' (as opposed to 'mastery / theoretical and critical understanding')
- 'particular occupation' (as opposed to 'professional practice')

Some of this terminology emerged as problematic when applied in the context of HE which embraces an open, expansive, transformational and critical approach to learning and knowledge. The debate could be linked to what Ball refers to as '*ontological insecurity*' (2012b; p.20) resulting from an increasingly performative and audit-driven environment as is possibly the case here. There was some concern expressed in both the interviews and the policy documents that a narrow focus on occupational competency, with the curriculum effectively condensed to a one or two page description

within the national, universal apprenticeship standard template. This did not necessarily align with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications which has the following description of a level 7 qualification: '*a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice*' (Quality Assurance Agency, 2014). This led some university respondents to question whether the focus was more on training (drawing on an outcome- or competence-based (Saunders, 2006a)) pedagogy rather than education (drawing on a cognitive and self-directed andragogy) (Knowles, 1983).

The focus in the funding rules on 'new' knowledge and skills is an interesting one and again appears to imply a somewhat formulaic approach to teaching and learning, whereby the apprentice's learning can apparently be paused and restarted at will, with only brand new information being permitted within the funding rules. This does not allow for more iterative and reflective approaches to learning. To counter this there was however, a sense that, rather than being restrictive, university apprenticeship policy offered HE an opportunity to celebrate and legitimise employer- and work-based learning for the first time. Many of the interviewees were positive about how the policy was shining a light on hitherto unseen pedagogical practice and bringing it to the fore. There is a strong, yet niche, tradition of pedagogical innovation in work-based learning in higher education, which developed over the last 20 years (Portwood, 2001, Costley, 2011, Walsh, 2007, Nottingham, 2017, Graham et al., 2007, Lillis, 2018, Helyer, 2010, Garnett, 2010, Young and Garnett, 2007, Minton and Lowe, 2019, Boud and Solomon, 2001). This sees much of the learning taking place in the messy peripheries or nexus of the workplace and the learning environment.

This tradition has seen the development of many techniques consistent with an expansive curriculum (Fuller et al., 2015) including self-audit, learning contracts, work-based projects and enquiries and exchange of knowledge and many of these were cited by respondents as being adapted and applied within the delivery of higher and degree apprenticeships. Others representing the FE and Skills sector were more circumspect and described reworked part-time programmes being rebadged as higher or degree apprenticeships which could be construed as '*agency shirking*' i.e. reducing the effort exerted (Gunn, 2015; p.41). Equally, the university sector could be seen to be applying '*agency slack*' (ibid) in that it is adapting the narrow constraints of the top-down policy by working in its own interests to develop and deliver programmes that meet its own interests and thus retain some level of autonomy.

5.6.3 End-Point Assessment

End-point assessment is another policy area that challenged the autonomy of the sector to a greater degree and is another example of the principal-agentic policy implementation. As set out in Chapter 1, all new apprenticeship standards must end with an assessment of workplace competence signed off by a third party neutral assessor. *Some* (but controversially not *all*) degree apprenticeship standards can be categorised as integrated, i.e. the apprenticeship is embedded within the degree qualification. Others (non-integrated) have the degree awarded and then the apprentice is required to undertake an additional assessment. Failure to do so would result in financial sanctions to the training provider.

The non-integrated degree apprenticeship policy is not entirely out of step with other professional training programmes delivered by HE (such as nursing or teaching, which see the final approval of professional ability undertaken in the workplace and signed off by third parties) (Tight, 2018; p.163). What has caused concern is the somewhat random way the policy has been applied, with no obvious justification as to which are classified as integrated or non-integrated and also how it abuts and duplicates processes already in place. The documentary analysis threw no light on the thinking behind this particular policy aspect.

The integrated approach was found to be popular with HEIs given that it retains their autonomy in delivery and assessment and also is financially more advantageous in that they reduce the risk of non-completion penalties, although some were positive about the inclusion of the non-integrated third-party check as they felt it gave more credence to the process. Another benefit of end-point assessment more generally was that the process was driving innovation in assessment approaches with key new roles for work-based coaches and mentors. Overall, however, the integrated end-point assessment was contested by the non-HE sectors taking the role of the '*outraged competitor*' and accusing the HE sector of obtaining special privilege and of '*gaming*' the system to their advantage (Bardach, 1977).

5.7 Perceptions and Attitudes

It is worth revisiting at this point Colebatch's description of policy as something which '*emerges from struggles between powerful interests pursuing different agendas*' and '*is marked by contest and uncertainty*'. What has become clear from undertaking this research is that there are multiple interests and agendas at play in the policy network: ministers, funders, governmental agencies, sector bodies and lobbyists, education providers, employers (large, small, public, private), apprentices / potential apprentices

and their parents to name but a few. All have strong views about apprenticeship policy and how it should be enacted. The analysis of the policy texts and the interviews highlighted some conflicting views and perceptions about the policy.

The original reforms in 2010 were inspired by a view or perception that apprenticeships were for those who had not thrived in the school system in terms of academic achievement and were seen as a low level, low quality option. There was a sense that the UK had let the apprenticeship system fall into disrepute and had not given it the status and reputation that it held in other countries (particularly Germany and Switzerland). One of the solutions proposed for raising its standing was to bring higher education into the fold – in an attempt to give apprenticeships the same aspirational value as attending university. The response to this from some quarters was not entirely positive; with some FE and private providers concerned about loss of market share and over-qualification for occupations (the encroaching graduatisation of previously non-graduate jobs (Tholen et al., 2016)).

One of the attitudes expressed by policy-makers and policy informants was around the purpose of both apprenticeship and university, with some of the view that the two should remain entirely separate and that apprenticeships should remain as what Bishop and Hordern (2017) called '*higher technical*' as opposed to '*technical higher*' education. The idea of apprenticeship as an alternative to university caused significant frustration from the universities that had worked hard to overcome systemic and other barriers. Linked to this was a perception from the HE respondents that the traditional apprenticeship providers (FE and private) saw them as '*cuckoos in their sectoral nest*' – a kind of reverse academic (or sector-) drift (Tight, 2018; p.134).

This could be due to the disruption that this policy had instigated in traditional institutional and sectoral hegemonies. Many of the HE respondents perceived apprenticeships to be culturally misaligned with too much focus on outcomes-based pedagogies, occupational competence and performance-based funding.

As Seddon et al. (2004) note, the rise of neoliberalism has resulted in a blurring of traditional sectoral boundaries resulting in new learning spaces and conflict around role, interest and regime. While their work was focused on the social partnership arena, there are parallels which can be drawn, for example in terms of how new policies can dislocate embedded practices, norms and cultures with the implementation of new ways of working and can represent '*professional and institutional imperialism*' (Seddon et al., 2004; p.241-2). What is interesting here is that the hierarchical norms of the HE sector as powerful

and autonomous were challenged by the policy which saw the HE sector having to adapt and adopt systems, processes and ways of working that were alien. This could be seen as turning the concept of mimetic institutional isomorphism (Gunn, 2015, Tight, 2015) on its head. This is the idea that higher education institutions of lesser status to aspire to higher status' (Tight, 2015; p.87), also referred to as '*academic drift*'. In this instance it could be argued that 'higher' status institutions (i.e. universities) are looking to a 'lower' status sector (FE) for approaches and expertise in relation to the delivery of apprenticeships and in some cases relying on them to provide a bridge to funding and other elements of support (e.g. sub-contracting of non-levy numbers). Of course, the universities themselves are not without their own hierarchy and some of the interviews confirmed there were considerable efforts by ministers to bring the research-intensive Russell Group universities into the apprenticeship fold as an indicator of status and quality, whereas in fact much of the activity and innovation was taking place in the post-92 institutions.

It is difficult to discuss apprenticeships without addressing inherent attitudes around snobbery. This manifested itself in several ways and aligns with Weimer and Vining's '*intrusion of values and interest*' in policy implementation (2005). The government's position is that for too long apprenticeships have been denigrated by the middle classes as of lower quality and value, and have called for parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes.

Behind all of this has been a bit of an attitude problem: as a nation I'm afraid we've been technical education snobs. We've revered the academic but treated vocational as second class – when we do it well, law, engineering, medicine – then we don't even call it vocational. Damian Hinds, Secretary of State for Education, (2018)

Some of the FE and independent training providers argued in the interviews that by conflating degrees and apprenticeships in the form of degree apprenticeship has added to this problem – it has resulted in a confusing hybrid which detracts from the latter by weaving it into an academic qualification in an attempt to raise its status. The direction of travel set out in Hind's speech (ibid) goes on to imply that the next raft of activity in this policy arena will be at Level 4 and 5 and will thus align more with Hordern's '*higher technical*' education (2017).

Colebatch's view of policy as value-laden and normative (2002) is supported by the statements from the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, who has referred to her own vocational training and who has shown some concerned about the proportion of HE in the delivery of apprenticeships. She has expressed concerns about a '*middle-class grab*'

on apprenticeships – although surely this is what the government is calling for (i.e. for such programmes to appeal to entrants from all backgrounds) rather than just for Hines' *'other people's children'* (presumably meaning, although not overtly stated, children from lower socio-economic family backgrounds).

5.7.1 An enacted experience

There was also some evidence of resistance towards the delivery of apprenticeships from the HE sector itself with evidence emerging of some university managers and academic staff unwilling to engage. This could be seen at a simplistic level as snobbery – a sense that the university sector should not be dabbling in the apprenticeship pool and perceived it to be of lower status (Tight, 2018; p.164). Certainly some of the interviewees reported that senior management were not always enthusiastic, that vice-chancellors had held their noses or looked the other way and much of the activity had been generated at a micro or street level and implemented *'bottom-up'* into the organisation by individuals or units who could see its potential for transformation.

Others (often speaking from the point of view of a business unit) reported academic staff had not always wished to engage with the development and delivery of apprenticeships and there had been mixed reactions in different areas of the same institution. It is worth revisiting the change management theorists at this stage – as Trowler states often resistance is not necessarily due to *'ill-will, indolence, ineptitude or indiscipline'* (Trowler, 2014a; p.175); it is more that there is a lack of appreciation by management of the *'connotative and affective luggage'* resulting from the change (ibid). This is where policy is experienced as organic and complex at the bottom steps of the implementation staircase and there perhaps needed to be a period of what Trowler calls *'negotiating and reconstructing'* in order to smooth the period of designing, approving and delivering new apprenticeship programmes in the HE environment. This also supports Lingard and Garrick's (1997; p.173) view that the *'smallest unit'* in an organisation is vital to successful policy enactment.

Trowler goes on to describe this as more complex than simply wishing to retain the status quo, describing how change can test practitioners' very purpose of being and describes how *'professional identity... is bound up in practice and this emotional attachment to practice is not an aberration that should yield to rational argument or superior force. It is the way being an expert is'*. He goes on to explain that a university is not nomothetic and is made up of myriad communities and collectives and that a single change initiative implemented top-down is likely to be met and *'enacted'* in multiple ways across the

organisation and what might seem straightforward at the macro or meso level might '*land in alien territory*' (Trowler, 2014a; p.175).

5.8 Summary

This chapter has sought to outline the key findings from the research and to place them within relevant policy implementation theoretical frameworks. These included policy networks and the implementation staircase, top-down and bottom-up implementation, the ambiguity-conflict matrix, and agency theory/principal-agent theory applied to the results of the research. Some of the contested areas and debates centred around the increasing role of neoliberalism in HE, the purpose of HE in the 21st century, academic identity and resistance, structure and agency and finally hegemonies, attitudes and perceptions.

The next chapter will draw conclusions from this work, revisiting and responding to the original research questions. It will also provide a reflection on the contribution of this work and will recommend areas ripe for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Purpose and aims of Research

This research set out to identify the drivers, tensions and opportunities presented by government policy on higher and degree apprenticeships and how this has impacted upon universities in England. This was prompted by the increasing number of universities that have decided to register and deliver apprenticeships – something that would have been unheard of at the start of 2010. As of 31st Dec 2018, 106 UK universities (of which 97 were located in England) had been successfully added to the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (ROATP) (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2018) to deliver higher and degree level apprenticeships.

The approach taken in this work was a qualitative study that sought to review key policy documentation and then to triangulate this with a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews. These were held with ‘policy informants’ and participants at micro level working in higher education. The themes that were identified were then analysed through policy implementation theoretical frameworks.

6.2 Originality and Contribution to knowledge

This research revisits themes that have been discussed in prior research as set out in the review of literature, particularly in relation to the purpose and ‘vocationalisation’ of higher education and its impact on the sector.

This piece of work provides a fresh insight into a specific context (Tight, 2018, p.174). There has not been an in-depth study published relating to the implementation of policy of higher and particularly, degree apprenticeships and its impact on the sector. The unique lens offered by this work is how this has impacted, both positively and negatively, on universities and how this policy has been enacted and experienced by the different stakeholders on the staircase at different stages of the implementation process. What is also novel is the exposition of the permeability of the boundary between policy formulation and implementation - these are not binary phases but a blurred and connected process of policy enactment. This work thus also adds to the growing body of work looking at policy implementation approaches more widely in Higher Education (Gaus, 2019, Rosli and Rossi, 2014, Saunders and Sin, 2014, Nic Giolla Mhichil, 2014, Wray and Houghton, 2019).

6.3 Research Questions Revisited

Three research questions were posed at the outset, which are now revisited here:

6.3.1 Research Question 1: What was the intention of government policy for English Higher Education (HE) with regard to higher and degree apprenticeships?

The overriding aim of the policy at a macro level was to address the skills shortages and skills gaps identified within the current and future workforce, with secondary aims of improving the quality and standing of apprenticeships. The research uncovered a view of a neoliberal ideology underpinning the approach taken by government, with the focus on an employer and market-led programme designed by powerful groups of employers often acting in their own interests. In addition to economic factors the research revealed a focus on how higher level skills and technical and vocational education can address social inequalities alongside debates as to whether this type of education is seen as second-rate or only for certain types of learners. The governments (Coalition 2010-2015, then Conservative from 2015) were shown to be torn between wanting to give control to employers and then being surprised or disappointed when they chose to exercise these powers in ways that were not always deemed in line with the government's wishes.

There was a clear intention for the policy to raise skills levels at higher levels (level 4+) which led to an increasing focus on higher and degree apprenticeships. This was challenged by the traditional apprenticeship sector who wanted to see a redressing of the balance both towards lower level apprenticeships and towards a higher technical education, with less focus on the academic qualifications embedded particularly in degree apprenticeships.

The secondary aim of the policy was to address the decline in apprenticeships and to improve the way they were perceived by employers, schools, potential apprentices (and their parents) and the general public. The policy aimed to demonstrate a different approach to the previous Labour Government (1997-2010) and the research found that the strategy was to use universities as a way to raise the quality and status of apprenticeship.

The other main policy plank related to funding and the reform saw the levy brought in which for the first time compelled larger employers to co-invest in skills development. This was also found to be controversial, with HE accused of gaming the system to its advantage. Smaller employers were able to benefit from subsidies to training through the non-levy allocation – again this was a contested area with some HEIs feeling they were disadvantaged by the policy and unable to meet the needs of smaller employers in their locale.

6.3.2 Research Question 2: How was this policy implemented and enacted at macro and meso levels?

The research found that the policy was implemented at macro level according to a causal rational-purposive approach with the policy passed down through the different actors on the implementation staircase. Universities were expected to deliver apprenticeship programmes but the research established that not enough thought was given to the distinctiveness of the HE sector resulting in confusion, resistance and adaptation/gaming of the policy.

At the meso level there were competing concerns between those universities wishing to enter and benefit from a new market and questions as to whether this activity aligns with wider institutional/sector missions and poses too great a challenge to entrenched positions. Weimer and Vining's (2005) intrusion of values and interests is relevant here and the research uncovered competing concerns of universities, the wider training and skills sector and employers. Diverse values and perceptions caused policy to be refracted and manipulated in several ways, particularly in relation to programme design, funding, inclusion of qualifications, application to upskilling and approaches to learning, teaching and assessment.

The findings showed there were ambiguity of policy goals in several areas: whether apprenticeships should be located within higher education or move to the technical/vocational sector; whether (academic) qualifications should be mandated within apprenticeship and contradictions between government control and employer freedoms.

6.3.3 Research Question 3: What tensions and benefits were experienced at micro level by those responsible for implementation and delivery within HEIs?

The focus here was on how the policy was experienced and situated (Saunders and Sin, 2014; p.139-40). The implementation staircase model shows that what is intended at the top is very often different to that which is felt by those at ground level.

Tensions:

Some of the contested areas and debates which emerged from the research centred around the increasing role of neoliberalism in higher education, the purpose of HE in the 21st century, academic identity and resistance, structure and agency and finally hegemonies, attitudes and perceptions.

The increasing role of neoliberalism in HE came up in several places in the findings – in relation to what Ball (2006) would call the initial *policy production context*. A leading entrepreneur was asked to make proposals for reform, which saw an increasingly important role for the private sphere. It was seen in the *practice context*, where HEIs weighed up the relative merits of market growth with liberal academic considerations – all of which is linked to debates about the purpose of HE in the 21st century – and also in the culture of audit, performance management and compliance that was integral to apprenticeship policy.

Other tensions which arose related to academic identity and resistance – for some in business-facing roles this was classed as academic staff behaving in a recalcitrant and reactionary manner, although this could be viewed from a bottom-up perspective as a struggle of academic identity and affect. Hegemony remains a contested area within this arena – much of this policy undermines HEIs traditional position as powerful operators – as the policy removes much of their autonomy and self-determination at meso level around programme design, qualifications, assessment and funding aspects – as Hordern states HE is not used to being in a '*policy supplicant role*' (Hordern, 2018a).

The research showed that in some cases the traditional hegemonies were reversed, while in others the HEI sector was perceived to be gaming the system to its own advantage by the traditional FE and skills sector. Contested areas included universities delivering programmes aimed at high level managers i.e. those already in a position of advantage, the rebadging of existing programmes and the inclusion of unnecessary academic qualifications leading to inflation and graduatisation.

Linked to this was what was perceived by many at the micro level as systemic and culture clash (at sector level), whereby processes appropriate for a different level (pre-HE) and different sector (FE and private training providers) was lifted into an HE environment impacting on ways of teaching, learning and assessment as well as quality assurance arrangements, attitudes and perceptions

Benefits:

Several benefits were reported by those at the meso and micro levels. The policy has resulted in a raft of new high level, high quality programmes which have resulted in positive outcomes for government (meeting aims of the industrial strategy), for employers (providing skilled employees), for individuals (opportunities and employability) and for some in the HE sector (through new markets and the protection of existing markets). The participating HEIs reported that they had experienced innovation in both curriculum design and pedagogical approaches as well as increased civic engagement, business

and enterprise activity, improved partnership working (for example public sector professionalisation) and a new seam of social mobility opportunities.

6.4 Reflection and impact

When this work was commenced in 2017 there was very little written about apprenticeship policy in HE and thus it was felt to be a ripe/relevant area of interest. Several pieces have been published while this work was in train but none of them duplicates this study of the impact on the HE sector. This growing corpus of work can be seen as symptomatic of the increasing relevance and importance of this area. A summary of the work will be shared with policy-makers and others with a view to them understanding more about HE, which, for many charged with delivering the policy, was not a familiar sector.

6.5 Next steps and possible areas for future research

March 2019 saw the announcement of a research programme (Middlesex University, 2019) aimed at identifying ‘the key challenges of providing degree apprenticeships and to develop and promote best practice for the sector’. It is proposed to make contact to share the findings of this work and for a summary of findings to be produced and shared.

Undertaking this research has been fascinating but inevitably has raised as many questions as it has answered. Several topics for future research have emerged in the course of doing this work; some of the main ones are listed here and will be considered by the author in the future:

- A quantitative study (numbers and types of HEIs engaging with this work). There is a lot of published quantitative data (Registers of providers and programmes, registers of assessors, numbers of starters on each programme) – all of this could be analysed to understand patterns of activity
- Range of occupations and professions in scope of apprenticeships – how does this map against knowledge theories and typologies – also traditional academic disciplines
- In depth study of academic staff tasked with delivery of apprenticeship (to delve deeper into resistance theme)
- Study of pedagogical approaches being deployed in this area – how are they being adapted and what is novel?
- Comparison of approaches undertaken in the other devolved nations of the United Kingdom
- Further analysis of social mobility aspects – is a degree apprenticeship route a more effective way to widen participation than other fair access policy levers being applied in full-time HE?

References

- ANDERSON, A., BRAVENBOER, D. & HEMSWORTH, D. 2012. The role of universities in higher apprenticeship development. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 2, 240-255.
- ANTCLIFF, V., BAINES, S. & GORB, E. 2016. Developing your own graduate employees: Employer perspectives on the value of a degree apprenticeship. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 6, 378-383.
- ASHWIN, P. & SMITH, K. 2015. Researcher creations? The positioning of policy texts in higher education research. *Higher Education*, 69, 1007-1018.
- BAILEY, I. 2016. *Irish adult education policy: victim or beneficiary of globalisation? - a critical policy analysis between 1997 and 2007*. Unpublished thesis (Ed.D), Sheffield University.
- BAKER, D. 2018. Potential implications of degree apprenticeships for healthcare education. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 9, 2-17.
- BALL, S. J. 2006. *Education policy and social class: the selected works of Stephen J. Ball*, London, Routledge.
- BALL, S. J. 2012a. *Global Education Inc: New Policy Networks and the Neoliberal Imaginary*, London, Routledge.
- BALL, S. J. 2012b. Performativity, Commodification and Commitment: An I-Spy Guide to the Neoliberal University. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60, 17-28.
- BALL, S. J. 2013. *The education debate* Bristol, Policy Press.
- BALL, S. J. 2015. What is policy? 21 years later: reflections on the possibilities of policy research. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 36, 306-313.
- BANDIAS, S., FULLER, D., PFITZNER, D. 2011. Vocational and Higher Education in Australia: A Need for Closer Collaboration. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 33, 583-594.
- BARDACH, E. 1977. *The implementation game: what happens after a bill becomes a law*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.
- BARNETT, R. 1994. *The limits of competence: knowledge, higher education and society*, Buckingham, Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- BISHOP, D. & HORDERN, J. 2017. *Degree apprenticeships: higher technical or technical higher (education)?* [Online]. Gatsby Foundation. Available: <http://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/degree-apprenticeships-report.pdf> [Accessed 25 November 2018].
- BOLES, N. 2017. *Ministers Reflect* [Online]. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/person/nick-boles/>: Institute for Government. [Accessed 15 December 2018].
- BOUD, D. & SOLOMON, N. 2001. *Work-based Learning: A New Higher Education?*, Buckingham Open University Press.
- BOULTON, D. & HAMMERSLEY, M. 1996. Analysis of Unstructured Data. In: SAPSFORD, R. & JUPP, V. (eds.) *Data collection and analysis*. London: SAGE in association with the Open University.
- BRAUN, V. & CLARKE, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- BRAUN, V. & CLARKE, V. 2013. *Successful qualitative research: a practical guide for beginners*, Los Angeles, SAGE.
- BRAVENBOER, D. 2016. Why co-design and delivery is “a no brainer” for higher and degree apprenticeship policy. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 6, 384-400.
- BRAVENBOER, D. & LESTER, S. 2016. Towards an integrated approach to the recognition of professional competence and academic learning. *Education + Training*, 58, 409-421.

- BRINIA, V., STAVROPOULOS, P. & ATHANASOULA-REPPA, A. 2018. Trainees' perception of vocational training institutes degree apprenticeship: An empirical approach. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, 8, 365-375.
- BROWN, R. 2009. Effectiveness or Economy? Policy Drivers in UK Higher Education, 1985–2005. In: HUISMAN, J. (ed.) *International Perspectives on the Governance of Higher Education*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- BRYMAN, A. 2016. *Social research methods*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- BURKE, J. 2018. *Government no longer backing its own 3m apprenticeship manifesto commitment* [Online]. Learning & Skills Events Consultancy and Training Limited. Available: <https://feweeek.co.uk/2018/08/20/government-no-longer-backing-its-own-3m-apprenticeship-manifesto-commitment/> [Accessed 15 December 2018].
- BUSINESS ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE. 2017. *Apprenticeships - Second Joint Report of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Education Committees of Session 2016–17* [Online]. Available: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmese/206/206.pdf> [Accessed 20 January 2019].
- CAMDEN, B. 2018. *Ofsted annual report warns apprenticeship levy being spent on graduate scheme rebadging* [Online]. Learning & Skills Events Consultancy and Training Limited. Available: <https://feweeek.co.uk/2018/12/04/ofsted-annual-report-warns-apprenticeship-levy-being-spent-on-graduate-rebadging/> [Accessed 12 February 2019].
- CARTER, J. & TUBBS, N. 2019. Degree apprenticeships, the 'joy of learning' excellence framework, and the common good. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 43, 127-137.
- CHARMAZ, K. 2014. *Constructing grounded theory*, London, Sage.
- COFFIELD, F. 2008. *Just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority* [Online]. Learning and Skills Network (LSN). Available: http://www.itslifejimbutnotasweknowit.org.uk/files/Coffield_IfOnly.pdf [Accessed 5 April 2017].
- COHEN, L. & MANION, L. 2018. *Research methods in education*, New York : Routledge.
- COHEN, L., MANION, L. & MORRISON, K. 2011. *Research Methods in Education*, Oxford, Routledge.
- COLEBATCH, H. 2002. *Policy*, Buckingham, Open University Press.
- COOPER, H. 1988. Organizing knowledge synthesis: A taxonomy of literature reviews. *Knowledge in Society*, 1, 104-126.
- COSTLEY, C. 2011. Workplace Learning and Higher Education. In: MALLOCH, M., CAIRNS, L., EVANS, K. & O'CONNOR, B. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Workplace Learning*. London: Sage.
- COUNCIL OF DEANS OF HEALTH. 2017. *Apprenticeships in nursing and the allied health professions: Briefing Paper 6* [Online]. Available: <https://councilofdeans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Apprenticeships-paper-version-6-July-2017.pdf> [Accessed 3 December 2018].
- CRANFIELD SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT. 2019. *Cranfield School of Management Executive (Senior Leader Apprenticeship)* [Online]. Available: <https://www.cranfield.ac.uk/som/cranfield-mba-programmes/executive-mba> [Accessed 8 April 2019].
- CREASY, R. 2013. HE lite: exploring the problematic position of HE in FECs. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 37, 38-53.
- CRESWELL, J. W. 2018. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*, Los Angeles Sage.
- CRESWELL, J. W. & CRESWELL, J. W. 2013. *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches*, London, SAGE Publications.
- CRIBB, A. & GEWIRTZ, S. 2013. The hollowed-out university? A critical analysis of changing institutional and academic norms in UK higher education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34, 338-350.

-
- CROTTY, M. 1998. *The Foundations of Social Research: meaning and perspective in the research process*, London, Sage.
- DALEY, J., COYLE, J. & DWYER, C. 2016. Sheffield Hallam University and Nestlé: Developing future leaders with the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship – a partnership approach. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 6, 370-377.
- DENSCOMBE, M. 2010a. *The Good Research Guide for Small-scale Social Research Projects*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.
- DENSCOMBE, M. 2010b. *Ground rules for social research: guidelines for good practice*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.
- DENSCOMBE, M. 2014. *The good research guide: for small scale social research projects*, Maidenhead Open University Press.
- DENZIN, N. K. & LINCOLN, Y. S. 1994. *Handbook of qualitative research*, Thousand Oaks, Thousand Oaks : Sage Publications.
- DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS INNOVATION AND SKILLS. 2009. *Higher Ambitions: The Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy* [Online]. London: Department for Business Innovation and Skills. Available: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/publications/Higher-Ambitions.pdf> [Accessed 20 November 2018].
- DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS INNOVATION AND SKILLS. 2010. *Skills for Sustainable Growth* [Online]. London: Department for Business Innovation and Skills. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32368/10-1274-skills-for-sustainable-growth-strategy.pdf [Accessed 25 March 2018].
- DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS INNOVATION AND SKILLS. 2011. *19,000 new higher apprenticeships to deliver skills for growth* [Online]. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/19-000-new-higher-apprenticeships-to-deliver-skills-for-growth> [Accessed 14 February 2019].
- DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS INNOVATION AND SKILLS. 2015a. *A dual mandate for adult vocational education* [Online]. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/427342/bis-15-145-A-dual-mandate-for-adult-vocational-education.pdf [Accessed 17 January 2019].
- DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS INNOVATION AND SKILLS. 2015b. *Government kick-starts plans to reach 3 million apprenticeships* [Online]. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-kick-starts-plans-to-reach-3-million-apprenticeships> [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS INNOVATION AND SKILLS. 2016a. *Post-16 Skills Plan* [Online]. Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536043/Post-16_Skills_Plan.pdf [Accessed 12 December 2018].
- DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS INNOVATION AND SKILLS. 2016b. *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* [Online]. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-success-as-a-knowledge-economy-white-paper> [Accessed 19 July 2016].
- DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS INNOVATION AND SKILLS & DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION. 2013. *The Future of Apprenticeships in England: Next Steps from the Richard Review* [Online]. Department for Business Innovation and Skills. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190632/bis-13-577-the-future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-next-steps-from-the-richard-review.pdf [Accessed 27 November 2018].

-
- DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION. 2017. *Strategic Guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships (See Annex B)* [Online]. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/712880/Strategic_guidance_to_the_Institute_for_Apprenticeships.pdf [Accessed 28 November 2018].
- DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION 2018. Institute for Apprenticeships: strategic guidance 2018 to 2019. In: DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION (ed.). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/institute-for-apprenticeships-strategic-guidance-2018-to-2019>.
- DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SCIENCE. 1985. *The development of higher education into the 1990s* [Online]. Available: <https://newbooksinpolitics.com/get/ebook.php?id=dqO7AAAAIAAJ> [Accessed 13 March 2019].
- DEPARTMENT FOR INNOVATION UNIVERSITIES AND SKILLS. 2009. *Annual Grant Letter to HEFCE 2009-10* [Online]. Available: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/HEFCE/2008/grant/grant0809.pdf> [Accessed 20 May 2018].
- DIBBEN, P., WOOD, G. & ROPER, I. 2004. *Contesting public sector reforms: critical perspectives, international debates*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- DIENHART, J. W. & LUDESCHER, J. C. 2010. Sustainability, Collaboration, and Governance: A Harbinger of Institutional Change? *Business and Society Review*, 115, 393-415.
- DOEL, M. 2017. Higher Technical Education: Resisting the Gravitational Pull of the Academic. *Centre for Global research in Higher Education (CGHE) Seminar 44*. London: UCL Institute of Education.
- DOUGHERTY, K. & NATOW, R. 2019. *Analysing neoliberalism in theory and practice: The case of performance-based funding for higher education* [Online]. Available: <https://www.researchcghe.org/perch/resources/publications/cghe-working-paper-44.pdf> [Accessed 12 February 2019].
- EDHLUND, B. M. 2011. *NVivo 9 essentials: your guide to the world's most powerful qualitative data analysis software*, Stallarholmen, Form & Kunskap.
- EDUCATION AND SKILLS FUNDING AGENCY. 2017. *Apprenticeship funding and performance-management rules for training providers* [Online]. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784106/Apprenticeship_funding_and_performance_management_rules_for_training_providers_May_2017_to_July_2018.pdf [Accessed 17 February 2019].
- EDUCATION AND SKILLS FUNDING AGENCY. 2018. *Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers* [Online]. Available: <https://roatp.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/download> [Accessed 31 December 2018].
- ERAUT, M. 1994. *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*, London, Falmer Press.
- EVANS, C., REES, G., TAYLOR, C. & WRIGHT, C. 2019. 'Widening Access' to higher education: the reproduction of university hierarchies through policy enactment. *Journal of Education Policy*, 34, 101-116.
- FELCE, A. 2017. The hub in a pub: University of Wolverhampton Apprenticeship Hub. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, 7, 70-78.
- FELCE, A. 2019. Managing the quality of higher education in apprenticeships. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, EarlyCite.
- FISCHER, F., TORGERSON, D., DURNOVÁ, A. & ORSINI, M. 2015. Introduction to critical policy studies. In: FISCHER, F., TORGERSON, D., DURNOVÁ, A. & ORSINI, M. (eds.) *Handbook of critical policy studies* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- FLICK, U. 2018. *Designing qualitative research*, London, SAGE.

-
- FULLAN, M. 1999a. *Change forces: the sequel*, London, Falmer.
- FULLAN, M. 1999b. Complexity and the Change Process. *Change Forces: The Sequel*. London: Falmer.
- FULLAN, M. 2003. *Change Forces with a Vengeance*, London, Routledge.
- FULLER, A. 2016. The Growth of Apprenticeship in England: Doubts Beneath the Numbers. *Challenge*, 59, 422-433.
- FULLER, A., LEONARD, P., UNWIN, L. & DAVEY, G. 2015. *Does apprenticeship work for adults? The experiences of adult apprentices in England* [Online]. Nuffield Foundation/University of Southampton. Available: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Adult%20Apprenticeship.pdf> [Accessed 5 March 2019].
- FULLER, A. & UNWIN, L. 2004. Expansive Learning Environments: integrating organizational and personal development. In: FULLER, A., MUNRO, A. & RAINBIRD, H. (eds.) *Workplace learning in context*. London and New York: Routledge.
- FULLER, A. & UNWIN, L. 2017. *Written Evidence to Second Joint Report of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Education Committees of Session 2016–17* [Online]. Available: <http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/SubCommittee%20on%20Education,%20Skills%20and%20the%20Economy/Apprenticeships/written/30602.html> [Accessed 15 March 2019].
- GALE, T. 2003. Realising Policy: The who and how of policy production. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 24, 51-65.
- GALE, T. 2007. Realising Policy: The *Who* and *How* of Policy Production. In: LINGARD, B. & OZGA, J. (eds.) *The RoutledgeFalmer reader in Education Policy and Politics*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- GAMBIN, L. & HOGARTH, T. 2016. Counting the cost, reconciling the benefits: understanding employer investment in Higher Apprenticeships in accounting. *Accounting Education*, 25, 502-518.
- GARNETT, J. 2010. Recognising, Assessing and Rewarding Work Experience. In: ROODHOUSE, S. & MUMFORD, J. (eds.) *Understanding Work-based Learning*. Farnham, Surrey: Gower Publishing Ltd.
- GAUS, N., YUNUS, M., KARIM, A., AND SADIA, H. 2019. The analysis of policy implementation models in higher education: the case study of Indonesia. *Policy Studies*, 40, 92-109.
- GEORGE, E. 2006. Positioning higher education for the knowledge based economy. *Higher Education*, 52, 589-610.
- GILLHAM, B. 2004. *The research interview*, London, Continuum.
- GOMM, R. 2004. *Social research methodology: a critical introduction*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- GRAHAM, S., RHODES, G. & SHIEL, G. 2007. Reflection through Work-based Learning. *WBL Futures*. Bolton: UVAC.
- GRAY, C. 2016. Implementing English Further/Higher Education Partnerships: the Street Level Perspective. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 70, 43-58.
- GRIFFITHS, R., PROBERT, J. & CROPLEY, B. 2018. The flipped university: exploring student progression in football coaching and development. *Education and Training*, 60, 375-388.
- GUNN, A. 2015. The Role Of Political And Policy Studies In Higher Education Policy Research. In: HUISMAN, J. & TIGHT, M. (eds.) *Theory and method in higher education research [electronic resource]*. Bingley: Emerald.
- HARLAND, T. 2009. The University, Neoliberal Reform and the Liberal Educational Ideal. In: TIGHT, M. (ed.) *The Routledge international handbook of higher education*. New York: Routledge.
- HARLEN, W. & SCHLAPP, U. 1998. *Literature Reviews* [Online]. Glasgow: Scottish Centre for Research in Education (SCRE) Available:

-
- <http://diversitypedagogy.com/EDCI5333.270-sheets/secured/5333.270new%20PDF/5/the%20SCRE%20centre.pdf>
[Accessed 15 March 2017].
- HART, C. 1998. *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination*, London, Sage.
- HAVERGAL, C. 2016. *OU makes 'significant reorientation' towards apprenticeships* [Online]. Available: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/ou-makes-significant-reorientation-towards-apprenticeships> [Accessed 19 October 2017].
- HEIMANS, S. 2012. Education Policy, Practice, and Power. *Educational Policy*, 26, 369-393.
- HELYER, R. (ed.) 2010. *The Work-based Learning Student Handbook*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND. 2016. *Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund (DADF) information* [Online]. Available: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319120624/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/skills/apprentice/dadf/> [Accessed 11 Dec 2018].
- HILL, M. J. & HUPE, P. 2002. *Implementing public policy: governance in theory and practice*, London, Sage.
- HINDS, D. 2018. *Technical Education Speech* [Online]. HM Government. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/damian-hinds-technical-education-speech> [Accessed 6 April 2019].
- HJERN, B. & HULL, C. 1982. Implementation Research as Empirical Constitutionalism. *European Journal of Political Research*, 10, 105-115.
- HM GOVERNMENT. 2013. *The Future of Apprenticeships in England: Implementation Plan* [Online]. London. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253073/bis-13-1175-future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-implementation-plan.pdf [Accessed 17 December 2018].
- HM GOVERNMENT. 2015. *English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 Vision* [Online]. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482754/BIS-15-604-english-apprenticeships-our-2020-vision.pdf [Accessed 17 November 2018].
- HM GOVERNMENT. 2016. *Enterprise Act* [Online]. Available: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/12/pdfs/ukpga_20160012_en.pdf [Accessed 18 December 2018].
- HM GOVERNMENT. 2017a. *Building our Industrial Strategy Green Paper* [Online]. London: HM Government. Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/611705/building-our-industrial-strategy-green-paper.pdf [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- HM GOVERNMENT. 2017b. *Industrial Strategy - Building a Britain fit for the future* [Online]. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730043/industrial-strategy-white-paper-print-ready-a4-version.pdf [Accessed 5 February 2019].
- HM TREASURY. 2014. *Autumn Statement* [Online]. London: HMSO. Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/382327/44695_Accessible.pdf [Accessed 11 May 2017].
- HM TREASURY. 2015a. *Autumn Statement* [Online]. HMSO. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-and-autumn-statement-2015-documents/spending-review-and-autumn-statement-2015#investing-in-britains-future-1> [Accessed 11 Feb 2019].
- HM TREASURY. 2015b. *Budget 2015* [Online]. HM Treasury. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/416330/47881_Budget_2015_Web_Accessible.pdf [Accessed 28 November 2018].

-
- HM TREASURY. 2015c. *Fixing the foundations - Creating a more prosperous nation* [Online]. London: HMSO. Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/443898/Productivity_Plan_web.pdf [Accessed 29 November 2018].
- HOLLIDAY, A. 2006. *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*, London, Sage.
- HORDERN, J. 2015a. Higher apprenticeships and the shaping of vocational knowledge. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 20, 17-34.
- HORDERN, J. 2015b. Higher apprenticeships in England: Professional and vocational formation. *International Journal of Training Research*, 13, 174-193.
- HORDERN, J. 2016. Differentiating knowledge, differentiating (occupational) practice. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 68, 453-469.
- HORDERN, J. 2017. Technical degrees and higher vocational education. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 22, 87-106.
- HORDERN, J. 2018a. Degree apprenticeships: higher vocational or vocational higher education? *Degree Apprenticeships: What does research tell us already?* London: SRHE.
- HORDERN, J. 2018b. Knowledge, Practice, and Workplace Learning. In: MCGRATH, S., MULDER, M., PAPIER, J. & SUART, R. (eds.) *Handbook of Vocational Education and Training*. Online: Springer.
- HOUSE OF COMMONS EDUCATION COMMITTEE. 2018. *The apprenticeships ladder of opportunity: quality not quantity - Sixth Report of Session 2017–19* [Online]. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/344/34402.htm>. [Accessed 3 January 2019].
- HOUSE OF LORDS ECONOMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. 2018. *Treating Students Fairly: The Economics of Post-School Education* [Online]. Available: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldeconaf/139/139.pdf> [Accessed 4 January 2019].
- HOUSE OF LORDS ECONOMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ORAL EVIDENCE. 2018. *Treating Students Fairly: The Economics of Post-School Education* [Online]. Available: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/economic-affairs-committee/the-economics-of-higher-further-and-technical-education/oral/80462.html> [Accessed 3 January 2019].
- HUDSON, B. 1993. Michael Lipsky and Street Level Bureaucracy - a neglected perspective. In: HILL, M. (ed.) *The Policy Process: A Reader*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- HUGHES, C. J. & SAIEVA, G. 2019. Degree apprenticeships – an opportunity for all? *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, EarlyCite.
- HUMPHREY, N. 1992. *A History of the Mind: evolution and the birth of consciousness*, London, Chatto and Windus.
- INGLEBY, E. 2019. It does more than it says on the tin! Problematising higher education in further education in England. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44, 20-30.
- INSTITUTE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION. 2019. *Apprenticeship Standards* [Online]. Available: <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/> [Accessed 29 April 2019].
- JACOB, M. 2009. Out with Humboldt and In with the Knowledge Society. In: TIGHT, M. (ed.) *International handbook of higher education*. New York: Routledge.
- JOHANSSON, V. 2015. When will we ever learn ? *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*, 8, 149-170.
- JOHN, P. 1998. *Analysing public policy*, London, Pinter.
- JOHNSON, A. 2007. *HEFCE Annual Grant Letter 2007-08* [Online]. Available: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2007/grant/letter.htm> [Accessed 20 November 2018].

-
- KEEP, E. 2014. The Role of Higher Education within Broader Skills Policies, a Comparison of Emerging Scottish and English Approaches. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 68, 249-266.
- KEEP, E. 2015. *From Trailblazers to Mainstream - Some Issues Relating to Future Development of Apprenticeship Policy and Delivery in England* [Online]. Gatsby Foundation. Available: <http://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/from-trailblazers-to-mainstream-final2-kf.pdf> [Accessed 15 February 2019].
- KELSEY, J. 2006. *Taking minds to market* [Online]. Available: <http://www.knowpol.uib.no/portal/files/uplink/kelsey.pdf> [Accessed 15 December 2017].
- KING, M., WATERS, M., WIDDOWSON, J. & SARASWAT, A. 2016. Higher technical skills: Learning from the experiences of English FE colleges and Australian technical and further education institutes. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 6, 329-344.
- KIRBY, P. 2015. *Levels of Success: The potential of UK apprenticeships* [Online]. The Sutton Trust. Available: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Levels-of-Success3-1.pdf> [Accessed 15 November 2018].
- KIRK, R. 2002. Exploring the existing body of research. In: COLEMAN, M. & BRIGGS, A. (eds.) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Sage.
- KIVISTÖ, J. 2008. An assessment of agency theory as a framework for the government-university relationship. *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 30, 339-350.
- KNOWLES, M. 1983. Andragogy: An Emerging Technology for Adult Learning. In: TIGHT, M. (ed.) *Education for Adults. Vol. 1: Adult Learning and Education*. London: Croom Helm.
- LAMBERT, S. 2016. Are current accountability frameworks appropriate for degree apprenticeships? *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, 6, 345-356.
- LANE, L. 2015. *Access, participation and mobility: a critical policy analysis of higher education in England between 1987 and 2012*. Unpublished thesis (Ed.D), University of Sheffield.
- LEATHWOOD, C. & READ, B. 2013. Research policy and academic performativity: compliance, contestation and complicity. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38, 1162.
- LEE, D. 2012. Apprenticeships in England: an overview of current issues. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 2, 225-239.
- LEITCH, S. 2005. *Skills in the UK: The Long Term Challenge Interim Report (Executive Summary)* [Online]. HM Treasury. Available: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/EB7/C6/leitch_review_skills_in_the_UK_interim_execsummary.pdf [Accessed 15 November 2017].
- LEITCH, S. 2006. *Leitch Review of Skills, Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills* [Online]. HM Treasury Available: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/523/43/leitch_finalreport051206.pdf [Accessed 16 November 2018].
- LILLIS, F. 2018. *Best Practice in Work-Integrated Learning for Degree Apprenticeships* [Online]. Middlesex University Centre for Apprenticeships and Skills. Available: https://www.mdx.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0034/488284/Best-practice-in-work-integrated-learning.pdf [Accessed 15 December 2018].
- LINFORD, N. 2019. *Anne Milton responds to the NAO apprenticeships report* [Online]. Available: <https://feweek.co.uk/2019/03/08/editor-asks-anne-milton-responds-to-the-nao-apprenticeships-report/> [Accessed 17 April 2019].
- LINGARD, B. & GARRICK, B. 1997. Producing and practising social justice policy in education: a policy trajectory study from Queensland, Australia. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 7, 157-179.

-
- LINGARD, B. & OZGA, J. (eds.) 2007. *The RoutledgeFalmer reader in Education Policy and Politics*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- LIPSKY, M. 1980. *Street-level bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public services*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation.
- MARSHALL, C. & ROSSMAN, G. B. 1995. *Designing qualitative research*, London, Sage.
- MARSHALL, C. & ROSSMAN, G. B. 2011. *Designing qualitative research*, London, Sage.
- MARTIN, L., LORD, G. & WARREN-SMITH, L. 2018. Juggling hats: academic roles, identity work and new degree apprenticeships. *Studies in Higher Education*, Published Online.
- MARTIN, L., TURNER, P., CARTER, J, BAINES, S, TAYLOR, D 2016. *Partnered innovation in the design and implementation of UK management education – new Management Degree Apprenticeships* [Online]. Barcelona, Spain. Available: https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/617383/1/Partnership%20in%20Apprenticeship%20Development_Lynn_Martin.pdf [Accessed 5 February 2019].
- MASON, J. 2002. *Qualitative researching*, London, Sage.
- MASON, J. 2018. *Qualitative researching*, Los Angeles, Sage.
- MATLAND, R. E. 1995. Synthesizing the Implementation Literature: the Ambiguity-Conflict Model of Policy Implementation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 5, 145-174.
- MATTHEWS, D. 2016. Universities must offer more apprenticeships, Sheffield vice-chancellor says. *Times Higher Education*, 27th January.
- MAY, T. 2011. *Social research: issues, methods and process*, Buckingham, Open University Press.
- MAY, T. 2016. *Statement from the new Prime Minister Theresa May* [Online]. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may>. [Accessed 17 November 2018].
- MAY, T. & PERRY, B. 2011. *Social research & reflexivity: content, consequences and context*, London, SAGE.
- MAZENOD, A. 2016. Education or training? A comparative perspective on apprenticeships in England. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 68, 102-117.
- MCCULLOCH, G. 2011. Historical and Documentary Research in Education. In: COHEN, L., MANION, L. & MORRISON, K. (eds.) *Research methods in education*. 7th ed. Oxon: Routledge.
- MCKNIGHT, S., COLLINS, S. L., WAY, D. & IANNOTTI, P. 2019. Case study: establishing a social mobility pipeline to degree apprenticeships. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, EarlyCite.
- MERRICK, N. 2018. "The default should not just be university" (Interview with Skills Minister Ann Milton). *The Guardian*, 6th March.
- MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY. 2019. *MDX-led consortium wins £99,000 funding from Edge Foundation for research into degree apprenticeships* [Online]. Available: <https://www.mdx.ac.uk/news/2019/04/mdx-led-consortium-wins-99,000-funding-from-edge-foundation-for-research-into-degree-apprenticeships> [Accessed 18 April 2019].
- MILES, M. B. & HUBERMAN, A. M. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods*, London, Sage.
- MINTON, A. & LOWE, J. 2019. How are universities supporting employers to facilitate effective "on the job" learning for apprentices? *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, EarlyCite.
- MITCHELL, R. K., AGLE, B. R. & WOOD, D. J. 1997. Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience: Defining The Principle of Who and What Really Counts. *Academy of Management Review*, 22, 853-886.

-
- MOULES, J. 2017. MBA students become unlikely beneficiaries of UK apprenticeship levy *Financial Times*, 6th April.
- MULKEEN, J., ABDU, H. A., LEIGH, J. & WARD, P. 2019. Degree and Higher Level Apprenticeships: an empirical investigation of stakeholder perceptions of challenges and opportunities. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44, 1-14.
- NIC GIOLLA MHICHIL, M. 2014. *Policy implementation in higher education: an ideographic case study*. Unpublished Thesis (Ed.D), Durham University.
- NOTTINGHAM, P. M. 2017. Re-evaluating work-based learning pedagogy. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 7, 129-140.
- OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS. 2018. *Being 18 in 2018 - Work, family, marriage – how has life changed for the children of 2000 reaching adulthood?* [Online]. Available: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/articles/being18in2018/2018-09-13> [Accessed 14 January 2019].
- OFSTED. 2018. *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2017/18* [Online]. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/761606/29523_Ofsted_Annual_Report_2017-18_041218.pdf [Accessed 17 December 2018].
- OLSEN, M. & PETERS, M. A. 2005. Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20, 313-345.
- OZGA, J. 1990. Policy Research and Policy Theory: a comment on Fitz and Halpin. *Journal of Education Policy*, 5, 359-362.
- OZGA, J. 2000. *Policy research in educational settings: contested terrain*, Buckingham, Open University Press.
- PADURE, L. & JONES, G. 2009. Policy Networks and Research on Higher Education Governance and Policy. In: HUISMAN, J. (ed.) *International Perspectives on the Governance of Higher Education*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- PILBEAM, C. 2009. Institutional Structures. In: TIGHT, M. (ed.) *The Routledge International Handbook of Higher Education*. New York: Routledge.
- PILLOW, W. 2003. Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16, 175-196.
- PORTWOOD, D. 2001. Making it Work Institutionally. In: BOUD, D. T. & SOLOMON, N. (eds.) *Work-based Learning: A New Higher Education?* Buckingham: Open University Press.
- POWELL, P. & WALSH, A. 2018. Whose curriculum is it anyway? Stakeholder salience in the context of Degree Apprenticeships. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 72, 90-106.
- PRESSMAN, J. L. & WILDAVSKY, A. 1984. *Implementation: how great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland: or, why it's amazing that federal programs work at all, this being a saga of the Economic Development Administration as told by two sympathetic observers who seek to build morals on a foundation of ruined hopes*, Oakland, University of California Press.
- PRICE, M. H. 2019. Strategic stories: Analysis of prior learning assessment policy narratives. *Review of Higher Education*, 42, 511-535.
- PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE. 2015. *PM announces rollout of flagship degree apprenticeships (11th March)* [Online]. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-rollout-of-flagship-degree-apprenticeships> [Accessed 14 April 2017].
- PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS RESEARCH ASSOCIATION. 2015. *Professional Bodies and Apprenticeships* [Online]. Available: <https://www.parnglobal.com/ItemDetail?iProductID=e135cafa-e5cf-4f69-990b->

-
- 931c6373b962&Class=09c61659-a500-41dc-ac03-4dd71a7120b7&WebsiteKey=91351e1e-fb38-4308-82d7-795de32aa7ce [Accessed 16 December 2018].
- QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY. 2014. *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* [Online]. Available: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf> [Accessed 18 December 2018].
- QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY. 2016. *Interim statement on Degree Apprenticeships* [Online]. Available: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/enhancement-and-development/interim-statement-on-degree-apprenticeships.pdf?sfvrsn=1479f581_12 [Accessed 16 March 2018].
- QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY. 2018a. *Quality Assuring Higher Education in Apprenticeships* [Online]. QAA. Available: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/quality-assuring-higher-education-in-apprenticeships.pdf?sfvrsn=6e4cff81_26 [Accessed 16 March 2019].
- QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY. 2018b. *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* [Online]. Available: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code> [Accessed 25 April 2019].
- QUINE, T. 2019. Degree apprenticeships: let's not snatch defeat from the jaws of victory *Times Higher Education (THE)*, 4th February.
- RHOADES, G. & SPORN, B. 2002. Quality assurance in Europe and the U.S.: Professional and political economic framing of higher education policy. *Higher Education*, 43, 355-390.
- RICHARD, D. 2012. *The Richard Review of Apprenticeships* [Online]. online: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34708/richard-review-full.pdf [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- RILEY, T. 2017. Work-based learning for the creative industries: A case study of the development of BA (Hons) web design and social media. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, 7, 79-91.
- RIZVI, F. & LINGARD, B. 2010. *Globalizing education policy [electronic resource]*, London, Routledge.
- ROBERTS, A., STORM, M. & FLYNN, S. 2019. Workplace mentoring of degree apprentices: developing principles for practice. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, EarlyCite.
- ROSLI, A. & ROSSI, F. 2014. *Explaining the gap between policy aspirations and implementation: The case of university knowledge transfer policy in the United Kingdom* [Online]. Birkbeck University. Available: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/innovation/publications/docs/WP20.pdf> [Accessed 17 February 2019].
- ROWE, L., PERRIN, D. & WALL, T. 2016. The Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship: trials and tribulations. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 6, 357-369.
- RUBIN, H. J. & RUBIN, I. 2012. *Qualitative interviewing: the art of hearing data*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- SABATIER, P. A. 1986. Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches to Implementation Research: A Critical Analysis and Suggested Synthesis. *Journal of Public Policy*, 6, 21-48.
- SARASWAT, A. 2016. Higher apprenticeships and the new apprenticeship standards: Perceived potential and limitations. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 6, 401-416.
- SAUNDERS, M. 2006a. From 'organisms' to 'boundaries': the uneven development of theory narratives in education, learning and work connections. *Journal of Education and Work*, 19, 1-27.

-
- SAUNDERS, M. 2006b. The 'presence' of evaluation theory and practice in educational and social development: toward an inclusive approach. *London Review of Education*, 4, 197-215.
- SAUNDERS, M. & REYNOLDS, J. 1987. Teacher Responses to Curriculum Policy: Beyond The Delivery Metaphor. In: CALDERHEAD, J. (ed.) *Exploring Teachers' Thinking*. London: Cassell.
- SAUNDERS, M. & SIN, C. 2014. Middle managers' experience of policy implementation and mediation in the context of the Scottish quality enhancement framework. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 40, 135-150.
- SEDDON, T., BILLET, S. & CLEMANS, A. 2004. Politics of social partnerships: a framework for theorizing. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19, 123-142.
- SILVERMAN, D. 2004. Who cares about experience? Missing Issues in Qualitative Research. In: SILVERMAN, D. (ed.) *Qualitative Research: theory, method and practice*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.
- SIN, C. 2014. The policy object: a different perspective on policy enactment in higher education. *Higher Education*, 68, 435-448.
- SKILLS FUNDING AGENCY. 2017. *Register of Apprentice Training Providers (ROATP)* [Online]. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-of-apprenticeship-training-providers> [Accessed 30 April 2017].
- STAVROU, S. 2016. Pedagogising the university: on higher education policy implementation and its effects on social relations. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31, 789-804.
- STRIKE, T. 2017. *Vocational education should not be removed from other pathways* [Online]. Available: <http://wonkhe.com/blogs/vocational-education-in-an-advanced-economy-should-not-be-removed-from-other-pathways/> [Accessed 25 February 2017].
- TAYLOR-SMITH, E. Graduate apprenticeships are great opportunities for individuals, but are they inclusive? Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) Annual Conference, 2018 Celtic Manor, Wales. SRHE.
- THOLEN, G., RELLY, S. J., WARHURST, C. & COMMANDER, J. 2016. Higher education, graduate skills and the skills of graduates: the case of graduates as residential sales estate agents. *British Educational Research Journal*, 42, 508-523.
- TIGHT, M. 1998. Lifelong learning: Opportunity or compulsion? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 46, 251-263.
- TIGHT, M. 2015. Theory development and application in higher education research: the case of academic drift. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 47, 84-99.
- TIGHT, M. 2018. *Higher Education Research: The Developing Field*, London, Bloomsbury.
- TIGHT, M. 2019. The neoliberal turn in Higher Education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 0, 1- 12.
- TRAFFORD, V. 2008. *Stepping stones to achieving your doctorate: focusing on your viva from the start*, New York, Open University Press.
- TROWLER, P. (ed.) 2002. *Higher education policy and institutional change: intentions and outcomes in turbulent environments*, Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- TROWLER, P. (ed.) 2014a. *Higher Education Policy and Institutional Change - Intentions and Outcomes in Turbulent Environments* CreateSpace (Amazon).
- TROWLER, P. 2014b. Introduction: Higher Education Policy, Institutional Change. In: TROWLER, P. (ed.) *Higher Education Policy and Institutional Change - Intentions and Outcomes in Turbulent Environments* CreateSpace (Amazon).
- TROWLER, P. 2015a. Change theory and changing practices: enhancing student engagement in universities. *Student engagement in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

- TROWLER, P. 2015b. *Writing Doctoral Project Proposals: Higher Education Research* Amazon (Kindle Edition).
- TROWLER, P. 2016. *Doing Insider Research in Universities*, Kindle Edition.
- TROWLER, P. R. 2008. *Cultures and change in higher education: theories and practices*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- UK GOVERNMENT. 2011. *10,000 Higher Apprenticeships to help business* [Online]. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/10-000-higher-apprenticeships-to-help-business> [Accessed 12 February 2019].
- UNITED KINGDOM PARLIAMENT. 2016a. *Finance Act* [Online]. Available: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/24/contents/enacted/data.htm> [Accessed 14 December 2018].
- UNITED KINGDOM PARLIAMENT. 2016b. *Ministerial Evidence to Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy* [Online]. Available: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-skills-and-economy/news-parliament-2015/apprenticeships-evidence-minister-16-17/> [Accessed 15 November 2018].
- UNIVERSITIES UK. 2016. *The Future Growth of Degree Apprenticeships* [Online]. London: Universities UK. Available: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/downloads/FutureGrowthDegreeApprenticeships.pdf> [Accessed 15 May 2017].
- UNIVERSITIES UK. 2017a. *Degree Apprenticeships - Realising Opportunities* [Online]. London: Universities UK. Available: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/degree-apprenticeships-realising-opportunities.pdf> [Accessed 11 March 2017].
- UNIVERSITIES UK. 2017b. *Written Evidence to Second Joint Report of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Education Committees of Session 2016–17* [Online]. Available: <http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/SubCommittee%20on%20Education,%20Skills%20and%20the%20Economy/Apprenticeships/written/30602.html> [Accessed 15 December 2018].
- UNIVERSITIES UK. 2019. *Downgrading degree apprenticeships would be a mistake* [Online]. Universities UK,. Available: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Downgrading-degree-apprenticeships-would-be-a-mistake-.aspx> [Accessed 13 May 2019].
- UNWIN, L. 2017. *The Role of Qualifications and End Point Assessments in Apprenticeships* [Online]. London: SEMTA. Available: <https://semta.org.uk/images/pdf/Role-of--Qualifications-and-End-Point-Assessment-in-Apprenticeships-March2017.pdf> [Accessed 14 December 2018].
- UPP FOUNDATION CIVIC UNIVERSITY COMMISSION. 2019. *Truly Civic: Strengthening the connection between universities and their places* [Online]. Available: <https://upp-foundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Civic-University-Commission-Final-Report.pdf> [Accessed 15 May 2019].
- VAN METER, D. S. & VAN HORN, C. E. 1975. The Policy Implementation Process:A Conceptual Framework. *Administration & Society*, 6, 445-488.
- VENKATRAMAN, S., DE SOUZA-DAW, T. & KASPI, S. 2018. Improving employment outcomes of career and technical education students. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, 8, 469-483.
- VIDOVICH, L. 2013. Policy Research in Higher Education: Theories and Methods for Globalising Times. In: TIGHT, M. & HUISMAN, J. (eds.) *Theory and method in higher education research*. Bingley: Emerald.
- VIDOVICH, L. & CURRIE, J. 2009. The Changing Nature of Academic Work. In: TIGHT, M., MOK, K. H., HUISMAN, J. & MORPHEW, C. (eds.) *The Routledge International Handbook of Higher Education*. Oxford: Oxon: Routledge.
- WALSH, A. 2007. An exploration of Biggs' constructive alignment in the context of work-based Learning. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 32, 79-87.

-
- WEIMER, D. L. & VINING, A. R. 2005. *Policy analysis: concepts and practice*, Upper Saddle River, NJ, Pearson Prentice Hall.
- WHEELAHAN, L. 2009. The problem with CBT (and why constructivism makes things worse). *Journal of Education and Work*, 22, 227-242.
- WILLETTS, D. 2017. *A university education*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- WOLF, A. 2011. *Review of Vocational Education* [Online]. HM Government. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-vocational-education-the-wolf-report> [Accessed 10 April 2017].
- WONKHE. 2019a. *WonkHE Policy Watch - Degree Apprenticeships* [Online]. WonkHE. Available: <https://bit.ly/2VApLbP> [Accessed 6 February 2019].
- WONKHE. 2019b. *WonkHE Weekly Podcast* [Online]. <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/wonkhe-weekly-s02e04/>. [Accessed 15 May 2019].
- WRAY, M. & HOUGHTON, A.-M. 2019. Implementing disability policy in teaching and learning contexts – shop floor constructivism or street level bureaucracy? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 24, 510-526.
- YEATMAN, A. 1998. *Activism and the policy process*, St Leonards, N.S.W., Allen & Unwin.
- YORKE, J. & VIDOVICH, L. 2016. *Learning Standards and the Assessment of Quality in Higher Education*, Switzerland, Springer Nature.
- YOUNG, D. & GARNETT, J. 2007. *Work-based Learning Futures Conference Proceedings*, Bolton, UVAC.