

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

Mind the Quality Gap:

Quality Management Models for Higher Education in Further Education Colleges

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Doctor of Education

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a postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester.

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Dedication

To my late family and my dearest friends who have offered unyielding support and understanding throughout my studies.

ABSTRACT

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The purposeful, and ongoing critical consideration of the quality of higher education (HE), wherever this education takes place, might be regarded as essential. This exploratory study focuses on the development, effectiveness and sustainability of real-world quality management models (QMMs) for HE in FE. From 1997 colleges were to expand their HE provision focusing on the growth of sub-degree qualifications, and with this develop quality infrastructures for HE. This study aimed to undertake a critical analysis of models for quality management and the understanding of quality for HE in FE institutions. Interviews complemented by documents explored the quality activities of this setting with the use of NVivo. The emergent themes were interpreted through the concepts of complex adaptive systems (CAS) and the theoretical framework of social constructionism illuminating different perceptions for the understanding of QMMs. Envisioning quality management for HE in FE in this way resulted in an impression of quality as a middle culture that has not developed a sustainable way of being and with many underlying tensions. The findings considered QMMs as socially constructed, complex self-organising CAS that can adapt and evolve to survive. The root of their complexity appeared to be their dependency on both FE and HE. Each HE CAS is constructed through pre-existing local cultures resulting in diverse HE CAS. Conceivably it is this diversity and capacity for change that may allow their survival. Though despite these complex interdependencies allowing for their survival, at the same time, this study concludes that there may be too many challenges and uncertainties that question their sustainability. Recommendations are made to reduce the number of factors that challenge QMM in order to support their effectiveness and sustainability.

Keywords: [Quality Management, Higher Education, College, Complex, Constructs, Diversity, Effectiveness, Sustainability]

Declaration and Copyright Statement	1
Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
List of Contents	4
Lists Figures	6
Glossary of Acronyms	7
Chapter 1: Introduction to Quality Management Models for Higher Education in Further Education and the approach to this study	8
Introduction	8
Overview of the context	8
Rationale and knowledge gaps	12
Aims	13
Overview of the research approach	14
Thesis structure, organisation and overview of the contents	16
Professional practice	18
Concluding remarks on this introductory chapter	18
Chapter 2: The context of HE in FE for quality	19
Introduction	19
Part 1. The development, characteristics and perceptions of HE in this complex and changing environment	19
Policies for the growth of HE in FE as an evolving and complex educational setting	19
After the Dearing Report 1997-Growth in, and focus on, HE in FE	22
Types of students	25
Intended growth of Higher Education	26
Perceptions of HE in FE	27
A clearer identity but a highly complex picture of HE in FE from 2012-Dual sector and mixed-economy	28
Consequences of HE and FE numbers, partnerships, teaching and culture	29
Economic downturn, competition and mergers	31
Summary of key points from Part 1	33
Part 2. The quality of HE in FE and the development of its quality processes	34
Development of quality for HE in FE	34
College HE and external reviews	36
Quality, purpose and defining quality for my research	40
Definition of Quality	42
Quality Management Models for HE in FE	42
Summary remarks	44
Chapter 3: Complex adaptive systems as a way of thinking about quality management models for HE in FE	45
Complexity v Reductionism	45
Characteristics of complex adaptive systems	46
Summary of CAS concepts	49
Complex adaptive systems and HE in FE	49
Chapter 4: Research methods	50
Introduction and linking CAS to the research methods	50
Social Constructionism and the nature of the inquiry	51
Parallels between CAS and Social constructionism	54
Case Study Approach	55
Research methods- Interviews theory	57
Application to the research-Method for interviews	59

Application to the research-Method the analysis of the interviews	62
Research methods- Documents Theory and Quality of documents	64
Application to the research-HER Documents and the quality of the documents	65
Method for HER reports: Extracting quality activities	65
Method for HER reports: Extracting other contextual information	68
Positionality	70
Ethics	70
Quality: Credibility and transferability- theory and application	73
Summary of research methods	76
Chapter 5: Quality Management Models for HE in FE Colleges as Socially Constructed Complex Adaptive Systems	77
Introduction	77
Introduction and Context: General characteristics of the participants and their institutions	77
HE QMMs seen through the concepts of Complex Adaptive Systems	79
CAS as open systems	80
CAS are made up of many agents	82
CAS agents act in non-linear ways	84
CAS show hierarchical structure	87
CAS agents show self-organisation and emergence.	89
Learning HE in FE Quality Management	90
CAS show co-evolution.	93
Environmental tensions and CAS at the edge of chaos	94
Management and culture	97
HE focus, time and resources for higher education	98
External changes and impacts – economic, policy and regulatory change	100
Partnerships and change	102
Working with university partners-reliance and resilience	103
Capacity for new changes	104
CAS show feedback systems.	105
CAS show diversity	106
Summary of the analysis	108
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions	109
Introduction	109
Purpose and aims	109
A review of the context for QMMs for HE in FE.	111
The analysis of quality concepts related to HE as understood and applied in FE institutions	113
The development and understanding of QMMs as social constructs (A)	113
The development and understanding of QMMs as CAS (B)	116
Discussing the challenges and tensions QMM	120
The FDAP community	126
Learning from this	127
Recommendations	130
Possibilities for future research	134
Potential Contributions to knowledge and professional practice and Transferability	135
Limitations and criticisms	136
Reflections on undertaking this study	140
Bibliography	141

Appendices	158
1. Summary of all quality activities by group of activities extracted from HER reports	159
2. Quality activity groups and engagement-example	178
3. Log 1 example of the spreadsheet of all quality activities-example	179
4. Log 2 example of quality activities for context-example	180
5. Interview questions	181
6. Participant QMM representations	182
7. Examples from the initial outline plan and storyboard linking themes	185
8. Extract of codebook 2.	188

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Examples of definitions of quality relevant to higher education	11
2. Representation A: The HE Sector before 1992 Fluid and fragmented	20
3. Representation B: The HE Sector from 1992 to 1997 Forming the HE and FE Sectors	21
4. After 1997-One Framework for all HE and but two different setting, with HE in FE evolving as a complex setting for HE.	24
5. Higher Education Programmes of Study in FE Colleges and student numbers 2014-15	27
6. Quality processes in universities by the mid-90s	34
7. Timeline of Key Quality Reviews for HE in FE and Outcomes	38
8. Summary of the scope of quality for this study and the questions necessary to answer to respond to the gaps in knowledge about quality management models HE in FE	43
9. QMMs as concepts of quality and the critical analysis of these.	44
10. Summary of the concepts of complex adaptive systems	49
11. Summary for the analysis of the findings	54
12. Summary of Coding	63
13. Example of the organisation of the HER categories and sub-categories for data collection	66
14. Allocating notional points	67
15. Table of key categories and criteria used to analyse data extracted from HER reports 2013 –2016.	69
16. Summary of the research approach	76
17. The participants, positions and the name of their institutions.	78
18. Student numbers and the number of university partners for each of the colleges	78
19. Representation of the different components of a typical FE college with a nested HE CAS	80
20. Representation of some the influential environments for HE in FE CAS	81
21. An illustration to show some of the possible interactions between the agents in an HE CAS	82
22. HE CAS 1. Before IQER and 2. Post IQER	85
23. An FDAP CAS compared to HE CAS in the inset Figure from p. 82	88
24. The numbers of activities that an HE CAS has to engage with.	105

25. Summary of the total number of quality activities at the different levels of the organisations to include external frameworks for the Colleges in this study	106
26. Interaction of social actors in an HE QMM adaptation of Fig.19.	114
27. Repeat of Fig. 23 HE CAS	116
28. Characteristics and challenges of QMMs as social constructs and as CAS	119/120
29. Challenges and tensions of an HE CAS or QMM	121
30. Challenges and tensions of an FDAP CAS or FDAP QMM	126
31. Programme (A) and Cross-institutional management and capacity(B). Enabling and enhancing the capacity of the institution to undertake QMM activities.	128/9

GLOSSARY ACRONYMS

AoC	Association of Colleges
BTEC	Business and Technical Education Councils
BIS	Department for Business Innovation and Skills
CAS Sing./Pl.	complex adaptive system/s
CATS	Colleges of Advanced Technology
CMA	Competitions and Marketing Authority
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfE	Department of Education
DFES	Department for Education and Skills
EFSA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
ESG	European Standards Guidelines
ETF	Education and Training Foundation
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
HER	Higher Education Review
FECs	Further education colleges
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FETL	Further Education Trust for Leadership
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HNC or HND	Higher National Certificates or Diplomas
IoE	Institute of Education
IQER	Integrated Quality Enhancement Review
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSIS	Learning and skills Improvement Services
MEG	Mixed Economy Group
NAB	National Awarding Body
NAO	National Audit Office
NCTA	National Council for Technological Awards
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
OU	Open University
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QMM/s	Quality Management Model/s
OFS	Office for Students
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TLRP	Teaching and Learning Research Programme

CHAPTER 1: Introduction to Quality Management Models for Higher Education in Further Education and the approach to this study

Introduction

The purposeful and ongoing critical consideration of the quality of higher education (HE), wherever this education takes place, might be regarded as essential. This exploratory research focuses on HE in further education (FE) by undertaking the critical analysis of quality management models for HE in FE through the theoretical frames of social constructionism and complex adaptive systems. Although Chapter Two elaborates on this setting for quality, this first chapter briefly introduces the socio-political context for the expansion and diversification of HE into the college sector and the subsequent requirement for the development of quality management practices for this HE. The literature review in Chapter Two brought to light gaps in research on this subject area. These gaps in knowledge informed the rationale for this study, as discussed in this first chapter. This chapter sets out the purpose and aims of this research and considers how this study was to respond to these knowledge gaps. The methodology underpinning this study is outlined, together with an account of professional practice relating to this area of study. The contribution to knowledge and the new insights this study makes are outlined, with further reflection on these aspects seen in Chapter Six. Following this, the organisation of this thesis and an overview of the chapters can be found, together with concluding remarks on this first chapter.

Overview of the context

This exploratory research sought insight into real-world quality management for HE in FE. HE in FE became a more prominent discourse from 1997 with the Dearing Review that set out the aim to grow and diversify HE, with an emphasis on the growth of HE in FE institutions (Dearing,1997). This was not the first time growth and diversification of HE had been a governmental focus. Ten years earlier, in 1987, the proposals set out in the White Paper Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge, had led to substantial growth of the HE sector, with the HE institutions taking on students from a broader range of educational backgrounds (DES,1987). This wider pool of entrants raised concerns for the maintenance of the quality of HE leading to a more formal approach to quality systems and processes (Green,1994). From herein, there was far greater attention to the quality of HE from the external perspective of those funding HE and an increased interest in institutional audits of the mechanisms for assuring and managing quality (Barnett,1992; Green,1994; Brown,2004).

With the growth of the HE sector and the concerns for quality seen above, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was formed in 1997 with the responsibility for the safeguarding of standards and the improvement of quality for all HE, wherever it was taught (Dearing,1997; Jackson and Bohrer,2010). Shortly after this, the QAA introduced quality frameworks. These frameworks set out reference points that were to act as a guide

to internal quality processes and help providers meet their responsibilities for the assurance of standards and quality (Brown,2004). Exactly what quality mechanisms were developed to meet the expectations of these frameworks was up to the institutions themselves (HEFCE,2010; Jackson and Bohrer,2010; Universities UK,2008). Although universities already had quality systems and processes in place, these frameworks were to bring about a more consistent approach with a shared understanding of quality across the sector (Jackson and Bohrer,2010). What was in place for quality for HE in FE at this time was largely unknown. In this study, it is the growth of HE in FE colleges and the development, effectiveness and sustainability of quality management in this setting that is central to this research.

This study relates to the largest group of colleges, the general FE colleges, though the sixth form and land-based colleges also come under the umbrella of FE colleges (AoC,2020). Further education colleges (FECs) serve local communities and deliver a broad range of qualifications (BIS,2014). Although HE is customarily associated with universities, FE colleges also offer HE qualifications, such as HNCs or HNDs and degree level courses. The HNCs or HNDs for local day release students, for example, and some degree level courses have been taught in FECs for some time (Parry,2016). With the expansion of HE as seen above, colleges were to focus on the growth of sub-degree provision and widening participation in HE, within the local communities (Dearing,1997). For colleges to grow their HE provision and to be able to deliver university qualifications such as foundation degrees, colleges had to enter into collaborative arrangements with universities (Parry and Thompson,2002). This was because only universities had the right to award degrees and this is still the case today, apart from a small number of colleges that now have degree awarding powers, such as one college seen in this study. Whilst the universities were, and still are, ultimately responsible for the quality and standards of the degrees they award, in entering into an agreement, colleges had to demonstrate that they could uphold the quality of the awards that they were to teach (QAA,2010¹; QAA,2018a²). This meant that colleges not only had to teach HE, they also had to take on the quality activities for this HE within the FE setting. It is important to note that this study is not about FE with its longstanding experience of quality management systems for FE and its extensive experience in relation to Ofsted. This study considers the development of new systems for HE quality management for HE in FE.

As developed in Chapter Two, the FE setting for HE is complex, as colleges were, and still are, accountable to both the HE sector and to the FE sector in which it sits. In terms of the quality activities for HE in FE, at least at the outset, this study indicated that colleges predominantly followed university processes and did what the universities asked them to do. Then, by the first round of external quality reviews for colleges, the

¹ For a partner organisation directly involved in the delivery and/or assessment of learning, awarding institutions have to assess the ability of the prospective partner organisation to manage processes for quality assurance in HE and their ability to meet the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure (QAA,2010).

² Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for assuring themselves that the Expectations of the Quality Code are met and that its Indicators of sound practice have been considered by those directly delivering or supporting learning opportunities (QAA,2018a).

Integrated Quality Enhancement Review (IQER) that took place between 2006 to 2010, colleges were to have developed oversight of their HE provision as a whole and demonstrate how they met the expectations of the external quality frameworks for HE. Outcomes indicated that colleges were at different stages in the development of their own quality processes for HE and a highly diverse approach to quality in these institutions was seen (QAA,2011). The pilot study for this research suggested that a varied approach to quality was still the predominant approach for the following Higher Education Reviews (HER), which took place between 2011 and 2016.

To support the growth of HE in FE, colleges were to deliver the new foundation degrees that were introduced shortly after 1997 (BIS,2009a). Despite these new qualifications, by 2010, the number of students studying HE in FE was only 8% of the total student numbers studying in HE in England (Parry et al.,2012). Another government drive to strengthen the growth of this sub-degree provision followed in 2011. Overall, as discussed in Chapter Two, the growth of HE in colleges was difficult. Furthermore, over the last decade colleges have had to endure years of economic cut-backs, mergers, compete for student numbers and stretch further to take on the new demands, such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), Competitions and Marketing Authority (CMA) requirements and now more recently the Office for Students (OfS). Reflections on how the potential tensions related to the growth of HE provision and the external demands on HE may influence the development, feasibility and sustainability of quality management models (QMMs), are included in this research.

As seen above, the development of quality systems was necessary across the HE sector. With this emphasis on quality and quality activities, at this point, it is important to reflect on the focus of these quality activities and how they relate to quality and the quality of HE. For Barnett (1992), the focus of quality in HE is on the students and their learning. Correspondingly for this study, the ultimate focus for quality is on the students, and their education and the learning experienced at this higher level. Barnett (1992:99) refers to this experience or educational process as what happens in between the time a student enters HE to when they leave, as the 'black box'. As Barnett (1992) recognises, one way of measuring the quality of the learning experienced might be through the use of performance indicators at the end of the process but emphasises and underlines, that what really matters is what happens in the 'black box'. Everything in the box counts, for example, the teaching, the staff development, the course, the learning process, the testing of the learning, together with all the other factors that contribute to the educational development experienced by the students. To concur with Barnett (1992), all these parts are important and they all contribute to the quality of the HE as a whole. So, for this study, with the focus for quality on the students and their learning, quality assurance and quality improvement activities must therefore relate to all of the parts of the educational experience, to include, for example, the quality of the teaching, assessments and the resources that provide the tools and the environment for the students to learn.

Certainly, the quality of this educational experience is a concern of many groups ranging from the students themselves or the teachers or the public, parents and employers and the Government, all with different expectations and interpretations of quality (Brennan,2012). As discussed further in chapter two, there was little agreement about what was meant by quality in HE or how it was to be assessed. Green (1994:17) argued that there were many meanings of quality or many 'qualities' possible, and this dilemma has not changed since then. At this point, it makes sense to think about some definitions of quality relevant to HE, and as with the broader discussion of quality so far, and as seen in Figure 1, the definitions are broad-ranging, include many parts and overlap in some way.

European Standards Guidelines (ESG) refer to quality as:
The result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment (ESG,2015:7).

For the QAA:
Academic Quality refers to how and how well the higher education provider supports students to enable them to achieve their award. It covers learning, teaching and assessment, and all the different resources and processes a provider puts in place to help students progress and fulfil their potential (QAA,2015a:2).

QAA maintains there is a material difference between quality and standards:
Quality is essentially about the learning opportunities provided for students (process), whereas standards relate to the level of achievement and the value of awards (outputs) (Jackson and Boher,2010:80).

Figure 1. Examples of definitions of quality relevant to higher education

After considering the focus of quality and the many ways of looking at quality, it is necessary to reflect on how quality activities relate to the quality of HE. Of these many ways of looking at quality, Brennan (2012) draws attention to the contribution of quality processes and the avenue they provide for reflecting on teaching and learning and the student experience, thereby increasing the potential of bringing about improvement. It is this perception of quality systems that enables a view of, reflection on and improvement of the quality of the HE educational path, inclusive of all of the parts in the 'black box', that is relevant for my study. As Barnett (1992) points out, some quality activities only relate indirectly to the student experience, whereas academic teaching, for example, has a more direct impact on learning. Also, some quality management systems may obscure some of the notions of quality that a lecturer may be interested in, such as an improvement in critical skills and other skills that are not seen when looking at performance numbers for example. Further criticisms of quality systems are discussed in Chapter Two. Nevertheless, as

for Brennan (2012), quality processes and quality frameworks bring attention to many aspects of the educational process. Even though this study is on quality activities and the management of these, it is important to keep in view the motivation for these activities, with the focus on the student and the potential of bringing about improvements in their education, learning and success, as central to their function. Together with further deliberations on quality, Chapter Two sets out the definition of quality and the scope of quality for HE as it applies to my study that centres on QMMs for HE in the FE setting.

Rationale and knowledge gaps

At the time of the intended growth for HE in FE, from 1997, little was known about this dual-sector setting for HE (Bathmaker et al.,2008). It seemed as if there had been little research on the feasibility of growing HE in FE, how equipped colleges were to grow HE or how these institutions were to develop infrastructures for the quality of HE. There was no blueprint for quality in this setting, so the question of how colleges were to learn and to develop knowledge of quality processes for HE in a predominantly FE setting was of interest. While some colleges had the experience of HE, this was not the case for all of the colleges that were to take on HE. As indicated above, little was known about this setting for HE or the quality systems and processes in place for its HE. It was only after the development of the national frameworks for quality that there was a greater interest in the quality of HE in FE and the systems and processes in place to meet the expectations of the quality frameworks. As noted earlier, these quality frameworks were to be applied wherever HE took place (Brown,2004; QAA,2010; QAA,2018a).

As seen in Chapter Two, the setting for HE in FE is complex and HE, together with the quality mechanisms for HE, were to develop in an FE setting that had its own traditions and ways of being. Little was known of how colleges developed their approach to HE quality or the effectiveness and sustainability of this approach given the changing and uncertain setting. Whilst review reports give judgements on the quality of HE in this setting and an impression of quality in colleges, external reviews only occur periodically and tell us little about the running of HE with the quality activities for HE and the management of these, on a day-to-day basis. To enable the real-world workings of QMMs in this setting to come to light, this research sought to find out more about quality for HE in the FE setting and its understanding, both from the perspective of those working in these colleges and from a university viewpoint. The literature, and some influential research on HE in FE, for example, by Parry, Bathmaker, Callender or Thompson, together with QAA overview reports, sector consultations or surveys, brought into view knowledge of the policy for HE in FE, its purpose, characteristics and operational functioning, together with a view of its quality status. Knowledge of current real-world quality arrangements for HE in FE was scarce.

To summarise the gaps in knowledge and the starting points relevant to this research: HE and quality mechanisms for this HE had to develop in a predominantly FE setting:

- How did colleges learn what to do given the FE setting?
- What are the quality activities and quality management models for HE in FE, and when, why and how did they develop?
- Given the FE setting, how is quality for HE understood? That is, what are the resulting quality management models in-situ that demonstrate how quality is understood in these institutions? How are these models enacted, and what influences their day-to-day functioning?
- How effective and sustainable is this approach given the complex and changing environment?

These gaps in research knowledge led me to want to find out more about the quality practices for HE in FE. Furthermore, it seemed that there was little in the way of a theoretical approach underpinning these quality constructs in these institutions. Therefore, given these gaps, this inquiry sought to bring to light real-world insights and new knowledge about quality practices for HE in FE institutions in the complex and changing context of HE in FE. If quality enables improvements in the students' learning in the HE in FE setting, then developing knowledge of quality practices for HE in this setting, might be regarded as essential. By responding to these gaps and as there is little research into QMMs in HE in FE, this exploratory research intends to contribute to the knowledge base of this subject area.

Aims

To respond to these gaps in knowledge and to find out more, there was one principal aim with several sub-aims:

Principal aim: To undertake a critical analysis of models for quality management and the understanding of quality for HE in FE institutions.

Sub-aims:

- To undertake a critical analysis of the development, effectiveness and sustainability of quality management models for HE in FE
- To analyse quality management models in this setting through the application of theoretical lenses illuminating different perceptions for the understanding of these quality concepts

Then, based on the analysis:

- To make recommendations for the development, effectiveness and sustainability of these quality frameworks for HE in FE
- To make recommendations for approaches to developing FE staff understanding of HE quality frameworks and models

To achieve this principal aim, I needed to find out more about: the development, effectiveness and sustainability of quality management models for HE in FE. For this, it was necessary to find out more about:

- The background of HE in FE and its intended growth and the characteristics of the context in which quality for HE was to develop
- When and why did colleges start to think about quality management for the HE provision
- How colleges developed knowledge about quality practices for HE
- The activities contributing to a QMM in this setting and QMMs as whole systems
- The factors influencing the development, effectiveness and sustainability of a QMM

Then to analyse quality management models in this setting through the application of theoretical lenses illuminating different perceptions for the understanding of these quality concepts it was necessary to:

- Identify a social theoretical framework as the epistemological underpinning of this theoretical approach to enable new knowledge to come to light
- Identify a theoretical framework to consider QMMs as whole systems
- Apply these theoretical frameworks to the findings about QMMs to support and voice the critical analysis of the findings

This approach would bring to the fore an impression of real-world QMMs and enable the consideration of what may be possible to enhance QMMs for HE in the FE setting and potentially inform future policy and practice.

Research approach

Social constructionism served as the theoretical frame to guide this study in defining the nature of knowledge for this study and to enable new knowledge to come into view. As seen above, I wanted to find out more about quality for HE in the FE setting. From a constructionist perspective 'as we confront the world, our descriptions and explanations emerge from our existence in relationships' (Gergen,2015:13). That is, the meanings of our social world, how we know what there is, how we come to understand things, even the way we go about things, emerge from our relationships with others, and this is discussed further in Chapter Four. These constructed meanings are not new as they are shaped by the historical and cultural setting in which they came about (Burr,2003; Gergen and Gergen,2003). As discussed in Chapter Four, it was assumed that the quality models of interest in this study were social constructs. By applying social constructionism as the theoretical framework, it was possible to find out more about how QMMs were understood in the different local settings.

To respond to this inquiry and explore QMMs in the context of HE in FE and to enable a rich understanding from multiple viewpoints, a case study approach was used. For this it was necessary to find out more about how different colleges made sense of, and enacted the requirements for quality for HE in their local contexts. Methods were required that enabled access to knowledge, not only about the constituting parts of the models but also about the models seen as whole entities, as well as access to explanations as to why they exist as they do. That is, methods were required that enabled access to meaning-making by the social actors themselves and for this, interviews were chosen. As discussed on p.54 and 57, the meaning-making process does not stop there, as knowledge is not just collected at the interview (Kvale and Brinkmann,2009). As for Gergen (2004), constructionists do not require or advocate any one method over another. Nevertheless, for this study, to understand this social world through the interpretation of social actors, semi-structured interviews were carried out and documentary evidence was gathered. Both the participants and documentary evidence were selected using purposive sampling.

Participants from the HE in FE college sector and the university sector responded to questions recounting their experiences, perspectives and understandings of QMMs from before IQER to how QMMs were understood at the time of the interviews post- HER. Five semi-structured interviews were carried out, of which three were with senior managers from colleges and two with senior managers from universities. The interview transcripts were analysed using NVivo as the data analysis software. To complement the participant accounts, eleven HER reports were analysed. Fragmenting and reconstructing the data enabled themes to emerge that could respond to questions about how and why colleges developed QMMs and how and why they exist in this way.

An interpretive approach encouraged visualising QMMs as complex wholes, rather than a focus on the individual parts. To approach this complexity, according to Morin (2007), it is necessary to gain knowledge of the parts and the whole, and how the parts and the whole mutually interact. In this study, the concepts of complex adaptive systems (CAS) served as the frame that encouraged the view of complex emergent whole systems. To attempt to view QMMs as whole systems, the themes that emerged from the participant accounts and documentary evidence were interpreted through the concepts of CAS. College HE and its quality systems were interpreted as nested CAS subject to local internal and external environments to which it has to adapt. CAS such as ecosystems, can reorganise internally and adapt to their surroundings (Holland,1992). When viewed as nested CAS, the college QMMs were assumed to act and adapt in a similar way to ecosystems. These nested CAS or QMMs were to emerge within the complex and changing HE in FE setting. The use of social constructionism as a theoretical frame for this study enabled new knowledge to come to light and more than that, as its use brought to the fore an understanding of QMMs, foregrounding the dialogical nature of QMMs as a social construct. Then, at the same time, the critical analysis of QMMs as CAS, brought into view their complex and uncertain nature.

Thesis structure, organisation and overview of the contents

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Chapter Two elaborates the context of the study, as briefly outlined in Chapter One, and substantiates the rationale for this study. The environment in which quality for HE in FE exists appears to be ever more complex and challenging. Chapter Two analyses this environmental context and considers the development of quality for HE within this complex setting. Part one of the chapter presents critical arguments for the development of HE in FE. Part two explores what is known about the quality of this HE and the quality mechanisms for this HE and defines the meaning of quality for my research. A more detailed account of the gaps in knowledge of the construction and understanding of QMMs that led to this study as stated in Chapter One, is located here. This chapter provides the setting through which I undertake the critical analysis of models for quality management and the understanding of quality for HE in FE in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3 Complex adaptive systems

As seen in Chapter Two, the setting for quality management models (QMMs) is complex and uncertain, and QMMs were to develop in this setting. With this picture of emerging complexity, Chapter Three sets-out and explains the theoretical concepts of complex adaptive systems (CAS) as a frame for the critical analysis of the development, feasibility and sustainability of QMMs for HE in FE in this changing and complex setting. This chapter reflects on this environment for HE quality activities and considers QMMs as CAS nested within this environment. Exploring the theoretical concepts to examine what is meant by complexity at this point seemed reasonable. Consideration of CAS here, acts as an intermediary step between the complexity perceived up to now and as a basis on which to think about the emerging picture of QMMs in this complex setting in the chapters that follow. How CAS relate to the theoretical framework of social constructionism is envisaged in Chapter Four. Both the concepts of CAS and the theoretical framework of social constructionism are applied in Chapter Five, illuminating different perceptions for the understanding of QMMs.

Chapter 4 Research methods

Chapter Four focuses on the methodology and the interpretive case study approach of this research. In this chapter social constructionism is explored as the theoretical frame that guides the methods for this research and enables new knowledge to come to light. Through this frame, my research sought to relate how QMMs were constructed in the local college settings. This chapter introduces the relationship between CAS seen in Chapter Three and social constructionism and explains why two frameworks were necessary to analyse these complex and uncertain QMMs. To gain a rich understanding of QMMs a case study approach was applied. QMMs for HE in FE in their complex settings were seen as nested cases and their development was explored from their early development at the time of IQER. Semi-structured

interviews with senior managers from universities and colleges gave access to the meaning-making as recounted by the social actors themselves. These individual perspectives and the complementary view offered by the documentary evidence contributed to an overall emergent insight into QMMs for HE in FE.

Chapter 5 Critical analysis of the findings

This chapter critically analyses the themes that emerged from the interviews and documents. Chapter Five starts by reiterating the socially constructed nature of the QMMs and how social constructionism links to CAS. Then, as outlined earlier, this chapter sees the findings, the emergent themes, interpreted through the different lenses of the concepts of CAS to consider how and why QMMs exist as they do. QMMs interpreted as CAS are made up of many interdependent agents that self-organise and adapt to survive in the uncertain and complex environment of HE in FE. The interaction of these agents results in a whole system or CAS (Holland,2014). When viewed in this light, analysing QMM as CAS supported viewing QMM as whole systems and more than the sum of the parts. This chapter brought to the fore the complexity and uncertainties of QMMs and considers the factors that influence their effectiveness and sustainability. The concepts of CAS permitted a novel understanding of how and why QMMs exist in this way. Added to this, when reviewing these themes as social constructs a different perspective and understanding of the nature of these quality concepts comes into view.

Chapter 6 Discussion and conclusions

Chapter Six discusses the findings and draws conclusions that culminate in recommendations based on these findings. The interpretations of Chapter Five resulted in a view of QMMs as socially constructed, complex self-organising CAS systems that can adapt and evolve to survive at the edge of chaos. The root of their complexity appeared to be their dependency on both FE and HE. Each HE CAS is constructed through pre-existing local cultures resulting in diverse HE CAS. Conceivably it is this diversity and capacity for change that may allow survival at the edge of chaos. Though, despite these complex interdependencies allowing for their survival, at the same time, many tensions and uncertainties question their sustainability. The findings of this study, therefore, consider whether QMMs are in fact too chaotic to be sustained in the current environment. Ways of reducing the tensions that challenge the sustainability of QMMs are proposed. This study suggests that, from the perspective of quality for HE in FE, the idea of a level playing field for HE providers might be contestable. The nature of QMMs illuminated in this study calls for a supportive focus on this setting to enable new approaches to be found. This chapter also makes recommendations for the development, effectiveness and sustainability of these quality models for HE in FE and for the development of FE staff and their understanding of HE quality frameworks and the institutional quality models. Contributions to new knowledge and proposals for future research are seen, as well as the limitations of the research.

Professional practice

The period of reviews covered in this study is familiar as I have had direct involvement in the development of a QMM during this time. Furthermore, working in a cross-institutional capacity meant that I became aware of how college QMMs were viewed from several standpoints. These views ranged from exchanges with peers and staff at many organisational levels, from both internal staff and those external to the institution: staff in partner universities, HE in FE Groups, or the QAA for example. All of this, together with an awareness of the influencing policies and literature on HE in FE during the time of development, culminated in a picture of QMMs that merited further exploration. In my role as a college quality manager for HE, I have witnessed the rapidly changing external landscape for both HE and HE in FE, with the significant recent changes as announced in the White Paper: Success as a Knowledge Economy that led to greater market competition (BIS,2016). Competition, funding cuts in the FE sector and austerity, have led to what is now years of college restructures, and on top of that, a major review of all FE colleges took place in 2016 that led to college mergers (BIS and DfE,2015a). Through cut-backs, mergers, restructures and organisational change and staff reductions, the focus on HE quality seemed to diminish. With this experience, this research sought to find out more about QMMs in the FE setting from the perspective of others.

Concluding remarks on this introductory chapter

This study may be of interest to those researching HE in FE, in particular anyone interested in quality. There are few researchers from FE writing on HE and HE quality in colleges, making this study pertinent. Teachers, quality managers and Heads of HE may draw on aspects of these findings to reflect on their own institutional practices, recognising similarities or gaining new insights. Policymakers may be interested in these findings with a view to collaborative working for HE in FE. The knowledge that emerged from this study could usefully be applied to other similar settings (Bloomberg,2018). From this perspective, my research may be of interest to others outside this field of study. Framing QMMs as complex adaptive systems and as social constructs may be of relevance to those interested in theoretical approaches to quality. As a whole, this research aimed to contribute to the knowledge base on quality for HE in FE, and its quality management models. This introductory chapter has given an overview of the context and purpose of this study, the research aims and sub-aims, the research methods for this study, together with a brief overview of the chapters that now follow.

CHAPTER 2: The context of HE in FE for quality

Introduction

The environment in which higher education in further education (HE in FE) exists is becoming more and more challenging. In this chapter the development of HE in FE and the arrangements for quality for HE in this setting are critically reviewed. The first part looks at the development, characteristics and perceptions of HE in this complex and changing environment. This is followed by an evaluation of what is known about the quality of HE in FE and the development of its quality processes in part two. The meaning and scope of quality for my research are seen here. The chapter substantiates the rationale for my study as set out in Chapter One and reiterates the gaps in research knowledge that led to my project and how this project aims to respond to those gaps. Throughout the chapter, the complexity and uncertainty of this setting for the development of quality becomes evident and this emerging complexity resonates well with the theoretical concepts of complex adaptive systems (CAS) presented in Chapter Three. This chapter serves as the setting through which I undertake the critical analysis of models for quality management and the understanding of quality for HE in FE in the chapters that follow.

Part 1. The development, characteristics and perceptions of HE in this complex and changing environment

Policies for the growth of HE in FE as an evolving and complex educational setting

Today, both universities and FE colleges with HE, are known as HE providers³(QAA,2021). As the following passages indicate, HE in FE is not new, and many further education colleges (FECs) have been providers of HE since the 1950s and 1960s (IoE,2012). At the time of the Robbins Review in 1963, there were several categories of colleges, namely the Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs), regional colleges, area colleges and local colleges (Robbins,1963). As recommended in this Review, the specialist CATs that already taught degree-level qualifications were to become universities. Other colleges delivered non-university degree-level awards⁴ alongside other qualifications (Robbins,1963; DES,1966). However, FECs were better known for their Higher National Certificates (HNCs) or the Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) (DES,1966; Parry et al.,2017). At the time, FE colleges counted around 72 500 students studying for degrees or higher nationals, and although some of this provision was full-time, the majority of the students were studying on part-time day release or evening courses⁵(DES,1966). Around 127 000 students were studying at university, and here

³ Universities and colleges are termed HE providers if they deliver HE courses as stipulated in schedule 6 [Education Reform Act 1988 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/10/schedule/6) (Education Reform Act 1988).

⁴ The non-university degree-awarding body, the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) replaced the National Council for Technological Awards (NCTA) after the Robbins Report. The CNAA was abolished in 1992 (Green,1994; Open University,2019).

⁵ In 1965 around 12 000 students were working for degrees, 8 000 on full-time or sandwich HNDs, around 2 500 part-time degree students and around 50 000 students studying for part-time HNCs. Around 140 000 advanced level students were recorded in all. (DES,1966)

the opposite pattern of attendance was seen, with a greater number of students on full-time rather than part-time courses (Robbins,1963). The Robbins Committee (1963) recommended the expansion of HE, with the intention that much of the growth would be in the universities.

Shortly after this, with a growing demand for more part-time qualifications for those in employment, the Government planned to expand non-university HE into FE colleges for those students wishing to study at degree or below degree-level HE qualifications (DES,1966). Following the recommendations in the Robbins Report and to accommodate growth in the college sector as proposed by the Government, some colleges were to become polytechnics as large regional centres for vocational and technical courses (DES,1966). Other colleges were to continue with HNCs and HNDs and some degree courses as well as all the other lower-level courses that FE colleges undertook. As illustrated and simplified in Figure 2 below, what is seen here is a differentiated, fragmented and fluid HE sector, with an expanding university sector (A), colleges becoming universities (B), a pooling and expansion of HE in the non-university sector in the polytechnics (Ci) and (Cii), with other local colleges (D) growing higher nationals and continuing with some ongoing, non-university degree-level⁶ work. Whilst each university was responsible for its own awards, the awards of the polytechnics were overseen by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNA), and the Business and Technical Education Council (BTEC) was responsible for the higher national awards (Parry and Thompson,2002).

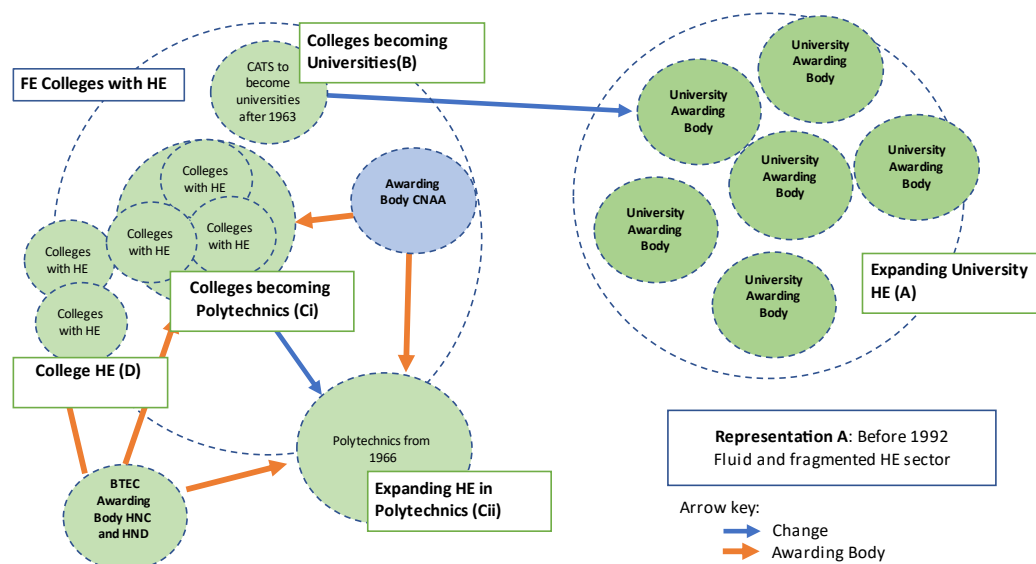


Figure 2. Representation A: The HE Sector before 1992 Fluid and fragmented

⁶ Colleges already offering HE but not designated as polytechnics were to continue with HE (DES,1966).

As outlined in Chapter One, government reforms of the late 1980s⁷ aimed for further growth of the HE sector in the universities, polytechnics and colleges, and diversification of the sector by broadening the entry criteria for HE, to include vocational qualifications and access courses (DES,1987; Education Reform Act 1988). For universities, more used to what was considered as the more academic entry route of A-levels, this diversification of entry qualifications was new (Green,1994). As mentioned in Chapter One, these changes brought about a mounting concern for quality, leading to a greater focus on quality and quality systems across the HE sector (ibid,1994). After further reforms in 1992⁸, polytechnics were to become universities and their non-university degree-awarding body, the CNA, was abolished, so now only universities had the right to award degrees (Further and Higher Education Act 1992; OU,2019)⁹. As another consequence of this reform, FE and HE were separated into two separate sectors, each with their own funding, regulatory and quality systems¹⁰. From this point, FE was the principal concern for colleges, though colleges could still develop HE provision collaboratively with universities (Parry and Thompson,2002; Parry et al.,2017). Although universities were largely independent of each other, this still represented an amassing of an HE sector (A) with polytechnics becoming universities (B), with FE colleges (Ci and ii) delivering a small amount of what was now university HE awards (not CNA), as well as BTECs, as illustrated and simplified in Figure 3, below.

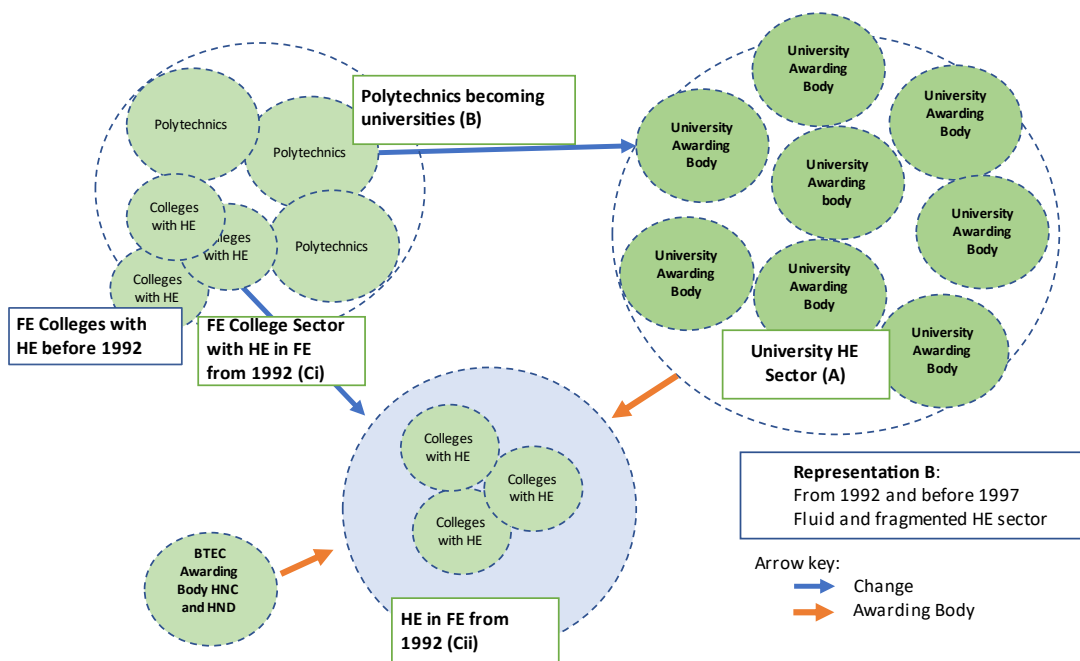


Figure 3. Representation B: The HE Sector from 1992 to 1997 Forming the HE and FE Sectors

⁷ The 1987 White Paper: Higher Education Meeting the Challenge (DES,1987) and the 1988 Education Reform Act 1988.

⁸ Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

⁹ The only other body to award degrees before this was the CNA, the Council for National Academic Awards.

¹⁰ The Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) for HE and the Further Education Funding Council¹⁰ (FEFC) for FE. From this point, the main focus for colleges was on their FE provision although the part-time HNCs were still funded under the FEFC (Parry et al.,2017). By 1999, both HNC and HNDs were funded by HEFCE.

By the mid-1990s, HE had grown considerably, with an estimated 1.6 million studying in higher education institutions (HEIs) and around 200 000 more in FECs (Dearing,1997)¹¹. There was now a single sector for the award of degrees and more focus on quality in these HEIs. The attention to quality was not only a concern of the HEIs. The HE funding body also had, and still has, responsibility for assuring the quality of HE with respect to public spending, and with the growth of HE, the cost to support and accommodate this growth was another concern, again bringing attention to quality (Barnett,1992). The FE sector had undergone significant changes, yet at this time, despite growing student numbers in HE in FE, little was written on the quality of this sector or the quality mechanisms in place to assure the quality of what was now collaborative university provision and BTEC awards. At the time, the part-time HNCs were funded by the FE funding body whilst the HNDs and the collaborative provision were funded by the HE funding body. Significantly, as indicated by Parry and Thompson (2002), there was no real alignment of quality expectations across these funding bodies. This meant that where there was information about the quality of college HE, it was difficult to make sense of because of the lack of commonality of the criteria for making judgements on quality.

After the Dearing Report 1997-Growth in, and focus on, HE in FE

By the mid-90s, more students were achieving level three qualifications and, as well as this, a greater diversity of students were entering the system, including more mature and part-time students. The 1997 Dearing Review aimed to increase participation in HE once more, this time with an emphasis on life-long learning and on increasing the representation of under-represented groups in HE (Dearing,1997). This increase in participation in HE, was largely intended to be in the HE in FE sector (Parry,2009; IoE,2012). Colleges already provided predominantly sub-degree HE qualifications of a vocational nature, providing 'non-traditional' HE for those wishing to study locally (Dearing,1997:259). So, it made sense for colleges to focus on the growth of this kind of provision. Accordingly, colleges were to concentrate on the growth of short cycle¹², directly-funded, sub-degree HE¹³, with no further growth in degree-level qualifications so that each sector offered distinctive opportunities for HE. The 1997 Dearing Review did not rule out franchised provision, particularly in geographical areas for local students who otherwise might not participate in HE or other family or cultural reasons (Dearing,1997; Parry and Thompson,2002). In essence, this focus on the growth of HE in colleges was aimed at boosting access and participation in HE. For Kennedy (1997), this role for colleges was seen favourably by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) as it provided a means of addressing low expectations and achievement, and a means of addressing the needs of those wishing to study locally. Essentially colleges were to teach more HE preparing students for their progression to

¹¹ Caution is required when looking at data, as what the data represents; for example, what counted as HE course, was uncertain and changed over time (Parry and Thompson,2002).

¹² One or two-year qualifications

¹³ A special mission to grow sub-degree provision growing directly funded provision such as HNCs or HNDs rather than franchised indirectly funded provision.

university (Parry and Thompson,2002). The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), supported the effectiveness of FE colleges in promoting widening participation for learners from disadvantaged or non-traditional backgrounds¹⁴(DfES,2006). Recognising the extra cost of supporting such students the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), was to award premiums to those universities and colleges facilitating widening participation (Lewis,2002).

Shortly after 1997, to help boost the uptake of participation in this sub-degree provision, two-year foundation degrees validated by the universities were introduced with the intention for these to be taught in colleges and subject to the university partner's quality arrangements (Parry and Thompson,2002). The Dearing Review (1997) had favoured the growth of directly-funded provision for college HE. However, for new foundation degrees an indirect-funding^{15 16} route was advocated (Parry and Thompson,2002; Parry et al.,2012). With the expected growth of these new degrees, this funding route and the close working partnership arrangements with the universities aimed to support the delivery of a high-quality provision (DfES,2003).

As illustrated in Figure 4 p.24, what seemed to be unfolding was a highly complex set of arrangements for HE in FE with multiple awarding bodies: higher nationals with BTEC, foundation degrees and sometimes full degrees, with one university or sometimes several universities. Also, as seen on p. 28, over time, different funding arrangements with the universities would develop. It was as if there had been an assumption that colleges had the capacity to expand and grow HE. How prepared colleges were to take on more higher-level provision and undertake the necessary quality arrangements for this provision appeared uncertain and largely unknown. As noted by Howard (2002), sufficient resources were required, including resources to develop staff to ensure the delivery of high quality HE. Although delivery of these foundation degrees was subject to the university partner's quality arrangements, this still would have required considerable engagement from colleges to take on these new arrangements and provide space, knowledge to teach HE and time to administer HE. What was seen as more structured arrangements for the franchised provision also implied a greater reliance on the university partners who were to oversee these arrangements (Bathmaker et al.,2008). Taking on HE was a considerable undertaking. As observed by Foster (2005:20), with this intended growth there was some concern of 'mission stretch', as colleges already had a broad range of FE provision. As seen in Figures 2 and 3 and in Figure 4, FE colleges stemmed from a different background to that of the university sector and college HE was to develop alongside the university sector. Likewise, BTEC and its higher national awards also developed outside of the university sector and taught

¹⁴ Traditional students are those going straight to university after A-levels. Non-traditional include those from minority backgrounds, first generation to go to HE in the family, low-income, mature students (Wong,2018)

¹⁵ Following research by HEFCE (HEFCE,2003b).

¹⁶ Diversifying funding routes was thought to support growth as directly funded provision was limiting although both funding routes were accepted in England. (Parry and Thompson,2002; Parry et al.,2017).

mainly in the FE sector. The theoretical consequences of these different social groupings and backgrounds become significant in Chapters Five and Six.

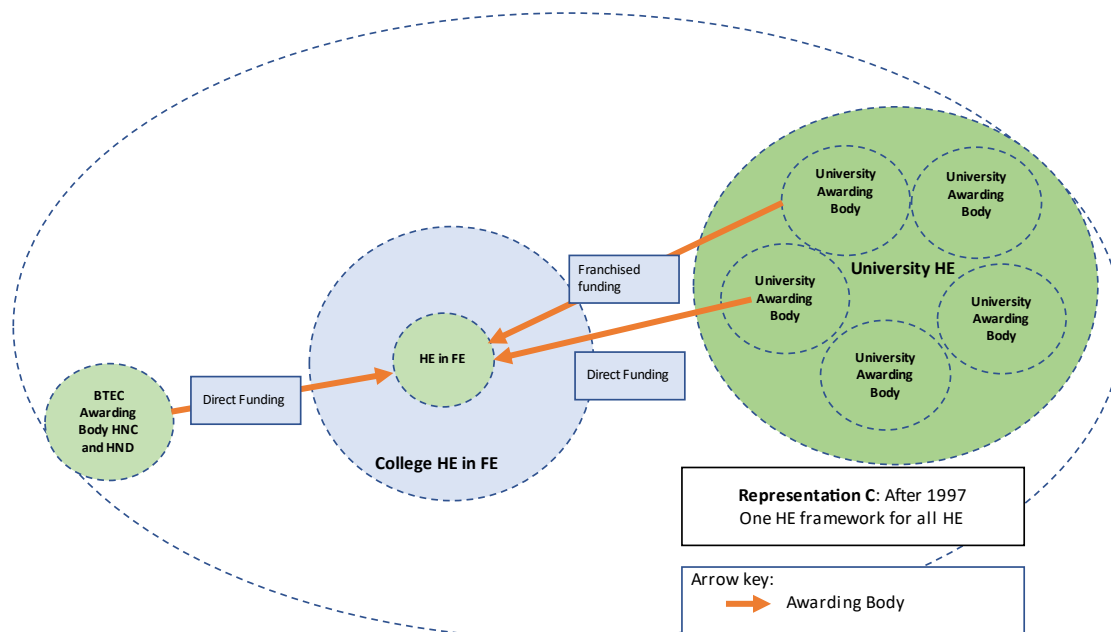


Figure 4. After 1997-One Framework for all HE and but two different settings, with HE in FE evolving as a complex setting for HE.

Over a decade later, the focus was once more on colleges. In 2011 the White Paper: Students at the Heart of the System (BIS,2011:49) framed colleges as having a ‘distinctive mission’ to deliver a diverse range of locally relevant, vocational qualifications such as HNCs, HNDs or foundation degrees. Colleges were seen as institutions with particular strengths in reaching out to non-traditional, part-time and mature students. This new policy resembled the ‘special mission’ for colleges to concentrate on sub-Bachelor level qualifications evoked in the Dearing Report in 1997 (Dearing,1997:260; Parry,2009). Government policy now requested the ‘removal of barriers that are preventing a level playing field for higher education providers of all types, including further education colleges and other alternative providers’ (BIS,2011:8). As Parry (2009:324) pointed out, FE colleges were positioned at the ‘lower end of the rank order’ of recognised providers of HE. So how this proposed levelness was to play out in what certainly was a differentiated and hierarchical HE sector with a clear designated mission for colleges was yet to be seen. Still, as part of the strategy for this level playing field, colleges and other alternative providers had already been granted the right to apply for foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP) (Parry et al.,2017). Not long after the introduction of FDAP, the Government proposed to simplify the route to gaining FDAP (BIS,2016a). Despite this, few colleges took up the FDAP route with only five having done so by 2015 (Martin,2015).

Still, the college sector seemed to look favourably at taking on HE where key reasons for doing so included: the enhancement of internal progression opportunities, or to address local skills gaps, as well as to enhance the college profile and to diversify income streams (MEG and LSIS,2013). Furthermore, compared to

universities, the cost of providing HE in this setting was lower, with lower teaching costs, greater teaching productivity and comparatively, a much lower outlay for the infrastructure for HE (IoE,2012). With designated missions for colleges, how it is perceived and with many other differences, the idea that there could be a level playing field seemed an unwarranted and an unlikely goal. The following paragraphs enlarge on some of the aspects of HE in FE seen up to this point.

Types of students

The Dearing Review (1997) set out to:

‘encourage and enable all students - whether they demonstrate the highest intellectual potential or whether they have struggled to reach the threshold of higher education - to achieve beyond their expectations’ (Dearing,1997).

In line with these government recommendations, widening participation was an important role for colleges where students tend to be from non-traditional, disadvantaged backgrounds, or where neither parent had an HE qualification (IoE,2012). As advocated in the Dearing Report (1997) widening participation in colleges opened opportunities for these students to achieve and extend expectations that may not have been possible otherwise. Compared to students in universities, for one study, college HE students were more likely to be older, study part-time and come from areas with a lower rate of participation in HE (MEG and LSIS,2013).

Seen from the students’ perspective HE in FE students tended to be:

- students who did not want to go to study for a degree at university
- students looking for an accessible and local place to study
- students appreciative of continuity of study, familiarity of environment and a more supportive learning environment and smaller classes
- students looking at lower costs (IoE,2012)

Even so, despite this seemingly decisive list of students’ choices, there were suggestions that some students were studying HE in colleges but not necessarily through an informed decision (ibid,2012). Some were not really aware of other HE institutions, whilst others, as many as one in six, thought that they had applied to a university. More positively, students who went to college did not see the fewer opportunities for extra-curricular activities or narrower breadth of experience as a drawback.

Intended growth of Higher Education

There were two rapid growth phases for HE when participation grew from 5% in the 1960s to 14% in 1973, and again from 1988 when participation grew to around 33% by 2000¹⁷ (Mayhew et al.,2004). Bathmaker et al. (2008) attributed much of this later growth to the demand for the Bachelor Degree at universities and polytechnics. As noted earlier, policy for the next phase of growth was aimed at widening participation, with an expectation for FE colleges to take the lead on this, focusing on the growth of sub-degree provision, to include foundation degrees (DfES,2006a; DfES,2006b; BIS,2009; King et al.,2010). For Bathmaker et al. (2008), there was no clear policy for growth in colleges as it varied from the earlier intention for colleges to grow sub-degree provision via a directly funded route, to a short while later, sharing this mission with universities through a franchised route, with a few colleges with larger numbers of HE students opting for their own degree awarding powers, once this was possible. Notably, some universities also taught sub-degree provision themselves, so this level of award was not exclusive to the colleges (Parry et al.,2012).

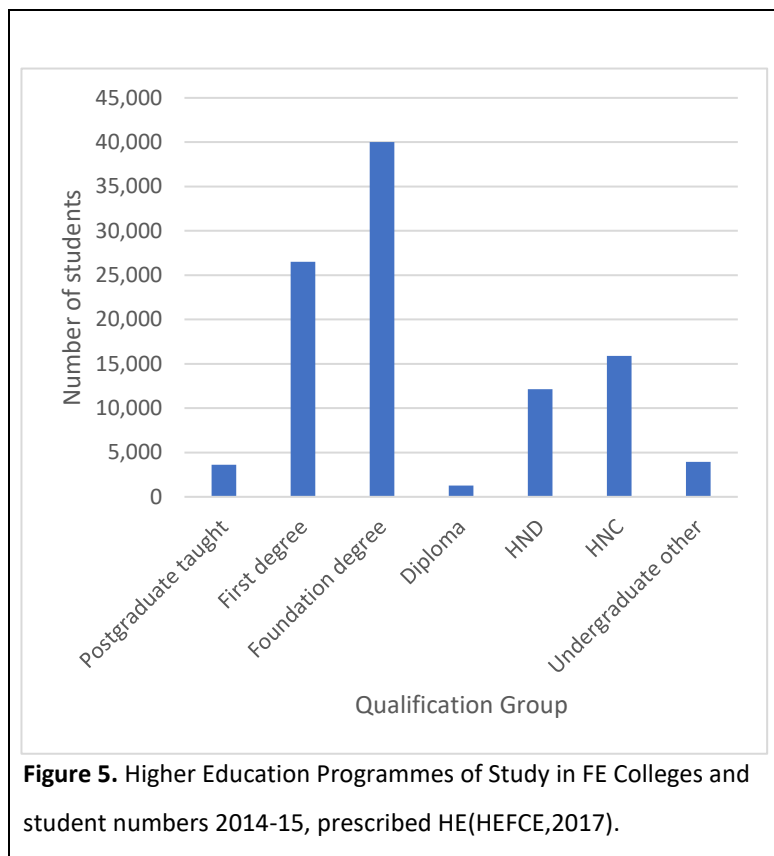
In 2010, 8% of the HE population was reportedly taught in colleges but a sustained policy shift was needed to increase the growth in colleges, in what was intended to become an increasingly diverse HE system (Parry et al.,2012; IoE,2012). Growth in the HE in FE sector was difficult to achieve, and although by 2012, most FE colleges offered some form of HE, participation was still only around 8% overall (IoE,2012). Contributing to the difficulties in growth was the significant generalised decline in both part-time and mature students, a decline of up to 50% by 2015; attributed, at least in part, to the rise in tuition fees¹⁸ and lack of financial support for part-time students (Callender and Thompson,2018). Overall, student numbers in 2014-2015 showed 103 360 were studying on typical undergraduate courses in 240 colleges, with a decline of 2.5% by 2015-16¹⁹ (HEFCE,2017; HEFCE,2018). To give a perspective of the numbers studying in university as opposed to colleges, by 2017-2018 initial participation rates for young people participating in UK HE by the age of thirty were estimated at 50.2%, with 46.5 % of this attributed to universities and only 3.7% for FE Providers (DfE,2019). Growth of HE in colleges was difficult.

¹⁷ The figures represent the number of (under 21) home initial entrants expressed as a percentage of the average 18-19 population Greenaway Report (2000). This excludes the part-time students of the Open University. The data was based on the Greenaway Report (2000) until 1996-97 and DfES for 2001-01.

¹⁸ Tuition fees rose for part-time courses in 2012 (Frazackerley,2017).

¹⁹ In 2009-2010 there was an estimated 177 000 studying HE, of which around 60 000 were on part-time courses. Around 108 000 were undertaking undergraduate qualifications to include 52 470 on Foundation degrees, 24 995 Bachelor's Degrees, 13 815 on HNCs, 10 510 on HNDs with a small number on Dip or Cert HEs. The other 64 000 were on other higher-level qualifications- vocational, technical or professional Parry et al. (2012). In 2015-2016 inclusive of HEFCE direct and indirectly funded provision, ESFA and full cost provision there were over 150 000 HE students taught in colleges (Widdowson and King,2017).

Despite the apparent policy focus on sub-bachelor provision for colleges, many colleges had a wide range of HE provision. As illustrated in Figure 5, in 2014-15 of HE provision taught in colleges, a range of qualifications from HNCs and HNDs, first degrees, postgraduate qualifications and foundation degrees were seen (HEFCE,2017). Foundation degrees were the predominant qualifications taught in colleges. Although, colleges delivered a much broader range of qualifications than the sub-degree qualifications initially designated to them.



Perceptions of HE in FE

At the time, there were mixed impressions of HE in FE and many explanations for the half-hearted growth seen. Whereas some envisioned the boundaries between the FE and HE sectors as becoming more permeable with colleges making distinctive contributions to widening participation (TLRP,2008, Parry et al.,2012); others saw the contribution to HE by FE colleges as largely complementary to mainstream HE (IoE,2012). Some saw the organisation of the two-sector system as a design that kept HE and FE apart (Parry et al.,2012). In terms of working together, college HE managers saw the relationships with universities as collaborative rather than competitive (IoE,2012). Likewise, employers viewed the relationships with colleges positively, recognising the contribution colleges made in meeting local needs and the quality of the graduates they employed (ibid,2012). Despite this, conceivably, employer demand for this form of HE may not have been sufficient to support local growth (Parry et al.,2012). The lack of a strategic approach for growing HE was seen as another reason for the slow uptake of provision (HEFCE,2003b; QAA,2011). Added to this low visibility and status were thought to contribute to this lack of growth (Parry et al.,2009; Parry et al.,2012). As already noted earlier, some simply pointed out that relatively little was known about this dual-economy sector (Bathmaker et al.,2008). These wavering attitudes towards this sector included discussions from within the funding body claiming that it was a bureaucratic burden to process courses with so few students (ibid,2008).

A clearer identity but a highly complex picture of HE in FE from 2012-Dual sector and mixed-economy

With the focus on HE in FE, and despite a degree of ambivalence concerning it, HE in FE emerged with its own identity, though not necessarily a complete picture of this setting for HE and its quality systems. To add to the developing picture, in addition to the complexity of taking on HE and teaching HE in an FE setting, overseen or not by a university, the funding systems for this setting are of significant relevance. England has a two-sector system of FE and HE in which FE colleges offering HE, are referred to as dual-sector institutions (MEG and LSIS,2013). Each sector draws on different sources of funding, and the term mixed-economy²⁰ institution, refers to those institutions that draw on funding sources from both sectors: HEFCE funding (direct from HEFCE, or via an indirect franchised arrangement with a university) and FE funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)²¹(KPMG,2003). The terms dual-sector and mixed-economy are mainly associated with the FE colleges that have HE provision, though the terms can equally apply to universities that teach FE funded students (Parry et al.,2009). In my research, these terms are used interchangeably, as dual-sector inherently involves mixed-economy funding.

Provision funded by HEFCE is referred to as prescribed provision such as foundation degrees or bachelor's degrees and HNCs and HNDs (OFS,2018a; OFS,2018d)²². Under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, HEFCE had the statutory responsibility to ensure that provision was made for assessing the quality of education for any institution receiving financial support. Funding drawn down from HEFCE was then dependent on the quality of the provision, and this applied for both directly funded or franchised study programmes. To evidence the quality of these HEFCE funded programmes, institutions delivering these were reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). In addition to prescribed provision, colleges deliver another form of HE called non-prescribed provision. For colleges with a dual-sector identity, much of the work may be non-prescribed rather than prescribed provision but this may vary from college to college and over time. Non-prescribed includes the work-based National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) (SFA,2016). These courses are in addition to the main concern of the FE sector that encompasses all post-compulsory education and training for 16 to 19 year olds and adults that is not delivered in HEIs to include: Basic skills, GCSEs, A-Levels, BTECs, NVQs, professional diplomas, apprenticeships, work-based training, and personal and community learning (Panchamia,2012). All of these SFA funded programmes, the higher-level vocational programmes and all the other post-compulsory education undertaken by FE colleges fall under the inspection regime of Ofsted (MEG and LSIS,2013).

²⁰ Some use the term mixed-economy for a group of the largest providers of HE in FE (Bathmaker and al.,2008).

²¹ The FEFC was replaced by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in 2000. The LSC was replaced with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) in 2009. Merging the SFA with the Education and Funding Agency in 2017 led to the ESFA.

²² The Office for Students (OfS) replaced HEFCE in April 2018. Providers delivering HE have to register with the OfS to access public grant funding to support teaching or to enable students to access student finance (OFS,2018b). Although the role of HEFCE has been subsumed by the Office for Students (OfS), up until July 2019 funding for HE was still under the conditions in place since 1992 under HEFCE. For my research, because this focuses largely on the time period before the OfS, I refer to HEFCE as the funding body for this prescribed provision.

As we have seen, FECs with HE are highly complex institutions answerable to a range of different awarding bodies, with accountability to the funding bodies for FE and HE and have to successfully demonstrate adherence to the differing requirements of both Ofsted and the QAA. All these different demands require knowledge and time. As the majority of the qualifications, teaching and learning, quality and other administrative functions are for FE, the place of HE may seem shadowed. Phoenix (2018:39) refers to the broad remit of FE colleges as 'unfocussed' and goes as far as questioning the place of HE in colleges. This mixed-sector is viewed from contradictory perspectives. On the one hand, it is seen as adaptable and responsive, alternatively, this mixed economy setting works against a clear identity of what these colleges do (IoE,2012). For this research, from this point in, only prescribed provision reviewed by the QAA is considered. This mixed-economy setting with accountability to both Ofsted and the QAA is the characteristic context for the development and management of quality for HE in FE; there is little research on the impact of this complex environment on the quality models for HE in FE.

Consequences of HE and FE numbers, partnerships, teaching and culture

With few exceptions, compared to the size of the FE provision in a college, the HE provision is usually in the minority (King et al.,2013). In 2014-2015, HE student numbers ranged from fewer than 100 HE students in a college (15 in the lowest reported case) to well over 3 000 (HEFCE,2017). In most cases, this only represents around 10% of the total institutional provision (King et al.,2013). Even in a college with relatively high numbers of around 3 000 HE students, in proportion to the student numbers in the institution of around 16 000 students, this is still only 19% of the overall student population (QAA,2015c). The size of the HE in FE provision has been linked to the success of reviews when colleges with more than 300 HE students performed better than those with fewer students (QAA,2016a). Where there were very low numbers, the HE experience of those studying on these programmes was in question (QAA,2011). Still, some colleges claimed that their HE students benefit from small group sizes (FETL,2018). Others proposed this small group setting, with greater access to teachers, could be more suited to those who may be from a deprived background or that this supportive ambience may compensate for the more limited resources available (Parry et al.,2012). On the contrary, others maintained that having such small groups is akin to 'spoon-feeding' (Bathmaker et al.,2008); similarly, that these smaller settings for learning could mean fewer opportunities to learn from others (Parry et al.,2012).

The size of the HE provision has been proffered as a potential indicator for the organisational differentiation of college HE management (QAA,2011). For the Mixed Economy Group (MEG), a critical number of over 900 HE full-time students was the number required for separating the HE provision from FE (King et al.,2010). However, for Parry et al. (2012), the evidence was inconclusive finding that size was not a consistent predictor as some colleges did separate off their HE provision and others did not, for reasons not necessarily related to the size of provision, like the college history or the subjects taught and the related

requirements, and student choice. There are then, other factors involved in differentiating HE from FE. These authors found that in most cases the HE provision was not separate from the FE provision though there were designated spaces for HE students. What is brought to light in the above passages is the proportionally much smaller HE provisions in these complex institutions when compared to FE, with smaller teaching groups that may, or may not, be seen as beneficial. These small numbers lead to speculation on the capacity to focus on the HE provision and how such a small provision can be sustained effectively.

The number of university partnerships varies considerably from one to eight, though most had one or two only (Parry et al.,2012). According to Parry et al. (2012), partnership arrangements were not always straight forward and when there were many partner universities, this required a considerable time commitment from senior managers to administer these. Some colleges preferred not to focus on one particular university partner only in order to mitigate potential risks of a change in policy, with that partner no longer wishing to maintain the partnership. Or, as envisaged in the Dearing Review (1997), some colleges had to look at a wider field to fit with their own curriculum needs that may not have been available at the nearest partner. Davies and Simmons (2012) claimed that having a higher number of university partners had a positive impact on the quality of college HE, as demonstrated by the good practice noted in IQER review reports. These findings were thought to be linked to the sharing of good practice with partner universities, together with greater exposure to HE policies and practices. Training days, for example, were offered by universities to support assessment practices in the HE context (QAA,2014b). In considering partnerships, the funding arrangements also influenced resource availability. For many franchised programmes, students benefit from HEI resources, the LRC, for example, whereas for a directly funded course, the college has to rely on college resources (Parry et al.,2012). Yet, there were cases when despite having access to university resources, the students did not go to the university to profit from these. Notwithstanding the beneficial aspects of partnerships, the administrative commitment and the regulatory demands, especially with several partners, and the choice of the funding relationship with the partners were all important considerations. The degree to which these factors were taken into account before taking on HE is unknown and may have been under-considered.

Colleges are primarily teaching institutions (AoC,2012). In addition to the high numbers of contractual teaching hours, throughout any one day, teachers may have to deliver classes ranging from level 3 or below to perhaps levels 4 or 5 (Simmons and Lea,2013). The allocation of adequate time for staff to prepare their teaching activities for this higher level has been in question for some time (King et al.,2010; King and Widdowson,2012). Although not the focus of my research, teaching in a predominantly FE environment in dual HE and FE roles brings the very nature of this teaching and the hybrid identity of those teaching in this environment into the debate (Turner et al.,2009). Questions around scholarship also exist due to the

different approaches to scholarship in the college HE context when compared to the more traditional research approach seen in universities (AoC,2012; Turner et al.,2009). As for the insufficient preparation time for HE teaching, the allocation of sufficient time for scholarly activity to support the delivery of HE is also under debate (King and Widdowson,2012; King et al.,2014; Feather,2017). Teaching in this environment, as Turner et al. (2009) suggest, generates few opportunities for staff to meet either with other HE staff across the institution or at the university, leading to a degree of isolation in their HE in FE environment; this isolation, in turn, may influence their identity. Although earlier, training and experiencing HE practice was seen as good practice in review reports, the time to engage with HE practices and with partner universities, may in reality, be restricted.

Together with FE overshadowing college HE in terms of numbers, Simmons and Lea (2013) contend that the predominance of an FE culture consequently, makes it difficult to establish an HE culture. FE is a sector judged primarily against retention and achievement benchmarks with subsequential management practices focusing on obtaining results (Lea and Simmons,2012). The managerialist approaches in FE of performance management and a culture of compliance have been recognised as a deeply embedded characteristic of this setting (Lea and Simmons,2012; Gleeson et al.,2015). This culture is not unique to colleges. Deem (1998) and Shepherd (2018) recognised the rising managerialism in universities with the increased need to justify public spending or the increased use of performance indicators. Unlike the university and given the predominance of the FE culture in colleges, Eaton et al. (2015:5) suggest that carving out 'HE-ness' in colleges is challenging and furthermore, may rely on the enthusiastic approach of a sole influential charismatic HE leader in the college.

Economic downturn, competition and mergers

As well as a distinctively complex internal environment, externally generated destabilising events have marked the college sector. During a House of Commons debate Daniel Zeichner (HC Deb,21 January 2019) expressed the view that colleges have had to face what is now nearly 10 years of economic downturn, with funding cuts of up to 30%. For Camden (2019), these funding cuts have led to reductions in staff, pay and provision and cuts in resources such as space, together with increased teaching loads. These economic and financial pressures impacting on the core FE business of a college have subsequential ramifications for the minority HE business of the institution (King et al.,2010).

Alongside this difficult economic environment, in 2016, as set out in the White Paper: Success as a Knowledge Economy (BIS,2016a), the Government had reinforced the idea of market competition amongst HE providers. The idea of a more competitive market with the expectation of more students entering HE overall, including more students for HE in FE and other new providers of HE, was already prominent in the earlier Government White Paper: Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the system (BIS,2011). Before

2011, the number of new undergraduates recruited annually by providers was limited or capped by the Government (Hillman,2014). To allow more students to enter the market, in 2011 the Government had started the process of removing the student number cap, with full removal of these limits by 2015 (BIS, 2016a; Hubble and Bolton,2018). At the same time, in 2011, student fee-paying loans were introduced (BIS,2011)²³. With more students and a greater diversity of providers permitted to offer HE programmes enabling a greater choice of where to study, this created the competitive market that the Government wanted (ibid,2011). The removal of regulatory barriers intended to bring about a more level playing field for all types of institutions that taught HE (ibid,2011). The resulting competition was seen as a pivotal means of driving up quality and ensuring value for money, allowing those providers with more demand to expand (HM Treasury,2013; NAO,2017). With this, colleges were increasingly seen as competitor providers of HE, competing with the universities in their localities (MEG and 157 Group,2012). The Higher Education and Research Act of 2017, saw the introduction of further market reforms with a new regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), whose remit included a focus on competition and student choice. Overall, greater competition between providers of HE did result from all of this, but there was little evidence that this competition has, or will, improve the quality of HE (NAO,2017; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts,2018). The competition for student numbers with the universities was and still is a concern for some colleges (Widdowson and King,2017). As considered earlier, from the perspective of HE in colleges, the vision of a level playing field is questionable.

As well as the economic environment and the increased competition, the Government brought about the post-16 area review programme that asked colleges to consider their futures and contemplate mergers (AoC,2019a). These mergers were intended to move towards having fewer, more efficient and more resilient providers (Foster,2018). During 2017 alone, there were 30 mergers of 61 colleges and some of those colleges had already undergone mergers before this new review programme. By the end of 2018, this number had increased to 43 college mergers, involving 90 colleges (AoC,2019b). These mergers involve complex organisational changes and recognising this, HEFCE published guidance to ensure that colleges considered any subsequent impact on their HE provision such as funding, student support, and some aspects of quality assurance (HEFCE,2016). To date, there has been little research into the consequences of these mergers on the HE provision or the quality of this provision, in these providers.

²³ Student fee loans or deferred fees, were introduced in 2006-2007 and following the 2010 Browne Review, the tuition fee upper limit was increased, student fee loans reviewed and the HEFCE block grant which included the teaching grant was reduced (Hubble and Bolton,2018).

During this same period and linked to the significant changes outlined in the previous paragraphs, there were further demands that colleges with already stretched resources were to embrace. These included consumer law and the Competitions and Market Authority (CMA), and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) introduced in 2015 and 2016 respectively. Both CMA and the TEF, aimed for better information to support students when making choices for their future study (CMA,2015; DfE, 2016a; OfS,2020). Besides this, the TEF aimed for better value for students by improving the quality of the teaching, which in turn, was to improve graduate outcomes (DfE,2016a). Holders of a TEF badge of excellence were allowed to raise their fees in line with inflation. Whilst some saw TEF as more of a marketing activity, others saw the increased focus on the student experience as both worthwhile and positive (O’Leary et al.,2019). From a college perspective, there were a number of reservations about TEF. The smaller groups sizes when numbers were below the required threshold for results publication or when the students on one-year qualifications, such as the higher nationals, were out of scope for TEF, meant that data sets for TEF were often incomplete (AoC,2019c). Boyd (2017) even suggested bias in the TEF towards larger institutions. Engagement with the TEF was also problematic in colleges as the time and resources required to engage with TEF were limited, so TEF was largely compiled by a small number of senior staff, sometimes only the HE lead, with little support from across the institution (AoC,2019c).

Summary of key points from Part 1.

The development of HE in FE, its purpose and its characteristics present a highly complex setting for quality. Some of these characteristics are summarised below.

College HE:

- was developed, from and within, an FE setting
- is aimed at local, non-traditional, mature or part-time students
- is seen as vocational-technical
- has institutional accountability to the QAA and Ofsted
- has accountability to the different regulatory funding bodies
- has different funding arrangements with HE awarding bodies
- has many awarding bodies for HE and FE, sometimes several awarding bodies for HE
- is dependent on working in partnerships with the universities with their requirements
- supports teaching at many levels and across different qualifications, and across FE and HE
- has to withstand external pressures: economic, mergers, competition and sector changes
- has to contend with different cultures and understandings HE and FE
- has an uncertain capacity, space and time for HE
- has low HE numbers relative to FE leading to the consequences of these comparatively small numbers
- has difficulties in growing HE

Of the research evidenced, for example, the research on the size of the HE provision as an indicator for separating HE from the FE provision, or the influence of the number of university partners and the amount of good practice seen in review reports, the approach to finding out more about HE in FE was quantitative and positivist. While in itself, this is of value, with so many interconnected factors, and with the evident complexity of HE in FE, researching separate variables can only result in a fragment of the complex picture of HE in FE. Overall, there is little research for HE in FE (Parry and Thompson,2002). In particular very little research was seen on the other factors seen above. Given this complex and uncertain setting, quality systems and processes would seem to be essential to allow reflection on, and potentially improve, the quality of the student experience in HE in FE. The following section considers what is known about the quality of HE in FE and the development of its quality mechanisms for HE.

Part 2. The quality of HE in FE and the development of its quality processes

Development of quality for HE in FE

As outlined earlier, with the emphasis on growth and diversification of HE from 1988 and again in 1997, there were concerns about how quality was to be assured in this expanding sector, bringing about a focus on quality and quality systems (Green,1994; Harvey,2005; Hillman,2014; University Alliance,2014; ESG,2015; Jackson and Bohrer,2010).

By the 1990s, quality mechanisms were already in place in the universities, and these were

<p>External quality monitoring: audits, assessments, accreditation and external examining.</p> <p>Internal quality processes: annual module or programme reports, reports on research activity and publication, periodic programme revalidation, departmental or faculty review, internal teaching assessments, internal audits, facilitating and responding to student feedback, individual performance review, staff development procedures.</p>
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Figure 6. Quality processes in universities by the mid-90s Harvey (2005).

brought into focus more at this time, for the reasons mentioned above (Ellis,2019; Harvey,2005). Some of those quality processes are seen in Figure 6, as listed by Harvey (2005). The statutory role of the new funding council HEFCE established in 1992, was to assess the quality of the HE it funded and to distribute public funds fairly (Further and Higher Education Act 1992). Then in 1997, the newly formed QAA was contracted by HEFCE^{24 25} to carry out reviews as an independent body, acting independently both to the sector and to the Government, in an advisory capacity, advising on standards and quality in UK HE (HEPI,2013; HEFCE,2010). More specifically, the QAA²⁶ was to safeguard standards and promote continuous improvement in the quality of HE and identify and disseminate good practice; but the responsibility for quality and the setting of academic standards lay with the institutions themselves (Dearing,1997; Jackson

²⁴ HEFCE was replaced by the OfS in April 2018.

²⁵ The statutory role of HEFCE set in 1992 was to assess the quality of the HE it funded and to distribute public funds fairly (Further and Higher Education Act 1992).

²⁶ The QAA took over the role of the CNAAs and the HECQs of the universities.

and Bohrer,2010). As set out in Chapter One, the QAA developed the Academic Infrastructure, a framework for quality to guide providers on what was required to meet the expectations of this framework, and with this, subsequently meet the requirements of the external funding body. This national quality framework ²⁷ was established by consultation with the sector, and these reference points for quality and thresholds were agreed by ‘consensus by the academic community’ (Jackson and Bohrer,2010:97). All HE providers were to follow this framework, though it was up to each provider to decide how it would meet its requirements. That is, no formal central approach to quality and quality management was required or imposed by the QAA, and each institution could devise its own processes. Equally, this meant that each institution was responsible for the mechanisms they developed to uphold the quality of the education they provided (Universities UK,2008; HEFCE,2010; Jackson and Bohrer;2010). With this framework in place, all institutions were to have quality systems and self-regulatory processes that were to be assessed both externally and self-assessed internally (Brown,2004). At the same time, the QAA also introduced a Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) to align qualification standards and Subject Benchmark Statements, both of which were to be used as reference points when writing qualifications (QAA,2008a; Griffith,2014). This was the first time there was a more formal overarching national approach to the quality of HE. As seen in Chapter One, colleges were also expected to uphold this framework, though the awarding bodies were ultimately responsible for the quality and standards of their awards (QAA,2010²⁸; QAA,2018a²⁹).

There were some criticisms about the reviews carried out as this new framework mainly looked at the self-regulatory processes of the providers and the attainment of threshold standards (Science and Technology Committee,2012). That is, there was no way of assessing above threshold quality, with concerns of not being able to drive up quality beyond this, and no way of comparing, for example, the standard of first-class honours awards across the various institutions (Science and Technology Committee,2012; Jackson and Boher,2010). The emphasis on process and lack of focus on improving learning and teaching was another criticism (Harvey,2005). Nevertheless, others valued this external evaluation as an opportunity to assess where they were in terms of the different aspects of quality activities (Brennan,2012). Quality and its processes were now high profile in the day-to-day functioning of HEIs with a more consistent approach to quality practices due to the overarching quality frameworks. Literature about quality practices focused on HE in universities with little knowledge of what was going on in FECs. Still, with an overarching national body for quality that included all HE, including colleges, comparability across the HE sector as a whole was now possible. An overview of review findings is seen below with a summary of findings in Figure 7, p.38.

²⁷ The Academic Infrastructure was the first national framework, replaced by the Quality Code in 2012.

²⁸ If a partner organisation is going to be directly involved in the delivery and/or assessment of learning, awarding institutions will need to assess the ability of the prospective partner organisation to manage processes for quality assurance in HE and to meet the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure.

²⁹ Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for assuring themselves that the Expectations of the Quality Code are met and that its Indicators of sound practice have been considered by those directly delivering or supporting learning opportunities.

College HE and external reviews

Subject Review had been in progress since 1993, with FECs included in the review process from 2000 (QAA,2003). This review for both universities and colleges included all programmes, at all levels, within designated subject areas of an institution. HNCs were included from 1999 when HEFCE took over the funding for these. Findings indicated that HE was of high quality across the sector, including in colleges where 97% of colleges were approved, at the first go. There were concerns for the degree of commitment and understanding of quality processes in the colleges at the subject level and for the management of processes such as annual monitoring or external examining procedures at an institutional level. However, it was recognised that colleges had not benefited from institutional level reviews of their HE quality assurance systems before this. Aspects of teaching and assessment, such as the inconsistent use of learning outcomes were also of concern (QAA,2003; HEFCE,2003b).

With the anticipation of the growth of HE in colleges, HEFCE³⁰ development funds³¹ were allocated to FECs to 'raise the quality and standards of HE learning and teaching within FECs' and to 'ensure that the student experience in colleges was comparable to that of universities' (HEFCE,2003b:3; HEFCE,2000). Colleges had mixed views on what to do. In some cases, university partners worked with FECs to replicate their quality systems. Some colleges considered that separate quality systems for HE were essential, whereas others used adapted FE systems, and some just used the same quality systems that were in place for their FE provision (HEFCE,2003a: HEFCE,2003b). Having separate HE systems did not necessarily result in higher QAA scores which left some uncertainty about what was required (HEFCE,2003b).

Academic Review (2002–2007) was another subject-based review, this time for college directly funded HE and consortium provision (QAA,2008b). 57% of the programmes seen were HNC and HNDs, 32% honours degrees, 9% foundation degrees and a small number of postgraduate programmes. 94% of colleges had successful review outcomes. For colleges, engagement with the Academic Infrastructure to inform delivery improved throughout the review cycle with a substantial amount of good practice seen. There was scope for improving annual review and monitoring and some concern over the informality of quality procedures, though some good practice for these aspects was also in evidence. Assessment practices, from assessment design to marking and feedback of the work, the monitoring of assessment processes and assessment policies required development and enhancement. Assessment consequently became a point of focus for

³⁰ Whilst the remit for HEFCE was set by the Secretary of State for the Government Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) ³⁰department, HEFCE was not a part of any government department (HEFCE,2013). This independent approach was aimed at supporting higher education providers in maintaining autonomy for the quality of the education they provided, whereby the responsibility for quality mechanism in place to uphold this quality lay within the institutions (HEFCE,2010).

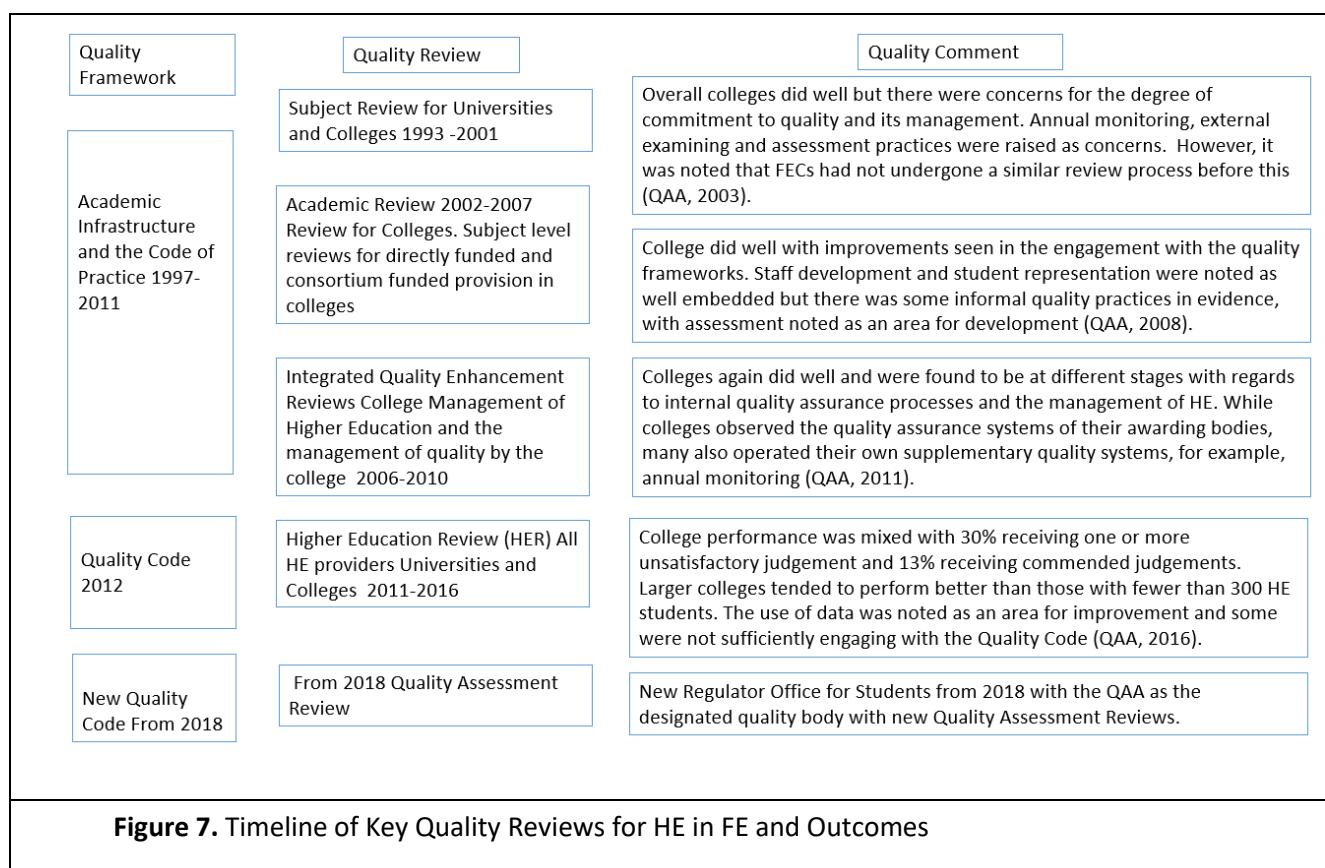
³¹ The HE in FE Development Fund was allocated to all FECs with over 100 HEFCE funded full-time equivalent students (FTEs) and consortia, for the period 1999-2000 to 2001-02. A further £18.5 million was approved for 2001-02 to 2003-04 (HEFCE,2003b)

the next set of reviews. Notably, any learning from these programme level reviews was rarely disseminated to other HE provision across a college (HEFCE,2006). Whilst successful at both Subject and Academic Review, attention was drawn to the uncertain quality mechanisms and assessment practices in some colleges. One reason for this was a lack of time for staff to undertake HE-related development activities (QAA,2008b). There may have been many other reasons for this and with small numbers of HE students, priorities may have been elsewhere. What is notable is the high success of FECs yet modest engagement with quality practices, including assessment practices in some colleges.

Integrated Quality Enhancement Review (IQER)³² from 2006 to 2010 was to look at how colleges managed the quality and standards of all of the HE provision across the institution rather than uniquely at the subject level, as with previous reviews (HEFCE,2006). Before the Summative Review, each college underwent a developmental period that aimed to support colleges in developing capacity for the management of quality for their HE provision (ibid,2006). This two-step review process was to encourage colleges to take on more responsibility for the management of their HE provision and its quality rather than rely on partner university processes; though, some universities viewed this as discordant with their own responsibilities (HEFCE,2007). Many colleges regarded this review in a positive light, as a means of raising the profile of HE within the college and as a way of bringing about change (QAA,2007). By the Summative Reviews, some colleges had developed HE management structures and committees (QAA,2011). Notably, there were no common management structures leading to a 'substantial variety in roles, systems and arrangements' (ibid,2011:3). Colleges were at different stages in the development of their internal quality processes, and some had now developed their own quality systems such as quality monitoring systems that were supplementary to those of the partner universities. Despite these developments in colleges, effective working with the awarding bodies was still seen to be 'crucial' (ibid,2011:2).

Some awarding partners were initially concerned about their reputation should the outcome of IQER be poor (QAA,2007). Still, colleges were seen to perform well in the IQER Summative period, and by end of the IQER period 2008 to 2011, of 165 Summative Reviews, only three colleges received limited or no confidence judgements (Parry et al.,2012). This was a very positive outcome for colleges, and whilst this review was not making judgements about the awarding bodies, these positive review outcomes for the colleges reflected well on the partner university, and to some extent, justified and strengthened the partnership (Dishman et al.,2010; QAA,2007).

³² (IQER) is defined in the current Handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review as 'an evidence-based peer review of a college's management of the student learning experience and performance of its responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of its higher education provision' (QAA,2011).



Higher Education Reviews (HER) took place between 2011 and 2016 for all HE provision³³. For colleges, the purpose was to investigate the HE provided and to make judgements on whether the academic standards and quality of this HE met the UK expectations of the Quality Code³⁴ (QAA,2014a). Colleges were to demonstrate how they upheld their responsibilities for maintaining the academic standards of their awarding bodies, as well as demonstrating the quality of learning opportunities, information and the enhancement of these learning opportunities for the HE provision as a whole (ibid,2014). How colleges managed their HE provision to uphold academic standards and the quality of their higher education provision was the key focus of this review (AoC,2015). Many colleges did well in HER nevertheless, of the 168 colleges reviewed 30% received one or more unsatisfactory judgement (QAA,2016a). Colleges performing well made ‘extensive use of the Quality Code and recognise key differences from further education practice’; those not doing well tended to have ‘less awareness or engagement with the Quality Code’ (QAA,2016:10). Improvements recommended for colleges included, better use of data from annual monitoring to support learning and monitor performance, also to recognise that HE provision needed different management systems and a more strategic approach (QAA,2015b; QAA,2016a). For one college ‘a growing number of policies, procedures and regulations specific to higher education’ was thought to reflect the level of commitment of a college to its HE provision (QAA,2016b:7).

³³ The scope of HER was all HE programmes of study L4-7 of the FHEQ and HNC/Ds of the Qualifications and Credit Framework or National Credit Framework. Including integrated foundation years (QAA,2014a).

³⁴ This replaced the Academic Infrastructure.

As discussed previously, colleges with a larger HE provision or those differentiating HE practice from FE and the degree of engagement with the Quality Code were some of the factors given, that may have directly or indirectly contributed to colleges doing well in reviews. More generally, the approach to HE and its management was variable and it seemed that some colleges took considerable time to engage with the practices required to meet the quality frameworks, though reasons for this are unclear. HE is not the sole focus in colleges with a relatively small HE provision when compared to the FE provision and as seen in part one, many factors impinge on HE practice in FECs. As mentioned in this chapter, at the time of the intended growth of HE in FE little was known of this dual-sector setting for HE (Bathmaker et al.,2008). There had been little research into the feasibility of growing HE or how equipped colleges were to grow HE or how these institutions were to develop infrastructures for the quality of this HE. The setting for HE in FE is complex and HE, together with the quality mechanisms for HE, were to develop in an FE setting that had its own traditions and ways of being. Little was known of how colleges developed their approach to HE quality or the effectiveness of this approach given the changing and uncertain setting.

While knowledge of college HE exists and some of the quality activities are known, knowledge of the day-to-day workings of quality for HE and its management, and the effectiveness of this approach, remains uncertain. It is conceivable that the same factors presented in part one, including, for example, time, capacity, understanding, culture and partnerships, may also be important in influencing the development and effectiveness of quality management models in HE in FE. Added to these factors with a climate of mergers, competition, cutbacks and change, the sustainability of the quality models may be in doubt. Furthermore, there are certainly many other factors that have not been considered that would add to this complex view. The manifest gaps in knowledge emerging from this literature review were stated in chapter one. These gaps led to this inquiry that sought to bring to light real-world insights and new knowledge about quality practices for HE in FE institutions in the complex and changing context of HE in FE. As stated in Chapter One, quality activities may be considered essential. External reviews like those seen in this chapter are a snapshot. They bring attention to aspects of quality but not to the day-to-day workings of quality management models. This research intends to offer insights into the workings of these QMMs. Before this, it is necessary to define what quality means for my research and to explain the scope of this research as set out in the following passages.

Quality, purpose and defining quality for my research

In Chapter One and part one of Chapter Two, growth and diversification of HE were depicted as drivers of quality. That is, drivers for the establishment of quality systems and processes for the quality of HE: the quality of the teaching and learning and the educational experience of the student overall. There were in reality, many other drivers of quality such as value for money for the students, accountability for public funds, the socio-economic relevance of HE, widening participation, comparability and globalisation that all added to the concerns driving the need for quality practices (Harvey,2005). More recently, marketisation and students as consumers have become key quality drivers (Brennan,2012).

As seen in Chapter One and based on Brennan (2012), for this study, quality processes provide a means of reflecting on teaching and learning and the student experience³⁵ and with this, an increased possibility of bringing about improvements. On applying this to college HE, formalising quality activities for HE can then steer what to look for and reflect on, with frameworks, policies and procedures and monitoring and evaluation activities for HE that can raise awareness of areas for potential improvement; there are always improvements to make. Once more, although this may give an indication of what quality processes may be used for, it does not define quality.

In Chapter One, definitions of quality were seen that included, for example, how well teaching supports achievement or that quality is the result of a set of interrelated activities. None of the examples seen really tell us what quality is and since this research is about quality, reflection on what this may be and what this means for my research is appropriate. Barnett (1992) proposes that quality is a metaphor for the aims of HE, with each stakeholder making claims to their view of the value of quality and their views of how to assess it. In reality, there is no one definition of quality for HE (Barnett,1992; Blackmur,2010; Krause,2012). Many concepts of quality exist, including the idea of quality as something exclusive or elite, or meeting the required standards, its fitness for purpose, its effectiveness or whether it meets customer needs (Green,1994). Despite all these concepts and in a similar way to Barnett (1992), Green (1994) suggests that all of these concepts are difficult to define and what is meant by these terms for one stakeholder in one setting may change when used by another. Harvey (2005) argues that these concepts do not really define quality as they are too static and tied to an assessment of quality as defined by sets of criteria. Harvey and Green (1993), opt for a pragmatic approach to quality recognising that this may not always work as there may be a tendency to latch onto convenient measures. Nevertheless, for Harvey and Green (1993), rather than the concepts seen above, the notion of transformative change of the student is advanced. In agreement with the ideas of Barnett (2012), Brennan (2012), Harvey (2005) and Harvey and Green (1993) the essence of quality for HE could be linked to development, transformation and bringing about change and improvement, but these terms still do not define quality.

³⁵ Everything in the black box

Green (1994) sees quality as a value-laden term that gives a sense of how good or how worthwhile something is. In HE there are many value judgements of how good something is. To add to the comment on performance indicators seen in Chapter One, the National Student Survey (NSS) satisfaction data or class contact hours give more examples of judgements of how good an institution or course is (Gibbs,2012). Still, Gibbs questions the value of such dimensions as indicators of the quality of student learning. Looking at what could be measured, for example, contact hours, leads to a reductionist and fragmented approach to quality and whilst important, such an approach does not start to address the interrelationships of the student learning experience as a whole and what may lead to the development of a student and to a successful outcome (Woodhouse,2013; University Alliance,2014; Harvey,2005). With the many ways of viewing quality as illustrated above, defining quality is a complex problem. Krause (2012:287) uses the term 'wicked' first introduced by Rittel and Webber (1973) when referring to ill-defined and complex problems that may change sense according to the setting. These socially complex problems are characterised by having many interdependent elements with multiple possible viewpoints and much uncertainty (ibid,1012). Defining and demonstrating quality in HE is a 'wicked' problem. Despite the rising interest in quality and quality systems as outlined earlier, there is no one definition for this.

Defining quality is not straight forward with many possible ways of going about this. With no one definition, it is necessary to define quality and explain what is meant by quality management models for my research. As seen in part two, both colleges and universities underwent the same review, HER, and both college HE and the universities, are bound by the same quality frameworks for HE: the Quality Code and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. These reference points give an idea of what to aim for to demonstrate quality. Therefore, the definition of quality for my research reflects the outcome of the interdependent contributory activities and quality activities in place that demonstrate adherence to these frameworks in the HE in FE setting, to include activities relating to both quality and standards. The definition of quality and the scope and application of this for my research are stated in the following passages.

Definition of Quality

Quality is the result of all the activities that contribute to learning opportunities and the evaluation of these activities in the HE in FE setting.

Quality Management Models for HE in FE

These activities are inclusive of all the activities that contribute to learning opportunities³⁶ and the evaluation of these activities. These could be any number of activities from, for example, assignment writing or personal development planning, or the employment of well-qualified staff, to the provision of suitable learning resources. Then, the evaluation of these activities might occur through module evaluations, programme monitoring reports or external reviews, and so on. There are also the quality activities that a college engages with to have oversight of the quality of its higher education and make its own judgements of the college's HE provision. All these activities are what a college engages with to contribute to and demonstrate the quality of its higher education provision. These activities are not stand-alone but work together to constitute an overall quality model.

Factors that impact on any of these contributory elements may influence the resulting quality. As seen in Chapter One, quality activities are an avenue for reflection on aspects of the students' learning experience inclusive of everything inside the 'black box' (Barnett,1992). As set out in Figure 8 on p. 43 the scope of quality for my study includes the quality activities and the objects of the activities. As stated in Chapter One, other than what is seen in external review reports or QAA review analyses, published guidance for colleges when preparing for reviews, publications by college groups or surveys from within the sector there are gaps in knowledge about these models for quality management for HE in FE. In general, HE in FE is an under-researched area (Parry and Thompson,2002). Much less is known about how those working in these institutions perceive their quality models for HE or how these are perceived by those working in the universities. My research intends to find out more about these quality management models and why they exist in this way. Given the context seen in this literature review and the knowledge gaps, it was necessary to find out more about the development, effectiveness and sustainability of quality management models for HE in FE.

³⁶ For HER Colleges were to demonstrate how they upheld their responsibilities for maintaining the academic standards of their awarding bodies, as well as demonstrating the quality of learning opportunities, information and the enhancement of these learning opportunities for the college's higher education as a whole (HER,2014a). In my research I refer only to learning opportunities and activities that contribute to these, inclusive of information and enhancement activities.

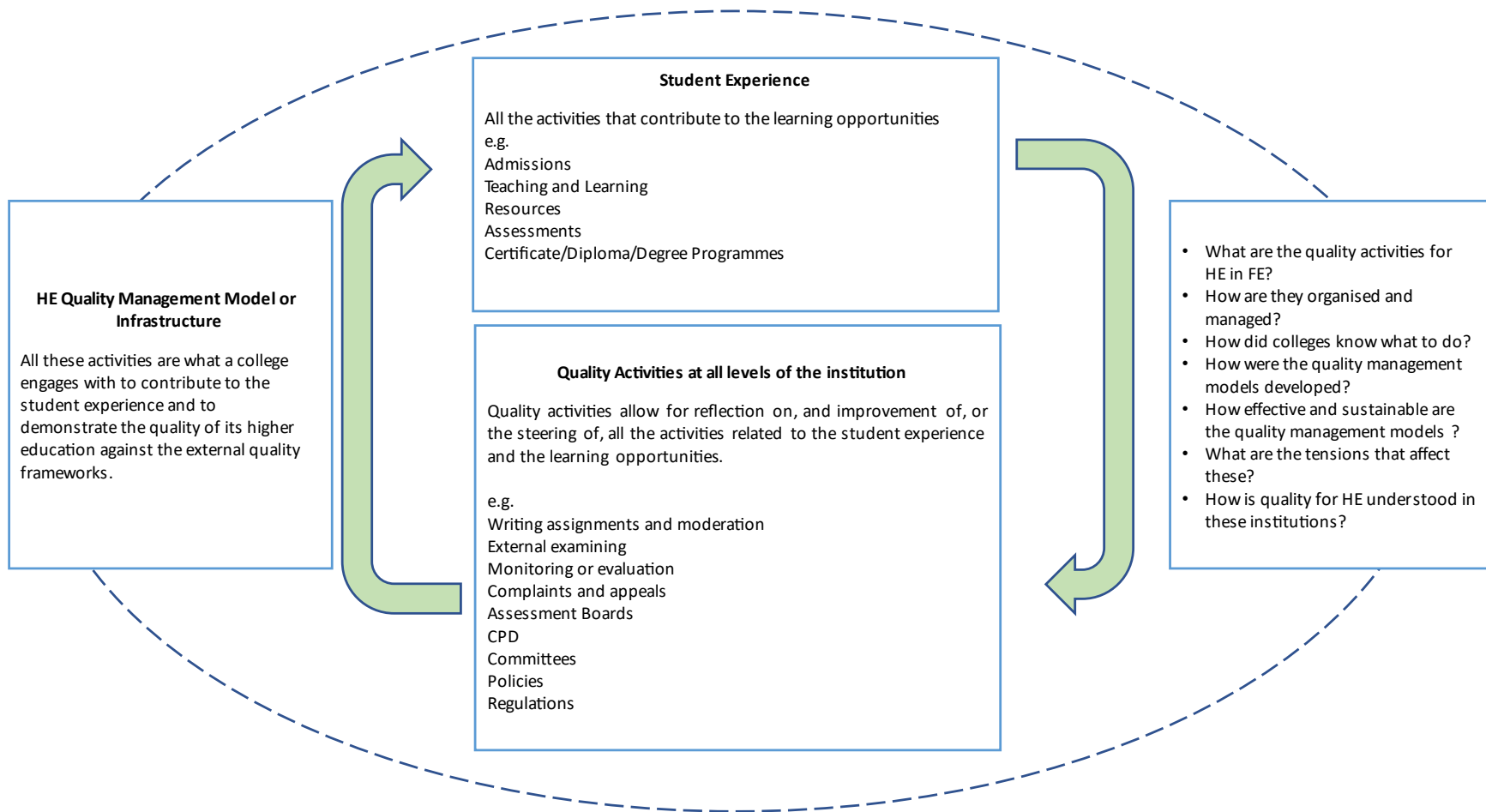


Figure 8. Summary of the scope of quality for this study and the questions to respond to the gaps in knowledge about quality management models HE in FE

To find out more, as stated in Chapter One and reiterated here, there was one main aim and several sub-aims:

Principal aim: To undertake a critical analysis of models for quality management and the understanding of quality for HE in FE institutions.

Sub-aims:

- To undertake a critical analysis of the development, effectiveness and sustainability of quality management models for HE in FE
- To analyse quality management models in this setting through the application of theoretical lenses illuminating different perceptions for the understanding of these quality concepts

Then, based on the analysis:

- To make recommendations for the development, effectiveness and sustainability of these quality frameworks for HE in FE
- To make recommendations for approaches to developing FE staff understanding of HE quality frameworks and models

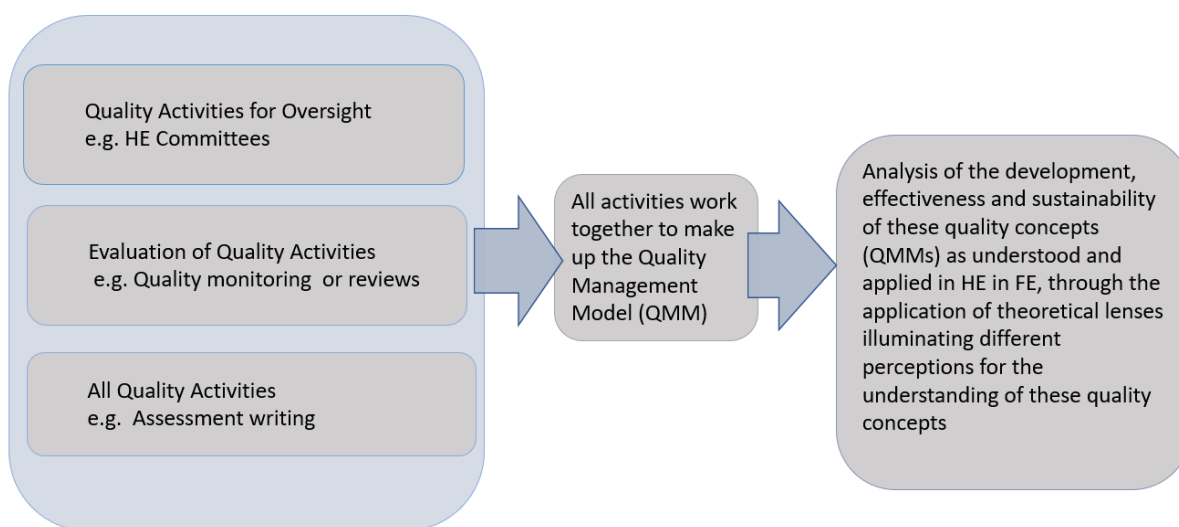


Figure 9. QMMs as concepts of quality and the critical analysis of these.

Summary remarks

This chapter has elaborated the complex and uncertain context of my study and substantiated the rationale and gaps in research about the construction and understanding of QMMs as outlined in Chapter One. The environment in which quality models for HE in FE were to develop, appears to be more and more challenging. What is known about the quality of HE and FE and the quality mechanism for this HE were presented, together with the meaning and scope of quality for my research. With this picture of emerging complexity, Chapter Three explores the theoretical concepts of complex adaptive systems (CAS), as a frame for the critical analysis of the development, feasibility and sustainability of QMMs for HE in FE in this changing and complex setting, as illustrated in Figure 9.

CHAPTER 3: Complex adaptive systems as a way of thinking about QMMs for HE in FE

As seen in Chapter Two, the setting for the development of quality management models (QMMs) is complex and uncertain. Indications from the literature review in Chapter Two also pointed toward the particularly complex nature of QMMs. At the outset, the concepts of organisational theory, as proposed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), had been identified for use in my research. However, as the data was gathered and findings started to emerge, the concepts of organisational theory (mimetic, coercive and normative behaviours) and the proposed mechanisms for organisational change, were seen as insufficient to account for the complexity of what I was finding. The emerging complex nature of HE in FE and its changing and unpredictable environment as a setting for the development of QMMs for HE, seemed to go beyond the scope of the concepts of organisational theory. My findings seemed to resonate more with the concepts of complex adaptive systems (CAS). In the following paragraphs, I explain the concepts of CAS and briefly relate these to the HE in FE context for QMMs. Exploring the theoretical concepts of CAS to illuminate complexity at this point seemed reasonable, both as an intermediary step between the complexity perceived up to now and as a basis on which to think about the emerging picture of QMMs in the chapters that follow.

Complexity v Reductionism

Whilst reductionist thinking may allow for the analysis of cause and effect, it does not lend itself to the complexities of HE in FE. Certainly, variables might be identified and manipulated against others, yet such an atomistic approach does not allow us to envisage how an organisational construction, as a whole, evolves and survives. For example, as seen in Chapter Two, one study correlated the number of university partners against the amount of good practice and recommendations seen in reviews (Davies and Simmons, 2012), yet this tells us nothing of the many other connected factors that may also have contributed to the practice seen. In favour of the interconnectedness of factors, Morin (2008) values complexity over reductionist thinking that focuses on phenomena that are isolated from their contextual environment. According to Johnson (2007), complexity occurs when objects³⁷ interact and then, without any central controlling mechanism, a new phenomenon emerges. Central to Johnson's complexity, the objects are all competing for some form of limited resources, for example, space (Johnson, 2007). To understand this complexity, Morin (2007) points out that it is necessary to gain knowledge of the parts and the whole, and how the parts and the whole mutually interact. Complexity results from complex adaptive systems in action (Johnson, 2007). In my research, I refer to complex adaptive systems as the frame for thinking about HE in FE and its quality models, both in terms of its parts and as a whole.

³⁷ These objects could be people.

For Holland (2014:25), complex adaptive systems are composed of many agents or parts that not only interact with other agents; they are also dependent on them. These agents learn to adapt as they respond to the interactions with the other agents. Due to this dependency and the consequential adaptations, complex adaptive systems result in emergent behaviour where the 'action of the whole is more than the sum of the parts'. The overall emergent behaviour of a complex adaptive system is always generated by the adaptive interactions of its agents (ibid,2014). These continuing adaptations lead to diversity. According to Waldrop (1993), these systems are complex self-organising adaptive systems that operate at the edge of chaos. These traits of adaptation, diversity and edge of chaos, lead to systems that are robust and able to persist in the face of external change, despite changes in the internal systems (Miller and Page,2007). The study of Complex adaptive systems (CAS) is a vast and growing field of knowledge spanning across many subject domains, so only the briefest non-exhaustive outline of CAS is permissible here. Even though the explanatory information seen in the following passage has been sourced from several fields of study, the founding concepts are generally applicable across all domains. Sometimes unavoidable overlaps in the following explanations are seen due to the nature of continuity and flow across the concepts (the concepts are in bold).

Characteristics of complex adaptive systems (CAS)³⁸

CAS are open systems connected to the environment. Systems can be nested within other systems, where the boundaries of any one system are permeable, allowing exchange between systems (Cilliers,1998; Cilliers,2001; Shayan,2019).

CAS are made up of many agents³⁹ that form networks in which these agents interact, respond and adapt (Holland,2014). For Holland (2014), this ability to learn or adapt is an essential characteristic of CAS. In a social CAS system, Miller and Page (2007:93) call these 'thoughtful' interacting agents. These thoughtful agents may receive information from the surrounding environment or other agents, adding to the information already possessed. This new information may be fully, partially, or not acted on, and the output may be influenced by factors such as timing or resources. Also, these agent interactions are local, so there may be no awareness of the behaviours or patterns of the system as a whole (Shayan,2019). These agent-to-agent interactions can also change over time (ibid,2019).

CAS agents act in non-linear ways. This means the resulting behaviour of the agents interacting is more than just a linear addition or subtraction of the parts where the 'whole is not just the sum of the parts' (Holland,2014: 25). This whole is the result of patterns that emerge at a higher level of the CAS due to interactions and selection pressures lower in the system (Levin,1998). Such behaviour could result in a food

³⁸ CAS could be a cell, organism, ecosystem, city, global banking system etc.

³⁹ An agent could refer to parts, elements, objects or people

web, for example, or a network of supply and demand (Holland,1992). It is difficult to predict future actions with this non-linear nature as small changes could rapidly build into more significant changes (Holland, 2005; Holland,2014; Turner and Baker,2019). These agent interactions also show what Levin (1998:433), refers to as 'path dependency' when, for example, early colonisers of an island interact and change the local environment for those that follow; the past lays the ground for the future.

CAS show a hierarchical structure where sets of interconnecting agents seen at one level become an agent at the next. For example, where many different proteins combine to become cells, cells group together to form tissues and so on (Holland,2014). Levin (1998) refers to 'aggregation and hierarchical assembly', not as the result of imposed behaviour, rather it emerges due to local interactions and 'endogenous pattern formation' (Levin,1998: 432). Here, similar elements may group together due to taxonomy, such as groups of species or similar. This aggregation behaviour, as seen previously, is not just a simple summing of the parts and occurs outside of any central control (Holland,2014). For Holland (2014), all the behaviour at all levels is generated by the interactions of the agents.

CAS agents show self-organisation and emergence. The aggregation of agents into a recognisable group is due to self-organisation (Levin,1998). There is no one governing central control. Instead, governance is distributed where the parts interact, each with their own local rules (Holland,1992). These rules may influence the action of other parts or the action of the system overall. Miller and Page (2007) maintain that CAS have simple rules. The emerging patterns or new behaviour of CAS, noted earlier, is called emergence. Miller and Page (2007:232) describe emergence where 'interactive agent systems take on behaviour that is qualitatively different from that of any individual agent'. The emergent behaviour may allow for anticipation of what may occur if they act in a certain way (Holland,1992). The ability to anticipate may be advantageous.

CAS show co-evolution. Lewontin (1977) cited in Levin (1998) distinguished two forms of evolution: selective that applies to the parts of systems and transformational that applies to the system as a whole. In Levin's (1998) interpretations for CAS, in one form of evolution, the local agents undergo selective pressures. On a larger scale, the evolution of the whole system may occur through transformational evolution, where self-organising aggregates re-shape the system, modifying the system as a whole. Miller and Page (2007) contend that co-evolution occurs incrementally, where at first, only small changes are seen. As the system adapts, the selection pressure may become greater, and this increasing degree of challenge could lead to rapid evolution and possibly transformational change. The degree to which the features of a system are determined by the self-organisation that arises from local evolutionary pressures, or the extent to which those local processes are then influenced by their effects on the environmental conditions of the ecosystem, are unknown (Levin,1998). Some agents may also evolve into specialised niches (Holland,2014; Miller and Page,2007).

CAS show diversity. For Shayan (2019), the more diverse the agents, the more adaptable and resilient a CAS becomes. Referring to ecosystems, Levin (1998) notes that this diversity at the species level is essential. The members of any one species making up a population have a slightly different genetic make-up where these differences lead to variation in the population. Many populations of different species make up the diversity in communities. Such diversity, genetic in this case, is seen as fundamental for the natural selection and adaptation that Levin (1998) sees as analogous to the processes seen in CAS. Levin (1998) argues that at the level of the species, some species are more important than others. Referring to the earlier work of Paine (1996), Levin (1998) calls these keystone species. Removal of these keystone species, or more often a small group of keystone species, may lead to substantial non-linear changes locally, even extinction.

CAS exist at the edge of chaos and are sub-optimal. Stable systems that cannot adapt or respond to their environment cannot survive, and neither can a system in chaos. The edge of chaos is the location of maximum variation and diversity (Shayan,2019). With the more or less continuous adaption, due to changing behaviour of other parts of the system, for Holland (1992), any resulting aggregate behaviour is sub-optimal. If optimal stability was reached, CAS could not survive.

CAS show feedback systems. CAS adapt over time due to both negative and positive feedback loops resulting from interactions between the system elements and between the elements and the environment (Holland,2014). The past can effectively shape current behaviour where this forward-looking information does not necessarily have to be acted on, or it could be acted on, leading to amplification or destabilisation behaviours (Shayan,2019; Holland,2014). There are several criticisms when using systems theories for understanding social systems. These criticisms are discussed in the concluding chapter. A summary of CAS concepts is seen in Figure 10.

Summary of CAS concepts.

- A CAS is an open system connected to its environment.
- CAS are made up of many interacting agents that adapt and respond to each other and to the environment.
- Interaction amongst CAS agents is non-linear, where the resulting output of the interactions is more than the sum of the parts.
- Agent interactions show path dependency.
- CAS show a hierarchical structure.
- Agents aggregate and interact resulting in new emergent behaviour of the CAS as a whole. There is no central hierarchical command for this self-organisation.
- Agents and the system as a whole can adapt and evolve.
- The more diversity there is in the system, the more resilient it is.
- Stable systems that cannot adapt or respond to their environment cannot survive, neither can a system in chaos.
- A CAS adapts over time due to both negative and positive feedback loops resulting from interactions between the system elements.

Figure 10. Summary of the concepts of complex adaptive systems

Complex adaptive systems and HE in FE

The literature review depicted the college HE setting and its wider environmental context as complex and subject to change. Complex adaptive systems such as economies, immune system and ecosystems, can reorganise internally and adapt to their surroundings (Holland,1992). College HE could be seen as a complex adaptive system where the HE system is subject to local internal and external environments to which it has to adapt. In general, as the HE provision within the college is in the minority, there may be internal competition for resources such as space, staff, time, finances and external competition for students, for example. Similar patterns may emerge across colleges, although each would have its own local identity and local history. Quality management models for HE were to emerge within this same college setting. Whilst this chapter has introduced CAS and points us in the direction of complexity, in Chapter Five, I return once more to CAS as a frame for thinking about QMMs and to gain a better understanding of how and why they exist in this way. Chapter Four now develops the methodology for this study that enables new knowledge about QMMs to come into view. The concepts of CAS bring to the fore the complex nature of a QMM, and as laid out in Chapter Four, these concepts relate to the theoretical framework of social constructionism that not only enables new knowledge to come to light but also acts as another view through which these complex QMMs can be envisaged.

CHAPTER 4: Research methods

Introduction

The principal aim of this study was to undertake the critical analysis of quality management models (QMMs) and the understanding of quality for HE in FE institutions. To respond to this aim and in accordance with Morin (2007), if QMMs were to be interpreted as CAS, it was necessary to find out more about the parts of these models and the emergent wholes. Then, and importantly for this study, it was necessary to find out more about how and why QMMs exist in this way. All of this would allow for consideration of the development, effectiveness and sustainability of QMMs that were to emerge through the complex setting for HE in FE, introduced in Chapter Two. In this chapter, I present the social theoretical framework that guides the choice of methods and enables new knowledge to come to light. This chapter also explains how the concepts of CAS, seen in Chapter Three, relate to this social frame. This is followed by the justification of a case study approach and reasons why interviews were the manifest source of data for this study, supplemented by documents. Finally, the methods for collecting and analysing the data, ethical considerations, positionality and credibility of the methods are set out, together with a discussion on the transferability of the findings. This leads to the critical analysis of the findings in Chapter Five.

As seen in the previous chapter, the concepts of CAS were to serve as a frame for critically thinking about QMMs when considering QMMs as CAS. However, a theoretical framework to define the nature of knowledge for this study and guide the research design was required. Byrne and Callaghan (2014) recognise the use of complexity as a framework of reference to make sense of findings and understand how systems came to be as they are, though argue that complexity should not be used to inform the design of the project. So, for this study, a social theoretical framework was necessary. For Miller and Page (2007:93), CAS are made up of 'thoughtful' interacting agents that I refer simply to as social agents. The interaction of these agents results in a whole system or CAS (Holland,2014). That is, CAS were not already there waiting to be inhabited, they were socially constructed, resulting from the interactions of the social agents. In a similar way in social constructionism, social constructs are derived from the shared meanings or shared understandings of those working in a local context (Gergen,2015). CAS could then be considered as social constructs, constructed through the interaction of social agents in a local context, in this case, the college HE in FE context. With this, social constructionism became the theoretical frame for this study as explained in the passages that follow. The potential for overlaps and similarities between this social theory and complexity as indicated by Byrne and Callaghan (2014), Gergen (2015), and Gilbert and Dilaver (2013), supported the use of these frameworks in my study. Drawing on this, for my study, social constructionism was to provide a framework that would allow an understanding and new knowledge of QMM to come to light. More than this, as this social approach would illuminate a different perspective of the findings from that found on applying the concepts of CAS. The purpose of using an overlapping systems approach and a social framework is clarified after finding out more about the nature of knowledge guiding this research and QMMs as social constructs.

Social Constructionism and the nature of the inquiry

As a starting point, one definition of social constructionism is seen here with its broader assumptions developed in the paragraphs that follow:

A perspective which sees the social world and its associated meaning as routinely produced and maintained through processes of social interaction and meaning-construction (SAGE Research Methods,2020 [Online]).

Although my research is fundamentally social, in social constructionism the meanings of the natural world are constructed in the same way as they are for the social world. For Crotty (1998), all meanings are constructed, that is, for both the social and natural worlds meanings are brought into existence through the social interactions of humans engaging with the world and interpreting it (Crotty,1998). This viewpoint of constructed meanings opposes the view whereby we come to know what there is by observing the world (Burr,2003). That is, as Gergen (2015) describes it, a view whereby we obtain knowledge of the world by observing it and after some rational thought then present an objective and neutral view of how the world is. As Burr (2003) contends, for the social constructionist there is no unbiased or objective view of the world as it is that can be revealed by observation, on the contrary, humans construct it amongst themselves. The following passages expand on the social nature and the principal assumptions of the social constructionist approach.

Crotty (1998), and Guba and Lincoln (1994), define ontology as the nature or form of reality. For Gergen (2015:35), social constructionists have shared assumptions or agreements about 'what there is'. The nature of reality for the social constructionist is then, based on shared assumptions or shared meanings and understandings. Essentially for the social constructionist, this means that 'what we take to be the truth about the world importantly depends on the social relationships of which we are a part' (Gergen,2015:3). Connected to this, epistemology considers the nature of knowing for which Crotty (1998:8) asks: 'how do we know what we know' or 'what is entailed in knowing'. Our social world is important in this, as Gergen (2015:13) asserts, 'as we confront our world our descriptions and explanations emerge from our existence in relationships'. It is through our relationships with others that we come to know things through language, for example, in dialogue or discourse. Then subsequently through our shared assumptions, we know 'what there is' (Gergen,2015:35). So again, what we take to be knowledge of the world, emerges out of shared understandings with others. For Crotty (1998:10) ontological and epistemological issues are closely entwined, so to 'talk of constructions of meaning is to talk of the construction of a meaningful reality'.

The following passages present the principal assumptions of the constructionist standpoint.

With this social view, meanings and meaningful realities are generated and constructed through relationships with others (Gergen and Gergen,2012). As Crotty (1998) emphasises, it does not matter

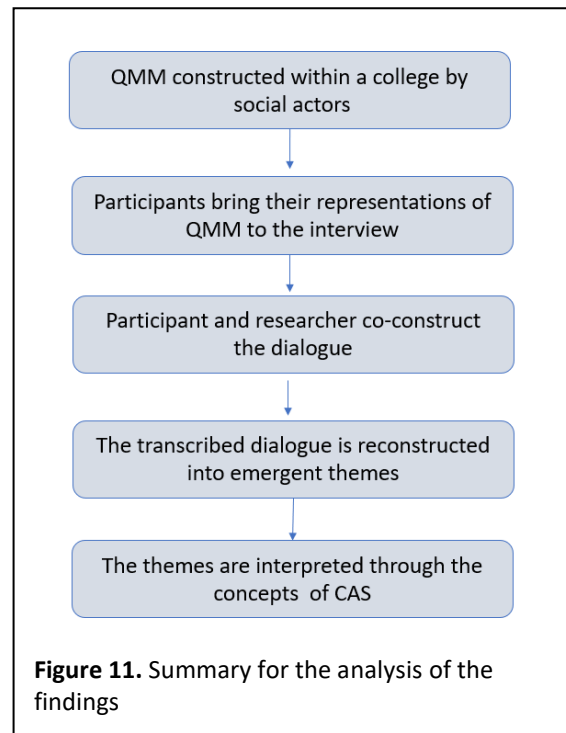
whether the object of the meaning is social or otherwise these meanings are always constructed socially. Importantly, these meanings are not newly invented, because the understandings of these meanings are shaped by the historical and cultural context in which they came about (Burr,2003; Gergen and Gergen,2003). For Crotty (1998), the influence of our culture and inherited understandings in shaping meaning is fundamental. Consequently, due to this contextual nature of meaning, as Burr (2003) reasons, an understanding or knowledge constructed in one culture may be different from that produced elsewhere. That is, there can be 'diverse ways of knowing' (Crotty,1998:64). This equally means that no one view can represent all views, as there are many possible viewpoints and constructions (Gergen,2015). Disciplinary bodies, for example, economics or medicine, each have their own bodies of constructed knowledge and conventions (Slater,2017). One contemporary example is the development of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, a set of reference points for HE 'developed in partnership with the higher education sector' (QAA,2017, [online]). Significantly, these reference points were constructed 'from the sector, for the sector, by the sector' (QAA,2018b, [online]). Adding to these examples, social constructionism is itself a constructed vocabulary and way of thinking (Gergen,2015). These constructed views are not set in stone and may be reinterpreted and change over time (Gergen and Gergen,2003). That suggests that what is important is the sense that we make of things at the time (Crotty,1998). Significantly, what comes out of this is the notion that all knowledge claims are constructed, our traditions and ways of life and we must be critical of knowledge and reflect on all claims of knowledge, as there are multiple possibilities (Gergen,2015).

Based on the understandings of the assumptions set out so far and to summarise: 'communities bring knowledge into existence' through their shared social circumstances, history and 'especially language' (Slater,2017:3). These shared understandings and traditions carry values of 'what we take to be knowledge of the world' (Gergen,2015:13). This is a different view to constructivism where Crotty (1998), and Gergen and Gergen (2008), distinguish this form of meaning-making as one that occurs within an individual's own mind, as opposed to meanings negotiated and constructed with others. Given this collaborative and local nature of communities, for my research, this implies that each institution may have its own practices, understandings and interpretations that are negotiated locally. It also implies that the HE and FE communities may have different understandings of QMMs, bringing with this, the question of how HE QMMs are understood in the FE setting? For my research, an interpretive approach aligns with social constructionism where for Crotty (1998: 67), this approach looks for 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social-life world'. Crotty (1998) opposes this view to a positivist value-free, detached and objective approach, that aims to find universal meanings. In my study QMMs are assumed to be social constructs with local and culturally relevant ties. As for Thomas (2016:52) there is no objective social world 'out there', as its meanings are constructed by social actors Thomas (2016:52). So, in a similar way, the meanings of QMMs are also constructed by social actors.

When applying constructionist concepts to an organisation, the organisation is constantly constructed and reconstructed by social actors (Bryman,2016). For Bryman (2016), to problematise research through objectivism would entail viewing the social world as external, and independent to the social actors, when, for example, the organisation and the culture or rules are pre-given. This assumes that there are external facts about the social world. To know this objective world would entail a positivist view and a 'quasi-experimental approach' (May,2011:9). In other words, a detached stance from the phenomenon under investigation, objectively examining cause and effect to produce generalisable results. For this form of organisational life this would suggest the social phenomena 'out there' such as an organisation and its rules and ways of working are considered as external facts where the 'social actors have no role in influencing it' (Bryman,2016:30). Constructionism on the other hand, 'invites the researcher to consider the ways in which social reality is an ongoing accomplishment of social actors rather than something external to them that totally contains them' (ibid,2016: 30).

According to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), researchers adhering to social constructionism might explore how meaning is constructed in their area of interest. To do this the researcher may ask participants to describe and relate their understanding of their socially constructed world by asking questions: What is there? How was this knowledge constructed? In responding and in describing 'what is there', we are relating how something is 'meaningfully constructed' and understood in a given community. (Crotty,1998:64). This means that on responding to the questions, the participant is not just relating what is there but more so, relating the meanings constructed in a given community. For (Guba and Lincoln 2005:167), it is these meaning-making activities that are of interest as the activities 'shape action'. According to Bryman (2016), there are layers of interpretation. The person or group encountered by the researcher interprets their social world, then this is reinterpreted by the researcher through a social framework, and through concepts, theory or literature related to the discipline. On applying this to my research to find out more about the QMMs, according to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), social constructionism points us to meaning-making methods that enable new knowledge to come to light by asking questions to participants about their understanding of the QMMs. So, for my research, interviews were used as the method to find out more, and how this method relates to social construction is seen later in this chapter.

Whilst the focus of the interviews was to learn about QMMs in each college, as Crotty (1998), Kvale and Brinkman (2009) contend, the findings are not just collected knowledge that mirrors what is there. To illustrate this an understanding of the socially constructed nature of the findings is proposed in Figure 11. As stated before, in this study QMMs are viewed as social constructs. In a college, many social actors contribute to the construction of the QMM. As for Bryman (2016), the person encountered by the researcher brings with them their interpretation of their social world. In applying this to my study, an interview participant from a college would bring their interpretation of their locally constructed QMM to



the interview. Then during an interview, the participant and interviewer interact⁴⁰ and co-construct the dialogue. The interviews are then transcribed, deconstructed and reconstructed into emergent themes. As for Bryman (2016), these findings are then interpreted by the researcher through a social framework or theory. As Morin (2008) argues, by interpreting these systems as CAS, for example, the observer or researcher, is part of the system itself, part of the construction, not independent of it. There are many layers of construction and interpretation involved. As we start to see layers of interpretation, this brings us back to a view of the world that is constructed and where in any community, the understanding and traditions reflect the layers of traditions and cultural meanings and ‘sedimentation’ of meanings that went before (Crotty,1998:59).

Parallels between CAS and Social constructionism

At the start of the chapter, I introduced how CAS, presented in Chapter Three, may be linked to social constructionism. Now, more is known of social constructionism, I return to this idea to enlarge on this relationship. Social constructionism not only points us to the methods to access new knowledge, this theoretical framework also provides a means for understanding real-world QMMs as social constructs. When QMMs are seen as social constructs, it is assumed that the meaning of these and how they are understood is generated through the interactions and perceptions of social actors (Crotty,1998; Bryman,2016). Through this same definition CAS may also be viewed as social constructs⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Each bringing with them their own culture and understandings of the systems of which they a part

⁴¹ When CAS are seen as social constructs, it is assumed that the meaning of these and how they are understood is generated through the interactions and perceptions of social agents.

To go further with this idea, this study views QMM as CAS, and both as social constructs. There are a number of parallels between the assumptions of social constructionism and the concepts of CAS, for example:

- both involve social interactions and interdependencies of social actors (Bryman,2016) or social agents in CAS (Miller and Page,2007)
- both are influenced by the local context and what went on before (Levin,1998; Slater,2017; Shayan,2019).
- both could result in many possible outcomes (Crotty,1998; Shayan,2019)
- neither are static and can change (Gergen and Gergen,2003; Holland,2014)

These parallels facilitate the interpretation of QMMs as socially constructed CAS. Through the assumptions of social constructionism an understanding of QMMs can be found and interpreting findings about QMMs through a narrative of CAS enables their complex nature to come to light. To align with Cilliers (1998), these QMMs are not just complicated systems made of the sum of the parts but complex systems with intricate interdependencies between the components and the environment, so much so that it is not possible to grasp the nature of whole just by analysing the parts. As we saw in Chapter Three, the use of CAS concepts supports envisioning QMMs as whole concepts.

Case Study Approach

Interpretive researchers try to see the world in its complexity and aim to look at the 'whole', the sum of the parts, rather than investigate the parts separately (Thomas,2016:47). For Thomas (2016), a case study approach lends itself to this whole approach and to exploring how or why something is the case leading to a rich understanding of what is going on. As for Bloomberg (2018:2), a case study can explore the case from multiple perspectives illustrating the richness and complexity of a particular social unit or system and allows for an understanding, insight and knowledge to inform, for example, professional practice or policy. Stake (2009) sees this social unit as a bounded system and the study centres on what happens within the boundaries and issues emerge within the case. For Stake (1995:2) the case is a 'complex functioning thing' that has 'a boundary and working parts'. In Yin's view, however, the boundary of a case is not clearly defined (Yin,2018). For Yin (2018), the case exists within its real-world context where the context is important to understanding the case. This intertwined context precludes an experimental approach where the context is separated from the phenomenon of interest, in controlled conditions. There are several formats for a case study and Thomas (2016) distinguishes three categories: exploratory, explanatory and evaluative. An exploratory study is where you want to know more of a situation where there is little knowledge. As Newby (2010:52) asserts, an exploratory case study might be used to 'throw light' on something to establish an understanding. An explanatory study offers reasons for what is happening and why, whilst an evaluative approach responds to whether something has changed or whether something worked (Thomas,2016). Whatever the approach taken, for Thomas (2016:10) the study focuses on the

'particularity' of the case rather than the 'general' and does not seek generalisable results. On the contrary, its attention to the local situation is what is important, not in how it represents other cases in general. This does not preclude others gaining insight from the findings as discussed on p.75. There are some drawbacks to using a case studies, as Stake (1995) points out, it is difficult to cover all the information needed for a case, and resources may be limiting. Finally, when choosing methods for use within the case there are many methods that could be used and for Thomas (2016) and Bloomberg (2018), an interpretive case study approach can draw on multiple methods of data collection. As Gergen (2015) contends, from the social constructionist perspective, there are no constraints for the methods to use, as the use of numbers and statistics or words, for example, are just different ways of seeing the world. This aligns with a case study approach.

In applying this to my study, QMMs for HE in FE in their complex settings constituted the overarching case. There was no intention of building a representative picture of these models for all colleges. Instead, the purpose of this case study approach was to enable a rich understanding of these complex models through a small number of real-world, knowledgeable actors who had tangible experiences of QMM, the processes, the people, the working relationships and their environments. The study covered the time frame from just before the IQERs that took place from 2006 to 2011, the HERs of 2011 to 2016, right up to the time of the interviews that took place in 2018. Each participant brought a different perspective of QMMs and the findings for each participant were considered as nested or sub-cases that were to contribute to the overarching case. These nested cases were seen as equivalent to CAS nested systems as applied to QMMs, as outlined in Chapters Three and Four. With little research on QMMs, my case study was principally exploratory and offered potential explanations for how and why these models exist in this way.

For this research, a QMM was regarded as a social construct, as the working social world of those setting up and working with these models in the HE in FE context. These models are not the result of the actions of individuals, rather they result from the interaction of many social actors working together in their environments, shaping their development and understandings. To make sense of QMMs, these models were viewed through the lens of social constructionism and the assumption they emerged as a result of a process of 'social interaction and meaning construction' (SAGE Research Methods,2020 [Online]). Methods were required that enabled access to knowledge not only about the constituting parts of QMMs but also to QMMs viewed as wholes and to explanations of how and why they exist as they do. That is methods that enabled access to the meaning-making as recounted by the social agents themselves. So, to this end, as for Bryman (2016), the emphasis and priority in this research was to understand this social world through the interpretation of the interview participants. This study does not look for a universal understanding as each institution has its own history and context, actors, processes and resources. The individual perspectives and the complementary perspective offered by the documentary evidence contributed to an overall emerging insight into QMMs for HE in FE.

Research methods- Interviews

For Kvale and Brinkman (2009:301) qualitative interviewing is an activity that produces knowledge through a meaning-making process, derived 'in and through conversation'. This constructed data is then reconstructed at later stages of the inquiry. This corresponds to the social constructionist interpretive approach of my study as illustrated on p.54. Aiming for more than a description of what there is, the use of interviews was to allow knowledge and insight into QMM to come to light together with explanations for how and why they exist in this way. To find out more, a predominantly qualitative approach using interviews had been envisaged for this study for the following reasons: A qualitative approach serves to unfold explanations for 'how and why' things happen, whereas a quantitative study yields data more adapted to respond to the questions of 'how much' or 'how many' (Anyan,2013). As Richards (2005:34) explains, if complex and context-bound data is reduced to numbers, there is a risk of 'losing understanding', and for this study an understanding of QMMs was important. Moreover, as Tierney and Dilley (2001:3) suggest, interviews can gather the information that other methods, such as survey or observation cannot, as more than a tool for data gathering, interviews are 'sites for discourse and social analysis'. In a similar way to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), for Tierney and Dilley (2001), not only can data be gathered about educational practice and identities, interviews can be the site of production of these practices and identities. Each encounter with a participant is unique and this allows the interviewer to know about what the other has to say about their experience of things (Nunukoosing,2005). Similarly, for Kvale (2007), interviews are a way of supporting a participant to unfold their perceptions or their understandings of their experiences and convey these to others. The researcher can then construct an in-depth understanding of these experiences that a more quantitative design would not allow for (Anyan,2013; Nisbet,2005). Furthermore, when comparing interviews to discovering information or facts in documents, interviews allow for facts to be discovered and more than this, as talking with people is a way of exploring these constructs with another, something that fact-finding in documents does not allow for (Kvale,1996).

Many forms of interviews exist, from unstructured or semi-structured to structured approaches, taking place one to one or in groups (Denzin and Lincoln,2005; Nunukoosing,2005). Structured interviews ask the same questions to each interviewee and in this approach the interviewee has limited scope to insert their own questions or ideas (Savin-Badin and Howell Major,2013). That might suit situations where there is already a good understanding of a situation or where new information is not required. The analysis of the data derived from a structured approach is straight forward as the data is already grouped into topics. On the other hand, in an unstructured interview, the interviewee has more control over what is recounted and when it is recounted (Burnard,1994). With this form of interview, it is more difficult to make comparisons across the participants. A third approach, a semi-structured approach, is good when there is only one opportunity to interview and makes the best use of the limited time available (Savin-Badin and Howell Major,2013). Semi-structured interviews allow for the possibility for an interviewee to ask their own

questions or add new information, though the interviewee cannot fully express their thoughts as they are limited by the agenda of the interviewer and their questions. As the interviewer has more control over what is discussed, comparisons across the participants are possible. For this study, as set-out on p.59, semi-structured interviews were chosen.

Designing the interview questions involves much thought. For Warren (2001) this process may start by reviewing the literature to see if the research would bring about new knowledge. Then, for a semi-structured interview, a sequence of themes and questions should be prepared whilst keeping in mind the possibility of changing the order or asking follow-up questions during the interview (Kvale,2007). Importantly, as for Woods (2011), to avoid misunderstandings or non-responses to the questions, prompts can be prepared and used where necessary, such as: Would you give me an example? Can you elaborate on that idea? Would you explain further? As Kelle (2006) points out, in an interview situation, if a question is not understood, it is always possible to rephrase the question or for the participant to change or improve on a response. Added to this, in an interview, participants may move away from the original questions, allowing new data to emerge (Warren,2001; Creswell,2007). Neither of these changes mentioned here would have been possible when using a quantitatively orientated survey. Overall, the questions and responses should result in a coherent narrative that is topically relevant (Gubrium and Holstein,2001). To start the interview, Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggest starting with basic and easy questions before moving to those requiring more reflection. Though, ideally, the interview should flow naturally based on the information provided by the respondents (Woods,2011). Even before the formal start of an interview, Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggest that preparing a script to begin the interview would be useful. This script may include introductions of those present with a description of how the interview is to proceed, with a similar script for exiting the interview. The order of interviews also needs consideration as in carrying out successive interviews the knowledge of the interviewer changes and this knowledge would be carried forward into the next interview (Nunokoosing,2005).

Deciding who to interview is crucial. So rather than probabilistic sampling, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) and Thomas (2016) advocate purposive sampling as a way of selecting information-rich cases for study by carefully selecting individuals who are likely to provide the best information. In a case study approach, such as this study, for Thomas (2016) the aim is not to find a sample to represent the population, but rather a choice or selection that can contribute to the focus of the research. When choosing the participants, other factors to consider are the accessibility of the participants and the setting and the choice of platform for the interview (Savin-Baden and Howell Major,2013). For Kuntz (2011), the setting for the interview is highly relevant, as staff make strong associations of what type of work is accomplished in different settings and in different spaces. For Kuntz (2011), the interview setting is more than just a neutral place more so, it is the place of daily practice and linked to cultural experiences. Similarly, for Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), the research site is critical, as it is more than the place where knowledge is

uncovered, as it is an integral part of the knowledge. The time required for the interviews and the timing for these are also significant factors (Sandelowski,1999; Savin-Baden and Howell Major,2013). For Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), the timing of the study may influence participant responses and therefore the findings. Time is a crucial factor, and this is considered further in the section on ethics on p.70. All these factors above, accessibility, setting and time, are linked to the choice of platforms for conducting the interviews. The choice is broad, ranging from over the telephone or email, instant messages, virtual environments to face to face (Savin-Baden and Howell Major,2013). How the interview is recorded is also important. To record the interview DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) note that digital recorders are effective. The recorded data is transcribed, and a recording can be listened to whilst reading the transcription to ensure accuracy. For DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), the recording is generally destroyed after transcription or analysis is complete. Other factors such as informing the participant about the study and many other factors to consider are examined in the ethics section on p.70.

Transcripts can be analysed using many methods, for example: using hard copies and highlighting the information of interest, making notes in the margin, cutting up the paper and organising cuttings into themes, or digital platforms such as spreadsheets or Word can be used to cut and paste units of information into themes or computer-based qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) can be used (Savin-Baden and Howell Major,2013). Notably, however, as for Bazeley and Jackson (2011), the use of the software does not remove the human element of making choices or interpreting (Bazeley and Jackson,2011). Whatever the platform of analysis chosen, as proposed by Burnard (1994) and Mostyn (1985), the text can be fragmented into meaningful segments where a meaningful unit is comprised of an idea or related set of ideas, or perceptions. Each meaning unit should stand alone, although it is likely to relate to the unit that precedes and follows it. These segments are labelled or coded and are then grouped into themes or categories where these groups have some meaningful link or pattern connecting them. For Burnard (1994:114), the themes might be categorised further into 'literal or descriptive' categories.

Application to the research-Method for interviews

The interviews aimed to find out more about QMMs and how and why they exist in this way. Although some of this information was found in documents, unlike documents, as Kvale (1996) claims, interviews allow for an exploration of constructs and an understanding of the lived world from the perspective of others. With little available literature, interviews were the manifest choice to find out more about the day-to-day experience of those working with QMMs in their local settings.

Types of interview and questions

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most suitable method for this project, although other methods were considered. Focus groups for interviewing were rejected because of the impracticality of trying to gather Directors or Heads of HE together. Besides this, a focus group may not have allowed for the perspective of the interviewees unique and in-context experience to be expressed fully. Unstructured interviews where the researcher may require spontaneous emergent responses were not used, this was due to the specific nature of the questions I wanted to ask, rather than having a unique focus on what the interviewee wanted to say. Also, a tightly structured approach was not suitable because I wanted to find out more about how and why QMMs came about with, in particular, local interpretations that were likely to go beyond the expectations of structured questions. Semi-structured interviews were the best approach for this study. Topics were pre-set, each with a small number of open-ended questions. Questions seeking structural and procedural information, as well as explanations or interpretations were formulated. The questions were primarily based on the literature, as well as on a small pilot study and observations from professional practice. The questions were refined further during the development of the literature review. All the questions were written in an open-ended way to avoid yes or no responses whilst ensuring they were sufficiently directed to encourage responses to the questions asked. There was the flexibility of asking more questions, adding prompts or explaining the questions. Importantly, this method enabled participants to volunteer information as participants could still deviate towards what might be of interest to them. Some limitation was seen as a good thing as the same questions were asked to each participant, with the initial objective of finding out responses to these questions asked.

Time and place

Interviews take up much time for preparation, travel, interview time, transcription and analysis. Most importantly, the availability of participants with extremely busy schedules had to be taken into account. Although tentative timings for the interviews were suggested, the final arrangements were for the participants to determine, to fit in with their schedules. On-site face to face, interviews, were chosen to allow the interviews to be carried out at the participant's workplace, the place where quality takes place. As for Kuntz (2011), the setting was considered highly significant. Holding the interviews at the participant's workplace was also regarded as the most suitable place for putting the participant at ease in their immediate and familiar surroundings. Face to face interviews would also allow for visual signs, regarded as important for communication, interpretation or explanations, facilitating the repeat of questions or further explanations or the acknowledgement of information received. Given this, all interviews were to take place in the usual workplace of the participants. The date of the interview and the time set aside and accessibility⁴² for the interview for both the participant and the interviewer, were agreed well in advance. Time was also factored in, to travel to the workplace of the interviewees.

⁴² Some participants worked across several sites so rooms or access to a site were necessary considerations.

Interview participants

Participants were selected by purposive sampling from both the HE in FE sector and from the university sector. In this research, the participants were selected from a particular group with knowledge specifications as set out as follows: all participants were to have been involved in the development of HE quality models and the embedding of these within an FE institution or to have extensive knowledge of working with collaborative partners. For college participants, these were members of staff with substantial knowledge of the working of quality in this sector, with oversight of whole college working of quality for HE in FE. For example, Directors or Heads of HE or other senior staff in similar roles. The participants from the university sector were to have substantial knowledge of quality in the HE in FE sector, giving a different perspective of QMMs for HE in FE. All participants were to have a good knowledge of recent developments of the HE sector at the time of the study. Participants were chosen to cover a range of colleges, in terms of numbers of HE students and a range of locations and therefore contexts. A number of potential participants were approached initially by email, with the expectation that some would not wish to participate and all participants, the University participants and the HE in FE participants were approached in the same way. Information about the research project was sent in the introductory email. Five interviews were secured, three from the HE in FE sector and two from the university sector.

The interview

Before the interview, each participant was informed of the research goals to ensure a clear understanding of what the research was about. Participants were asked to sign a consent form before the interview. At the start of the interview, participants were reminded of the scope of the research project and were reassured about the confidentiality and anonymity of the interview process. Introductory conversations consisted of clarifying the participant's role within their institution and asking how they became involved in HE in FE, as well as reassuring the participant that I was genuinely interested in their stories. One week before the interview, participants had been asked to prepare an outline diagram of the HE in FE quality model in their institution or for the participants from the universities, a diagram of a quality model from an HE in FE institution that they knew of or had worked with. The intention of this exercise was twofold. Firstly, this served to focus the participants' thoughts on quality models, structures and processes. Secondly, as recommended by Jacob and Furgerson (2012), this diagram served as a starting point around which the more basic structural questions could be asked. The more open questions asking how the quality models came about and their understanding of quality in this setting followed. When asking questions, time was purposefully given to allow the participant to reflect before responding. Where information was offered that was outside the scope of the set framework of questions, this was welcomed. The number of questions had been estimated to concord with the time allowed for the interview. At the end of the interview, the participant was thanked once more for their participation and reminded they would be sent the transcript to review it for accuracy. A digital recorder was used as the most practical option and one

where the recorded interview could easily be transferred to a laptop at the end of the interview. Recordings were kept securely throughout the project in password-protected digital folders. Interviews were carried out depending on the availability of the interviewee and any change in knowledge on going from one interview to the next was not seen as prohibitive. This was because of the semi-structured interview style where there were set questions to be asked and new knowledge at whatever stage of the project was seen as enriching to the project. Transcription took place as soon as possible after the interviews and all analysis took place once the participants had reviewed the transcriptions.

Application to the research – Method for the analysis of the interviews

NVivo was chosen as the QDAS⁴³ platform for analysis⁴⁴ and to house the anonymised transcripts with the coded materials. Having all the transcripts, codes and notes in one place made data retrieval and analysis more convenient. This did not negate the requirement to print and read the transcripts many times or to listen to the recordings again. Anonymised verbatim transcripts were preferred, as together with the audio recording this approach added insights into the conversations, for example, tone of a conversational point or length of time spent on a topic. Several stages of analysis were then undertaken:

Fragmenting: Each interview or case was analysed systematically line by line, or segment of text, simply by asking the question ‘what is this data telling me’ or ‘what is of interest here’. The text selected as ‘meaningful’ was highlighted and ‘dragged and dropped’ to form a case node. As far as possible, as for Burnard (1994), each node contained one ‘meaning unit’ only. Each node was given a title together with additional information in the description box if this was thought to be necessary. Memos or annotations were added when the information was thought to be pertinent. The interviews generated up to 184 nodes per interview and all nodes were recorded in codebook 1.

⁴³ QDAS Qualitative data analysis software.

⁴⁴ Studies show minimal differences in outcomes when using different QDAS platforms for the analysis of data (Evers, Silver, Mruck and Peeters, 2011).

Organising nodes into themes

The nodes and corresponding text highlighted in the transcripts were reviewed, and for each interview potential emergent themes were noted. These emergent themes from each interview were compared to establish one set of common emergent themes and sub-themes across all of the interviews. These themes formed the basis of the storyboard. The lists of nodes for each interview were reviewed and organised into the common themes, for example, the themes of Knowledge and understanding or external quality drivers. That involved revisiting the transcripts and nodes and occasionally amending the node title or re-constructing or re-interpreting meanings that were not apparent previously. Nodes were copied into more than one theme where relevant. On revisiting the transcripts, pertinent quotes were highlighted and copied into the codebook and any changes made to the nodes were recorded, forming codebook 2. This long process allowed me to become closer to the data. Once all the nodes were grouped into themes and once no further changes were made, a table of the themes, the broad definition of the themes, links to other themes, sub-themes and links to literature were established, resulting in a storyboard. An extract of codebook 2, the plan and storyboard are seen in the Appendices 7 and 8 on p.188 and p.185.

Summary of the method

1. Initial coding codebook 1
2. Emergent themes form common themes
3. Review of text and nodes and reorganisation of nodes into common themes
4. Update codebook 2 and formation of the storyboard
5. Extraction of themes
6. Draft write-up
7. Analysis through theoretical frameworks

Figure 12. Summary of the coding process

Extracting themes for writing up the findings

New folders were set up for the common themes and within each theme folder, folders were set up for each sub-case, for example, one for Beth, one for Jonathan etc. Corresponding nodes were re-organised into these folders. The relevant nodes for each participant were then aggregated and extracted with the text from the transcripts corresponding to the nodes, forming effectively, the draft notes to write-up for each theme. These notes were written up as an initial step. The next step was to re-analyse these themes through the concepts of complex adaptive systems and through the theoretical framework of social constructionism.

Research methods-Documents and the quality of the documents

Documents provide a way of gaining understandings and making sense of organisational practices (Coffey,2014). For Bryman (2016), they could be of interest to look at the culture of an organisation or to look at its preoccupations, but whilst it may seem appealing to view documents as a representation of what really happens, as social or organisational realities, documents are written for a purpose, to convey an impression. Minutes of meetings, for example, are written for a purpose and are to be read by others, and they may bring attention to some issues whilst omitting other things; they play a part, and they cannot just be a reflection of reality. Bryman (2016) and May (2011), consider documents as not a simple reflection of reality but as a constructed social reality and representing versions of events. The notion of documents as a socially constructed reality is also embraced by Coffey (2014:4), who takes documents to be versions of reality as social facts 'produced, shared and used in socially organised ways'. It is not only the document in itself that is of interest as the context in which the document is written is significant. For May (2011), what is recorded in a document is both informed by, and relates to the social context, for example, the environments: the social or economic situations and the social structures of which they are a part. This means that when we take documents into account, we must therefore be mindful of the nature of the document with its meanings constructed by social actors. Not only that, as for Slater (2017) and May (2011), we need to be aware of the local context and its culture and traditions. The document then is a representation of social reality meant for the context in which it was written. As Bryman (2016) suggests, if these documents are to tell us something about the underlying constructed reality, then other data is needed to provide an understanding of what these documents mean and the context in which they were written. Then, added to this, as we engage with the documents, we use our own understandings to interpret the meanings of these documents (May,2011).

Despite the official nature of documents, before analysis, according to Scott (1990), the quality of the documents should be assessed by asking the following questions: authenticity-is the evidence genuine and of dependable origin? Credibility- is the document free from error and distortion? Representativeness-is the evidence typical of its kind? Meaning-is the evidence clear and comprehensive? Once the quality of the documents is assessed, to analyse the documents, for Coffey (2014) both quantitative and qualitative approaches for document analysis are possible, from word frequency or coding data to identify themes, generate categories and identify patterns. From a social constructionist view, these methods are just different ways of looking and multiplicity is welcomed and no one approach is better than another (Gergen,2015).

Application to the research-HER Documents and the quality of the documents

The documents used were not generated with my research project in mind, so it was essential to connect the use of these documents to my study. In a holistic case study frame, a variety of methods can be used to contribute to the case (Thomas,2016). The HER documents contributed to the case study, as did the documents in the literature review that set out the context for the study. The focus of the HER documents was on the parts of a QMM, whereas the interviews aimed to look at the parts and the wholes and to gain an understanding of why these models exist as they do. For Yin (2018:115) the use of documents is to 'corroborate and augment evidence from other sources'. In line with Yin (2018), the documents used in my research aimed to complement and add to the findings from the interviews: to gain more details about the quality activities making up these models, and in turn contribute to the understanding of why the QMMs exist as they do. The use of the document data was not to triangulate and verify data from the interviews.

In considering the quality of the HER documents, HER reports are official public records of the outcomes of reviews undertaken by teams of QAA reviewers. These documents summarise the evidence presented during a review that enabled the review team to make judgements against the points of reference of the Quality Code. The reports are then constructed according to the conventions of the QAA. On applying Scott's (1990) criteria for authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. The documents were judged to be of suitable quality for the purpose of extracting quality activities. Even with this relatively simple purpose in mind, it is important to recall that these documents represent many layers of construction.

For Atkinson and Coffey (2004:58) documents are seen as 'social facts produced, shared and used in socially organised ways' and they 'construct particular kinds of representations according to their own conventions'. For my research, the documents contained information about the socially constructed quality activities and quality models as defined in Chapter Two. These activities were presented at the review, judged against the review criteria and reported according to the conventions of the QAA. As well as using the documents to extract quality activities, as for Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), these documents provided contextual information. With these layers of socially constructed meanings in mind, the documents permitted access to quality activities and contextual information about the QMMs, for example, the length of time a college had been running HE, the size of the HE provision or the number of university partners. As for May (2011), the meanings of these documents were then interpreted.

Method for HER reports: Extracting organising and analysing quality activities.

In my pilot project, five college HER reports from the review period 2013-2014 were scrutinised. As previously noted by the QAA (2011), there was a substantial variety of quality activities, together with an uncertain and variable approach to quality management. For this study, HER reports from the review

period 2013-2016 were selected using purposive sampling to cover a range of colleges with a range of HE student numbers and a range of university partners. The reports for the colleges represented in the interviews were included in the selection. For each HER report, all the quality activities were extracted and reported in a spreadsheet under the categories of programme, cross-college, university and external levels of activities. As more and more activities were extracted, these activities were re-organised into sub-categories as illustrated in Figure 13 (and Appendix 3 p.179). These sub-categories were then rearranged in a logical sequence to represent the life cycle of a year of a programme of study, from the planning activities right through to the awards. Some activities appear non-sequentially, for example, staff development, policy documents or HE management. Due to the diversity of the activities extracted, a further level of organisation was required. For example, in the sub-category of *writing documentation*, the data was sorted by logical sequence: the programme team writes the module guide, then this is reviewed by employers or other externals, followed by validation and so on. Some activities appear in more than one category, for example, external examining, as this is an activity engaged with at more than one level (see all activities summary Appendix 1 p.159). Each HE activity was allocated a notional point or half a point if the quality activity was uncertain (see Figure 14). The idea of notional points is to allow patterns to emerge and not represent any hierarchical value.

Category: Programme level quality activities		Colleges Points allocation 1 or 0.5				
Sub-category	Quality Activities Within the Sub-category	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta	Etc.
Planning	E.g. Curriculum Planning				1	
Writing documentation for approval and for use throughout the programme of study	E.g. Module Learning Outcomes	1	1			
	Definitive Module Documents					
Externality for Development and Approvals						
Validation						
Agreements						
Modifications						
Revalidation						
Reviews						
Programme Committees						
Etc.						

Figure 13. Example of the organisation of the HER categories and sub-categories for data collection

Allocating activities to Programme, College, University or External levels.

An activity was allocated to a category to reflect where the greatest degree of engagement with this activity was most likely to occur. For example:

- Planning is a more senior activity, so best fits with college level activities rather than programme level activities.
- Strategy or other policy type documentation were reported at college level only. Programme teams will interact with policies and strategies, but the main level of engagement for this activity, and for this research, was seen to be located with the managing teams of a college.

Quality engagements at more than one level

- Some activities were reported at more than one level, for example, engagement with external examiner reports occurs at programme, college and university levels.
- Writing programme specifications was sometimes specified in a report as an activity undertaken by programme teams in conjunction with the university. In this case, the activity was placed at programme level and at university level.

Where categories of engagement were not explicit in the report a degree of judgement was made depending on what was written in the report or depending on the nature of the activity. Note the inclusion of interaction or engagements with a university are seen uniquely from the college perspective and are no reflection on the processes overall, of a university.

Comments on the notional points

Sometimes 0.5 was allocated instead of 1 due to several reasons, for example:

- When the activity was not fully in place:
When a report states that a college is going to undertake a certain activity that is not yet in place. For example, a draft policy, not yet in place. Sometimes such an activity not yet in place, may have been noted as a recommendation to complete the activity, but not always. For my research, allocating 1 or 0.5 in this case was dependent on the reported degree of engagement with the emerging activity
- When an activity was reported as inconsistent
- When an activity was reported as not fully evidenced
- When the nature of an activity was not clear. For example, where a committee is stated, but where the organisational level of the committee is not clearly stated
- When an activity is not uniquely for higher education

Figure 14. Allocating notional points

As for Bryman (2016), data extraction and recording⁴⁵ was an iterative and evolutive process with frequent reviewing of the categorisation. Data extraction continued until the number of new sub-categories emerging diminished. That was the point at which there was sufficient data to proceed and the point of what Bryman (2016) refers to as data saturation. After 12 reports and 773 quality activities⁴⁶ listed, the data was reviewed to sense check and to remove errors in data recording, referring back to the reports when data entries were unclear. Each stage of the process was described to ensure transparency and all steps of data reporting and data analysis were kept in archived files as a record, should this be required. Depending on the timing of a review, engagement with certain quality activities may not have been present. For example, in the early reports, before 2015 there would not have been any mention of the Competitions and Marketing Authority and its requirements or reports dated before 2012 would not have included Key Information Sets.

An extensive variability of the activities was found, with multiple ways of stating similar activities. Therefore, to reach a more general vision of the scope of quality activities, where similar activities were seen, these activities were merged and given one overall name. For example, an HE Area in the LRC, HE Study Zone, HE Hub, HE Zone were all considered to be areas separated off from FE. All these similar activities were then renamed as one activity called the HE Study Zone. Activities were then categorised as HE or ⁴⁷HE/FE activities, where activities used in FE also served for HE. The total numbers activities and relative frequencies were calculated by category and sub-category for each college, and for all of the colleges combined (see Appendices 1 p.159 and 2 p.178).

Method for HER reports: Extracting other contextual information

Other contextual information, was also extracted using the categories and sub-categories as set out in Figure 15. This data was categorised and notional points were allocated and reported in a spreadsheet (see Appendix 4 p.180). Once more, the point system was intended only to identify patterns and not to act as variables or as differentiating measures of the colleges and their quality models. The sub-categories were frequently reviewed as new data emerged. Where adjustments to sub-categories were made the review reports were revisited to ensure a consistent approach. The categories and sub-categories were based on themes that were prominent in the literature review and by no means exhaustive. As seen in Figure 15 categories included the length of time a college had been running, HE or the number of university partners, whether there was an HE strategy or an HE reporting group such as a discrete HE Academic Board, for example.

⁴⁵ In the data analysis capitalisation was only used for the roles of staff, names of committees, or divisions e.g., HE Committee, Registry, or national initiatives e.g. NSS, but not for activities such as validation or marking. In the listing in the spreadsheets, capitalisation was used throughout for consistency, as each row represents a title.

⁴⁶ Note that HE roles, Strategies, organisational structures such as HE Academic Board are included under the umbrella term of quality activities

⁴⁷ The degree to which activities are overseen by or shared with by partner universities and the degree of formality of an activity was taken into consideration.

Category	Sub-category
1 Success of the review	0 Requires improvement\does not meet expectations 1 Meets expectations successful with recommendations 2 Meets expectations no recommendations Plus 1 for good practice and plus 1 for commendations
2 Longevity of HE in FE Indication of the length of time a college has delivered higher education	1 2010 and > (later than) 2 2000 -2009 3 1990 - 1999 4 1980 - 1989 5 (earlier than) < 1980
3a Number of HE students	1 (less than) <100 2 100-499 3 500-999 4 1000-1499 5 1500 -1999 6 2000 and > (more than)
3b Total number of students as stated in the report	Total
4 Number of university partners	1 1 2 2-5 3 6-10 Plus 1 National Awarding Body (NAB)
5a Qualification categories	For each qualification category E.g., Higher National, Foundation Degree, Bachelor's Degree 1 For each category
5b Qualification funding relationship to the University	The nature of the relationship with the university partner is reported as directly funded/validated, or franchised provision 1 For each category
6 Strategy and policy	1 Combined HE/FE strategy (or Teaching and Learning strategy HE/ FE) 2 Separate HE strategy 3 Separate HE quality strategy/policy
7 Other documents: College Higher Education Self-evaluation document (SED)	1 Combined HE and FE SED 2 Separate HE SED
8 HE Quality Activities	a. Programme b. College c. University HE Quality Activities d. External Quality Activities 1 For each activity 0.5 Where it is not clear if the activity is a separate HE activity (see notes below on 0.5)
9a Higher-level reporting group- Governance	1 Governance Group Mixed HE and FE 2 HE Governance Group
9b Higher-level reporting group-SMT only	1 SMT Group Mixed HE and FE 2 Discrete HE SMT Group
9c Higher-level reporting group Note: The names of each reporting structure will be recorded.	1 Higher level groups mixed HE and FE 2 HE reporting group mixed-function 2 Discrete HE Academic Board 2 Discrete HE Operational Board 3 Discrete HE Quality group
10 Quality Team and management	1 Mixed HE and FE responsibilities 2 1 Designated HE Quality staff 3 2 or more Designated HE Quality staff
11 HE Registry	1 Designated HE Registry Staff
12 HE strategic management	1 Mixed HE and FE responsibilities 2 1 Designated HE strategic staff 3 2 or more Designated HE strategic staff
13 Other HE Staff	1 For each named HE role (this does not include HE teaching staff)

Figure 15. Table of key categories and criteria used to analyse data extracted from HER reports 2013 –2016.

Positionality

As Crotty (1998) contends, our beliefs and assumptions about the nature of the world influence all aspects of the research. Furthermore, the position of the researcher, relative to both the context of the research and the participants, will influence the research as a whole. Clough and Nutbrown (2010) claim a researcher's need to write on a particular topic stems from the context in which the researcher operates. This means that the researcher's experience of the context will potentially influence the research (Holley and Harris,2019). My role in HE in FE is primarily that of an insider. However, it seems as if this role within the smaller HE in FE community, is on the edge of a larger community, or communities. This role focuses on and experiences, a small complex community that is part of, and reliant on, other much larger ones. The role is not insular and allows for communication and contact with other similar organisations, universities and common interest groups. Before this, I taught in the larger FE community and that included teaching and managing HE courses. This experience enabled a good understanding of how both FE and HE in FE works.

This insider (insider-on the edge) status brings both advantages and disadvantages to the research. As for Brannick and Coghlan (2007), an insider has the advantage of being an inside actor with good knowledge and understanding of how the organisation works and its language, and potential access to networks of information, documents and people. Working for many years in the organisation gave me access to a wide range of people, both inside and outside the organisation allowing for access to insights that might not have been possible from an outsider perspective. Additionally, if the researcher is considered an insider, participants may be more confident in sharing experiences, which, in turn, affects the information that participants are willing to share (Berger,2013). For Rowe (2014), there are many elements of the relationship of the researcher and the participant (e.g. culture, social identity, gender, age) that influence the information disclosed. On the other hand, this closeness to the context may be considered a lack of objectivity and distance if objectivity is deemed necessary for valid research. However, the researcher cannot be objective in interpretive research where there are many layers of interpretation undertaken by the researcher (Merriam,1998; Thomas,2016).

Ethics

Informed participation

The participant should be fully informed about the study (Hammersley and Atkinson,2007; DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree,2006). All participants should be aware of the intentions of the research and the intended audience for the research. That is, the aims of the research, the involvement of the participant, what will be done with the data, the credibility of the data, should all be clearly explained to ensure that participants are fully informed. For my research, an email sent out inviting participation in the study contained information about the topic and the intentions of the research. The email included a statement explaining that

participation was voluntary and that should the circumstances of a participant change, meaning that they were no longer able to participate or no longer wished to participate, then participants had the right to withdraw from the project. Equally, should a participant have already participated and subsequently prefers that their interview data no longer serves as a part of the project, participants had the right to request the withdrawal of their data from all possible usage in this project.

Risk and anonymity

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), consider the unanticipated risks to a participant and protection of the interviewee's information to ensure that their position is not jeopardised. To minimise risk in my research, all the participants were assured that any information shared would be treated as confidential and anonymised. Nevertheless, it was made clear that it may be impossible to ensure that a given reader could not deduce the identity of that participant or person within the institution through the recognition of the use of hierarchical title e.g. Head of School or Programme Lead, or processes that might be recognisable to some. Identification of a participant may be unavoidable when small samples are used. To minimise this risk all names were anonymised.

Where it was considered that recognition may be possible, agreement for the data to be used, or not, was sought. Anonymity is of particular importance to ensure that data disclosed by a participant does not lead to any personal harm, for example, if disclosures concerning work or colleagues are made in the interview. It was possible to omit passages that may lead to contention, depending on what an interviewee may agree to and indeed whether any such statements were relevant to the study. The anonymity of the institutions was equally crucial, so again names were anonymised so that no real institutional names would appear in the main body. Finally, although HER reports are public information and institution names appear in the published reports, this research did not wish to imply any judgemental notion about any one institution or give cause for any inferred judgements by a reader. So again, all institutional names were anonymised.

Boundaries of the questions

It is important to ensure that 'an interview should not be exploited for personal gain, or, to substantiate a personal agenda (DiCicco and Crabtree,2006:319; Brinkmann and kvale,2009). The questions are constructed to respond as closely as possible to the research questions, thus setting boundaries to the subject of interest (DiCicco and Crabtree,2006). As the questions in this study were constructed based on documents and literature and not just on observation, questions were less of a personal quest for information and more a way of gaining information to fill apparent gaps in knowledge, as evidenced through the literature review.

Security of the data

All the data collected was kept securely throughout the study should it be required for further analysis or as a transparent record of all of the steps of the methods relating to data collection and data analysis. Only the anonymised data records were available.

Respect and time

All staff in educational establishments have extremely busy schedules. Although the timing of the interview was finalised through mutual agreement, to respect a participant's time, all efforts were made to allow the participant to determine the day and time of the interview and to minimise the time required for participation. An estimated time for completion of the interview was given to participants, although participants were able to take more time to respond and engage with discussions if they wanted to.

Power balance

With any interview, it is important to be mindful of several potential power relations. For Kvale (2007), an interview assumes a lopsided and hierarchical form of a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. As for Brinkmann and Kvale (2009) and Anyan (2013), the interviewer determines the questions, poses the questions and follow up questions, transcribes and analyses the data. That is, interviews could be seen as unequal conversational events whereby the interviewer has the monopoly and control of the interview (Kvale,2007; Anyan,2013). This potentially one-sided power imbalance is not rigidly determined, because many other factors come into play. For example, as Anyan (2013) suggests, other factors such as socio-economic status, educational or professional background, gender or ethnic identity of the parties involved could all influence the balance between the interviewee and interviewer. My research intended that the interviewee was given the power to express their story and not to feel judged on any of the responses given to the questions asked. More so, the intention was that the interview felt like a conversation between peers. However, where there was a known hierarchical difference, when the interviewee had a higher professional or institutional status, then a suitable demeanour by the interviewer was accorded through courtesy. Although, a courteous disposition was aimed at throughout the entire process as a matter of course and especially because I was mindful of the time the interviewee had given up to participate in this research.

Alternatively, the balance of power could be seen to lie with the interviewee. As Anyan (2013) suggests, it is the interviewee who interprets the questions and this could shift the focus of the questions, possibly distorting the interview themes. New material could be evoked or information could be given more or less freely, and ideas could be changed when reviewing the transcript. Though for this study, should the interviewee have added extra information or additional dialogue, these additions were welcomed as they may have allowed for new insights.

Honesty

Interviews are dependent on the quality of the questions and the truthfulness of the participant (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). While aiming for honest responses, some participants may wish to protect the reputation of the site and so may not provide open answers as they might in discussion with a close colleague, for example. The hierarchical positions of the interviewer and interviewee may influence both the approach to questioning and how the interviewee may respond. Efforts were made at the outset to ensure that the interviewee was sufficiently comfortable, especially in terms of assured anonymity and confidentiality to be able to respond to the best of their knowledge, and not to be influenced by the interviewer or by who may or may not, read the final report. Assurance of confidentiality and anonymity aimed to address fears that may have led to the participant not answering or not answering openly.

Quality: Credibility and transferability

Although the quality of the documents was discussed on p.65, the following passages consider the quality checks for the study as a whole. No one research design is better than another but the research must stand up and be credible to those reading it. Different communities will go about the study in different ways, so it is important to ensure that the study has a coherent design for the intended audience and is congruent with the underlying assumptions. Many checks have already taken place along the way, some of which are made more explicit in the following passages. This study offers an interpretation of the day-to-day workings of QMMs. That is, this study is interpretive rather than offering what Crotty (1998) refers to as a positivist view that might offer objective, valid truth claims. For Holley and Harris (2019), the goals of interpretive work are different from those of science, so for this study, there was no aim to derive generalisable data but instead, the aim was to end up with sufficiently rich data for others to make inferences from.

Credibility rather than reliability and validity

In an interpretative case study, for Thomas (2016), commonly used judgements of quality such as reliability, validity and generalisation do not apply to interpretive work. To start with, reliability and validity, for Thomas (2016), are terms that have been taken from a different kind of research and do not sit well in interpretative approaches. According to Burr and Dick (2017), reliability rests on the idea that findings are repeatable. That means that if the same methods are carried out, in the same way, under the same conditions, you would expect to find the same results. As for Thomas (2016), the case or nested cases in this study are particular to the locality and the time frame and the environment at the time of the study. So even when using the same questions, there would be no expectations to find the same results in a different locality. For validity, as Thomas (2016) explains it, judgements are made on the methods and the extent to which a study investigates what it is intended to investigate. Such an approach may involve probability or predictions. For Thomas (2016), a case study has no set expectations for what may be found, so validity has

less meaning in this kind of research. Gergen (2015) also challenges the idea of validity as for the social constructionist validity reflects what a community says is valid, such as a cultural or traditional belief. This view or sense made may change depending on the community and its beliefs (Crotty, 1998). So what is important, is that the study reflects the multiple views of the participants.

On moving away from the terms reliability and validity as described above, the work still has to be credible. For Holley and Harris (2019), it is still necessary to make sure the processes lead to work that has credibility or internal validity. Many checks happened along the way, for example:

Kvale and Brinkmann (2007) suggest checks of what was said when the interviewer may ask the participant to clarify meanings. In this study, sense-checks were encouraged to clarify meanings. Or, as for Lincoln and Guba (1985), checks on credibility may be possible, whereby the participants are asked to re-read their interview transcripts to ensure that what was written corresponded to what was said or intended as a way of ensuring confidence in the findings. In this study, all the participants agreed to go over the transcripts to confirm that I had correctly transcribed their intended meanings. Audit trails to attest to the consistency and dependability of the data analysis methods provide another form of checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In my study details of the methods are seen in Chapter Four and detailed records of all the steps of the data analysis are available should they be required. Review meetings with the Director of Studies and Supervisor added to the assurance of the credibility of the study by, for example, prompting thought or asking questions about the intentions of the study or checking its coherence.

Transferability rather than generalisation

Kelle (2006) notes the difficulties in making generalisations based on small numbers of interviews that take place in local contexts. The lack of generalisability in interpretive approaches has been criticised, however, a scientific approach does not fit well with interpretive studies. For Bassey (2001:5), in a scientific approach, generalisations are based on predictions 'if X happens in Y circumstances, then Z will occur'. These predictions are often linked to the probability of something occurring. Generalisations such as these are based on large samples. As social studies may have many variables, often with small numbers of data, after some time the earlier approach was reformulated, changing it to the more tentative idea of 'fuzzy generalisations' (Bassey, 2001:5). This nuanced approach proposed that in certain circumstances, particular proceedings or events *may* result in particular happenings and that professional judgements based on experience and literature were to be used to estimate the likelihood of something happening (Bassey, 2001:5). Nevertheless, some claimed this was no different to scientific predictions as they are also always tentative (Hammersley, 2001). Moreover, the use of the notion of predictability in interpretive work has been challenged. For Thomas (2016), given the nature of the case study approach that seeks an understanding of how and why things happen in particular contexts, for example, the HE in FE context for QMMs in this study, there is no call for predictions or generalisations. Also, given the degree of change and

inherent unpredictability of CAS for Turner and Baker (2019), predictions may not be possible. On at least two counts, the contextual nature of this study and QMMs seen as CAS, with their uncertain nature make the use of predictability and extrapolating results and generalisation unconvincing. From a social constructionist viewpoint, predictability and claims of generalisability are not possible, there is no one view to represent all views, as there are multiple ways of knowing (Crotty,1998; Gergen,2015). As for Burr (2003), an understanding of what there is in one culture may differ from that produced elsewhere. From these perspectives aiming to make generalisations for this study does not make sense. However, this does not discount the utility of predictions and generalisations for scientific studies, as for Gergen (2015), that is just another way of thinking.

Despite the arguments above, there is still a need for meaningful and useful results that are relatable to others and to this end, Bloomberg (2018:5) refers to transferability and how the knowledge emerging in a case study can be applied to other similar settings. For Bloomberg (2018), rich descriptions of a case study allow 'claims for relevance in some broader context' where others can connect to this knowledge and gain insight. In agreement with this idea, rather than generalisations (and predictability), for Holley and Harris (2019), the development of the context and allowing for a depth of understanding is more important than making generalisations based on large samples that may overlook context specific happenings. Stake's (2009) idea of tacit naturalistic generalisations resembles the approach of Bloomberg (2018), in which we recognise similarities of how things are due to our experiences, and for Hellström (2008), both of these approaches cover the same ground.

Given all of this, transferability resonates in a useful way with my study. For Bloomberg (2018:5), transferability concerns 'how the understanding and knowledge gained can be applied to similar contexts, setting, and conditions. The nested cases in my study provide accounts that are rich in narrative and experience and as a whole, the narrative produced in this study would hope to be sufficiently in-depth for a reader to develop an understanding of the case overall and allow a reader to identify with the patterns or contrasts found. In this case study approach, with a detailed narrative, it is intended that others may connect with the experiences seen here.

Summary of research methods

To summarise the research methods used in this study, as illustrated in Figure 16: the theoretical frame for this research was social constructionism. Given the nature of the study, an interpretive case study approach was applicable and the themes emerging from the findings were critically analysed through the frameworks of CAS and social constructionism, as seen in Chapter Five. This chapter has introduced social constructionism as the theoretical framework guiding this study with indications of how CAS and QMM interconnect to this social frame. The case study approach and the methods for collecting and analysing the data were deliberated. Chapter Five sees the application of social constructionism and CAS to the emergent findings, illuminating different perspectives of QMM.

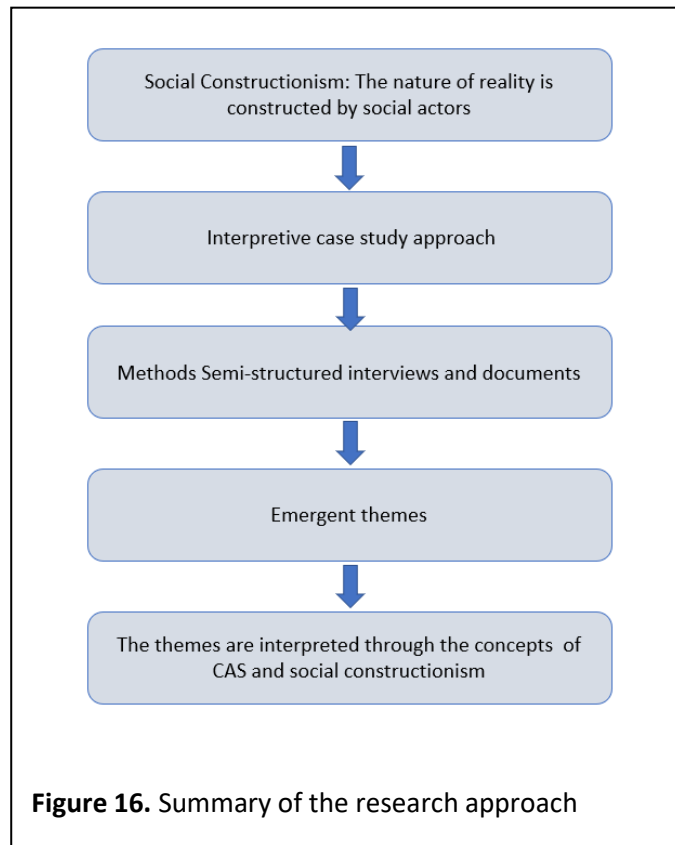


Figure 16. Summary of the research approach

CHAPTER 5 Quality Management Models for HE in FE Colleges as Socially Constructed Complex Adaptive Systems

Introduction

Byrne and Callaghan (2014) recognise the use of complexity as a framework of reference to make sense of the findings and to inform the interpretative strategy that aims to understand how systems came to be as they are. The systems in this study are the quality systems and the quality management models (QMMs)⁴⁸. Whilst the complex characteristics of HE in FE were explored in Chapter Two, this chapter critically analyses the development of QMMs as complex systems and considers the factors that influence their effectiveness and sustainability. For Cilliers (1998), a complex adaptive system (CAS) is a complex system with intricate interdependencies between its components and between the system and its environment. In my study QMMs are conceptualised as CAS made up of many interdependent agents that self-organise and adapt to survive in the uncertain and complex environment of HE in FE. For QMMs, as for CAS, it is not possible to grasp the nature of the whole just by analysing the parts, so the concepts of CAS, as introduced in Chapter Three, serve as a frame that encourages the view of QMM as complex whole systems. This chapter explores the emergent themes of the findings through the concepts of CAS. In line with Thomas (2017), the use of the CAS concepts also serve as a framework, a tool for thinking about how and why these models exist as they do. To add to this, Chapter Four considered QMMs and the quality activities that make up these models as social constructs. Parallels drawn between the principal lines of thinking of social constructionism and CAS facilitated the interpretation of QMMs both as social constructs and as CAS⁴⁹. This chapter sees the critical analysis of QMMs through the application of both of these closely linked theoretical lenses, illuminating different perceptions for the understanding of these quality concepts. The resulting representations set out in the chapter that follows, gives an impressionistic interpretation of QMMs that intends to produce useful knowledge (Kvale and Brinkman,2009).

General characteristics of the participants and their institutions

Teemshire College is the largest of the colleges and it has the particularity of being a college with Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP). As with the other two colleges, Teemshire College underwent HER in 2016 (QAA,2015f;QAA,2016d). Like Neelsborough College, this college group is the result of college mergers. There were around 27 000 students with well over 1200 studying for foundation degrees, top-ups or higher national programmes through two university partners, a NAB and through its own foundation degree awards. All the HE provision is taught in faculties of higher education, separate from FE. Sally-Anne had worked in a university before taking up a post in this college where she has undertaken several senior posts.

⁴⁸ HE quality management model (QMM): The activities that a college engages with and the management of these activities that demonstrate the quality of its HE against the external quality frameworks. See page 42.

⁴⁹ Generally social actors is the term used when making reference to social constructionism and social agents is used when referring to CAS.

Neelsborough College has undergone significant changes due to mergers to become a college of over 25 000 students. At the time of HER in 2016 there were over 800 HE students, studying on 32 different qualifications, ranging from post-graduate teaching certificates, a BSc., foundation degrees and higher nationals awarded through seven university partnerships and NAB (QAA,2016c). Beth the Senior HE Manager,

Participant and Position	Name of the Institution
Sally-Anne Senior HE Manager	Teemshire College
Beth Senior HE Manager	Neelsborough College
Jonathan Senior HE Manager	Chattersbridge College
Olivia Senior Quality Manager	University of Westheath Olivia's previous workplace Sittingdon College
Vincenta Senior Quality Manager	Upperhatton University

Figure 17. The participants, positions and the name of their institutions.

reported a drop in student numbers from over 1000 from before HER, to just over 500 at the time of the interview. The HE provision is distributed across the different colleges and managed through matrix⁵⁰ management in mixed FE and HE faculties. Beth has undertaken several senior management posts in the College, in roles uniquely for HE, and as a Director in charge of a mixed HE and FE school in her current role. Beth has been at the College for over 20 years.

At the time of HER in 2016, Chattersbridge College had around 650 HE students studying on over 20 HE programmes to include full-time or part-time foundation degrees and higher national awards. This provision is delivered through one university partner and a NAB. HE is managed and overseen by the HE office though the HE provision is not separated out from the FE part of the college. Jonathan, has managed HE as the sole full-time Senior Manager and lead for HE for over 10 years, from before the IQER review in 2011.

Institution	HE and FE Student Numbers 2018	HE Student Numbers 2018	Number University Partners
Teemshire College	27 000	1200	2
Neelsborough College	25 000	800	7
Chattersbridge College	26 000	650	1
Sittingdon College	11 000	550	2

Figure 18. Student numbers and the number of university partners for each of the colleges.⁵¹

Olivia now works as the Senior Quality Manager for the University of Westheath, which is relatively new in terms of its university title. At the time of HER in 2015, there were around 6 500 students. Olivia had previously worked at Sittingdon College with approximately 550 HE students, taught on programmes of two

⁵⁰ Matrix management is where senior management posts serve across more than one college (AoC,2016)

⁵¹Data in this table was mainly derived from the interviews and approximated for anonymity).

university partners and a NAB (QAA,2013). The HE programmes were integrated within the FE curriculum areas. Before this, Olivia had worked in a large university that had many FE collaborative partners. Olivia was very well placed to relate informed ideas about quality management and how the workings of HE in FE differ from that of a university.

Upperhatton University gained its university title in 1992, as with many other similar institutions at that time (Further and Higher Education Act,1992). At HER, this university had over 35 000 students and near-on 100 collaborative partners (QAA,2015e). Now only about 10 of those collaborations were still with FE colleges, according to Vincenta, the number of partners had dropped over recent years. Vincenta the Senior Quality Manager, has had extensive experience of HE in FE, in supporting colleges through IQER and HER reviews, as well as experience of numerous partner collaborative reviews, validations and periodic reviews. Vincenta represented the university perspective of quality management in HE in FE colleges.

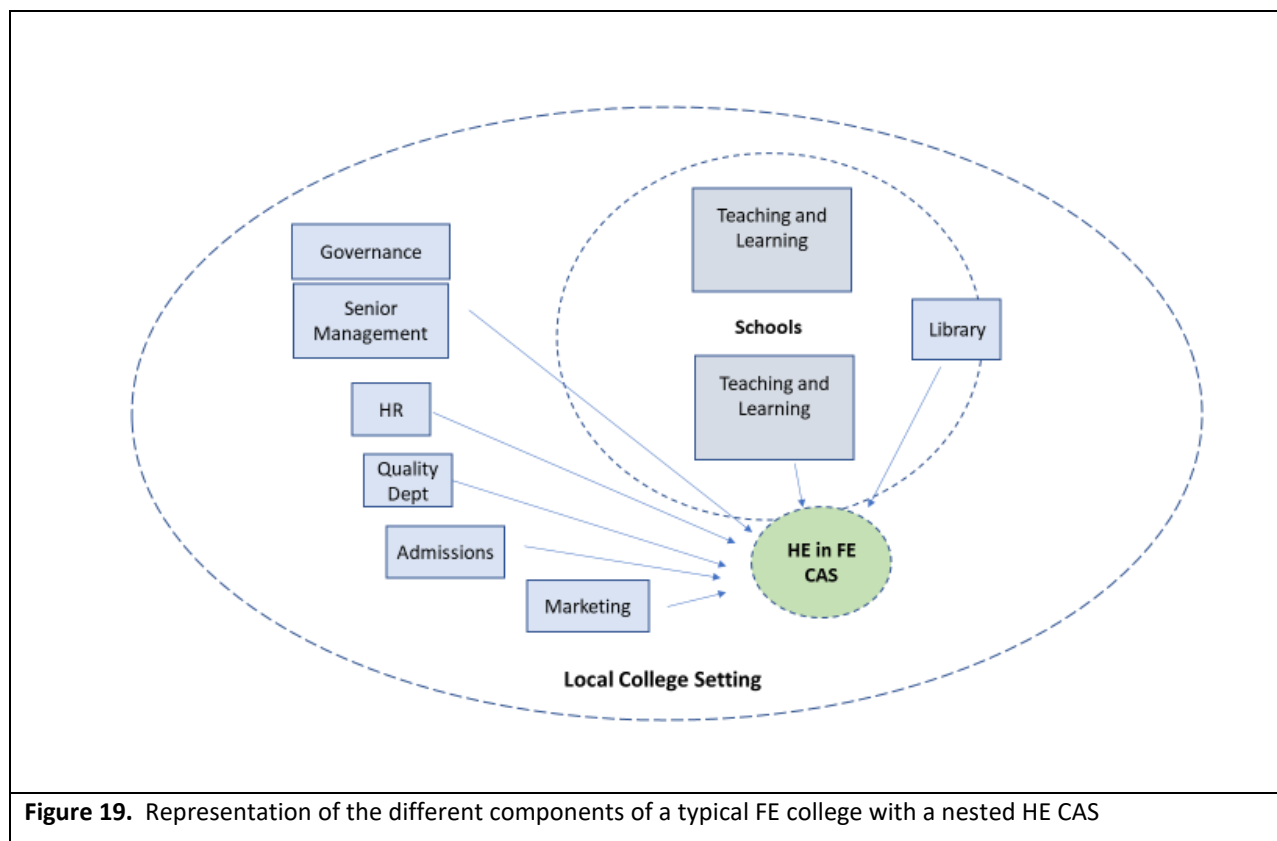
HE QMMs seen through the concepts of Complex Adaptive Systems

In my research, HE QMMs are considered as nested HE in FE CAS (HE CAS). Each nested HE CAS is comprised of a college's HE in FE, with its HE quality systems and processes (all the activities that enable an HE CAS to meet the quality frameworks of the HE sector⁵² situated within its complex environment. An HE CAS is not considered as a separate entity as it is a part of the FE college, most often a minority part that rarely represents more than 8 to 10% of the college student population as a whole (King et al.,2012). Despite this, many colleges strive to establish an HE environment for their students although this can be challenging (Simmons and Lea,2013; Eaton et al.,2015). The HE CAS is nested within an FE College, which itself could be considered as a CAS. As a starting point, Figures 19 and 20 illustrate different views of an HE CAS and these are explained in the following paragraphs. The complexity of these HE CAS builds throughout the chapter as new concepts are added to construct a 'whole' picture. As proposed by Heylighen (2008), it is not possible to reduce a CAS to its discrete parts as the parts work together as a whole. This means that some of the examples and ideas used to illustrate the earlier CAS concepts may be drawn on more than once and developed in later concepts building the idea of a 'whole'. As Heylighen (2008) suggests, this 'whole' cannot be fully described as there will still be more aspects to uncover.

⁵² HE quality management model (QMM or HE CAS) see p.42.

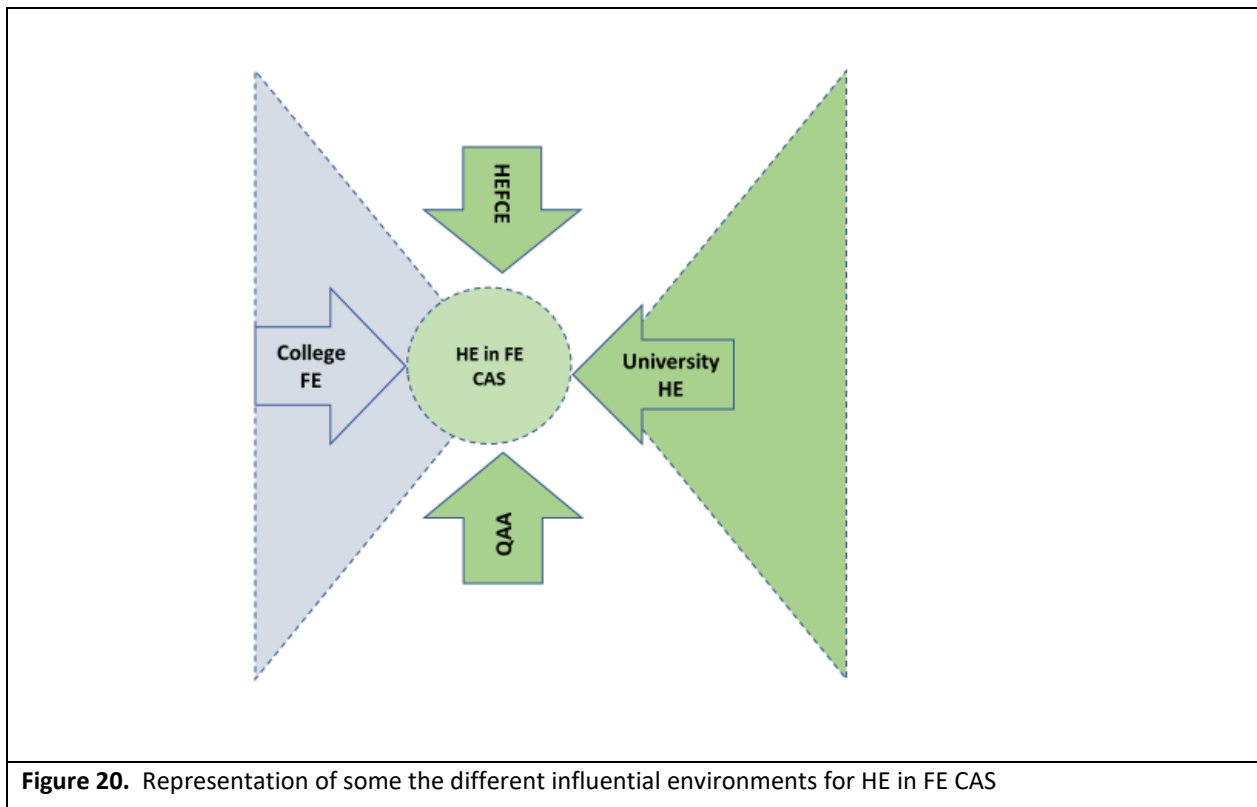
CAS as open systems

CAS are open systems with permeable boundaries (Cilliers,1998; Shayan,2019). Many of the characteristics of HE CAS depend on this concept of open boundaries. In concurrence with Cilliers (1998), for an HE CAS there is no discernible physical boundary. An HE CAS as an open system is illustrated in Figure 19.



This simplistic non-exhaustive representation above illustrates that many resources are shared across the FE and HE parts of the college: staff from the schools of the college, teaching spaces, facilities such as the library resources, admissions, HR, marketing, quality department policies and processes, funding, senior management and governance. The HE CAS is dependent on the College. The HE CAS also shares its boundaries with its university partners on which they are dependent for their awards and regulations, and to some degree, resources, depending on the terms of the partnership agreement. At least at the outset of college HE and for qualifications such as the FdAs, colleges were reliant on the quality infrastructures of the university partners (Parry and Thompson,2002; HEFCE,2003a). In Vincenta’s experience, college HE Programme Leads would work with the University Link Tutors giving a college a ‘procedural infrastructure...something to map into’. In addition to the awards of a university, an HE CAS usually delivers HE awards of a NAB and it has to uphold the standards of these awards as well (Widdowson, J. and King, M.,2013). For the qualifications of this awarding body, Olivia thought a college had more ownership of how these programmes were run without having to follow all the various processes of a university. When Olivia worked at Sittingdon College, for any award of a university ‘we followed their processes and it was the development [of the programme] really that was owned by the College in liaison with the universities’.

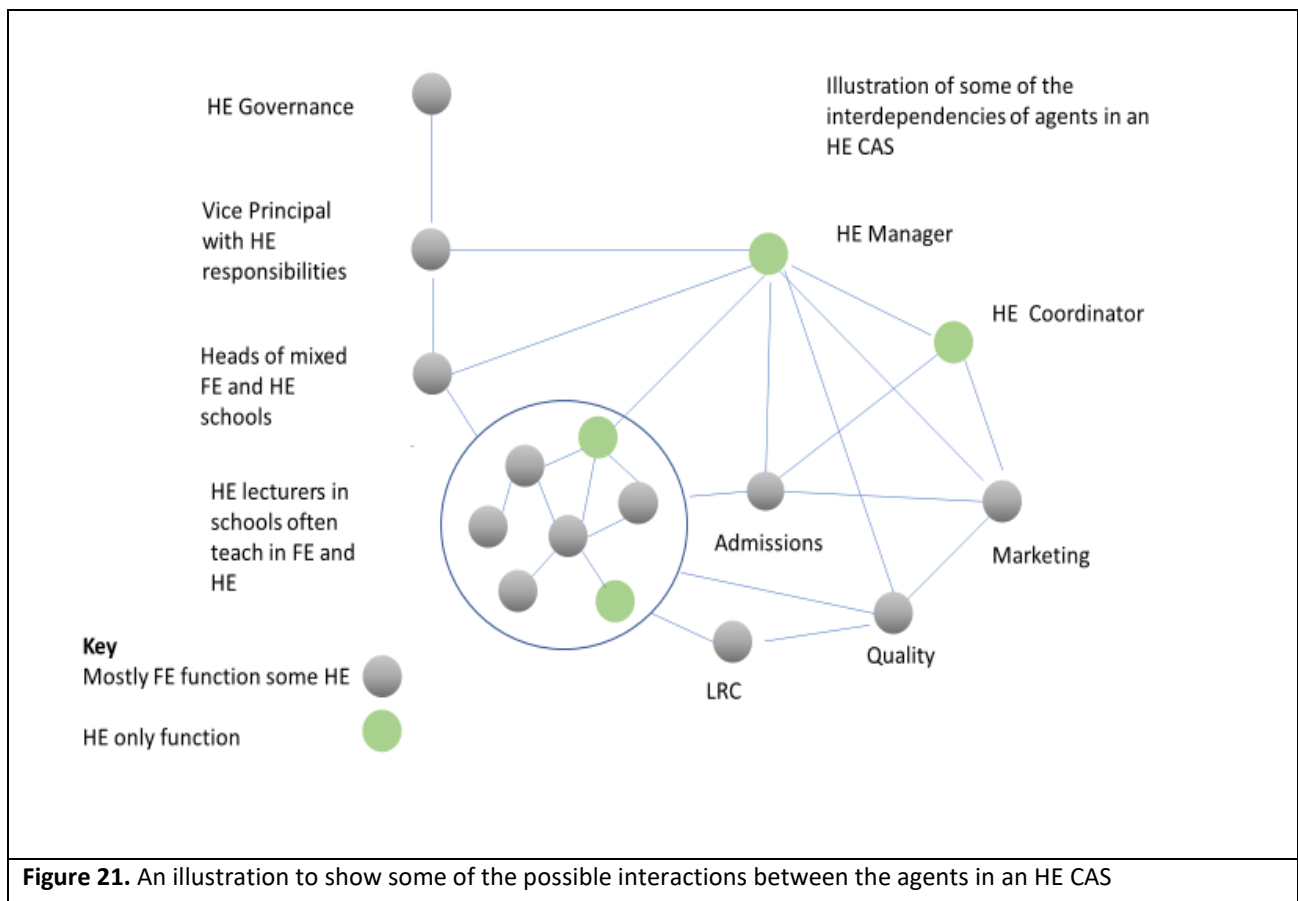
According to Slater (2017), the practices that emerge and are then accepted in a society are those derived from the society that these practices serve, such as subject fields, for example. Likewise, Vincenta’s procedural infrastructure’ of a university is seen as the accepted way things are. The HE CAS were to accept and internalise the university ways, as the ways things are. For the NAB programmes, there were no such pre-existing ways of being.



In the abstraction seen in Figure 20 above, the focus is on the HE CAS, with its quality model, nested within a college. It shares its boundaries with a complex environment comprised of the college environment in which it sits, the HE awarding bodies, HEFCE, QAA and all the government directives for HE. All resources and activities shared across these permeable boundaries are not static and can change depending on both the internal and external environments and the availability of resources or requirements at the time. As HE CAS depend on both the FE and HE environments, then factors that influence these wider environments may in turn, have an impact on the HE CAS. Examples of such factors are economic cut-backs, mergers, competition or any changes that may occur in the university. Each college HE CAS is in a similar situation, though each would be influenced by its own unique local environment. Byrne and Callaghan (2014) assert that open systems exchange information with their environment. The nested HE CAS draws on both FE and HE for its way of being, though its main resources are derived from the FE space in which it exists and nests. Particularities generated due to sharing boundaries are discussed more fully in the following sections. Then a greater focus on the internal and external tensions and the impact these have on an HE CAS can be seen from p.94.

CAS are made up of many agents

Social constructionism involves the active social interaction and interdependencies of social actors (Bryman,2016). An HE CAS is made up of a network of many agents. In line with Miller and Page (2007:93) CAS agents in my research are social and ‘thoughtful’ agents, for example, the HE leads and other staff with HE responsibility. All agents in the network interact, learn and adapt (Holland,2014). Often, these agents are not solely HE facing as they may also have FE responsibilities, such as a Vice Principal, the Heads of School or staff that teach across HE and FE. Equally, the organisational divisions that enable HE activities and resources are rarely for HE only, for instance, the LRC or marketing, the College quality team, or facilities allocating space. All these entities involve social agents that are part of the network of agents that interact and exchange information with each other. As seen in Figure 21 there are very few HE only agents with the majority having shared roles and sometimes conflicting priorities. Gergen (2015) reasons that organisations are made up of units where conversational meaning-making takes place. Misunderstandings may arise between these groups as to how things ought to be, and this may challenge communication and sometimes the effectiveness of the organisation as a whole. This same scenario could exist in an FE College or any organisation, though by and large and over time, a collective way of being develops. The HE CAS is unique as it partly shares many of its agents with many different units and some agent may only be periodically involved with the HE CAS and so it requires different understandings and ways of being. These differences may add to the potential for conflict, such as conflicting priorities for resources or conflict in the understandings of what is required for the FE side, versus what is required for the HE CAS and so on.



In an HE CAS, many agents deliver on a range of FE and HE programmes resulting in hybrid teaching roles (Simmons and Lea,2013; Turner et al.,2009). At Chattersbridge, Neelsborough and Sittingdon Colleges, staff teaching on HE programmes have the same contracts as the FE staff and the majority of HE staff also teach on FE programmes of study. Mixed-agent roles are also seen at other levels of the college hierarchy. As with Chattersbridge College, HE Programme Leads at Neelsborough and Sittingdon Colleges report to managers who oversee a mix of HE and FE programmes (Curriculum Managers or Heads of School and Curriculum Directors). At Chattersbridge College there is a distinct cross-college Head of HE role to lead and oversee all HE requirements and HE quality processes and an HE Coordinator in charge of, for example, the student voice. At the time of HER, Neelsborough College also had a discrete HE management structure though this has now changed. Beth, who was the HE lead at the time of HER, now has FE responsibilities as well as HE responsibilities and oversees a mixed-faculty made of FE and HE programmes of study. As with Chattersbridge College, very few staff at Neelsborough College have HE only roles. There is only an HE Data Manager [it is unclear if this person is solely for HE] and one other member of staff in central Quality who has some HE responsibilities. Similarly, at Sittingdon College there were only two members of staff with HE only roles: Olivia in Quality, who in turn reported to a Head of HE whose role was similar to a Registry Lead for HE, looking after student loans, for example. The tensions arising from mixed-roles with only a few staff for HE only, are developed in the section on HE focus, time and resources for HE on p.98.

All these agents interact. For example, an HE Lead and the programme team may discuss monitoring activities, preparation for validation or go over HE regulations. Programme leads might interact on CPD days. Higher in the system interaction may take place at HE committees. No agent of an HE CAS is isolated as they are interdependent with, and influenced by, other agents from both inside and outside the HE CAS. Agent interactions and the resulting understandings within a CAS can vary widely. For Crotty (1998:64), social constructionism is relativist, that is, 'the way things are' is really just 'the sense we make of them'. This suggests that each CAS, with its social agents, would have been influenced by the local history and culture. These local differences mean that the sense made in one CAS may differ from that in another. The FE CAS, or the University CAS, may both have very different cultures and understandings. Likewise, the local quality models constructed by each of the participants that contributed to this research differed. For Crotty (1998), the sense made in one locality may differ from that in another, and so many outcomes are possible.

Interactions amongst the agents are local and are reliant on local resources Shayan (2019). For example, College HE students are often local to the college (IoE,2012). Each HE CAS will have different local resources and different agent interactions with the FE CAS, with marketing, LRC, admissions or with the university resources and the university agents, with all of this culminating in local differences in the HE CAS. HE CAS depend on both the FE CAS and the University CAS, and the HE CAS is different again. As seen in the examples above, the HE CAS has agents belonging to more than one CAS. An HE CAS with its agent

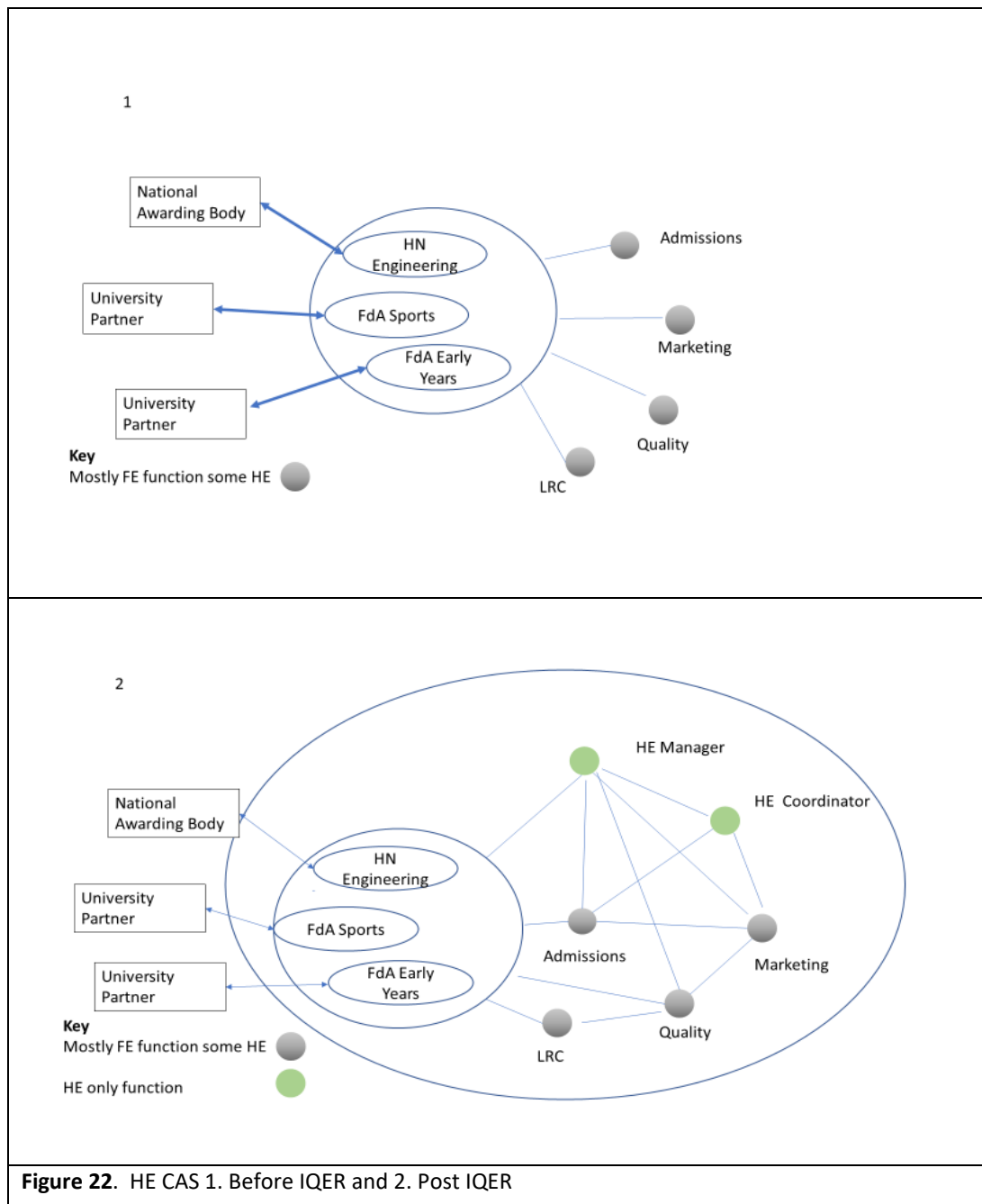
interactions, knowledge and understandings, may result from a different construct, different to that of an FE CAS or a University CAS.

For Gergen and Gergen (2003), a socially constructed system is not static and can change. In a similar way CAS may change due to changes in agent-to-agent interaction over time (Shayan,2019) Staff change roles, like Beth whose role was no longer uniquely for HE, or if jobs are not replaced when staff leave, as was the case when Olivia left Sittingdon. This means that knowledge and understanding within the CAS may change. Moreover, agent interactions in a CAS are local and there may not be any awareness of the behaviours or patterns of the system as a whole (Shayan,2019).

CAS agents act in non-linear ways

In agreement with Holland (2014:25), the whole HE CAS is 'more than the sum of the parts' and for this study it consist of the many quality activities and agents that enable these activities. This network of interdependent agents and the quality activities contribute to the HE in FE community and result in the overall HE CAS. Many colleges have been delivering HE programmes for well over 30 years and from 1997 colleges became the focus for the expansion of HE (Parry,2009; Parry et al.,2012 IoE,2012). At that time there were no HE CAS in colleges. The foundation degrees taught in colleges were subject to the quality arrangements of the universities and colleges mainly relied on the quality systems of their partner universities (Parry and Thompson,2002; HEFCE,2006; QAA,2011). Colleges had more say in the quality arrangements for their higher nationals, in line with the NAB requirements (HEFCE,2009). Before IQER 2006-2010, most of these quality arrangements were at subject level with little in the way of institution-wide oversight of the quality of HE (QAA,2003), as illustrated in Figure 22. There were independently functioning parts but with no 'whole' view. Before IQER 2006-2010, Jonathan at Chattersbridge College described the HE quality processes at the College as a 'bit messy and a bit confused' and 'decentralised and more of an add-on to FE'. Beth at Neelsborough College agreed and thought that IQER was the point at which HE and its HE processes started to be clearly identified. Before this, the College had used the university processes of each of its university partners and for its higher national programmes, the processes used for HE were the same as those used for the FE programmes of study. IQER was a clear demarcation point for developing their own separate HE quality review cycle and HE policies, such as their HE Academic Standards Policy or HE Admissions Policy.

'With the onset of IQER, we thought it would be good to develop a very separate HE Quality Cycle'(Beth).



From a university perspective, Vincenza of Upperhatton University observed that at the outset of the IQER process, they [colleges] ‘didn’t really have any sort of background or understanding’. Vincenza was referring to the Academic Infrastructure⁵³, the HE quality framework at the time of IQER. She remembered how they [the universities] immediately engaged in working out how to work with this quality framework, whereas colleges ‘weren’t really thinking about it’. At Teemshire College, Sally-Anne thought that there had been a strategic role for HE before IQER and whilst recognising IQER as an important step, for her, Teemshire College saw the application for FDAP and HER as the triggers for developing HE processes that were separate from those of FE. By HER, HE CAS were to have developed further, with a greater expectation for colleges to have their own HE processes and not only to engage with the processes of others (Vincenza).

⁵³ Now the Quality Code

Colleges that performed well at HER demonstrated practices that were tailored to HE, for example, a college with policies for its HE provision (QAA,2016b).

‘I think that has [HER and the Quality Code] really driven a big change in the seriousness of FE colleges, to take the Code and so realise that you had to look at all the bits of it and think about how you met the requirements’ (Vincenta).

Carving out an HE ‘whole’ in a college is not straight forward as it is not the only focus of the College. As large institutions, colleges have to primarily focus on their FE provision as the main part of their business (QAA,2015e). The result is that all of the HE agents have local pressures that may influence their availability, focus and knowledge of HE. Given the different local pressures of the agents, the ‘whole’ for one college may differ from that in another. In an HE CAS, the parts and how these parts interact to construct the ‘whole’ result in an overall identity or way of being of the system. As Levin (1998) argues, the interactions of the agents lower in the system result in emerging patterns higher up. That is, the HE in FE structures, processes and ways of working, and how they interrelate and develop over time, culminates in a functioning whole HE QMM or HE CAS. What is unique in an HE CAS is that not all the agents are solely for HE. As seen earlier, apart from a few HE only agents, most of the agents and resources are shared with other CAS. Many of the tensions arising in HE CAS stem from this shared and overlapping nature, and these tensions are discussed later in the chapter. It is difficult to envisage HE CAS as an entity solely with its own agents as it is dependent on and interconnects with both FE and the HEI partners, without which it could not survive. Nevertheless, each participant was able to reconstruct their perceptions of their HE QMM in the interview as if it was a ‘whole’ (see appendix 6 p.182 to p.184).

As Holland (2014) and Turner and Baker (2019) point out, it is difficult to predict future actions with this non-linear nature. Selective pressure may lead to small changes that could rapidly build into significant changes in HE CAS. For example, externally generated pressure such as a quality review may have led to the building, consolidation and emergence of an HE CAS. Alternatively, rather than events leading to consolidation or building of an HE CAS, market competition, for example, may lead to year-on-year reductions in HE student numbers and smaller class sizes (MEG and 157 Group,2012). These incremental changes may rapidly accumulate, leading to colleges closing courses or to reducing the number of HEI partners or, as noted by Dishman et al. (2010), in some case closing their HE entirely. Examples of adaptations, co-evolution and tensions in HE CAS are seen later in the chapter.

‘Path dependency’ may also contribute to the different nature of these ‘whole’ HE CAS (Levin,1998:433). According to Crotty (1998), the institution, with its pre-existing culture was already in existence. That is, it has a history, rules and traditions. These experiences and the accumulated knowledge are passed on, thus

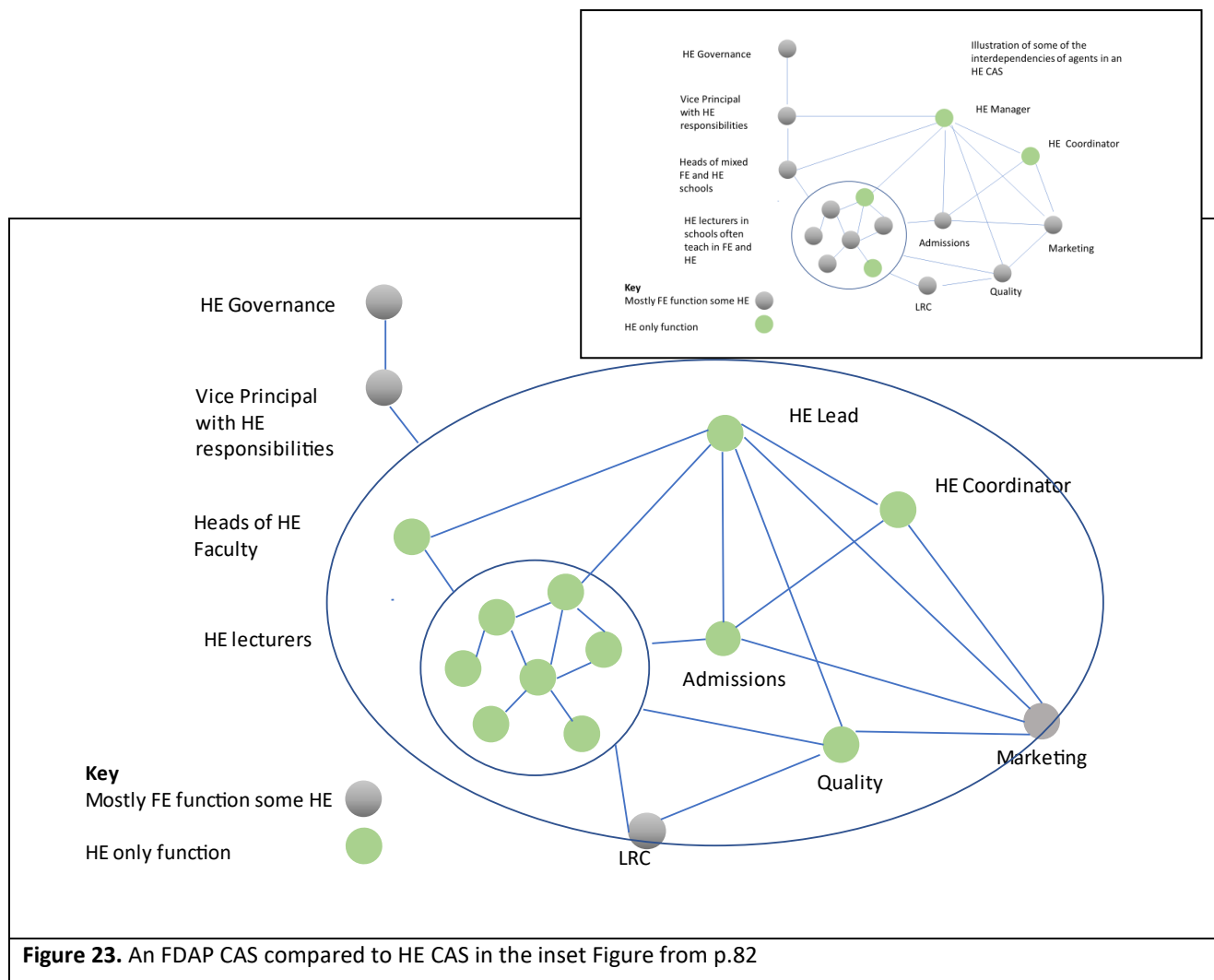
perpetuating the traditions, culture and understandings (Slater,2017). As Byrne and Callaghan (2014) argue, what is there, is the product of past actions, so a nested system has to take account of the nature of the other systems already in place and that these pre-existing systems will influence what can happen within the new nested system. This means that in terms of constructing HE CAS, the ground on which they were built was not bare ground as each developed from an FE base with its own history and local context that would influence how a future HE CAS behaves. Each college HE CAS would differ due to the different pre-existing traditions. The knowledge and learnt traditions of the agents will also influence how the HE CAS develops. The agents in an HE CAS may also come from a university. For example, before working in a college Olivia was in a university setting. Olivia's model of a college HE CAS resembled what could be considered typical of what might be expected in any university quality unit. It is plausible that Olivia had a preconceived idea of how a quality model should look and what should be a part of it, having worked in a university prior to and post working in a college.

CAS show hierarchical structure

A hierarchical structure occurs when sets of interconnecting agents at one level become an agent at the next level (Holland,2014). This 'aggregation and hierarchical assembly' is not imposed, instead, it emerges due to local interactions and 'endogenous pattern formation' (Levin,1998:432). Applied to my research, each college HE CAS becomes an agent of a higher-level CAS, that of HE in FE as a whole. This idea of HE College CAS forming part of a wider interconnected network may have contributed to the development of, and reinforcement of, the common identity of the HE in FE system: a place for students looking for an accessible place to study, lower costs, smaller classes, non-traditional students and local students (IoE,2012). That is, the identity-forming values and the 'making meaning' occurs through the interaction of the social actors of this higher-level network (Gergen,2015:53).

As with any CAS, the agents of this higher-level CAS learn from each other. Whether there is the same degree of interdependency across these higher-level agents as there is lower down in the system is unknown. Though the status, visibility and identity of HE in FE may depend on the interaction of all of the HE CAS as a whole. The wider identity and wider HE in FE environment, may in return, influence the HE CAS lower down in the system. Like all CAS, higher-level HE CAS are not isolated and they are also subject to the wider environmental demands: government policy, regulatory body demands or sector competition, all of which may in turn impact on the local HE CAS. It is at this cumulative higher-level that it becomes evident that HE in FE has a different way of being. FE Colleges are part of FE system. Universities are part of the HE system. HE in FE aggregates have aspects of both. What Levin (1998: 432) refers to as 'aggregation and hierarchy assembly' seems to result in a new community system set apart from both HE and FE. Though ultimately, this new aggregate has to work to the same Quality Code as the universities and 'on a level playing field' as the HE sector as a whole (BIS,2016).

Teemshire College has Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP) and its HE is set apart from FE. Most of the staff teach on HE programmes only and are supported in undertaking higher qualifications (Masters, PhDs or EdDs) and research activities. It is an HE CAS distinct from the others with more HE only agents and with less reliance on the university as it transitions to its own awards.



Sally-Anne recounts that HE is a self-contained division with its own systems and processes, though she recognises that it is not isolated. There is still overlap with FE as a part of a larger organisation with some policies common to both HE in FE, and it ultimately reports to Governor's in the same way that FE does. For Sally-Anne, in FE, by and large, decisions come down from the top, whereas for their HE there is a degree of self-governance and ownership:

'I would like to think it's owned more. It's owned through the processes by the staff, by the students, what the students come out with because of the processes we've got, the infrastructure, including the committees and this process [the evaluation cycle], that it is actually owned by the staff more'(Sally-Anne).

Compared to the HE CAS seen on p. 82 and inserted here for ease of comparison, there are several differences. The FDAP CAS is separate from FE and it has many more teaching and organisational staff that are only involved in HE, except for a few that still teach across HE and FE. The teaching staff work in a discrete HE only faculty, though the programmes are taught at the different colleges of the Group. Staff no longer have to switch from HE to FE and can focus on one way of being. For Gergen (2015), the language used is directly linked to the sense and value we make of things. With more members of the same group conversing in one common way, the way of being is more readily reinforced, and a new culture becomes possible. As Gergen (2015) asserts, this new group can build what they see as their shared reality, or ontology, that is, for my study, a reality that is different from an HE CAS, or FE CAS. The FDAP CAS may be starting to resemble a university, developing what the group understands as an HE ethos. Yet, it is still dependent on the FE college and on the university partners for the top-up awards. This new CAS raises the question of the wider HE in FE community and where this FDAP CAS sits? Is it an agent of the higher HE CAS network contributing to the HE in FE identity overall? Or does it form a new and emerging higher network community with the other FDAP colleges with its own identity and nature, that has yet to emerge?

CAS agents show self-organisation and emergence.

Levin (1998) asserts that species aggregate into recognisable groups to form CAS by self-organisation. Likewise, agents may aggregate to form HE CAS. As for Cilliers (1998), both the environment and past experience may influence this self-organisation. In a self-organising system, there is no central control (Holland,1992). In an HE CAS there may be an HE lead, however, there are many other internal and external governing factors of a CAS. For Heylighen (2008:72), a CAS is too complex for one central control and its activities depend on the interaction of all the agents 'bottom-up'. The interdependency of all the agents and the environmental resources in these unique HE CAS results in what Miller and Page (2007:232) describe as new behaviour that is 'qualitatively different from that of any individual agent'. This emerging pattern or new behaviour of a CAS is called emergence. For Holland (1992), governance is distributed where the agents interact, each with their own local rules. In CAS there are simple rules (Miller and Page,2007). However, this may not be the case in HE CAS. Because of the dependency on other systems, agents may have to switch to different rules depending on which CAS they are a part of at a particular time. For Burr (2003) and Slater (2017), these social actors and their understandings of their rules are shaped by the traditions and context in which they came about. This raises the question of the rules in these unique HE CAS of 'whose rules', or are there 'new rules' and if there are new rules, to what extent are they known and understood? There are many sources of rules and governing factors: from FE or the HEI partners with their regulations, the wider systems of the QAA or the OfS or an HE CAS may construct its own rules. Furthermore, questions arise around the concept of no central control with the lead being no more than a part of the network of agents. In an HE CAS it may not be as clear cut. As suggested by Eaton et al. (2015),

the culture in an HE CAS may be reliant on charismatic HE leads. Jonathan, Beth and Sally-Anne have a long experience of HE in FE and they characterise these charismatic leads of Eaton et al. (2015). According to Gergen (2015) social actors, such as these leads may have leverage in the system. Jonathan, for example, is an influential gatekeeper for what happens and what is understood in the system.

‘So, I’m line managed by the Vice-Principal of 14 to 19 adult and Higher Education, so that Vice Principal has a huge portfolio himself and in my experience I’ve had a number of line managers who come in and know very little about higher education, so as well as sideways management, the HE office has a very important role to play in upwards management’ (Jonathan).

Leads such as Jonathan may be what Paine (1966) refers to as keystone. Should they be removed, this may lead to substantial and detrimental non-linear changes locally. If these leads retire, or their posts are removed in cutbacks, extensive long-term experience and knowledge are lost. To what extent could the HE CAS re-organise? In the FDAP CAS, this may be less of a concern as there are a greater number of HE agents who collectively may have sufficient knowledge and voice to sustain the CAS. In the HE CAS there were very few HE only staff with the knowledge of how things ought to be, so changes as outlined here may threaten the sustainability of the HE CAS.

Learning HE in FE Quality Management

Each local HE CAS is different, with different local pressures, availability of resources and local knowledge. The following paragraphs consider how colleges learnt to develop their quality management systems in their local contexts. Early on, for FdAs, for example, colleges were to follow university processes (Parry and Thompson,2002). There was no blueprint for how the HE in FE quality management system was to develop. Nevertheless, by 2011, after IQER, the QAA observed that some colleges had started to engage in their own HE quality systems and processes, with some colleges more advanced in this than others (QAA,2011). The idea that before IQER some colleges may not have been fully cognisant or engaged in HE processes was reinforced by Vincenta:

‘...you [colleges] would have to fill the forms in and then and as they started to fill the forms in, they would start to understand that perhaps there was a little more to it than they thought. Having worked with a number of FE colleges in those IQER days I think that it was a real spectrum and sometimes essentially the university had to drive the college through the IQER process and not quite do it for them, well I did for one, for a college, but actually, to support Colleges through that process to say what you need and this is how you get through it. We’ve [universities] got experience in doing these things; this is what you need to do and this is what you need to get

through. That is why it [IQER] started off as a developmental route and gave the college feedback and a bit of time before there was the actual review with outcomes' (Vincenta).

In learning processes, colleges both did what the university asked them to do and mimicked them. With the experience of working in both sectors, Olivia saw the lack of confidence as a problem for FE colleges delivering HE due to it being unfamiliar. For Olivia, if a college was partnered by a 'solid institution that would enhance their provision, as there would be the definite processes that they can align too and follow'. Vincenta saw no problem in colleges using the university processes as they stood 'no point in reinventing the wheel'. When Neelsborough College had several university partners, they just used the university processes and templates for the self-evaluation process. So did Olivia when she worked in a college. Sally-Anne always thought the university quality model was a requirement of the partnerships and they still use a similar evaluation template and process to that used by their key partner:

'You can mirror them, but since we're moving across to teaching our own[degrees] I think we will still be using that as a template as it just keeps everything simple when you are a Programme Leader' (Sally-Anne).

Templates were aligned for style and terminology in the hope that some similarity in style would help teams when it came to completing the university template for the top-up. Recently, Sally-Anne had adapted this documentation to incorporate new external requirements.

For Vincenta, colleges were used to doing what they were asked, as colleges already worked with many awarding bodies: 'they say this is what we need, you do it and so that's the model fit for FE, why would it be any different for HE'. At the time of IQER, there were clear arrangements for partners, and there was a notion of driving university processes on to colleges. Support and training for staff delivering their programmes in colleges were important for Vincenta and the university needed to ensure that its quality processes were 'implemented locally'. What happened in a college, did, after all, reflect on the university. The Link Tutor was an important source of support and knowledge and collaborative partners were always invited to annual conferences. During Olivia's time at a college, liaison with the university and with their quality department was their way of ensuring that they were following the correct processes.

Beth asserted that they knew what they were doing and described how their behaviour and attitude had changed over time. For Beth, at first, it seemed as if FE had to do everything that a university did. Colleges were judged in the same way as universities, so at the outset, they did mimic the university as they were the exemplars and to succeed they had to mimic their behaviour. She thought that their own model would not have differed much from the model at the university as they had wanted to capture what a university did. In retrospect, Beth had doubts about that approach.

‘Now there's a difference between what's the best thing to do and ticking a box for what we were expected to do... rather than to ‘recognise that we can probably do it better, do it in a different way’ (Beth).

When asked whether there was pressure from the university to do things in a certain way Beth was adamant that by the time HER came around, they had their own model in place and that the College was in the driving seat:

‘No, I thought we were driving them. I thought absolutely we were driving all of our partners at that point’ (Beth).

Undergoing validation and reviews were critical points of learning. For Jonathan, experiencing the process of a university validation early in his career and ‘having come out the other side of that intact but fairly bruised, I kind of went from rejecting the process to then embracing it’. This experience meant that in a later validation Jonathan knew exactly what to do, and so did his team. At Teemshire College, ‘dry-runs’ for the validation events for their top-up courses with their key partner were undertaken to prepare programme teams for the events. Teams at the college now write their own validation documentation for their own FdAs. Experiencing reviews was another profitable experience and for Chattersbridge College HER left a favourable impression: ‘I never thought I would say this, in one way I miss the HER type experience’ (Jonathan). Jonathan saw this experience as a driver for change.

Networks are a way of sharing experiences and constructing and reinforcing knowledge. Vincenta knew of organisational networks established to support colleges in meeting the requirements of the new agendas. As Burr (2003) contends, social actors fabricate our world through interactions with others. Early on, Jonathan, like the Deputy Principal of Sittingdon College attended regional networks for HE in FE to participate in discussions and to meet others in similar positions. The Deputy Principal also has a ‘critical friend’ at one of their partner universities. For Olivia, being a member of a networking group or attending information sessions was essential, and even uplifting to hear that everyone else was in the same position and attendance would increase the visibility of the institution. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) was another way in which Colleges found out what to do. Jonathan or the HE Coordinator would go to events or training to find out more and he organised training with the HEA to develop himself. To disseminate this knowledge internally, Beth at Neelsborough College relied on a strong internal network amongst those involved in HE. At one time there was a senior member of staff from a university and who she described as ‘a real champion of HE’ and who was a key influence for her. At Chattersbridge, the HE Office ensures that others are aware of requirements and are meeting sector expectations. All these external and internal interactions serve to construct and reinforce the language of the HE CAS.

When people interact, their world is constructed (Burr,2003). The social actors of the university interact and share understandings shaped by the traditions and cultural context of the HE sector. The HE sector is constrained by the 'rules' or reference points of the HE quality frameworks, constructed 'for the sector, by the sector' (QAA,2017; QAA,2018b). As for Gergen (2015), with interaction and common language, shared understandings of practice become possible. Although universities were to embed this frame, they were already part of the culture and traditions of the sector that helped to construct it. Agents of the HE in FE CAS also had to become familiar with this same frame and embed this in the HE CAS. At the outset, these conventions were learnt by doing what the university supported them to do via link tutors, training or by experiencing processes that reinforced the learning of these conventions and by mimicking what the university did 'to succeed' (Beth). Over time, for the colleges in this study, less support was required from the university. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983) mimicking, conforming to the rules of the authoritative body, (the university) and aligning to the professional norms would result in organisations resembling each other. This did not occur with HE CAS. As Burr (2003) argues, an understanding constructed in one culture may be different from that produced elsewhere. Beth, for example, realised that they might do things differently from the university. Significantly, these HE in FE social actors interacted in their own external networks amongst actors from institutions with similar traditions, with a shared understanding of their context and with the possibility of constructing their own way of being. The following passages give examples of how HE CAS evolved and adapted.

CAS show co-evolution.

IQER was a two-step process when colleges underwent an intensive developmental process, followed by a summative review (Simmonds and Lea,2013). During the developmental period, based on Levin (1998) and Miller and Page (2007), local selective pressures may have resulted in an incremental change of the parts, building a local understanding of HE systems and processes. These changes may have instigated a move towards institutional-wide oversight of HE, rather than the 'decentralised' approach described earlier in Figure 22. By HER, colleges were to have fully engaged with the HE quality frameworks and developed some of their own HE processes. Reviews may have contributed to a transformational change, bringing about the development of HE CAS, as illustrated in Figure 22. As for Levin (1998), this transformational evolution results when self-organising aggregates re-shape the system, modifying the system as a whole. Some agents may evolve into specialised niches (Holland,2014; Miller and Page,2007). It could be argued that these specialised niches are occupied by those agents with HE only roles. There are insufficient HE only members to construct an HE only CAS so an HE CAS is reliant on the broader environment. According to Byrne and Callaghan (2014:225), 'co-evolution allows other systems in'. In an HE CAS, those are FE and HE systems, both of which it needs to survive. Colleges had to develop, adapt and evolve HE CAS in their unique environment with quality activities adapted from HE and FE processes and some FE processes remained unchanged, as illustrated in the following passage.

Jonathan at Chattersbridge College adapted some of the university regulations and processes: 'because we are dancing to the tune of a different band'. University regulations were thought to be 'like War and Peace', so these were adapted. Whilst not deviating from the meanings, in making adaptations regulations were more accessible to staff and students. Many of the College's own documents, policies or processes were adapted 'to dovetail' with external expectations of the sector or the University (Jonathan). Most of the other HE quality activities were college-owned and run, such as Programme Boards attended by a university representative or the HE student voice. Jonathan emphasized that 'we run fairly autonomously, our own quality systems...' [in a different way to those of the University]. Demonstrating autonomy for the College's HE processes was important for Jonathan, and he stressed that a degree of autonomy would be expected when using and applying the Quality Code. Jonathan would prefer a 'one-stop shop' approach for HE, but the College was resistant to change for some processes, such as teaching observations or internal verification.

Environmental tensions and CAS at the edge of chaos

CAS agents constantly interact, change and adapt, resulting in aggregate behaviour that is sub-optimal (Holland,1992). Stable systems that cannot adapt or respond to their environment cannot survive, and neither can a system in chaos (Holland,2014; Shayan,2019). There is much uncertainty in an HE CAS when both its internal and external environments are complex and unstable. These environmental tensions seen in the following sections cumulatively shape and challenge the feasibility, clarity and sustainability of the HE CAS as a whole. HE CAS may exist at the edge of chaos where for Waldrop (1993), a system has just enough stability to sustain itself.

HE in FE colleges have multiple perspectives of quality arrangements to contend with. Jonathan pointed out that there is usually only one quality regime across a university. Whereas for a college, as Jonathan highlighted, many different quality perspectives exist. One for FE driven by Ofsted⁵⁴ and the SFA and another for HE guided by the QAA and the HEFCE. In addition to these, a college must take on the quality systems required by the university. More than this, when there are several university partners, the number of differing demands is multiplied. Having to face the confusing circumstance of having to implement each of the partner's quality processes and when each university 'presents its own variant of quality processes', was a key issue at Chattersbridge College (Jonathan). For Jonathan, this was one of the reasons for reducing the number of their university partners. Beth added another perspective that was not a concern for Jonathan at that time, that of the quality demands of professional bodies or health providers for health-

⁵⁴ Ofsted work on behalf of the Government to inspect education providers and to make judgements against the framework called the Common Inspection Framework. This Framework has recently changed in early 2019 to become the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted,2019). The QAA safeguards standards and improves the quality of all UK higher education and is the designated body for quality working on behalf of the Office for Students (OfS,2018b).

related courses. Then, for an FDAP college like Teemshire College, in addition to the processes of the university partners and those of a NAB, whilst transitioning from higher national qualifications (HNs) to foundation degrees, the College had to construct its own internal quality processes for its own degrees.

At Chattersbridge College, multiple perspectives of regulations and policies exist. Students on a college HND follow college processes when students on a foundation degree, for the same subject area and the same level of study, follow university regulations. Despite these similarities, each of these courses has different rules: for submitting work, for late work, or referrals and differing rules for the turnaround of feedback. Jonathan felt that this was not a fair way of working for students studying at the same college, and he has always pushed for systems that were 'a lot more equal to all students'. Reducing the numbers of partners was one way of overcoming such disparities. You might expect that for a college with FDAP, such as Teemshire, with their own FDAP regulations and policies, that the problem of having several sets of rules across different awarding bodies, would have been resolved. However, the picture was not so clear cut. Whilst it does have separate policies and regulations for its 'divisionalised' HE, Sally-Anne noted that some policies still 'key into FE' such as safeguarding or equality and diversity and there were still the policies and regulations of the university partner for the top-up qualifications.

Having to grapple with multiple perspectives of data is another difficulty faced by colleges. Beth and Olivia recognised inconsistencies in their HE data. When writing reports, some of the data would be available from the college systems, but they would then have to liaise with the partner universities to obtain the data they needed from there. For both Beth and Olivia, their internal data would differ from that of each of their university partners due to the slightly different approaches to data and calculations. In the end, at Neelsborough, they decided to use their own methods for calculating oversight data for the various reports they had to compile. To add to this, there were the problems of the college FE data systems not aligning with the formats required for the HE data. So, it 'ultimately it comes down to one individual really holding things [on spreadsheets]' (Beth). For an HE CAS having to contend with all of the perspectives of the different quality systems, regulations and data systems, comparatively, is far removed from the single perspectives for systems found in a university with one quality system, one set of regulations and one data system.

Colleges were to develop their own quality processes for HE, yet at the same time, university partners had their own that the colleges were to use. Before IQER, Chattersbridge College completed the self-evaluation documentation required for each of their university partners and they used their own for the NAB programmes. At that time, Jonathan was reticent to use the universities' self-evaluations documents because, in his eyes, their own was more rigorous in terms of tracking actions, for example. Jonathan approached the universities to see if they would agree for the College to use its own documentation and

process instead of the university versions. Only one partner accepted: 'you've got through IQER... we trust you, go and do your own'. However, the others did not, insisting that the College uses their documentation, even if the partnership status of both those universities was changing 'on their way out' as Jonathan called it. For the partner that did accept, Jonathan's approach was to adapt their document to fit both internal and external requirements 'taking the best of both'. For about six years Chattersbridge used their own documentation for this one university partner. However, with the arrival of a new Head of Quality at the University, this changed, and from that point they refused to accept the College format, enforcing the use of university documentation only. Vincenta recognised the potential conflict of who's processes a college had to follow:

'You might have a set of processes that you say you do it this way, and your awarding body says you have to do it this way. So that's a bit of a tension' (Vincenta).

Not long after this, the NAB brought out their version of a monitoring document that colleges were to complete. Given the pressures from the awarding organisations and given that, by then, the College only had one university partner, Jonathan felt that he could 'no longer argue the case' in terms of using their own documentation. Now Chattersbridge only uses the documentation of the awarding bodies, so in some way, they have devolved back to the pre-IQER status, even though this means that the College has to use multiple annual monitoring formats. Beth recounted a similar story. At one time Neelsborough had nine university partners and all nine universities had agreed that the college could develop its own evaluation process. This management of multiple validating partners was noted as good practice at IQER and HER. By having their own documentation Beth could impose internal standards and a consistent approach, and of key importance, avoid the duplications of having to follow both internal and external quality requirements. Nevertheless, as with Chattersbridge College, after some time, Beth recalls that the universities changed their tune and they had to go back to using the university templates once more. Mindful of duplication of work, like Jonathan, Beth decided to accept that teams only complete the monitoring documents of the respective universities:

'...so, for example, the XW University, all their course journals, their annual monitoring is all online. I'm not going to have my team then re-visit everything they're doing during the year just to complete a form for me'(Beth).

Teemshire College and Sittingdon College just followed the processes of the partner universities. Olivia had introduced a cross-college higher-level report to give an overview of the HE provision. However, Olivia would have to write the document from several perspectives depending on whether the paper was for the universities with their data sets or for internal oversight purposes using all the data. Colleges had different perceptions of what they were to do. For Crotty (1998) and Shayan (2019), many meanings

and outcomes are possible. Across the HE CAS with the different agents and social groups, meanings and understandings could be construed in many ways. What happens in an HE CAS seems to be strongly influenced by leads such as Jonathan and Beth, though they were still dependent on what was permitted by the university. Were tensions like those illustrated here, envisaged before HE CAS were expected to develop their own processes?

Management and culture

The FE culture of performance management is deeply ingrained, making it difficult to establish an HE culture (Simmons and Lea,2013; Gleeson et al.,2015). Having experienced it, Jonathan takes a strong stance against the managerialist culture and structures rife in FE. As the lead of the HE Office, sitting in between the university regulations and the managerialist cultures of FE, Jonathan aims 'to create an environment where we hope HE staff have a buzz about them'. One of his ongoing battles is to be able to free up his HE academics so that they can teach and have the time to develop their teaching for this level. However, more time is something this current culture will not allow. These differences in culture extended to how HE students were treated in the college environment. Some managers still treated students as if they were sixteen in spite of the advice of the HE Office to the curriculum on 'things like Graduate Identity... and how to treat higher education students differently instead of throwing the book at them'(Jonathan). HE at Teemshire is still part of an FE college, so the HE section was not completely autonomous from FE. Maintaining a degree of autonomy for their HE culture in the current climate was a concern. For Sally-Anne, HE had a more self-reliant culture and more discursive, whereas for FE 'somebody makes a decision and it comes down from the top'.

Beth also described how their HE teams have become more proficient in an evaluative approach, with input from staff and students to develop programmes, as opposed to FE, where reporting boils down to 'we have an achievement rate of 65%, it's a great course' or 'my attendance is over 60%, teaching's great'. Beth believes the HE and FE processes are converging, with a greater focus on KPIs, success or achievement rates for HE in a similar way to FE. Despite this potential convergence, Beth felt there was more discussion of the student experience and student engagement in HE. Both Sally-Anne and Jonathan were cautious about the recent changes in regulatory bodies for HE bringing about a more data-driven approach. 'I think FE in some cases has gone too far... it's become too much watching the data'(Sally-Anne). Jonathan was also sceptical of a more data-driven HE environment as hailing the 'dangers of performance management'. The participants' perception of an HE culture seems to ascribe to what Gergen (2015) refers to as a socially constructed culture based on dialogue (Gergen,2015). For Crotty (1998:52) there are 'institutions that precede us'. In other words, before the construction of an HE CAS the traditions and ingrained local rules of FE were already in place. As for Levin (1998), the early colonisers shape the landscape. In the HE CAS, most

agents are part of the FE systems with its culture and traditions, with few solely for HE. Establishing a different culture for the HE CAS may be challenging.

HE focus, time and resources for higher education

Jonathan was concerned about the drift in the HE effort when the College was focusing on improving their Ofsted grade:

‘...the College has worked incredibly hard for that, but unfortunately, it bulldozed right through higher education and a number of things have been introduced to the College without any regard to higher education at all’(Jonathan).

At that time [Ofsted], processes such as scorecards or appraisals were introduced, with no consultation or reference to HE and these new systems applied to all college staff. The introduction of these new systems was a particular concern for Jonathan because of his TEF submission written before Ofsted. In this, he had written about the HE system of appraisals and HE teaching observations, which no longer existed due to the changes brought in, and over which he had little say. Beth also recounted how their Ofsted re-inspection had impacted on the time and focus for HE and how priorities changed when there was an imminent QAA review. Beth illustrated this with her change in roles over time, moving away from HE for about a year before HER:

‘then suddenly QAA was coming again, so here I am again... well there is only half of me now really with the faculty’(Beth).

At HER Beth's role was HE facing, now once again, her role is no longer dedicated solely to HE as her time is divided between HE and FE.

Relating to the focus on the QAA and the Quality Code, Jonathan raised another point of tension around the time and attention paid to analysing external criteria. Jonathan described how he takes ownership of the Quality Code and other requirements, CMA, or HEA [now Advanced HE] and acts accordingly:

‘The QAA Quality Code, for example, I don't think anyone had previously sat down and treated it in the same way as they would treat the College Inspection Framework, so you kind of had to look at what we really had been asked to do’(Jonathan).

According to Jonathan, he was the only person who sat down and analysed the criteria of the Quality Code, whereas the Ofsted Inspection Framework would be under scrutiny as a matter of course and by many more members of staff. This situation may not be surprising given that other than Jonathan and his

coordinator, Jonathan estimated that the senior manager responsible for HE at the Director of Curriculum level would only have around 10% of their time to dedicate to HE on a daily basis.

Vincenta pointed out that when the Quality Code came in, the universities acted straight away to look at how to work with this, while colleges were 'not really even thinking about it'. For Vincenta this was because, in most cases, HE is a marginal fraction of the college business, unless the HE numbers are significant. In agreement with Beth and Jonathan's accounts, Vincenta had witnessed a far greater focus on the FE business. It seemed to Vincenta that HE was no more than just another awarding body, or just another set of programmes:

'I was saying that more attention was paid to the FE side and that HE was just a bit on the side. You know, that we might see if we could squeeze it in, in the same way'(Vincenta).

The allocation of sufficient time to prepare teaching at this level and for scholarly activity relevant to HE, is problematic (King and Widdowson,2012; King et al.,2014b; Feather,2017). Staff in HE CAS are on the same contracts as FE staff, with the majority teaching on both FE and HE courses. There were exceptions for a couple of programmes at Neelsborough. Significant growth in HE student numbers for these courses had enabled more HE teaching hours for the staff. 'Capacity and time constraint issues' for HE activities was a problem at Sittingdon College. On a day-to-day basis for those in mixed- roles, teaching across both FE and HE, HE was not a priority. So 'you can see why HE tutors didn't consider themselves as very important almost...why would they want to engage as much if they don't see the benefit of doing so'(Olivia). Attending meetings or training at the university was also an issue due to teaching commitments. Instead, Jonathan focused on the unique skill set of the lecturers who in addition to a 'real affinity for HE, they can also teach across all the FE levels'. Viewed from a university perspective, Vincenta thought colleges would have to work harder to support staff in understanding the differences between the Ofsted FE and the QAA HE modes of working.

At Chattersbridge HE Programme Leads had a more favourable time remission on their timetables than FE Programme Leads and for Teemshire College, time to teach HE and time for scholarly activity was not an issue. At Teemshire, most HE staff are timetabled for HE only with fewer contact hours over the year overall, or 'at least technically'. As Sally-Anne explained, having fewer contact hours is rationalised by the differences in assessment and the expected management of assessments, that 'you don't really have in FE'. Still, to justify this, staff had to demonstrate HE-type activities, such as scholarly activity and research, updating professional practice or taking higher-level qualifications. Staff were also expected to identify the impact of these activities on the student experience. However, just like Jonathan, Sally-Anne referred to the uncertainty of maintaining this favourable time differential in the future.

As commented on earlier, HE CAS inhabit an FE CAS that has its own rules and traditions. For Crotty (1998), the institution was a pre-existing system with those working within it imbued with its culture and traditions. With few HE only agents in the HE CAS, it is difficult to establish a new system, within a system that is already established and understood. Inhabiting FE space with its open boundaries, the HE CAS may be influenced by the FE environment with its current harsh economic climate, making it ever more difficult to allow more time for what is often a minority group. The FDAP CAS with a different construction seemed to fair better.

External changes and impacts – economic, policy and regulatory change

Severe economic pressures, mergers and market competition depict the harsh environment for college HE and its quality models. The following passages demonstrate the consequential impacts of these highly significant and destabilising events. For Cilliers (1998), CAS are open systems. That means an HE CAS is not closed off from the economic pressures affecting FE and this has ramifications for the minority HE business of a college (King et al.,2010).

At Teemshire College, Sally-Anne mentioned ‘efficiencies’ and having to keep a close eye on numbers. Wishing to avoid going into too much detail, Sally-Anne briefly mentioned the serious difficulties of the current financial situation, with imminent hard-hitting consequences for FE. Seemingly, this was not the first year that it has been difficult for the College⁵⁵. Nevertheless, even with the financial pressures, Sally-Anne believed this would not impact on their quality model for HE. The FDAP model seemed to be resilient in these circumstances. However, there were few colleges with FDAP and not long after Teemshire College had gained FDAP and to encourage a more diverse open market, the Government proposed a simplified route to gaining FDAP (BIS,2016). Currently, there are still only seven colleges with FDAP (AoC,2019b). Olivia suggested the costs involved in gaining FDAP, both in terms of financial hurdles and the associated preparative costs could be prohibitive, especially in this current strained economic climate. Olivia speculated that some colleges may have reduced the number of university partners or formed closer ties with one, because of this unsteady climate.

Aiming for fewer, but more resilient colleges the Government asked them to consider mergers (AoC,2019a; Foster,2018). The potential consequences of these complex changes on funding, student support, and some aspects of quality assurance for College HE was recognised by HEFCE (2016), and colleges were to consider any potential impacts of a merger on their HE provision. Neelsborough College had undertaken a series of mergers involving four colleges to form one larger college. However, the students wanted to stay locally and not have to travel to these new sites. Due to this situation, the merger terms were changed,

⁵⁵ Before this Teemshire College had already gained FDAP and the scrutiny committee had recognised the challenges the Group were under and what the College was doing to maintain and grow HE (QAA,2015f).

reverting back to four separate colleges managed locally but with one overarching governing body and one name. The HE provision was managed across the different colleges by matrix management and Beth thought this was working well. The main concern for Beth, was that as a result, similar science programmes awarded through two different universities were now taught at two college campuses. For reasons that were unclear, for relatively common programmes of study such as IT or subject areas typical of a consortium linked to one university like Early Years that were now taking place at different campuses due to merger, this was less of a concern for Beth. Teemshire College had undergone a merger of three colleges to form a college Group, with each college situated on a different site. Sally-Anne had no real concerns emphasising that the HE teams of the Group were still expected to use the same quality processes, no matter which college of the Group they were situated in.

Market competition amongst HE providers was seen as a way of driving up quality (NAO,2017). However, for colleges, competition may be detrimental in terms of HE recruitment and HE student numbers (FETL,2018). Since HER, attrition rates of 50% had been experienced at Neelsborough. Now all of the HE provision was under curriculum review as an area at risk. The drop in numbers was thought to be due to both competition and, as pointed out by Callender and Thompson (2018), the decrease in part-time students nationally. Beth insisted that there was still a positive focus and appetite to grow HE despite a drop in numbers 'we all have HE as high in our priority as FE in terms of development and growth and everything else and absolutely buy into that'. For Beth, HE has not lost its status, even though it is smaller. Though notably, Beth's role was no longer uniquely for HE and some of the HE processes at Neelsborough College were not solely for HE, as they were before. The Termly Review Board, for example, was no longer uniquely for HE and now covers both HE and FE curriculum areas. Beth attributed this reduction in time for separate HE meetings to the knock-on effect of a drop in HE student numbers. The drop in student numbers, therefore, led to a change in the HE CAS. Sally-Anne had also noted that recently, some faculty meetings were no longer for HE only, and she had witnessed a slight drop in the formality of HE processes. For Sally-Anne HE numbers had started to go down when the student number cap was removed, resulting in the competition that followed on from this. Unconditional offers at the universities had also taken their toll. Still, in the last couple of years, they have been pleased with their recruitment numbers. For Jonathan:

'This competition effectively leaves little elbow room for colleges of HE, what with the universities dropping entry requirements, in particular the post-1992 universities and giving unconditional offers'(Jonathan).

Jonathan claimed that colleges are not very good at describing what they do well and this reduced capacity to market themselves well, together with the status advantage of universities, only exacerbated the situation for colleges. More recently, Jonathan had observed that universities were now encroaching on the

vocational territory more associated with colleges, resulting in colleges losing 'a bit of their market edge'. Sally-Anne had witnessed this recently when a local university had started a Year Zero Foundation award, that consequently was in direct competition with theirs.

For Vincenta the size of the HE provision is directly related to the infrastructure for HE. Vincenta illustrated this with an example of one college with several university partners, with around one thousand HE students with quite a good infrastructure for HE. Whereas another, with only a very small amount of HE, did not. In this latter case, Vincenta recalled that the university [Upperhatton University] basically did the IQER for them as the college did not have the supporting infrastructure to do it independently. Where numbers were small, Vincenta had observed that there was often no dedicated HE lead. Something that Vincenta put down to insufficient students to be able to sustain such an organisational structure. Small numbers lead to small group sizes for HE. As Sally-Anne pointed out, in this economic climate, they have to find ways to circumvent the risks associated with small numbers and find ways to be more efficient and innovative in delivery, otherwise, courses would have to close. For Olivia, small numbers also influence the visibility of HE in a college, not only within the college but externally as well. Despite the small numbers, Olivia thought that running HE would still be a relevant sum of money for a college. At Teemshire College few students progressed up internally to their HE programmes. Similarly, few progressed from their FdAs to their internal top-ups, with many students leaving to go to universities instead. Olivia described a similar situation where for some, it could be positive to move on, but for others, more used to the smaller local arrangements of a college, the university setting may prove daunting.

Partnerships and change

All colleges in this study had reduced the number of university partners, although reasons for doing so were not always known. Whether this was due to the decrease in student numbers as a knock-on effect of funding cuts in FE, or whether it was the college or the university that instigated the cutting of ties remains unclear. For Jonathan and Chattersbridge College, reducing the number of partners and setting up an arrangement so that all of the HE provision would be under the auspices of one university, made sense. Closer ties and acting as 'one voice' would be profitable both to the local community and for their students who were more likely to stay locally rather than travel to the other partners. Jonathan saw this as a positive move, and for him, it was as if the university had created a new faculty for College HE. Whilst colleges were reducing the number of partner universities, at Upperhatton University, Vincenta reported a drop in the number of collaborative partners. For Vincenta partnership working was driven by national agendas, and her university had moved away from its collaborations with FE colleges. With the introduction of the FdA just after 1997, the idea was that colleges were to deliver this sub-degree provision and at that time of initial growth, the university had expanded its work with FE Colleges. However, the expected growth did

not occur, so consequently, the number of college partnerships were reduced. Vincenta thought that universities could look once more to colleges with the new apprenticeship agenda.

‘The university too is fighting for its share of the market, so that may be why you are looking at working with the college, not because of the progression opportunities, or the top-up opportunities...or just sort of building the HE provision in the region, the regional aspect of the markets’(Vincenta).

As Olivia pointed out, whereas FdAs were destined for colleges, despite colleges being a favourable destination for degree apprenticeships, they are not the exclusive destination for these qualifications as universities are running these as well. In reality, as Vincenta remarked, universities look for partners to meet their mission and strategic objectives, so there are elements of dependency on universities and competition. In the end, as Olivia emphasised, it is the universities that have the final say in whether to take on colleges or not.

Working with university partners-reliance and resilience

For Vincenta, colleges were very reliant on what the universities told colleges to do. So, at the start of the IQER process, this ‘demonstrated that colleges didn’t really have any sort of background or understanding, realising perhaps that there was more to it than they realised’(Vincenta). For Vincenta, universities provide a ‘procedural infrastructure’, so by following this ‘university manual’ colleges were able to show engagement with the Quality Code through using the university processes. That was particularly relevant where a college may not have had the capacity to build and sustain their own organisational structures for HE and quality. That meant that early on, colleges were very reliant on what a university told them to do, and at the time, there was no expectation for a college to worry about another external set of drivers. The university had the sole responsibility for quality and colleges just followed what the universities asked. With the growth of HE in FE and certainly by Higher Education Review (HER), the expectations for colleges changed:

‘Then with HER an actual expectation on the part of the QAA and their masters, that not only do you work with [the Code], that you start to actually have your own processes for doing things that can be tested and I think that's really driven a big change in the seriousness FE colleges take with the Code and realised that you had to look at all the bits of it and think about how you met the requirements, so at a huge cost really to colleges to have the privilege of delivering a bit of HE’(Vincenta).

Vincenta believed that some colleges had not quite understood the difference between IQER and HER leading to some colleges falling into difficulties. IQER compared to HER ‘was actually quite light touch in a

way and HER was rather different'(Vincenta). Vincenta believed that colleges had not completely internalised all the requirements. Some colleges thought that HE could be left to one or two HE leads who would know and demonstrate the Code and that nobody else needed to know about it, because 'you're the expert, you're in charge'. The idea that the Code needed to be embedded across all levels of a college, and not just 'in the brains of two people' has been 'a bit of a shock to FE Colleges'. HER had a substantial impact on colleges and that helped to crystallise the understanding of the requirements of quality, in particular by the Head of HE or equivalents: 'to get to the point they are at, it's been a hard road, and you want to maintain that'(Vincenta). There were still concerns for the NAB awards, as for these awards, there was no supporting infrastructure from the university, so this was solely in the hands of the college to develop. That meant that by the reviews many colleges had not prepared their own processes for this awarding body, so consequentially, they did not do well in the HER review.

Capacity for new changes

Like universities, colleges have to keep up with all the regulatory demands, the new Quality Code, TEF or CMA. With all the changes, especially in HE quality and with more changes 'down the track' [OfS] Vincenta wondered if colleges would have the capacity to keep up with those changes. With the new Quality Code, that may not have the same level of detail as before, Vincenta wondered how colleges would manage:

'you need to be really careful not to lose that level of detail that's in the old code...that's a lot of good guidance there' (Vincenta).

With the new Quality Code, both Olivia and Vincenta were concerned that new providers may have some difficulties in getting to grips with the new Code and were concerned how they may fair with the shorter preparation time for review. With this backdrop of regulatory change, there was speculation over whether smaller providers like colleges would continue, in which case the HE would go back to the universities. Jonathan reflected on the changing attitudes of colleges in the new landscape:

'I think the requirements to meet baseline performance, the increase in the marketization of the sector and the expectations for the students, have all absolutely changed the game. I don't think colleges will survive if they don't, if they just think that higher education is a nice thing to do, or a supplementary income to a depleting FE resource'(Jonathan).

For staff in HE in FE, the time to focus on these changes may be limited and the same degree of engagement that you would find at a university may not be possible. Vincenta reflected on the mis-match of the relatively small amount of provision in a college, vis-a-vis the number of processes required for HE. To expand on this mis-match, the data extracted from HER reports is summarised in Figure 24 and the full list of activities is seen in appendix 1 p.159. Figure 24 illustrates the number of quality

activities that staff in college HE CAS engage with. Of the quality activities making up the HE CAS and presented at HER, some activities such as validation or programme assessment boards are solely HE, whereas other activities could be seen as common to HE and FE such as curriculum planning, advice and guidance for applicants, student handbooks or annual staff appraisal. Figure 24 emphasises the number of quality activities that staff in HE CAS must engage with over and above those activities that could be considered common to both HE and FE.

Of the 176 activities at the programme level, 117 are seen as HE only with 59 activities common to HE and FE. At the college level, 194 activities are HE only with 109 activities for HE and FE. Added to this are the 106 university activities that also require interaction from the colleges, then on top of this is the requirement to engage with sector frameworks such as the Quality Code, the FHEQ or Subject Benchmarks statements.

Level of Quality Activity	HE Only Activities	Activities common to both HE and FE
Programme	117	59
College	194	109
University	106	0
External Frameworks	8	3

Figure 24. The numbers of activities that an HE CAS has to engage with.

Notably, this illustration does not calculate the time required for each activity. Nor does it estimate the time required to prepare for teaching at this higher level or the time required to engage with the external frameworks. It may be that both the number of HE activities and the time required for HE activities had been overlooked when considering the development and feasibility of HE CAS in colleges.

CAS show feedback systems.

For Morin (2007) society is produced by the interactions between the individuals that make it up. Then the society, the organised whole, feeds back to form the individuals through education, language and schools. Similarly, in a CAS, the CAS agents interact constantly and feedback to each other, self-organising to form the 'whole' HE CAS. At the same time, the HE CAS, as the organised whole feeds back to the agents. For Gergen (2015), with feedback among the members of the group, the whole becomes organised and self-sustaining. CAS adapt over time due to feedback loops resulting from interactions between the system elements and between the elements and the environment (Holland,2014). In a CAS made up of one society, with its traditions and culture, feedback loops could support the sustainability of the CAS, such as in an FE CAS or a University CAS. In the unique HE CAS, its sustainability is dependent on both FE and HE. The HE CAS is dependent on agents derived from the FE CAS who may teach or work across both HE and FE.

Changes in the FE CAS, for Ofsted for example, may see some agents focus more on FE, reducing efforts for the HE CAS. The HE CAS is also dependent on the awards of the university, the university CAS and its systems such as the external examiners that feedback on the standards of the awards taught at the HE CAS on behalf of the university. With dependency on the interaction with two other CAS and where changes in either FE or the university can bring about change in HE CAS, it is difficult to imagine how such a system can become self-sustaining.

CAS show diversity

For Shayan (2019), the more diverse the agents of CAS the more adaptable and resilient CAS become. In colleges, despite the tensions described, HE CAS exist in around 200 colleges (AoC,2019b). These HE CAS are diverse in terms of their quality activities and the resulting HE CAS, as a whole. Diversity is important for survival (Levin,1998; Shayan,2019). Following Levin (1998), natural selection and adaptation are fundamental processes in CAS, and so the diversity seen in HE CAS may allow those with suitable traits to survive better than others. Colleges use an extensive variety of quality activities to meet the Quality Code, as seen in the lists of activities extracted from 11 HER documents in appendices 1 and 2, P. 159 and P. 178. This substantial variety in roles, systems and arrangements for quality, had been noted in 2011(QAA,2011). As seen in appendix 1, at the cross-college level, for example, the considerable range of strategy and policy type documents, quality assurance guides and regulations, different forms of HE Boards and Committees contribute to the diversity of approach. While some activities were common to most colleges, such as HE course evaluations, many were particular to only one or two. The HER reports for the HE CAS in this research suggest a diverse approach to quality activities illustrated in Figure 25.

Level	Chattersbridge College	Sittingdon College	Teemshire College	Neelsborough College
Programme	61	36.5	67	51
College	61.5	42	101	71.5
University	41	15	7	24
Frameworks	4	4	6	6
Sum	167.5	97.5	181	152

Figure 25. Summary of the total number of quality activities at the different levels of the organisations to include external frameworks.

The numbers of activities presented at HER differed greatly across the colleges in this study. All colleges were successful in the reviews, despite very different approaches to the quality activities seen. As for Burr (2003), an understanding of something is shaped by the local context. For QMMs, social actors construct the meanings and the understandings of the quality activities and quality models, shaped by the local

context and ways of being. As for Crotty (1998) and Shayan (2019), many constructions are possible as seen with the different approaches to QMMs or HE CAS.

The complexity and diversity of an HE CAS constructed by sharing resources with FE and with partner universities and with the possibility of adapting these resources, may be advantageous. Policies for equality and diversity or Prevent are shared across FE and HE, and policies for complaints are adapted for HE. There is no standard format required for an HE CAS, so activities such as an HE Committee, staff roles, or the management of an HE CAS, can be constructed according to local capacity and resource availability. Marketing, careers, counselling or LRC spaces and staff are shared with FE and teaching staff often teach on both FE and HE courses. To borrow the metaphors of Weinstein and Weinstein (1991) cited in Denzin and Lincoln (2005:4), far from a universal approach, an HE CAS might emerge as a 'bricolage' constructed by the local social actors the 'bricoleurs' who construct the HE CAS with what is available locally and at that time. This diverse and adaptive approach may allow HE CAS to survive.

Despite the advantages of resourceful adaptation and sharing, for some activities seen in the HER reports their HE nature was uncertain, for example: a learning behaviour agreement, teaching and learning observation guide, teaching and learning policy, tutorial plans, college guide to verification, staff recruitment and selection. To which CAS do they belong FE or HE? One HER report noted that policies were related to the College as a whole, recommending that policies were reviewed to meet the purposes of higher education (QAA,2014b). Sharing resources with operational groups mainly for FE may allow gaps to be filled momentarily but this is not without local problems. The FE marketing team have their own self-organised 'working vocabularies' and ways of being (Gergen,2015:28). The capacity to take on a new HE culture or a new 'working vocabulary' and a new way of being may be limited and result in competition for resources such as staff time or allegiances and priorities. All these things influence the understandings of the requirements of the HE CAS. HE CAS seem uncertain, and to sustain the FE CAS and the HE CAS, resources are reorientated depending on the requirements at the time: to Ofsted or QAA or teachers switching from FE or HE. For Shayan (2019), stable systems cannot survive, nor can a system in chaos. As Holland (1992) suggests, due to the more or less continuous adaptations due to changing behaviour in other parts of the aggregate, a CAS is sub-optimal. This is the edge of chaos, where there is maximum variety and diversity (Shayan,2019). The diversity, sharing resources and adaptability may allow CAS to survive, however, as discussed in Chapter Six, when the 'whole' is considered, it may be that HE CAS are too chaotic, jeopardising their sustainability.

Summary of the analysis

This chapter analysed the development and understanding of quality management models in HE in FE, together with the factors that influence the effectiveness and sustainability of these models constructed in this setting. QMMs were considered both as CAS and as social constructs illuminating different perceptions for the understanding of these quality concepts, as discussed further in Chapter Six. These models are understood both as social constructs and as self-organising complex adaptive systems at the edge of chaos that can adapt and evolve. To add to their complexity, they are dependent on both FE and HE, without which they cannot survive. Each HE CAS is constructed through pre-existing local cultures resulting in diverse HE CAS. It may be this diversity and capacity for change that allows them to survive at the edge of chaos but are they too chaotic? It is not possible to consider all the parts contributing to the wholes. However, insight into the interdependencies between the parts and an impression of whole HE CAS is possible. Given the complex and multiple interdependencies and the resulting tensions and uncertainties of these unique HE CAS, their sustainability is in question.

CHAPTER 6. Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

This exploratory inquiry has brought to light new real-world insights and new knowledge on quality management models (QMMs) and the understanding of quality for HE in FE institutions. Thinking conceptually about QMMs as complex adaptive systems (CAS) and viewing these through the theoretical framework of social constructionism has enabled critical knowledge of QMMs to come to light and opens the door for new ways of thinking. It seems that QMMs can be seen as complex self-organising CAS systems that can adapt and evolve to survive at the edge of chaos. The root of their complexity appears to be their dependency on both FE and HE. Although these complex interdependencies may allow for survival, at the same time, they result in tensions and uncertainties, so much so that the sustainability of QMMs may be in question. Whilst their adaptability and inherent diversity characteristic of QMMs supports their survival, QMMs may be too chaotic, reducing their effectiveness. Still, as social constructs, new approaches to QMMs are possible. In this concluding chapter, I revisit the purpose of this research and the findings are then related back to the aim and sub-aims of the study. The findings are summarised through the different perspectives of social constructionism and CAS, contributing to an overall view of QMM for HE in FE. The significance and implications of these findings lead to recommendations for future practice. These recommendations are followed by suggestions for further research together with the limitations and criticisms of my research. Finally, how my research contributes to knowledge and its transferability to a wider community are considered, ending with a reflection on what I have learnt as a researcher in this process.

Purpose and aims

At the outset, this inquiry sought to bring to light, real-world insights and new knowledge on quality practices for HE in FE institutions in the complex and changing HE in FE context. That is, given this complex setting, to find out more about the development, effectiveness and sustainability of quality management models in this setting. As outlined in Chapters One and Two, the rationale and the aims of this study came about in response to apparent gaps in the research literature. These gaps together with observations from professional practice and the pilot project supported the necessity for new knowledge in this subject area. Consequently, these knowledge gaps led me to want to find out more about the quality practices for HE in FE institutions. As stated in Chapter One, if quality enables reflection on, and the potential improvement of, any step of the student experience of HE, then developing knowledge of the quality practices for HE in the FE setting may be considered essential. To find out more, there was one overarching research question that was broken down into sub-aims. Each sub-aim is addressed in turn in this concluding chapter.

Principal aim: To undertake a critical analysis of models for quality management and the understanding of quality for HE in FE institutions.

Sub-aims:

- To undertake a critical analysis of the development, effectiveness and sustainability of quality management models for HE in FE
- To analyse quality management models in this setting through the application of theoretical lenses illuminating different perceptions for the understanding of these quality concepts

Then, based on the analysis:

- To make recommendations for the development, effectiveness and sustainability of these quality frameworks for HE in FE
- To make recommendations for approaches to developing FE staff understanding of HE quality frameworks and models

To find out more about QMMs, participants from the HE in FE college sector and the university sector recounted their experiences and understandings of QMMs from around the time of IQER, up to how QMMs were understood at the time of the interviews post-HER. The participant accounts were supplemented by documentary evidence. As seen in Chapter One, Morin (2007) points out that it is necessary to gain knowledge of the parts and the whole, and how the parts and the whole mutually interact. This interpretive case study approach has encouraged visualising a QMM as a complex whole and more than the sum of its parts; rather than focusing on the individual parts. The concepts of complex adaptive systems (CAS) served as the frame that encouraged this view of complex emergent whole systems. To attempt to view QMMs as whole systems, the themes emerging from the interviews and the documentary evidence were interpreted through the concepts of complex adaptive systems (CAS). Interpreting QMMs as CAS brought into view the complex nature of QMMs. These same themes were also interpreted through the theoretical framework of social constructionism to enable new knowledge to come to light and bring to the fore the dialogical and socially constructed nature of these quality concepts.

Although this study was on QMMs, overlap with the general activities of HE in FE was inevitable. As illustrated in Chapter Two Figure 8 p.43, quality mechanisms ask questions about the activities that contribute to the learning opportunities of the students. These quality activities and the HE activities are interlinked, and therefore one cannot be considered without the other. That said, my research aimed to view HE in FE from the perspective of the day-to-day working of its QMMs in situ and how quality for HE is understood in these institutions. I was surprised and concerned by what was found. These findings indicate that new ways of approaching QMMs for HE in FE are required to support colleges, which in turn would enhance the possibilities of bringing about change and potential improvements in educational processes and the educational experiences of the students.

A review of the context for QMMs for HE in FE.

With little research on QMMs, the literature review mainly served to situate QMMs in the FE context and to present the purpose and characteristics of this setting. The available literature and research on the quality of, and the quality mechanisms for, HE in FE were included. Further Education Colleges (FECs) have always served local communities by offering a wide range of courses, across many teaching levels, including HE for this local community. During the 1980s and 1990s, the socio-political context for HE changed considerably bringing about the growth and diversification of HE, and with this, greater concerns for quality. What was striking, was that whilst the university sector expanded its HE community, with its rules, culture and way of being, HE in FE was to develop within a different setting entirely, in the FE community. For colleges, taking on HE was not just a case of just taking on another qualification that had been developed for the FE setting, with its oversight bodies. Any expansion of HE in the FE setting meant learning the rules and traditions of this different HE community, whilst continuing with all of the FE requirements already in place. College HE had never been a part of the larger HE community, and this was to develop alongside the HE community, from, and within the FE setting. Notably, many of the HE qualifications making up a prominent part of this HE in FE, the HNCs and HNDs, were also developed alongside the HE community, and not from within the university community (see Figures 3 and 4, p. 21 and p. 24).

Several changes brought about a clearer oversight of quality in the HE sector. HEFCE, formed in 1992, already had the responsibility for assessing the quality of the HE it funded (Further and Higher Education Act 1992). Then, in 1997, the newly formed QAA was contracted by HEFCE to carry out reviews on its behalf (HEPI,2013; HEFCE,2013). As well as reviews, the QAA developed quality frameworks to bring about a more consistent approach to quality across the sector (Dearing,1997; Jackson and Bohrer,2010). These frameworks were to act as a guide only, leaving the responsibility for the quality and standards of the awards and the quality mechanisms designed to meet the requirements of these frameworks, in the hands of the degree-awarding bodies (Jackson and Bohrer,2010). Colleges providing HE were to uphold the quality of the awards they delivered according to the agreements and funding arrangements in place with their awarding partners (QAA,2010). However, regardless of the funding arrangements with the awarding bodies; even if the awarding bodies were ultimately responsible for the quality and standards of the awards delivered by their partners, colleges delivering HE funded by HEFCE also had to demonstrably meet the requirements of these new frameworks.

Not only were colleges to take on HE programmes of study from a different community; they were also to learn and take on the quality mechanisms for this HE provision. This was not straight forward, as colleges had to engage with and uphold the requirements of the different awarding bodies for the HE they were to deliver and at least by the time of IQER, they were to have developed their own quality mechanisms to meet the requirements of the HE sector frameworks. It was only from 2007 with IQER, that the expectation

for the oversight of HE and QMMs for all the HE provision in a college became more formal. Before IQER, it was a 'bit messy and a bit confused' and 'decentralised and more of an add-on to FE' (Jonathan). Colleges had to learn what to do, and there was no single approach to going about this; there was no blueprint. Especially at the outset, colleges did what the universities asked them to do and mimicked university processes. Colleges work with many awarding bodies, and as Vincenta had observed, colleges were more used to just doing what was required by the awarding bodies, so 'why would it be any different for HE'. As colleges gained confidence, some developed their own processes or adapted existing processes for their HE provision. At one stage, Beth thought their model would not have differed much from the university as they had tried to capture everything that the university did. Though later on, Beth questioned whether this had been the best approach. Adaptation of processes was a strong element for some 'because we are dancing to the tune of a different band' (Jonathan). Many processes were adapted from both HE and FE, though some FE processes were immutable, as were many university processes. Both Beth and Jonathan tried to develop and impose their own systems to enable oversight and a more autonomous approach. Others just used the university systems of each of their university partners.

Generally, colleges did well in reviews, notably those with larger HE provision or those differentiating HE practices from FE and those demonstrably engaging with the HE quality frameworks. Yet HE practices were generally variable across the colleges, and it seemed that colleges took much time to engage with the practices required to meet the quality frameworks. This study suggested that despite a focus and push for the development of QMMs at IQER, after HER, it became difficult to sustain a college QMM with its own systems and oversight and that colleges were devolving back to the more fragmented pre-IQER status together with a reduction in the formality and focus on their QMMs. This complex background briefly outlined here, provides the setting in which colleges were to develop QMMs for their relatively small HE provision.

The characteristics and tensions of HE in FE, seen in Chapters Two and Five, may have resulted from the different community and cultural setting in which HE was to grow. Consequently, this may have influenced the development of HE in FE and its QMMs. As noted above, it seemed there had been little research on the feasibility of growing HE in the FE setting and even less on the feasibility of developing QMMs for this HE. My research suggests that the same tensions seen throughout Chapter Two, including, for example, time, capacity, understanding, culture and partnerships, were all important factors that influence the development and effectiveness of QMMs for HE in these institutions. Additionally, adding to these tensions, in the last decade, colleges have had to endure years of economic cut-backs, undergo mergers, compete for student numbers and stretch further to take on the new demands of TEF, CMA and now the OfS. All of these factors contribute to the tensions that influence the development and effectiveness of a QMM in this setting. There are certainly many more factors that have not been considered that would add to this.

If the development of HE in FE had occurred in new spaces and with staff for HE only, then it might have been possible to consider HE in FE as an extension of a university or as a new college faculty of the university, that was to learn and embed its processes, however, this was far from the case. Whilst reliance on the university partners and the FE college in which the QMM sits is indispensable, the resulting QMM is complex with many factors influencing how a college might accommodate the development of mechanisms for the quality of its HE. In Chapter Four, parallels were drawn between the concepts of CAS and social constructionism that facilitated the interpretation of QMMs as CAS and both as social constructs. Whilst insight into the extent of the complexity of a QMM came to light through theorising these quality concepts as CAS; their dialogical nature was forefronted when viewed through the theoretical framework of social constructionism. In the following⁵⁶, part a) the socially constructed nature of an HE QMM is summarised and in part b), QMMs are reviewed as CAS and part c) summarises the tensions influencing a QMM as a whole.

The analysis of quality concepts related to HE as understood and applied in FE institutions

The development and understanding of QMMs as social constructs (A)

For Morin (2007) society is produced by the interactions between the people that make it up. Then the society, the organised whole, feeds back to influence the way of being of the individuals within this whole through education in schools and language. In a similar way, the practices that emerge and that are accepted within particular subject fields are practices that are derived from the fields that these practices serve (Slater,2018). In Chapter Five, Vincenta's 'procedural infrastructure' for quality in a university is constructed by the social actors of the university and this becomes enacted as the accepted way things are in the university. Likewise, the quality frameworks for HE are constructed by the HE sector, which the sector itself then abides by (QAA,2017; QAA,2018b). On a wider scale, the university sector as a whole is constructed by HE social actors that interact, with their values and constructed meanings that are accepted by the sector. Similarly, the social actors in FE colleges, regulated by Ofsted and its own funding body emerged as a sector that was shaped by the social actors that make it up. For Gergen (2015), with feedback among the members of the group, the whole becomes organised and self-sustaining. Both HE and FE are long-standing sectors or groups, with their established ways of being and each with their own approaches to quality. HE with its way of being, together with quality mechanisms for this HE, were to develop within an established FE environment, with some difficulties, as reviewed in the following passages.

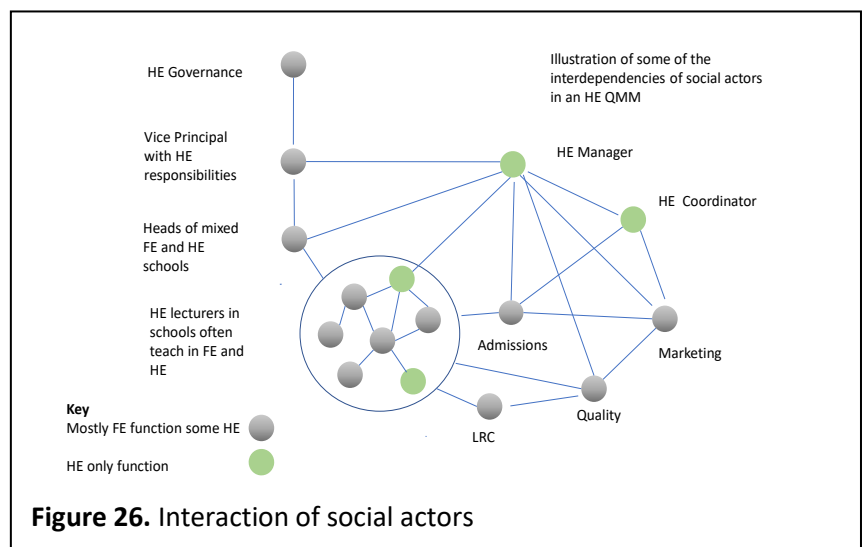
An HE in FE QMM is shaped by pre-existing cultures that make it up. Burr (2003) and Slater (2018) suggest that social actors and their understandings, are shaped by the traditions and context in which these

⁵⁶ Generally social actors is the term used when making reference to social constructionism and social agents is used when referring to CAS.

understandings came about. According to Crotty (1998:52), the ‘institution’, with its pre-existing culture, was already in existence. That is, it has a history, rules and traditions and culture. These experiences or shared discourses and accumulated knowledge are passed on, thus perpetuating the constructions and pre-existing understandings (Slater, 2018). In the same way, an FE college or a university has its own pre-existing cultures, traditions and rules. These conventions are transmitted on to any new generation of workers within the same institution. This means that a new nested system developing within a pre-existing institution has to take account of the nature of the other systems already in place, and these pre-existing systems will influence what can happen within the nested system (Byrne and Callaghan,2014). The QMM had to develop nested within a pre-existing FE system, that is, it had to develop in an already shaped landscape.

As seen in Chapter Two, a QMM is made up of all the activities that a college engages with to contribute to the quality of a college’s HE provision and also serve to demonstrate the requirements of quality frameworks of the HE sector. In a QMM, social actors carry out or enable the quality activities that make up the QMM.

These social actors interact and are interdependent (Bryman,2016). Many of the social actors in the QMM were drawn from and may still be part of FE systems, with few solely for HE, as illustrated in Figure 26 (adaptation of Figure 21. p.82 (inset here for reference to illustrate the interacting social actors)).



The starting point for an HE QMM is not bare ground, so it was not as if a QMM could develop afresh as some form of extension of the university, with the university ways of being, traditions and culture. Nor was it a case of a group of social actors from HE and a group from FE coming together to develop a QMM. Had this been the case, according to Gergen (2015), these social actors would interact and adapt, finding new shared understandings. The nested QMM is different again in that it draws predominantly on one pre-existing institution, FE, and it must bring in HE ways of being drawn from another pre-existing culture with its traditions; more than this, as the QMM is bound by the rules of this incoming HE institution. There was no pre-existing HE in FE way of being. The social actors, mostly derived from FE, had to learn and adapt, and take on new ways of being before any shared understanding of an HE QMM was possible.

Gergen (2015) reasons that organisations are made up of different sub-groups or units in which conversational meaning-making occurs. These meanings and the understanding of these meanings result

from interactions and perceptions of social actors (Crotty,1998; Bryman,2016). In QMM, as illustrated in Figure 26 above, these meaning-making units might be a school, or marketing department, or an HE manager in the HE Office. Each unit carries out its own activities that contribute to the QMM as understood by the social actors within each unit and through communication with other units with which they interact. As encapsulated by Burr (2003), social actors fabricate our world through interactions with others. These social meaning-making groups in a QMM are complex as most of the social actors contributing to a QMM are not uniquely for HE and have mixed HE and FE roles; some social actors only contribute periodically to HE. Very few social actors have HE only roles. There are several potential implications of these mixed roles for the staff involved in a QMM embedded in an FE environment with its working vocabulary and understandings, culture, rules and traditions. When working across FE and HE neither the teaching staff nor the organisational staff are focused on HE all of the time. This may limit the capacity to engage with the knowledge and understanding required for the HE QMM. For example, Jonathan estimated that a senior manager of staff may only have around 10% of their time dedicated to HE. When social actors only partially or only periodically, contribute to the QMM, sometimes spending most of their time in FE, the time for HE and constructing a new way of being is limited, and the motivation for doing so may be reduced. This means that gaining and sustaining a shared understanding and a consistent approach to QMM is problematic. Gergen (2015) asserts that where members of the same groups converse in common ways, a way of being is more readily reinforced, and a new culture becomes possible. However, despite these possibilities, for the reasons seen above, bringing about a consensus and a new sustainable culture and understanding for a QMM within an FE institution may not be feasible or practicable with the current approach.

There was no one agreed format for HE QMMs. As Burr (2003) contends, an understanding of something is shaped by the local context, so that an understanding constructed in one culture may be different from that produced elsewhere. Each nested QMM would have been influenced by the local history and culture of the FE college in which it nests. For Crotty (1998), many outcomes are possible and the sense made in one locality may differ from that in another. Consequently, this may have contributed to the varied approach to QMM, as illustrated in this study. These understandings and shared meanings may also change. Social constructs and constructed meanings are not set in stone and may be reinterpreted and change over time (Gergen and Gergen,2007). Higher-level interactions may also occur. According to Gergen (2015), the interaction of higher-level social actors may allow for identity-forming values and the making of meaning. Such higher-level interactions of college representatives may occur at HE in FE networks across the country and these may have resulted in reinforcing the HE in FE community identity, setting it apart from both HE and FE. Namely, a place for widening participation for non-traditional and local students, with lower fees, small groups, and teaching institutions focusing on sub-degree programmes (Dearing,1997; Kennedy,1997; DfES,2006b; IoE,2012). Whilst these interactions may have brought about, and reinforced the identity and

nature of HE in FE, these did not seem to bring about a consensus, or a common approach to QMMs, as many different approaches to QMMs were seen in this study for the social and cultural reasons seen above.

The development and understanding of QMMs as CAS (B)

When QMMs are perceived as CAS, the emphasis changes, with greater attention to their complexity and the organisational and functional properties, rather than on social dialogue; both perspectives overlap to give an overall view of the whole. For CAS, the interaction and aggregation of the social agents that self-organise to form CAS are fundamental to this approach. For Miller and Page (2007), new patterns of behaviour emerge

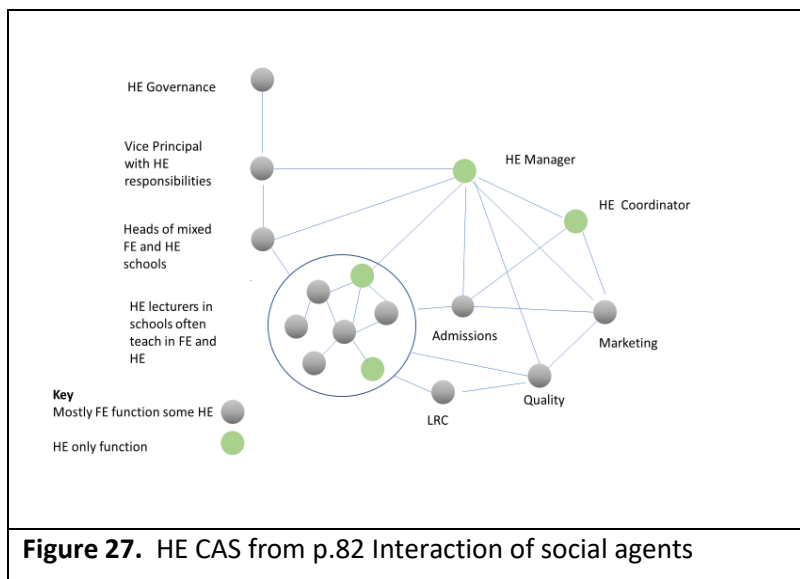


Figure 27. HE CAS from p.82 Interaction of social agents

from these agent interactions. For this study, these agent interactions result in HE CAS, as illustrated in as illustrated in Figure 21 p.82 (inset here for reference). An HE CAS has to develop nested within a college that was already pre-existing. As seen in part a), a QMM is influenced by the pre-existing institution in which it nests and similarly, and in agreement with Levin (1998), CAS are therefore path-dependent. Each college has its different interacting and interdependent agents of an FE CAS existing in its local environment. HE CAS were to develop from and within these FE CAS, so path-dependency may have contributed to the different approaches seen in the emergent HE CAS.

As for the social actors of part a), most of the agents in an HE CAS have mixed HE and FE roles. As Miller and Page (2007) contend, CAS have simple rules. Still, for those agents with mixed roles, working in both FE and HE CAS, the issue of whose rules and priorities, and whether they must switch rules and priorities, depending on which CAS they are in at the time, becomes apparent. In the same way as in part a) these different priorities may have an impact on the understanding of the HE frameworks required for an HE CAS. With social agents belonging to more than one CAS, this may limit the development of an HE CAS with its way of being. Consequently, HE CAS are constructed in a different way to an FE CAS or a University CAS. HE CAS are dependent on the college FE CAS for space, staff and resources. Also, HE CAS are dependent on the university partners for awards, regulations, and are highly reliant on the universities, especially at the outset when learning what to do, and for a procedural infrastructure. Each university partner with its traditions, culture, local rules and requirements also shapes the emergent HE CAS. Though, notably, HE CAS have more responsibility and freedom to develop the processes for NAB awards.

Agents in CAS interact with each other and with the environment and self-organise; no central lead is required (Cilliers,1998). To develop or sustain HE CAS, some colleges may be dependent on a single energetic lead. In a CAS, there is no one central control and governance is distributed (Holland,1992). Nevertheless, a lead may have leverage on what goes on in a CAS (Heylighen,2008). Given the difficulties in developing an HE CAS in an already existing system with its established occupational groups, as Heylighen (2008) suggests, leverage from these leads may have been necessary for HE CAS to develop in the predominantly FE system and to shape an HE in FE culture. Acting as knowledge holders in the HE CAS, the HE leads strongly influence how an HE CAS may develop and what happens within the system. These HE leads may not be the sole central controllers, but they may be what Paine (1966) refers to as a keystone species. If these leads with longstanding experience (the keystone species) leave or retire, this may lead to substantial non-linear changes internally⁵⁷. Not all HE CAS have a lead. Where there is no lead, greater input from the university is required to sustain the HE CAS. Vincenta thought that such a situation might arise when there are insufficient students and so insufficient income, to be able to sustain an organisational infrastructure for HE CAS.

CAS show a hierarchical structure where the interconnecting agents at one level become an agent at the next (Holland,2014). Higher-level interactions amongst representatives of the nested HE CAS, as seen in part a), may have resulted in the collective emergent and reinforced, wider identity of HE in FE. Whilst this explanation for the wider identity and mission for HE in FE is feasible, not all colleges followed suit with some developing provision other than sub-degree provision. Also, as seen earlier, there seemed to have been no feedback or consensus for how HE CAS were to develop locally. Each FE CAS had its local history and culture, rules and resources, including staff resources. As for Shayan (2019), interactions amongst the agents are local and rely on local resources. As each HE CAS was to develop according to these local possibilities and understandings, this may have accounted for the different approaches to HE CAS seen.

Also, as Shayan (2019) contends, agent to agent interactions can change over time resulting in new adaptations. Changes in the marketing, admissions or teaching teams, or the hierarchy, may influence the capacity of the HE CAS. Changes in the capacity to act, because of time constraints, for example, or changes in teams, changing the knowledge of how to act, may re-shape the HE CAS. Furthermore, the information in feedback loops may or may not be acted on (Holland, 2014; Shayan,2019). This means that changes may or may not influence the HE CAS overall. Reviews were seen to strongly influence the transformation and emergence or reconsolidation of HE CAS. Colleges did well in reviews, yet, they are highly reliant on the universities, and their role in reviews and the development of college HE CAS is largely under-researched.

⁵⁷ Unless there is a resilient stable internal network that will continue the work without a lead. Without the leverage of a lead, the continuity of the HE CAS may not be feasible.

CAS are open systems (Cilliers,1998; Shayan,2019). As an open system, this means the FE CAS can accommodate HE. The resulting nested HE CAS is also an open system. As adaptive systems are open systems, changes may occur due to experience and exchange of information with the environment (Byrne and Callaghan,2014). Nested HE CAS share social agents and experiences and exchange information with the FE CAS in which it sits, and besides this, exchanges take place with the university CAS. More than this, as these nested systems are also open to the environments of both FE and HE. From one view, this nested and open HE CAS results in a greater scope for the exchange of information and resources and diverse ways of working. On the other hand, these nested CAS are open to many internally and externally derived tensions that have a bearing on the coherence and sustainability of the HE CAS. To be open to both the FE and its environment and HE and its environment make it vulnerable to change. Changes in the university may alter what can happen in the HE CAS, for example, changes at the universities meant the self-evaluation processes of Beth and Jonathan were no longer accepted or when the programmes are withdrawn from a college and taken back into the university. More generally, the governmental changes that may lead to competition for students, mergers and funding cuts all influence the HE CAS.

HE CAS have a diverse approach to HE in FE. As suggested earlier, this diverse approach and adaptability may allow HE CAS to survive, though much energy seems to be required to keep it going. CAS agents constantly interact, change, and adapt, resulting in aggregate behaviour that is sub-optimal and at the edge of chaos (Holland,1992; Shayan,2019). If HE CAS were either too stable or too chaotic they could not survive, so sub-optimal diverse and adaptive behaviour supports their survival. This adaptability and far from the equilibrium state, does not preclude these systems from being relatively stable for periods of time (Byrne and Callaghan,2014). For Shayan (2019), the greater the diversity of the CAS agents, the more adaptable and resilient CAS become. HE CAS agents are diverse and resourcefully adapt using processes, resources and staff from the FE CAS and the HE CAS and agents are reorientated depending on needs. This diverse and adaptable approach may help HE CAS to survive and may allow those with suitable traits to survive better than others. Nevertheless, and more importantly, this variable approach to HE CAS seen in this study results in tensions and challenges, so much so, that rather than sub-optimal, as this research argues and concludes, that these systems may be too chaotic.

When QMMs are viewed as HE CAS the characteristics of the nested system become clearer. HE CAS are dependent on two very different communities and cultures: FE and HE. Whilst these dependencies are necessary in allowing HE CAS to operate and enabling more possibilities to adapt and survive; at the same time, this reduces the effectiveness of the HE CAS. Where there are agents with mixed roles, the capacity to engage with the HE quality processes of the University or with the requirements of the sector frameworks and with the HE CAS as a whole, is reduced. Also, HE CAS must compete with FE for space, staff and resources, to include competition for time. Furthermore, the HE CAS is also highly vulnerable to changes in

both the HE sector and the FE sector. Both competition and change may reduce the effectiveness and sustainability of the HE CAS.

As suggested in Chapter Four, and to reiterate these here, there are some feasible overlaps between QMM as social constructs and QMM as CAS, supporting the view of QMM as CAS, and both as social constructs:

- both involve social interactions and interdependencies of social actors (Bryman,2016) or social agents in CAS (Miller and Page,2007)
- both are influenced by the local context and what went on before (Levin,1998; Slater,2018; Shayan,2019).
- both could result in many possible outcomes (Crotty,1998; Shayan,2019)
- neither are static and can change (Gergen and Gergen,2003; Holland,2014)

What is emphasised more when a QMM is viewed as a CAS is the system as an open system, an emergent and self-organising system, a system of more than the sum of the parts and its capacity to change. Whereas when QMM and the quality activities are viewed as social constructs the emphasis changes. As for Crotty (1998) and Bryman (2016), the understanding of a QMM as a social construct is generated through the interactions and perceptions of social actors. The characteristics of QMM when seen as social constructs and as CAS, together with the characteristic consequential challenges that came to light in this study are summarised in Figure 28 below.

Characteristics	
QMM as Social Constructs	QMM as CAS
<p>HE and FE are well-established sectors each with their own way of being, culture and language.</p> <p>QMMs and its social actors for HE had to develop from, and within, a pre-existing FE institution.</p> <p>QMM social actors are derived from FE, they interact and are interdependent.</p> <p>QMMs are influenced by local cultures and understandings.</p>	<p>HE CAS are constructed in a different way to a University CAS or FE CAS.</p> <p>HE CAS are path-dependent and develop from the FE CAS in which it is nested <u>and</u> from the University CAS for its rules and way of being.</p> <p>Social agents (mainly from FE) involved in HE interact and self-organise, these patterns of behaviour result in an emergent HE CAS.</p> <p>HE CAS are dependent on the FE CAS for space, time, resources and staff.</p> <p>HE CAS are dependent on the University CAS for awards, validation, quality infrastructure and processes, regulations, policies and procedures, staff development.</p> <p>HE CAS are open systems: +allows for existence and survival and a greater scope for sharing, exchanging resources or reorientating resources according to need.</p>

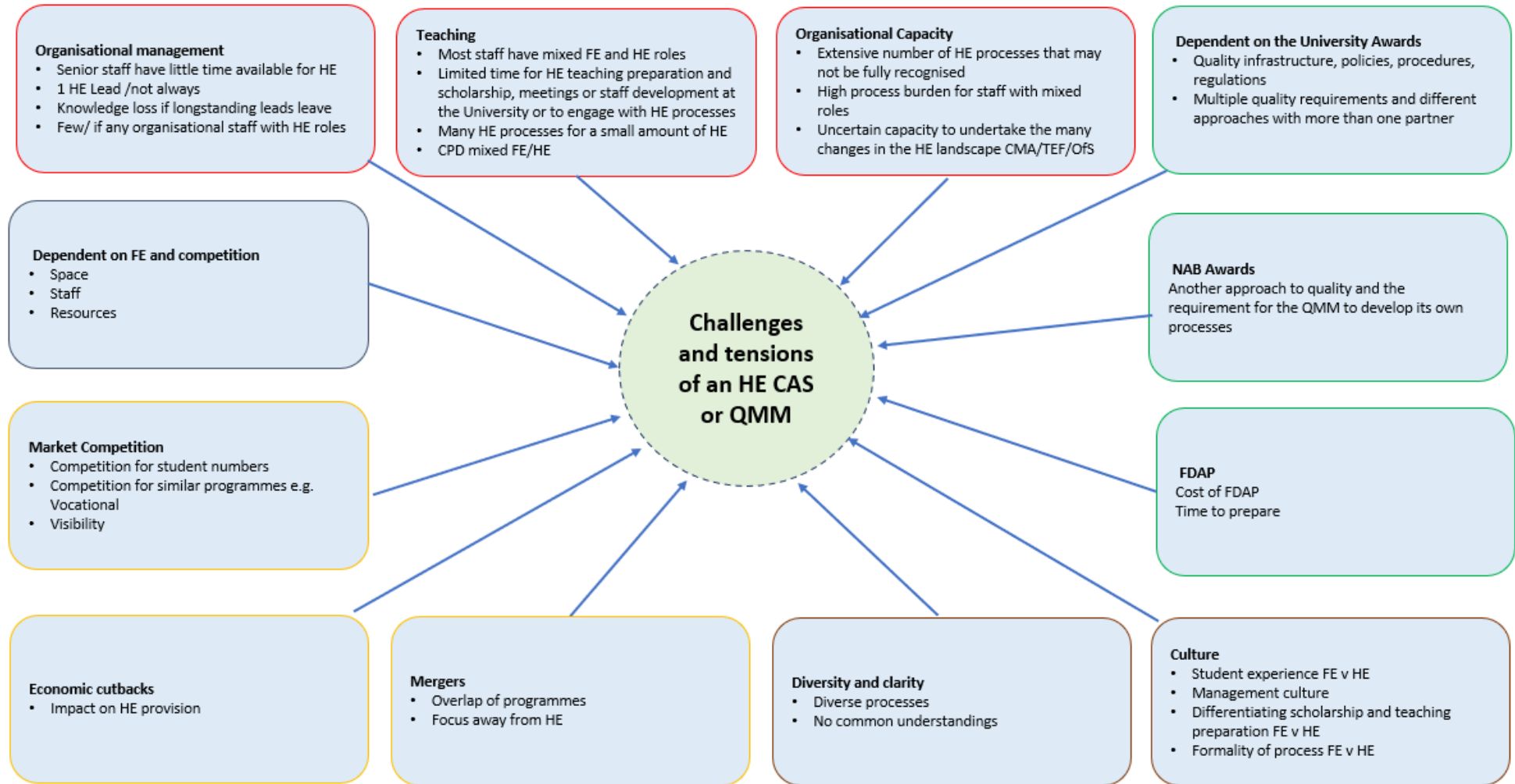
Characteristics and challenges	
<p>The social actors: Had to learn new HE ways. Have mixed-roles with few for HE only leading to challenges of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time • capacity • resources • constructing and sustaining a consistent approach • understanding- different rules, traditions and culture <p>Understandings can change over time. Higher-level interactions with no agreement for local QMM that are diverse.</p>	<p>HE CAS agents have mixed or intermittent roles and may have to prioritise one set of rules over another. With several university partners, different universities have different rules and requirements. Changes bring about adaptations and re-shaping of the CAS and this may change the functioning of the HE CAS. In an HE CAS a lead may be required for leverage to enable an HE CAS to function-enabling time, resources, space and to bring in HE requirements into pre-existing FE occupational groups. HE CAS are open systems: -vulnerable to change and tensions in the FE and a University CAS and their environments. HE CAS at one level become agents at the next - the representative HE CAS are diverse, with no consensus on the activities of the CAS</p>

Figure 28. Characteristics and challenges of QMMs as social constructs and as CAS

Discussing the challenges and tensions shaping QMM

As seen in Chapter Five, and as illustrated in Figures 29 and 30 on pages 121 and 125, many real-world tensions shape QMMs. When considered alone, each of these factors may strongly influence QMM. Some factors are punctual, such as a merger, but the impact may be long lasting, re-constructing and re-shaping the QMM. In agreement with Holland (2014:25), the whole HE CAS is ‘more than the sum of the parts’. In the same way as an HE CAS, a QMM is made up of many quality activities and the social agents that enable these HE activities of the QMM. This network of interdependent agents and the quality activities contribute to the overall HE CAS or QMM. HE CAS or QMM communities are unique, in that they are dependent on and co-evolve and exist mutualistically with more than one other system. It is only when the whole is envisaged, together with all the interrelated factors that influence the system seen in this study, that the extent of the complexity and how these factors may shape the HE CAS or QMM, challenging its feasibility, effectiveness and sustainability may be considered. Though as Heylighen (2008) suggests, there will still be many aspects that have not been considered.

Figure 29. Challenges and tensions of an HE CAS or QMM



Often a university has a central unit for quality responsible for the organisation and management of quality systems and processes. Faculty-based quality leads or someone in the faculty responsible for quality management may supplement this central unit for quality. Colleges may have a similar central unit for FE, but not for HE. As seen in this research, an HE lead and the HE programme leads are the central conduits through which the quality processes for HE are known, and through a central quality office if there is an HE role there. The following passages illustrate some non-exhaustive and sometimes overlapping examples of the tensions and interrelationships shaping a QMM in the college setting, as seen in Figure 29 earlier. Note that from this point onwards, the narrative refers to QMM for a general HE in FE college or FDAP QMM for an FDAP college. It is still possible to re-interpret QMM as HE CAS or as social constructs at any point depending on the perspective that may be useful for illuminating an understanding of the different aspects of QMMs addressed in the remainder of this chapter.

Dependency on FE: HE QMMs are dependent on and compete with FE for space, staff and resources. Many factors influence the availability of these resources, for example, the institutional strategy or senior management decisions, their time for HE or their knowledge and understanding of the HE requirements, and the influence of the HE lead. As observed by Vincenta, the size of the HE provision and the related financial income may add to the factors that determine the extent of the infrastructure for HE and its QMM.

Organisational Management for HE: The HE lead may be the only member of management with an HE only role. The HE lead plays a crucial role in leveraging HE and its QMM. Should leads, like those longstanding leads of this study, move on, this could result in considerable change in the QMM. These leads would have experienced past reviews and the developmental support for colleges during the initial construction of QMMs in colleges at the time of IQER. Colleges had to learn what to do and there was no prescription of what to do. It took a 2-year review process to bring about significant changes in college QMMs and to increase the depth of knowledge about what to do. Loss of those leads present through the initial learning process may result in an experiential gap for the QMM. In agreement with Eaton et al.(2015), the leads in this study were charismatic, influential and pivotal in a complex system in the role of what Paine (1966) refers to as a keystone species. Other FE senior managers may have limited or tokenistic HE roles, with a limited engagement in QMM, yet they significantly influence what is possible within the QMM. These FE managers strongly influence the resources available for HE, staff availability and time, strategy and policy for HE and the implementation of these. As these FE leads perpetuate the institutional culture, the possibility of constructing a new culture for HE may depend on what they allow to happen within this FE culture

with its rules and traditions. Other than an HE lead, the HE programme leads play a significant role in the HE QMM. Most of the other teaching staff have mixed FE and HE roles.

Teaching and mixed roles: For Jonathan, HE in FE teaching staff have the skills and flexibility to teach across a wide range of levels. Except for the FDAP college, most teaching staff in this study had mixed-teaching roles, teaching both FE and HE. Turner et al. (2009) refer to staff in these mixed roles as having a hybrid identity. My study suggests these mixed roles may have implications on the time and capacity for HE and its QMM and on the understanding of the quality frameworks for HE. Besides this, and in agreement with (King et al.,2010; King and Widdowson,2012; King et al.,2014; Feather,2017; AoC,2012; Turner et al.,2009), this study supports the findings of insufficient recognition of the time required for teaching and scholarship activities for HE. The FDAP college was different, with time allocated for these activities. To gain FDAP, a college must evidence structured opportunities for scholarly development for staff intended to inform teaching or to engage with any pedagogic developments of their disciplines (BIS,2015b). This leads to the question of why the requirements for those teaching at the same levels in a non-FDAP college are not the same? Additionally, CPD may primarily be for FE, with less time dedicated to HE CPD, thus limiting the possibilities to engage with, for example, the requirements of the HE quality frameworks in CPD. Furthermore, for those teaching HE, the number of HE processes and the related quality processes that staff undertake, on top of those required for FE, may not be fully recognised, leading to limited time to undertake these activities.

Organisational capacity: As for the teaching staff, organisational staff may have conflicting priorities, with limited time and capacity to undertake the HE requirements and its related quality processes. Similarly, at the institutional level, the feasibility of one HE lead and a few others carrying out all of the necessary activities required in a QMM, including integrating all the external changes, may be implausible, thus undermining the capacity of the QMM. This raises the question of why some members of staff have HE in their titles for hierarchical purposes, with little time to engage with and to develop knowledge of HE and its requirements, yet they strongly influence what may happen in an HE QMM. With so few HE only staff and when for some functions, there is a dependency on staff whose priorities are FE orientated, how can one HE lead, and a few others, do everything that entire units or teams are allocated to in a university. There is a mis-match between what needs to be done and the capacity to do it. With most staff and resources focused on FE and Ofsted, the institutional focus on HE is reduced. HE frameworks such as the Quality Code require equal, if not more attention as it is less familiar, so it is surprising that this may be in the hands of so few. It is not surprising that there is so much reliance on the universities to provide the necessary quality infrastructure to

support some colleges. Although HE reviews seemed to galvanise focus on HE, for those charismatic leads of this study, it was disappointing to have so little focus on HE and its QMM outside of review periods.

Awarding bodies and multiple processes: Notwithstanding the benefits and opportunities for a college delivering awards of a university, several consequential challenges came to light. The College QMM must align with the university regulations and quality processes, and the college HE social agents are to engage with, learn, align with and implement these. Other than for those in HE only roles, time, understanding and culture may hinder engagement with the university requirements. These tensions may also limit the uptake of any opportunities for staff development or attendance at conferences at the partner university. Should there be several university partners, this multiplies the different regulations or processes that a QMM must engage and align with, on top of the college's own HE quality activities. For a college QMM, these multiple approaches make it difficult to gain an oversight of its HE and its quality processes. Besides this, many colleges deliver NAB awards with its awarding body requirements. For NAB, the onus is on the QMM to develop its internal quality checks, such as assessment boards, rather than rely on the university for these boards. Unlike a university with one set of processes, it is not evident for a college to embed its own processes, if, at that same time, they are to follow those of each of its university partners. Overall, this amounts to a substantial number of different activities that a relatively small QMM has to take on. For most of the social agents of the QMM, these activities are in addition to FE activities and as stated earlier, the time allocated to HE processes and the capacity to undertake these activities may be underestimated. Theoretically, gaining FDAP would reduce the number of different quality processes. However, this would only apply if all the HE awards of the college were foundation degrees, with no other HE awards of another awarding body, which was not the case of the FDAP college in this study. Furthermore, FDAP may be too costly and preparing for this requires much time, as Olivia observed, both cost and time may be prohibitive.

Culture: The culture of HE in FE and the resulting engagement with its QMMs is uncertain. As for Barnett (1992), everyone in the institution has responsibility for the overall quality, it has to be owned by every member of staff throughout the institution. In HE in FE, this is complicated by the necessity of having to adhere to two different quality frameworks of two oversight bodies with differing priorities and cultures: Ofsted and the QAA or OfS. As this study suggests, staff in mixed roles may have to switch rules and traditions, depending on which culture they were working at the time and be knowledgeable of the different frameworks for quality. With most of the institutional provision, staff and resources aimed at the FE provision, Ofsted and the FE quality frameworks may

take precedence, so much so, as illustrated in this study, that focus on HE was reduced during Ofsted reviews. These shifts in rules or cultures make it difficult to develop and maintain a common language and practice for HE.

External factors destabilising QMM: QMM are vulnerable to externally driven changes. Mergers, for example, may take the focus away from the QMM or result in similar programmes of study taught within the same institution through different awarding bodies and each with differing regulations, adding to the complexity of the QMM. Furthermore, economic cutbacks that restrict FE growth consequently affect the QMM of a college. For example, with these cutbacks staff may have to take on more FE hours resulting in less time to engage with HE and its processes. Added to this, the ramifications of external regulatory changes resulting in market competition may subsequently lead to a reduction in HE student numbers. With small numbers, the visibility of a college's HE is reduced making it difficult to compete with larger institutions. This reduction in numbers may lead to reduced funding, thus increasing constraints for staff hours for HE, again reducing the capacity for HE and its processes.

Diversity: The approach to QMM is highly diverse and this diversity may support survival, but not stability. Some of this diversity may originate from an uncertainty of the requirements for HE QMM, as well as the availability of local resources. The ability to utilise FE resources and processes allows the QMM to survive. However, with mixed roles, and an instability whereby a college can re-orientate resources according to needs, despite supporting survival; this may lead to an uncertain coherency of QMM and a reduced effectiveness when undertaking quality activities for HE in this setting.

To summarise, an HE in FE QMM is highly dependent on the FE college in which it is nested and highly reliant on its university partners. The HE in FE community may be shaped by the HE lead and the others with HE roles, though this may depend on the degree of leverage the HE lead may have vis-a-vis the FE community and the university. With so few in the HE community, and with many of the community only having a partial focus on HE, the QMM is difficult to sustain. Nevertheless, it must engage with the same external quality frameworks as any other provider of HE. The findings of this study question the current capacity to engage with and maintain a consistent approach to QMM.

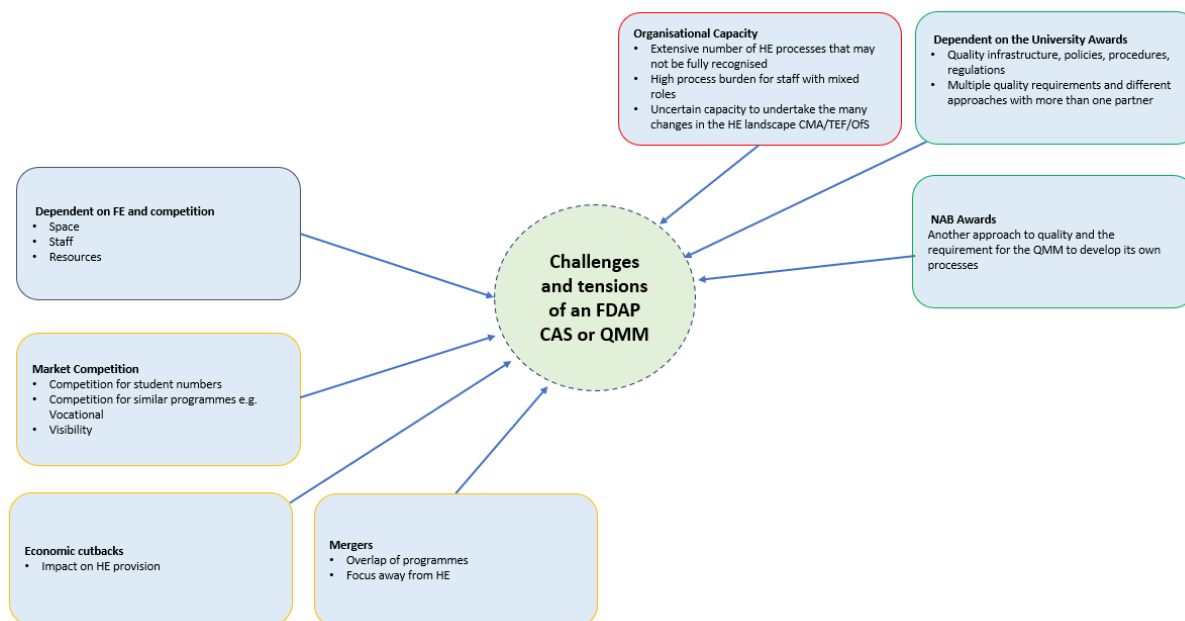


Figure 30. Challenges and tensions of an FDAP CAS or FDAP QMM

The FDAP community

As with the HE in FE QMMs, an FDAP QMM is derived from the FE community. An FDAP QMM differs in that it is shaped by the FDAP regulations. The college must evidence all the requirements before degree awarding powers are granted. Although nested in an FE college and dependent on it, there are fewer tensions with the FE community as the FDAP QMM forms a separate nested HE community. For the FDAP QMM seen in my research, the tensions related to mixed roles were significantly reduced. College HE sat in a self-contained division with a greater number of HE staff and where most of the staff taught on HE programmes only. Staff were supported by allowing time for the preparation of teaching at this level and for scholarly activity. There were more HE only agents, increasing the possibilities for common understandings of QMM with a more consistent approach to HE and its requirements. According to Gergen and Gergen (2003), this would allow for negotiated understandings that would allow for certain patterns to be retained and others to be excluded. This, therefore, facilitates the formation of the FDAP community with a common working language and a more sustained way of being becomes possible. Staff no longer had to switch from HE to FE and could focus on HE. With its own awarding powers, the QMM was less reliant on the University. 'I would like to think it's owned more' (Sally-Anne). Nonetheless, there was still the dependence on FE for space, staff and resources, and its university partner for the top-up awards. Likewise, there were still uncertainties due to external change and the organisational capacity to take on new requirements.

Theoretically, on comparing the FDAP QMM to a university QMM, tensions in the latter would be reduced further. The University QMM is autonomous, with its quality mechanisms, its own space and culture and a greater capacity to take on new requirements. The university QMM is constructed by the university community, shaped by the regulations for degree awarding powers and the sector quality frameworks constructed by this community. The social agents engage with this community and with its traditions and perpetuate the community. Nevertheless, external change such as market competition, economic cutbacks and potential mergers remain a concern for all providers of HE.

Learning from this

There are considerable differences in the construction of a QMM in a general HE in FE college when compared to one in an FDAP college, and both differ from that of a university. Both Beth and Jonathan recognised that it was not possible to do things in the same way as a university and adaptation of processes was a strong element for some 'because we are dancing to the tune of a different band' (Jonathan). According to (Gergen,2015) no one construction is better than another, they are just different ways of looking. This study finds that this may not be the case and that certainly changes could be made to support and enhance QMMs for HE in FE. Consequently, this study finds that there is no level playing field for QMM. This study underpins the QAA findings of a highly diverse approach to HE (QAA,2011) and as seen in this study, an equally diverse approach to QMM. These complex QMM may be too chaotic and uncertain, and unsustainable in their current form. Reducing diversity and bringing about a more consistent approach to QMM may allow for greater cohesion amongst the interacting agents and a greater focus on quality processes.

It seems there may be better ways to go about QMM and to support colleges with already stretched resources and capacity for HE QMM. As seen in Chapter Two, for my research quality was defined as the result of all the activities that contribute to learning opportunities and the evaluation of these activities in the HE in FE setting. The QMM includes all the learning opportunities and the evaluation of all of these activities, at all levels of the organisation. There are many interdependent, quality activities in the QMM and these processes allow reflection on, and potential improvement of, any aspect of the students' learning experience. Factors that impact on these contributory elements may influence the resulting quality. This exploratory study tentatively concludes that due to the complexity of QMM for HE in FE, their current status may be unsustainable. This situation may undermine the effectiveness of the quality processes reducing the possibility of bringing about potential change. Figure. 31 A and B summarises reflections on the challenges and resulting tensions that, according to this study, could be addressed and would lead to a significant reduction in tensions. The recommendations emerging from this study follow this.

Programme level: Enabling FE staff to undertake QMM activities	
Time	Except for FDAP colleges, this study suggests there is insufficient recognition of the time required for HE staff to design courses, prepare activities for this higher-level teaching, write assignments and assessments, feedback, second mark and moderate. Added to this the allocation of time for activities such as Assessment Boards, Boards of Study or Annual Reviews associated with programmes is unknown. There are many HE quality processes required in addition to FE processes for those staff with mixed roles and there needs to be recognition of the time required to carry these out. Time allowances could be mandatory and contractual.
Scholarship	As HE in FE is principally for teaching, then time for traditional research is less of an issue. As for teaching at higher levels, all HE teachers should be supported with time to undertake scholarly activities to support evidence-based teaching. How much time is allocated to scholarship activities?
Teaching HE and FE and teaching across many levels	There are the implications of working across many levels and many awarding bodies, each with different requirements, and additionally having to understand and evidence competence in the different criteria for Ofsted and QAA. The hybrid identity of those teaching HE in FE of Turner et al. (2009) or as framed in my research, the question of having to switch rules for FE to HE and the impact of this, calls for further research. Those teaching HE should have maximised HE teaching. It is recognised that with such small numbers of HE, this may not be possible, however, there could at least be a minimal contractual obligation to maximise HE teaching. It is unsurprising that with so little time to engage with HE that there is potentially less understanding and confidence when engaging with HE quality processes.
CPD and staff training and qualifications	For those teaching both HE and FE how much CPD or training is undertaken for HE as opposed to FE? What support is there for teachers that are new to HE? Should staff have a year of supportive induction from, for example, a member of staff at the University? For those teaching HE, there could be a minimal requirement for HE CPD and training. How much are HE teachers supported to upskill and to what extent are these qualifications then recognised in terms of career progression? On top of all of this, how much CPD is dedicated to learning about quality activities for HE?
QMM Processes	There are an extensive number HE processes that are to be carried out, on top of those for FE. Colleges need to recognise these processes in their entirety and ensure that staff have sufficient time and development to undertake these. Further research could be undertaken to estimate the time requirement of these additional processes.

Figure 31. A) Programme level activities. Enabling and enhancing the capacity of the institution to undertake QMM activities.

Cross-institutional management and capacity. Enabling and enhancing the capacity of the institution to undertake QMM activities.	
Knowledge and understanding and focus on HE	As for Teemshire College, should it be a requirement to have to bring HE together within colleges to form a critical volume of HE? This would increase the possibilities of constructing and reinforcing a common working vocabulary and common understandings of HE and its quality practices. Reviews were seen to be favourable in galvanising focus on HE. Bringing knowledge holders of HE together permanently may support a more consistent approach to HE as well as reinforcing knowledge of HE and its quality mechanisms.
Capacity	Bringing HE staff together may increase the capacity for HE and reduce the conflicts seen when staff work across two systems. With more HE staff focusing on HE at any one time, this increases the possibilities of engagement with, and understanding of, HE requirements. This may reduce the reliance on a sole lead and a few others. Compared to a university, the capacity for HE may still be comparatively small, and there would still be some dependency on FE for some systems or functions. This problem of capacity may not be fully resolved within any one college.
Culture	The culture of HE in FE is uncertain and inconsistent. Establishing a culture for HE quality in institutions where there are so few HE staff and where FE takes precedence, is challenging. Once more, drawing from the FDAP approach and bringing HE staff together, may support the development of an HE culture within FE.
Diversity	A diverse approach as seen in colleges may support survival, but not stability or understanding of QMM. Some of this diversity may originate from uncertainty about what has to be done for HE or by simply making use of what is available locally. In the FDAP college, there was minimal overlap with FE processes. The use of FE processes raises questions of their suitability for HE. For a more consistent and manageable approach to QMM, there could be an agreement on minimum requirements for HE for all colleges.

Figure 31. B) Cross-institutional management and capacity. Enabling and enhancing the capacity of the institution to undertake QMM activities.

Recommendations:To support the development, effectiveness and sustainability of QMM this study proposes the following potential recommendations to:

Develop HE communities to build knowledge and understanding, capacity and culture

Prioritise moving to an FDAP type model: HE Communities and enabling a common working vocabulary. This study recommends enabling or requiring colleges to develop a critical volume of HE by assembling HE staff in discrete faculties for HE, ideally on one site. The aim would be to enable better engagement with, and an improved understanding of, the requirements for QMM and the external frameworks for HE. As for Gergen (2015), this arrangement would support dialogue and facilitate sense-making and the emergence of an HE community. As for the FDAP community, this HE community would still form within, and from, the FE College on which it depends, so the college and the local community benefit. All the staff and hierarchy in the community would ideally be for HE only. To reach a critical volume, agreements with other local colleges to work together in cooperative type agreements may be required.

Reduce diversity, simplify and support a more consistent approach to QMM: A common model for HE Quality in colleges. The development of a common model of minimal requirements for college HE quality would support the clarity, effectiveness and sustainability of QMM in these institutions that already have stretched resources for HE. Such arrangements would reduce administrative burden whilst bringing about a more consistent approach to quality in these institutions. Rather than asking each college to develop their oversight processes, a definitive minimum list of requirements and expected practice could be devised, tailoring practice to the smaller HE provision in colleges.

This generic documentation for HE only could include, for example:

- A definitive list of expected policies, together with outline contents
- Regulations: for example, admissions, attendance or malpractice regulations
- A process and documentation for monitoring or self- evaluation
- A common system for data monitoring for HE
- A format for HE committees with agendas
- Expectations for programme level meetings
- Assessment templates
- Assessment Board templates
- External expertise requirements from the colleges' perspective
- Templates to respond to an external examiner report
- Preparation for validation templates
- Templates to map processes or policies to the Quality Code
- Guidelines for student engagement with an agenda and templates for student Boards
- Guidelines and templates for marketing and minimum expectations for CMA

The above practices would effectively amount to a college QMM manual. Universities would then know what colleges do and what the expectations are. Why not just use the university partner documentation and requirements? Where there is one university partner, or where one university provides oversight for a course consortium and provides the quality infrastructure for this, this is effectively an extension of the university. However, this would not allow colleges to:

- Build and maintain their oversight processes across all of the HE provision
- Reduce the multiple perspectives of regulations or the multiple versions of processes where there is more than one university partner and NAB
- Also, that would not allow a more consistent approach for quality across colleges of HE as a whole

For such an approach to be acceptable to the universities, there would need to be a working group with participants from both the universities and from HE in FE. Similar participants to those of this study would be required to agree on the approach and to clarify which processes would be necessary, and which would be outside of the common approach: such as validation or external examining. This dialogical approach would enable new understandings and consensus between those involved. Another possibility could be to develop a separate quality unit for HE that serves many regional colleges. The unit would consist of staff with an in-depth experience of QMM, and in a similar way to the above, this unit would develop a generic range of documentation. As above, the documentation would have to be agreed upon by the universities. The unit could carry out training sessions to ensure suitable usage and possibly, at the outset, manage these processes for each college. These units could be replicable elsewhere as required. As suggested above, these units may support a more consistent approach to quality management across the colleges by a) reducing the diversity of the QMM, b) reducing the time colleges would otherwise have spent on developing their processes and c) supporting engagement with these processes.

Either formulation may be developed with QAA approval or require subscription as a condition of OfS registration. The ultimate aim would be for colleges to run their own formalised QMM, setting up colleges in good stead for the next step of FDAP. The approach would be inclusive for all college HE, inclusive of NAB programmes and for other similar alternative providers. An extension of this thinking could be the formation of college HE cooperatives or consortiums sharing services for HE. Assembling services would increase their capacity, for example, HE admissions, marketing, or data services, increasing the possibility of an HE working vocabulary and common dialogue strengthening the HE in FE community. It is a prescriptive approach but this would increase the consistency and stability of QMM. It goes against the grain of today's landscape with a focus on outcomes (OfS,2018); rather than how things are done.

To develop FE staff understanding of HE quality frameworks and models this study proposes:

1. **Time for teaching:** Prioritise teaching requirements at level 4 and 5 or 6, so these higher levels of teaching have a minimum time allocation for preparing programmes of study, teaching and assessment at these higher-levels and time to undertake scholarly activity related to the relevant subject area.
2. **CPD and training and development for HE:** All HE staff should have CPD related to HE. Additionally, all staff new to HE should receive support and training for teaching HE programmes of study.
3. **Time for engagement with quality processes for HE:** a) Time to engage fully with support and training for all quality processes for HE, for those at the home institution and those of the partner institutions is essential and b) time to carry out all HE quality processes.

Other recommendations: Policy and the role of HE in FE and HE QMM

Up to this point, HE in FE QMMs have developed alongside university HE with a unique and uncertain middle-culture, and this may be unsustainable. That may, in part, be due to unclear, current expectations for HE in FE. The role of this sector for HE requires clarification and consolidation and this could be achieved through cross-sector dialogue. The recent announcement calling for an end to the 'bogus HE-FE distinction' (Morgan,2020a: [Online]) does little to resolve any of the points raised in this study and with no recognition of HE in FE. The Government aims to increase the interest in flexible lifelong learning and part-time study and raise the interest in high-quality vocational or technical courses in FECs and universities. As Parry (2015) argues, there has never been any clear indication about what is meant by vocational programmes of study or why colleges are seen to be centres for vocational studies. Others argue that the universities should take responsibility for expanding the sub-degree provision, together with a few FECs and even proposing that the post-1992 universities could revert back to their previous applied university status (Morgan,2020b). All ways round more thought into who does what is surely required, with further research to ensure that policy is well thought out prior to new initiatives for HE in FE.

Past policy has required colleges to focus on sub-degree provision, though in practice, as seen in this study, this was wide of the mark, as in reality other levels were taught. This raises the question of whether colleges should be confined to sub-degree provision? For the student wishing to progress to do a third year at a university and who would prefer to study locally, this could only be possible if there was a local university (so not a cold spot), and then, only if the local university had a third year in the relevant subject area. Also for some students, sometimes it makes sense not to do a top-up in

the university. Olivia found that for colleges at some distance from a university, it made more sense for students to remain at the college in the setting that they were more familiar with.

What comes next

On the assumption that HE in FE is here to stay and with its fundamental role that it plays in the local communities, far more research is required as an evidence base on which to base future decisions. What is vital is to offer better ways of working. Diamond (2020) advocates for a more joined-up education and skills system in communities with a network approach and a clearer strategy for the different roles each part of the system should play. My research concurs with this, and more than this, as this study highlights the need for greater dialogue across the sectors to reach a clear understanding of who does what and how one type of institution relates to the other to form a clear path of stepping stones from HE in FE, to FDAP and to university status. The identity and role of HE in FE needs to be re-thought out with open dialogue and consensus across sectors to clarify what this middle ground should be, rather than development from within the HE in FE sector alone. From the perspective of HE QMM this study may indicate that associating with a university or becoming a college with FDAP could be stabilising factors that effectively reduce diversity. But further research is required into this.

HE student numbers contribute to the financial stability of a college and consequently any change may influence the sustainability of the HE QMM infrastructure (Vincenta) and the viability of HE in FE. In 2019, around 137,000 ⁵⁸students were studying HE in 165 colleges (AoC,2019b)⁵⁹ providing opportunities for local students and contributing significantly to the participation of students in HE in geographical areas where participation in HE is low (cold spots) (ETF,2017). If numbers continue to decline and HE in FE was no longer possible in these colleges, what would these students do if these opportunities were no longer available and if this was their route to studying HE? These questions cannot be addressed here but must be the subject of further research. Policy for HE in FE has been unclear (Bathmaker et al.,2007), or unheeded, and is now far removed from the initial intentions for FECs to grow directly funded programmes and partnering with one university as Dearing (1997) had originally proposed. Although not the focus of my study, without clear policy and clarity of purpose the future of HE in FE and its HE QMMs seems uncertain.

⁵⁸ This number includes non-prescribed provision. 165 colleges were registered with the OfS.

⁵⁹ Estimated HESES data FTE completed 2019-20 1,653,938 students in universities and colleges (registered or have applied to register with OfS).

Possibilities for future research. In agreement with Parry and Thompson (2002), the knowledge base and evidence base for HE in FE is weak. This lack of research is particularly so for quality practices for HE in these institutions. This study suggests that the construction of nested systems for quality and their understanding may be path-dependent. That is, a nested system depends on the culture in which it develops (FE); more than that, it is also influenced by the culture brought into the system (HE). There are many questions and avenues for research that emerged from this exploratory study. Some of these possibilities are listed below:

Development of QMM: Culture, practice and understanding.

- FE and HE have different external quality frameworks. To what extent do these frameworks overlap? To what extent are quality practices for FE acceptable for HE?
- How would increasing dialogue between HE in FE and HE sector shape the development of QMMs in colleges?
- Is there a best practice model for quality practice for HE in FE?

Effectiveness and sustainability: Resilience and stability. What influence do the following factors have on QMM in colleges?

- Mixed roles on the understanding of quality frameworks for HE in general FE colleges.
- Decreasing the number of partner institutions to associate with one partner only. How beneficial is this?
- Gaining FDAP and the effectiveness of QMM. Does gaining FDAP increase resilience?
- Creating a critical volume of HE in colleges and the influence on quality practices for HE.

Staff development: Time and capacity seem to be significant factors that may influence quality practices for HE in FE.

- What are the time requirements for HE quality processes?
- How do time allocations for teaching preparation and scholarship for HE in general FE colleges, colleges with FDAP, and universities compare? Given any differences found, how might this influence quality practice and improvement of the student experience?
- What knowledge and skills do FE teachers have to teach HE? What are the training requirements for teaching at higher levels and what support is there for teachers new to HE?

General HE in FE and policy. Developing the evidence base for policy initiatives for HE in FE, in general, may be necessary. For example:

- What is the impact of market competition on college HE? Or, what is the impact of mergers on college HE and its quality processes?
- What are the advantages for non-traditional students or disadvantaged students, studying in colleges as opposed to universities?
- What is the extent of the importance of HE in FE colleges in cold spots?
- Should colleges still teach HE and why?

Theoretical considerations

- Developing research in the field of education in relation to CAS and social constructionism. For example, on quality or the student experience.

Potential Contributions to knowledge and professional practice and Transferability

This research sought to make a positive contribution to the knowledge of HE QMMs for the HE in FE community. As Walsham (1995) contends, an interpretive case study contributes to rich insight. The socially constructed discourse and the analysis of the emergent themes in this research may support future ways of working for college HE QMM as outlined in the recommendations. In agreement with Gergen (2015), a constructionist view holds potential and opens the door to new possibilities. That translates to new possibilities and new ways of thinking for QMMs in the HE in FE setting. As an overarching reflection, bringing staff together in HE communities, as seen earlier, would facilitate a common understanding of QMMs and its expectations but only once a cross-sector understanding of QMMs for HE in this setting has been developed through dialogue and co-construction to find new ways forward.

With an exploratory aim, this research has illuminated the following themes that may also prompt further study:

- The early development of QMMs in HE in FE setting
- How colleges learnt what to do when developing a QMM and factors influencing its development
- Quality activities, their organisation and management for QMMs for HE in FE
- Knowledge and understanding of HE quality frameworks from a college and university perspective
- Diversification and adaptation v sustainability of QMMs in a complex environment
- Tensions impacting on the survival, effectiveness and sustainability of QMMs
- Recognition of the challenges of QMMs with a view to finding ways to support colleges
- How QMMs for HE in a general FE college differs from a QMM in FDAP colleges
- FDAP QMM as a more resilient form of an HE in FE QMM

From a theoretical perspective:

- This research has framed QMMs as complex adaptive systems and as social constructs.
- An HE in FE QMM has been identified as a different community, as one not yet clearly defined as it is dependent on two very different, well-established communities each one with its own traditions and culture.
- It has encouraged a QMM to be envisaged as a whole, rather than as separate parts.

Transferability

The knowledge emerging from this case study approach can be applied to other similar settings (Bloomberg,2018). Others knowledgeable of the context may recognise similarities between the findings here and the QMMs in their own setting and others may gain new insights. In this research, QMMs were interpreted as CAS and both QMMs and CAS as social constructs. Interpreting QMMs through the theoretical framework of social constructionism and the concepts of CAS enabled both the relationship with knowledge about QMMs and the complexity of QMMs to come to light. These different perspectives and understandings led to an improved understanding of QMMs. These same theoretical frames could be applied elsewhere to other complex situations. Although the object of my research was to focus on QMMs, the parallels drawn between social constructionism and CAS resonated well with my research and may be of interest to others. My research indicated that further parallels could be drawn between these theoretical approaches, though further research would be necessary and comparing these approaches was not the focus of this research. Some limitations became evident and these are discussed in the following passage.

Limitations and criticisms

Limitations to social constructionism

- Given the local nature of knowledge claims, there may not be any universal claims (Weinberg, 2014). In my research, as there were no claims of universal knowledge, this notion was not limiting. On the contrary for my study, it was the diverse local knowledge and the interpretation of each nested case that was important.
- Social constructionism allows for multiple knowledge claims. If there are multiple claims, some see the diverse cultural interpretations and the consequential variations as problematic (Nightingale and Cromby,1999). However, Nightingale and Cromby (1999) point out that others emphasise cross-cultural similarities instead. In my study, together with the differences seen, similarities across the different nested cases were apparent. Similarities and differences were evidenced in the data analysis and the emergent themes (appendices 4, 6 and 7 p.180, p182 and p.185).
- With many possible meanings comes another criticism of social constructionism: the notion of 'anything goes' and that any beliefs are possible (Ratner,2006). Countering this is the argument that social reality is relative to what has already pre-existed (Slater,2017). That means that any construct is limited by local culture, with its local rules and beliefs and ways of being. Social constructionism stresses the hold our culture has on us with our 'inherited understandings' and the tendency to take 'the sense we make of things' to be 'the way things are' is in itself restrictive (Crotty,1998:59). Crotty (1998) maintains that a mindful and critical approach to these

constructs is necessary. In this study, different interpretations of QMMs were possible. However, a QMM is constrained by local rules, culture and resources and by the quality frameworks for HE.

Limitations of using social constructionism as opposed to another approach

- From the perspective of social constructionism, no one research method is better than another. The way things are within any one disciplinary body rely on the agreed conventions within that community (Gergen and Gergen,2012). That suggests an approach using one method over another shows adherence to the conventions of a particular community (Gergen and Gergen,2012). That means different disciplinary bodies have their truths with differing methods, resulting in multiple possibilities (Gergen,2010). This interpretation opens the door to more possibilities with more than one method or research tradition to draw on. It is more a case of what is useful. In my research, reality was interpreted as a perspective constructed through dialogue. This interpretation of reality as a social construct may not be that of others (Ellis,2011). Also, the interpretations in this study of QMMs as socially constructed CAS may be different from another's interpretations, so this is something to be mindful of.

Limitation to using CAS concepts.

- It is not possible to know a 'whole' fully (Miller and Page,2007; Heylighen,2008). Only the elements about QMM that emerged from the interviews or the documents were addressed in this research. There are certainly many other elements, unevicenced or unseen, still to contribute to this picture.
- Arthur et al. (1997) and Holland (2014) found that when mathematically modelling CAS systems, the difficulties in predictability with rational agents, and the efforts required to do so, may outweigh the benefits of using CAS concepts. Though modelling and simulations were not precluded, Byrne and Callaghan (2014) were reticent in their capacity to reproduce social systems. As far as mathematical models were concerned, in my research the concepts of CAS were used to reflect on the complexity of QMM and not to mathematically model these systems or to make complex predictions. Notably any predictions based on reductionist causal variables would have ignored all the other intertwined contributing factors.
- Caws (2015) thought that trying to solve human problems with tools from the natural sciences may be seen as problematic. Krakauer (2019) of the Institute of Complexity at Santa Fe is optimistic for the transdisciplinary of complexity and Byrne and Callaghan (2014) note the use of these concepts in many disciplines already and see their use as already interdisciplinary. Using CAS concepts from different disciplines was not seen as problematic. To derive the CAS concepts for my study commonalities in the concepts from across different disciplines were

brought together. This may mean that my interpretations of the concepts are not the same as those of others, or the same as those of the disciplines from which they were derived.

- The concept of the edge of chaos might be challenged as some CAS are robust and can be stable for long periods of time (Shayan,2019; Byrne and Callaghan,2014).
- Byrne and Callaghan (2014) found difficulties in reconciling the emphasis on CAS as unique and local. Yet at a higher level, overarching characteristics are assumed, thus reducing the emphasis on the uniqueness of each CAS.
- Although CAS concepts were used as a tool for thinking, it is worth identifying which concepts did not fit so well for QMM:

A higher-level identity may have emerged due to the higher-level network though for QMM there was little agreement.

The HE Leads may have more control in QMM than the CAS concepts suggest.

There may be too much diversity moving beyond sub-optimal systems and more towards uncertainty and instability. Though where this edge resides exactly, is down to interpretation.

Despite the emphasis on local CAS, as with social constructionism, it was still possible to note similarities, differences or patterns and to reflect on factors that influence change across the different CAS.

Using CAS concepts may be limiting. For Walsham (1995) it is important to recognise that you may be looking to match the data with the concepts and this may be limiting as there may be other possible interpretations.

Limitations to a case study approach

- It is not possible to make generalisations from a case. Though for Stake (2009) tacit naturalistic generalisations derived through experience allow for the recognition of similarities. Nonetheless, the strength of case study is its attention to the local situation, not in how it represents other cases in general. Still, it is difficult to cover all the information needed for a case and resources may be limiting (Stake,1995).
- There may be a tendency to provide selective accounts resulting in potential bias (Ellis,2011). Attempts were made to minimize this potential bias. Another source of data, the documents, were used to supplement the interview findings helping to mitigate potential bias. Other ways of mitigating bias are indicated below.

Limitations to an interpretive approach

- As the researcher in this interpretive approach is not an outsider looking in but is a part of this process of inquiry and interpretation, with his or her own understandings, it is important to consider how these views may influence the inquiry. The closeness to the context of the research may be considered a lack of distance and objectivity deemed to be necessary for valid research. However, the researcher cannot be objective in interpretive research where there are many layers of interpretation undertaken by the researcher (Merriam,1998; Thomas,2016). To mitigate the possibility of choosing data to fit with my ideals, interview transcripts were fragmented phrase by phrase asking 'what is this data telling me'. Themes emerged from the text and were not specifically sought. Also, during the analysis process the original interview questions asked were not reviewed, so as not to influence the nature of the themes that emerged.

Limitation to the methods

- For the interviews, a small sample size was used. However, this generated more data than expected. It is uncertain whether data collection reached saturation point as more interviews may have revealed further aspects of QMM.
- According to Bazeley and Jackson (2013) for small samples a manual approach might be sufficient rather than having to learn new software and as with any software used for this purpose, the software does not remove the human element of making choices or interpreting element. In my research NVivo was used as a practical way for storing and retrieving data and manipulating hundreds of nodes, its use rapidly outweighed any small inconvenience in learning its usage.
- In analysing the documents, again more data than expected was generated. More use could have been made of this data.

Reflections on undertaking this study

It has been a privilege to undertake a study in an under-researched area contributing to the knowledge of quality in HE in FE with the hope this study may prompt further research focused on bringing about change in the current organisational practices. Discussing common interests with the interview participants deepened my knowledge and understanding of the perceptions of quality practices for HE in FE. Meeting those dedicated participants from colleges and universities led to a heightened sense of responsibility to find out more and to seek avenues for change that could bring about improvements. That is, change that would be acceptable to both colleges and universities. The iterative process of improving skills, guided and encouraged by my supervisors, added to the drive of responsibility to seek to continually improve, to be in a position to contribute to research in this subject. Pushing through boundaries builds resilience.

Much of my professional experience has been bound by the scientific method whilst studying and teaching sciences, thus perpetuating this method through education. It was my habitual way of being, and that of peers in the department, and this way of thinking influenced a later career in quality. Whilst influenced by science, outside of work, much of day-to-day life had a more pragmatic outlook and had always acknowledged different views and differing beliefs, yet I took for granted that the scientific method was the right path. In agreement with Garland and Garland (2012), to change epistemological beliefs from a taken for granted way of knowing, in my case from the scientific method, was challenging. Operationalising theoretical constructs of social realities and transcending my accepted beliefs of what previously had been dichotomised as objective and subjective ways of thinking, and challenging what was known, was enriching and humbling, and daunting at the same time.

Thinking through theory enabled the organisational practices of HE in FE to be articulated and visualised in a new way. This thinking brought to the fore a complex system constructed from the two different cultures from which it stems. Now acknowledging the constructed nature of knowledge, and acknowledging uncertainties in previously accepted knowledge, has brought a critical view to what was once thought of as immovable knowledge and allowed for new and critical dialogue. Critically analysing findings through cross-disciplinary concepts gave a new view to the findings, allowing new interpretations to come to light.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Summary of all quality activities by group of activities extracted from HER reports, the number of engagements and number of HE or HE/FE activities- final version.

Key Activity Group	Programme Level Quality Activities	Total engagements for Each Activity for all Colleges	Number of HE Activities	Number of HE/FE Activities
Planning	Curriculum Planning	3.5		1
	New Programme Proposal/Business Case	4		1
	Due Diligence	1	1	
	Totals	8.5	1	2
Writing Documentation for Approval and for use Throughout the Programme of Study	Module Learning Outcomes	2	1	
	Mapping Learning Outcomes to Assessment	2	1	
	Module Specifications	4	1	
	Module Descriptors	5.5	1	
	Module Handbooks/Module Study Guide	3	1	
	Definitive Module Documents	2.5	1	
	Module Guides- NAB? Add to Module Study Guide	0.5	1	
	Programme Development	2	1	
	Mapping Programme Content to Programme LOs	4	1	
	Programme Aims	1	1	
	Programme Learning Outcomes*	2	1	
	Writing Learning Outcomes at the Correct Level	1	1	
	Mapping to Benchmark Statements	1	1	
	Programme Specifications NAB Programmes	4.5	1	
	Programme Specifications/Definitive Record- university. Sometimes written by University e.g. for PGCE. Sometimes written by Colleges using University templates	8	1	
	Contextual Documents	1	1	
	Totals	44	16	0
	Externality for Development and Approvals	Engaging with Employers for Programme Development	2	1
Engaging with Employers for Approvals		5	1	
Externals on Validation Panels		4	1	
External Examiners Report on Appropriateness of New Programmes		1	1	
Totals		12	4	0
Validation	Internal Validation of NAB Programmes/Standard Module Specifications/Programme Structures	2	1	
	Scrutiny for Work based or Placement Learning at Validation and Periodic Review	1	1	
	Staff to be Approved by the Recognised Teacher Status Panel	1	1	
	New Programme Approval NAB	0.5	1	
	Programme Validation	8	1	

	Validation Reports	1	1	
	Responding to Conditions made at Validation	1	1	
	Totals	14.5	7	0
Agreements	NAB Approval/Code of Practice	3	1	
	Partnership Agreements/Memorandum of Agreement	3	1	
	Totals	6	2	0
Modifications	Programme Modifications- Assessment/Module/Programme	6	1	
	Totals	6	1	0
Revalidation	Revalidation	5	1	
Reviews	Mid- year review	1	1	
	Annual Review	7	1	
	Course reviews	2	1	
	Field Review	1	1	
	Periodic Review	10	1	
	NAB Periodic Review	1	1	
	Collaborative Partner Review	3	1	
	Peer Review- by consortium e.g. of Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report	1	1	
	Totals	32	8	0
Programme Committees	Course Boards/Committees	2.5	1	
	NAB Team Meetings/Committees	0.5	1	
	Internal Team Meetings- various	3		1
	Totals	6	2	1
Information	Sign off Published information	1.5	1	
	Approval of Programme Specifications for Publication	1	1	
	Programme Specifications on Website	1	1	
	Prospectus	0.5		1
	Applicant Advice and Guidance	1		1
	Totals	5	3	2
Admissions	Admissions Training	0.5		1
	UCAS admissions	1	1	
	Making Offers	1		1
	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning/Recognition of Prior Learning	0.5	1	
	Clearing Training from the University	1	1	
	Interviewing Applicants	3		1
	International Student Information Pack	0.5		1
	Information About Preparation for Programmes Pre-enrolment	0.5		1
	Totals	8	3	5
Handbooks	Student Handbooks	8.5		1
	HE Student Handbook Checklist	1	1	
	Programme/Course Handbooks- Sometimes Written by the Universities	4		1
	Staff Handbooks	1		1

	Totals	14.5	1	3
Leads	Modules Leaders	3	1	
	Programme Leaders	10	1	
	Totals	13	2	0
Assessment Writing	Learning and Teaching Plans	1		1
	Assessment Strategies/Variety of assessment	5		1
	Assessment Plans/Schedules	8		1
	Summative and Formative Assessment	2		1
	Assessment Spread	1	1	
	Modification to Assessment Strategies	1	1	
	Assessment Briefs /Assessment writing	10		1
	Working with Partners for Assessment Design	1	1	
	Assessment Criteria	2		1
	Grading Criteria	1		1
	IV of Assignments	6		1
	Totals	38	3	8
	Marking and Associated Activities	Marking	4	
Double Marking/Second Marking		4	1	
Cross-site Marking		1	1	
IV of Assessed/Assessment Verification		6		1
Moderation Assessed work University work		4	1	
Moderation of assessed work with or by University		2	1	
Moderation e.g. Across Partnership/Consortium/Cross Marking		4	1	
IV Training		0.5		1
Standardisation		2		1
Standardisation e.g. Across Partnership/Consortium		2		1
Formative Feedback		1		1
Feedback		5		1
Timeliness Feedback		5	1	
Totals	40.5	6	7	
External Examining	External Examiner/Role	8	1	
	External Examiners NAB	1	1	
	Proposing External Examiners	1	1	
	External Examiner Reports	2	1	
	Scrutinising/ External Examiner Reports	8	1	
	Response to External Examiner Report	10	1	
	Monitoring of External Examiner Report Action Plan	1	1	
	Sharing External Examiner Reports with Students	5	1	
	Students Can Meet the External Examiners	1.5	1	
	Staff Becoming External Examiners	1	1	
	External examiners at Exam Boards	1	1	
	Totals	39.5	11	0

Support	Transition Activities/Support	3	1	
	Internal Transition Summer School Study Skills	1	1	
	Induction	9		1
	Students Briefed on Academic Regulations	1		1
	Tutorial/Tutors	8		1
	Weekly Target Setting	0.5		1
	Promonitor	0.5		1
	PDP- Integrated Modules	3	1	
	Development Planning for Students PDP	3	1	
	Promoting Independent Learning	1	1	
	Use of Upper Year Students for Support	0.5		1
	Totals	30.5	5	6
Additional Support	Learning Needs Assessment	1		1
	Additional Learning Support	1		1
	Counselling	0.5		1
	Totals	2.5	0	3
Resources and support	LRC Resources College	1		1
	VLE College/University	4		1
	E-Learning	1.5		1
	Student Services	1		1
	Careers	0.5		1
	Totals	8	0	5
Student Representation	Student Reps	8		1
	Student Rep handbook	1	1	
	Student Involvement in New Programmes/Development	5	1	
	Student Involvement in Programme Modifications	3	1	
	Student Reps and Course Team Meetings/Committees	4	1	
	Totals	21	4	1
Evaluations	Module Evaluations, Mid-module	7.5	1	
	Mid-Course Evaluations	1	1	
	Staff Student Consultative Committee SSCC	1	1	
	Induction survey	2		1
	HE Satisfaction Survey	1	1	
	Responding to Student Feedback	1		1
	National Student Survey NSS	2	1	
	Totals	15.5	5	2
Employer/Work Engagement	Employers Involved in Developing and Approval	1.5	1	
	Employer Involvement in Assessment and Module Design	4	1	
	Employer Engagement/Live Briefs/Delivery	9.5		1
	Employability Skills/Local Industry Embedded in Curriculum/Work Placements/ Industry Visits	4		1

	Employers Invited to Programme Committees	1	1	
	Totals	20	3	2
Work- based learning	Work- Based Learning/Credited	2.5		1
	Staff Current Recent Industrial Experience	1		1
	Work-based Mentoring	1	1	
	Totals	6.5	1	2
Staff Development Observations	Peer Observation	3	1	
	Teacher Observation	5.5		1
	Learning Walks	1		1
	Observed by the University	1	1	
	Totals	10.5	2	2
Appraisal	College Appraisal/Performance Management	2.5		1
	Totals	2.5	0	1
Development Opportunities	Learning Development Plans (staff)	1		1
	Professional Development College Driven	2		1
	Staff Development at the University/ Staff Development Revalidation	4	1	
	Partner Conference	1	1	
	Attending Meetings Where Assessment Practice is Discussed- Less Formal Staff Development	1		1
	Inspiration Centre- Innovations for Teaching/Sharing Resources	1		1
	Staff as External Examiners	1	1	
	Staff Sitting on External Validation Panels	1		
	Staff as Reviewers	1	1	
	Totals	13	4	4
Professional Membership/Status	Associate Lecture Status	1	1	
	Higher Education Academy HEA	2	1	
	Totals	3	2	0
Interaction with the University	Link Tutor/ Liaison Officer	3	1	
	Interactions with Quality Office	1	1	
	Consortium Management Committee/Sub- committees	1	1	
	Totals	7	3	0
Data	Progression and Achievement Retention and Success/Attendance	3.5		1
	Totals	3.5	0	1
Types of Programme Boards	Unit Boards or MABS	2	1	
	Exam Boards/ Assessment Boards/Awards/Progression	9	1	
	NAB Exam Board/HE Exam Board	4.5	1	
	HE Assessment Board for all HE or Just NAB?	1.5	1	
	Assessment Panels	1	1	
	Assessment Boards Minutes	2	1	
	Totals	20	6	0
Monitoring and Evaluation	Module Reports	1	1	

	Annual HE course Evaluations/Review/Monitoring	12	1	
	Annual Programme Monitoring NAB	1.5	1	
	Termly Review Boards	1		1
	Link Tutor Report	2	1	
	Totals	17.5	4	1
Understanding	Understanding External Reference Points FHEQ/Subject Benchmarks/FdA Benchmark Statement	3	1	
	Understanding of LOs- at Module and Programme Level	2	1	
	Understanding Qualifications e.g. FdA Early years and EYQTS (Early Years Qualified Teacher Status Awarded by National College for Teaching and Leadership, which is part of DfE)	1	1	
	Understanding Partner Quality Handbooks	1	1	
	Understanding and Adherence to FDAP Policies and Regulations	6	1	
	Understanding and Engaging with Practice Partnership Agreements/Institutional Agreement/Memorandum of Cooperation	1	1	
	Understanding and Application of Examination Regulations	1		1
	Understanding and Application of Regulations for Reviewing Assessment Decisions	2	1	
	Understanding of Employer Engagement, Work- based learning, Work- related Learning Requirement of the Foundation Degrees	1	1	
	Totals	18	8	1
Key Activity Group	College Level Quality Activities	Total engagements for Each Activity for all Colleges	Number of HE Activities	Number of HE/FE Activities
Planning	Curriculum Planning Add to Planning and Strategic Review of NAB Provision	4.5		1
	Internal Business Reviews/ Strategic Review	5		1
	Due Diligence	1	1	
	Totals	10.5	1	2
Writing Documentation for Approval and for use Throughout the Programme of Study	Programme Specification/Definitive Record- NAB			
	Internal College Programme Approval/Pre-Validation	7	1	
	NAB/Validation Approval	1	1	
	Pre-validation Internal Approval Panel- University- Informal	1.5	1	
	Writing Validation Reports	1	1	
	Follow up of Actions	1	1	
	HE Committee signs off responses to validation/periodic review	1	1	

	Revalidation	1	1	
	Totals	14.5	7	0
Agreements	Partnership Agreements/Collaborative Agreements/Institutional Agreements	10	1	
	Totals	10	1	0
Agreement Administration	Records of Partnerships	1	1	
	Record of Liaison Arrangements for Awarding Bodies	1	1	
	Responsibilities HE Checklist	1	1	
	Totals	3	3	0
Withdrawing Programmes	Consortium Committee	1	1	
	Totals	1	1	0
Awards	Transcripts /Diploma Supplements	1	1	
	Totals	1	1	0
Reviews	Mid-year Review	1	1	
	Collaborative Partner Review	4	1	
	Internal Panel Pre-Periodic Review	1	1	
	Periodic review	9	1	
	Periodic review report	3	1	
	Periodic review for NAB programmes	0.5	1	
	Centre Review and Development Report NAB	1		1
	Totals	19.5	6	1
Information	HE Pages on Website	5	1	
	HE Prospectus	6	1	
	HE Course Guide	1	1	
	Short Guide to HE Regulations	1	1	
	External Examiner Reports Available on Website	0.5	1	
	Programme Specifications on Website	2.5	1	
	Key Information Sets	2	1	
	HE Fairs	1	1	
	Keeping Warm Events	0.5		1
	Open Days	0.5		1
	Progression Days at the University	1	1	
	Progression Days Internally	1		1
	Totals	22	9	3
Accuracy and Oversight	Review of Information for HE Students	3	1	
	Approvals for Published Information Add to Oversight of HE Information	8.5	1	
	HEAB Has Oversight of Changes to Programme Specifications	1	1	
	Procedures for Public Information	0.5	1	
	Student Feedback on Website/Information	0.5	1	
	Totals	13.5	5	0
Internal VLE	College VLE Review	4		1
	Staff Portal Add to Staff Intranet	2		1
	Totals	6	0	2
Admissions				
	Direct HE Admissions	2	1	

	UCAS HE Admissions	3.5	1	
	Admissions Appeals	1		1
	Professional Development for Admissions/UCAS by Admissions	1.5	1	
	Information for International students	0.5		1
	Clearing	1	1	
	Clearing Training from the University	1	1	
	Accreditation of Prior Learning	1	1	
	Credit Accumulation/Transfer	1		1
	Totals	12.5	6	3
Admissions and support	Additional Learning Support Information	1		1
	Bursaries Published Information	1		1
	Matrix Information Advice and Guidance	0.5		1
	Totals	2.5	0	3
Oversight of Admissions	Admissions Unit Oversees Admissions	0.5		1
	Equality and Diversity Scrutiny of Admissions	1		1
	Totals	1.5	0	2
Starting Information	Welcome Packs	1		1
	College Induction	0.5		1
	Registration at the University	1	1	
	Totals	2.5	1	2
Handbooks	Handbook for Employers and Mentors	0.5		1
	Course Handbook- College	0.5		1
	College Adult Education Handbook	0.5		1
	Higher National Student Guide to Assessment	1	1	
	Short Guide to Regulations	1	1	
	HE Staff Handbook	1	1	
	Staff Quality Handbook HE	1	1	
	Quality Manual	1		1
	Totals	6.5	4	4
External Examining	Role of the External examiner information	2	1	
	Approval of external examiners	1	1	
	Scrutiny of External Examiner reports	7	1	
	Sends Reports to Teams and Responses to Externals	1	1	
	Judgements of External Examiner Reports/Actions/Oversight	5.5	1	
	Share Report Actions With HE Ambassadors	1	1	
	Students Aware of EE reports	2.5	1	
	Totals	20	7	0
Support	Support for Prospective Students	0.5		1
	DSA Support for Applications	2	1	
	Disability Services-With Input from the University	1	1	
	Additional Learning Support/Dyslexia/Disabilities HE/FE	3		1

	Embedding Learning Materials for Disabled Learners	0.5		1
	Tutors	2		1
	Support From the LRC (ALS)	0.5		1
	Totals	9.5	2	5
Resources and Support	Resource Allocation/Bids	0.5		1
	HE Study Zone/Hubs	6	1	
	Degree/Undergraduate/ HE Centre	3	1	
	HE Office/ Support/Admissions	3	1	
	Annual Review of Services	0.5		1
	Teaching and Learning Unit (manages quality)	0.5		1
	HE Registry	1	1	
	LRC Resources/Journals- college	4		1
	HE Library and E- learning Service	1	1	
	Careers HE/FE	0.5		1
	HE Careers- External Agency	1	1	
	IAG Student Services	0.5		1
	Counselling Staff and Students	0.5		1
	Totals	22	6	7
Representation	Student Reps/Elected reps	5		1
	HE Student Ambassadors	1	1	
	Student Rep Training	5	1	
	Student Rep Handbook	1.5	1	
	HE SU Officer	2.5	1	
	Student Governors 1 HE	0.5	1	
	Totals	15.5	5	1
Consultation and Engagement	Students Engaged in Resources Planning	1	1	
	Students at Leadership Conferences	0.5	1	
	Students Involved in T&L conference (partners in research with staff)	0	1	
	Totals	1.5	3	0
Evaluation and Feedback	HE Student Forums	7		
	Learner expert forum (includes HE) Add to cross-institution Group	1.5		1
	HE Student Ambassador Meetings	1	1	
	Email feedback on quality of lessons to HE Student Director	1	1	
	Learner Voice Conference with SMT	1		1
	Totals	11.5	2	2
Reps on committees	HE SU Reps on Executive Committees	1	1	
	Students on Committees	9	1	
	Student Reps on Programme Committees	1	1	
	Students on Board of Governors 1 HE Rep	2		1
	Totals	13	3	1
Surveys	Admissions Survey/Pre-admissions Survey	0.5		1
	Induction Survey	2.5		1
	Student survey HE only?	0.5	1	

	Group Review for HE Students	1	1		
	Internal HE Survey	2	1		
	National Student Survey NSS	6	1		
	Internal Destination Survey- HE/FE	0.5		1	
	Student feedback on Student Support services 0.5	0.5		1	
	First Impressions Survey 0.5	0.5		1	
	Skills Builder	0.5		1	
	Totals	14.5	4	6	
Students-other	Student Interns LRC	0.5		1	
	HE Student Journal	1	1		
	Totals	1.5	1	1	
Employability Skills/ Work-based learning	Curricula Based on Skills of Staff	1		1	
	Employer Engagement as a Strategic Objective	1	1		
	Employers Consultative Committee	1	1		
	Employers at Programme Committees	1	1		
	Employer Engagement Programme Design	3.5	1		
	Employer Engagement Approvals	1	1		
	Employer Engagement Delivery and Assessment Design	1	1		
	Employer Handbook for Placements /Mentors	1.5	1		
	Local Employability Partnerships/Enterprise- to looks at local skills gaps for HE (and other- but included HE)	2		1	
	Work-based Tutors/Mentors- responsible for quality assurance of work- based learning	1.5		1	
	Live Briefs	1	1		
	Work Place Mentors? E.g. Early Years/PCGE	2	1		
	Ofsted Review of Early Yrs. Placements and PGCE/Cert Ed.	1	1		
	Work- based Learning/Work Placement Handbook and Module Guide	1		1	
	Work Placements and Assessments	7		1	
	Training Hub/Pitch on Demand	0.5		1	
	Embedded WBL Modules/FdAs	2	1		
	Totals	29	11	6	
	Staff development	New Staff Approved at HEAB	1	1	
		New Staff Induction	1		1
Mentors/Coaches		3		1	
New Staff Probation		1		1	
Totals		6	1	3	
Observations	HE Lesson Observation Framework- college	1.5	1		
	HE Lessons Observed by University	1	1		
	Staff Training for Leadership in Lesson Observation to Distinguish Levels (trained at a university)	1	1		

	Peer Observation	3	1	
	Teacher Observation	5.5		1
	Learning walks	1		1
	Teaching and Learning Coaches/Learning Coaches	1		1
	Totals	14	4	3
Appraisal	Annual Staff Performance and Development Review	2		1
	Totals	2	0	1
Development Opportunities	Supporting Staff to Become External Examiners	1	1	
	HE Learning and Teaching Conference/ In House Conferences	2	1	
	Staff Development- at/by Partner University	5	1	
	Staff Development Internal/CPD	10		1
	HE Day- Sharing Good Practice for HE	1	1	
	Scholarly Activity and Research	3		1
	Thematic Network for HE	1	1	
	Totals	23	5	2
	HE Time Remission e.g. for L6 or Programme Leads	3	1	
	Totals	3	1	0
Qualification and Research Support	Support/Funding for Furthering Qualifications or Research.	4		1
	Support for Research and Conferences	1	1	
	Scholarship Peer Review and Research Development Group- College Network	1	1	
	Staff Active Practitioners	1		1
	Qualified One Level Above the Teaching Level	1		1
	Expectation to Have or Gain a Teaching Qualification	1		1
	Totals	9	2	4
Professional Membership/status	HEA Membership/Fellows	4.5	1	
	Staff with Industrial Experience	1		1
	Totals	5.5	1	1
Survey Staff	Staff Survey HE only?	1.5		1
	Staff Voice/HE Network	2	1	
	Totals	3.5	1	1
Data	Data Oversight	0.5		1
	MIS Data Analysis	1		1
	Data System for HE	1.5	1	
	Key Data Oversight of Data Retention/Achievement/Success/Progression/Student Satisfaction/Attendance	6		1
	Equality and Diversity Data	2.5		1
	Institutional Academic Partner Achievement Report for the university	1	1	
	Destination of Higher Education Leaver DLHE	1	1	
	Destination Data	0.5		1
	Graduate Employability	1	1	

	Totals	15	4	5
MABS and PABS	Appointment of External Academic for HE Assessment Board	1	1	
	Totals	1	1	0
Monitoring and Evaluation	HE Quality Cycle/HE Annual Review	2	1	
	Approval of Annual Monitoring Reports	1	1	
	SAR included in College wide SAR	0.5	1	1
	Oversight HE SED/HE SAR	6.5	1	
	HE SAR Validation	1	1	
	HE Quality Improvement Plan/HE Improvement Plans	3.5	1	
	Totals	14.5	6	1
HE Working Groups	Recognised Teacher Status Panel	1	1	
	Meetings with staff and stakeholders	1	1	
	HE Academic Practice	1	1	
	Teaching and Learning Communities	0.5		1
	Totals	3.5	3	1
HE Boards and Committees	HE Student Experience Committee	1	1	
	Student Learning and Quality Committee HE/FE	0.5		1
	Research and scholarly activity committee	1	1	
	HE planning and resources committee Add to Business Committee	3	1	
	Learning and Teaching Committee HE	1	1	
	Equal Opportunities Committee	0.5		1
	HE Committee/Board/Group	5.5	1	
	HE Operational Board/HE Operational Group	2	1	
	Academic Board HE	4	1	
	HE Strategy Group	1	1	
	Quality Assurance Board	0.5		1
	HE Quality/ Standards Board	3.5	1	
	Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Committee e.g. Programme Approvals	1	1	
	HE Committee for NAB/all	1	1	
	Governance Group with HE	0.5	1	
Totals	26	12	3	
HE Management	HE Student engagement officers/Coordinators	2	1	
	Student Engagement Leader Add to Students	0.5	1	
	HE Data Analyst	1	1	
	HE Registrar	1	1	
	HE Learning and Teaching Managers	1	1	
	NAB Quality Nominee	0.5		1
	HE Quality Manager/Lead	2	1	
	Quality Manager	0.5	1	
	HE Quality and Research Manager	1	1	
	HE Coordinator /Manager	2	1	
Head of HE	4	1		

	Director for HE	4	1	
	Senior Leadership/Vice or Assistant Principal/Executive Lead	3.5	1	
	HE Governor	1	1	
	Totals	24	13	1
Interaction with the University	Attendance at University QEC	1	1	
	Agreement for HN Students/Interaction with the University (to secure standards)	1	1	
	Totals	2	2	0
Meetings added to above	Minutes of Meetings-various	1		1
	Minutes of Meetings with Awarding Bodies	0.5	1	
	Consortium Management Committee	0.5	1	
	Totals	2	2	1
Strategy and Policy or Regulatory Type Documents for HE	HE Strategy	7	1	
	HE Development Plan	1	1	
	HE Resourcing Plan/Business Plan	2	1	
	Strategic Development Plan and QIP are College FE including HE	0.5		1
	Quality Assurance Processes in HE Admissions/University Policy	2	1	
	HE Admission policy	2.5	1	
	Admissions Policy	2		1
	Accreditation of Prior Learning	2	1	
	NAB Admissions Policy	1		1
	College Code of Conduct/Student Charter	5		1
	Student Contract- University	1	1	
	HE Student Engagement/Student Voice Policy	5		
	Complaints and Appeals + OIA	6.5	1	
	HE Academic Appeals Policy	1	1	
	HN Appeals for NAB	1	1	
	Praise and Complaints Policy	1		1
	HE Assessment Policy	2.5	1	
	Assessment and Verification Policy / IV Guide/ IV Policy	3		1
	HE Mitigating Circumstances Policy	1	1	
	Referral/Compensation/Mitigation Regulations	1		1
	Malpractice/Plagiarism	2		1
	HE Academic Standards Policy Add to Standards	3	1	
	College HE Academic Regulations	1	1	
	Teaching and Learning Observation Policy	1		1
	Teaching and Learning Policy/ Teaching Learning and Assessment Policy	1		1
	HE Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy	3	1	
HE Research and Scholarship strategy	1	1		

	HE Placement/Work- based Learning Policy	2	1	
	Agreement for work-based learning providers	0.5		1
	Staff Recruitment and Selection Policy	1		1
	New Staff Support	0.5		1
	Teacher/Staff Development Process/ Policy	2		1
	Single Equalities Scheme	0.5		1
	Equality and Diversity Policy	0.5		1
	Safeguarding	0.5		1
	Prevent	0.5		1
	Tutorial Policy	1		1
	Procedure for Course Closure	1	1	
	Polices and Proformas on Approval, Monitoring and Review	1	1	
	HE Quality Framework Add to HE QA	2	1	
	Quality Strategy	0.5		1
	Checking Policies Against the Quality Code	1	1	
	Totals	74.5	21	20
Quality Assurance Guides NAB and University	BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment and Standards Verification Guide/NAB Frameworks and Regulations	5.5		1
	Assessment and IV for NAB HN's	1.5		1
	College Guide to verification IV/IV Policy	2		1
	College Mitigating Circumstance for NAB (for all HE/FE)? Add to College Guides	0.5		1
	College Academic Malpractice Misconduct for P (for all HE/FE)? Add to College Guides	2		1
	College Reasonable Adjustment for P (for all HE/FE)? Add to College Guides	0.5		1
	NAB Academic Regulations Add to BTEC Guides	0.5		1
	Guidance on Programme and Module Design- NAB	0.5		1
	NAB Quality Assurance Process Handbook	1.5		1
	HE Quality Assurance Processes Document (For HE Board) Generic Course Review for NAB	1	1	
	Academic Regulations	3.5	1	
	Partnership Handbooks	1	1	
	Academic Complaints and Appeals	2	1	
	Assessment Policies of the Universities	1	1	
	Arrangement for External Advisors- for Approval and Review	1	1	
	Role of the External Examiner	1	1	
	Peer Review from the University	1	1	
	Course suspension Guidelines of the University	1	1	
	Advisory Documentation for Planning of the University	1	1	

	e.g. Course Handbooks	2		1
	Totals	30	10	10
Understanding	Understanding of an Application of Partnership Agreements	6	1	
	Understanding of and Application of University Regulations	6	1	
	Recognition and Understanding of the Interaction of Complaints Initiated at the College and the Processes of the Awarding Bodies	1	1	
	Understanding of and Application of Quality and Standards Processes	2	1	
	Embedding the Quality Code/Documentation/Training	2	1	
	Understanding of Approval, Monitoring, Review	2	1	
	Totals	19	6	0
Key Activity Group	University Level Quality Activities	Total engagements for Each Activity for all Colleges	Number of HE Activities	Number of HE/FE Activities
Planning	University Review and Development Group	2		
	University Learning Partnership Advisory Group- for programme approval	2		
	Totals	4	2	
Writing documentation for approval and for use throughout the programme of study	Programme design and development	2		
	Assures Alignment to FHEQ	1		
	Programme Specifications/Definitive records	4		
	Totals	7	3	
Externality for Development and Approvals	Externality for Programme Approval Employers or External Academics	2		
	Validates/Assures Programme Specification	1		
	Scrutiny of CVs/Scrutiny of College Staff	5		
	Totals	8	3	
Validation	Programme Validation/Approval	11		
	Validation Handbook	2		
	Validation Reports	1		
	Totals	14	3	
Agreements	Partnership agreements	4		
	Memorandum of Cooperation	3		
	Totals	7	2	
Modifications	Programme modifications	4		
	Re-approval/Revalidation	4		
	Revalidation reports (periodic review report)	2		
	Totals	10	3	
Reviews	Mid-year review	1		

	Annual Review	9		
	Periodic Review	9		
	Field Reviews	1		
	University Review of College			
	Collaborative Partner Review	4		
	Peer Review -Across Consortium e.g. of Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports	1		
	Sector Endorsement	1		
		26	8	
Externality for Reviews	External Specialist Advisors- Currency of Programme and Student Opportunities	1		
	Totals	1	1	
Information	HE Prospectus	1		
	University Website -for College Courses	1		
	Programme Specifications on Website (e.g. Franchised)	1.5		
	Totals	3.5	3	
Admissions and Admissions Oversight	Clearing Training From the University	1		
	Oversight of Admissions	1		
	Approvals/Checking of Published Information	7		
	Monitoring of Admissions Statistics Across Consortium	1		
	Totals	10	4	
Handbooks	University Student Handbook	2		
	Trainee Handbook- for Assessment Practice	1		
	Checking Handbooks	1		
	Totals	4	3	
Assessment writing, marking, feedback and moderation	Assessment Schedule Approvals?	0.5		
	Modifications of Assessment Strategies	1		
	Overseeing/Checking Assessment Design from College	1		
	Oversees Assessment Strategies at Validation	1		
	Volume of Study to Meet LOs	0.5		
	Assignment Writing	3		
	Assignment Briefs-University Overseen Across Consortium	2		
	Marking	1		
	Second Marking	1		
	Moderation After Double Marking	2		
	Assessment/Moderation and Marking Guidelines	2		
	External Moderation (by?) Add to Moderation	1		
	Totals	16	12	
External Examining	Role of the External Examiner Add to Awarding Body Appoints	1		
	Awarding Bodies Appoints External Examiners	6		

Externals	External Examiners Trained by the Awarding Body	2		
	External Examiner Approves Assignment Briefs/ Assessments	4		
	Receives and Disseminates External Examiner Reports	8		
	Scrutinizing of External Examiner Reports	5		
	Overseeing Response to External Examiner Reports	3		
	Arrangement for External Advisors- for Approval and Review	1		
	Totals	30	8	
Support	Disabilities Support	2		
	Totals	2	1	
Resources	Library Resources	5		
	University VLE	2.5		
	Totals	7.5	2	
Student Engagement Representation	Board of Study	1		
	SU and Student Rep Training	1		
	Totals	2	2	
Student evaluations	Module Evaluations	1		
	Totals	1	1	
Employer/work engagement/ Work- based learning	Oversees Work Placements e.g. PGCE	1		
	Mentor Handbook	1		
	Totals	2	2	
Staff development	Support for New Staff	1		
	Support for Completion of Validation/Periodic Review Documentation/Revalidation	2		
	Peer Observation	1		
	Observation of College Staff	1		
	Staff Development Provided by the University	5		
	Annual Conference for Associate Partners	2		
	Totals	12	6	
Observations	Observation of college staff before giving associated lecturer status	1		
	Totals	1	1	
MABS/PABS				
	Exam Boards/ Assessment Boards	7		
	Chairing Exam Boards/Assessment Boards	3		
	Assessment Board Minutes	1		
	Totals	11	3	
Review reports	University Annual Report Against DFE Criteria Sector Endorsement	1		
	Annual Review /Monitoring/Standards Reports	10		
	Academic Achievement Partner Report	1		
	Faculty Improvement Plan	1		

	University Programme Enhancement Plans	1		
	Periodic Review	2		
	Totals	16	6	
HE Boards and Committees	added below			
	Consortium Management	2		
	Totals	2	1	
Interactions and oversight-added above?	University Quality Team Meets College Senior Managers Regularly	1		
Total interactions	Link Tutors	5		
	University Liaison Officer	1		
	Interactions with Quality Office	1		
	Annual Strategic University Review and Enhancement Procedure/Review Frameworks/ Monitoring and Review Policy	2		
	Agreement for HN students/Interaction with the University (to Secure Standards)	2		
	Totals	12	6	
Strategy and policy	University Admissions policy	1		
	Collaborative Provision Policy	2		
	Quality, Standards and Enhancement Policies	2		
	Totals	5	3	
Guides and Regulations	University Operations Manual e.g. Includes University Admissions Process	2		
	University Assessment Design Approval and Marking Guidance	2		
	University Academic Framework and Regulations	3		
	University Examination and/or Assessment Regulations	5		
	University Regulations to Review Assessment /Appeals Decisions	2		
	Academic Misconduct	1		
	Course Suspension Guidelines of the University	1		
	Advisory Documentation for Planning of the University	1		
	Totals	17	8	
Standards	University Quality and Standards Handbook	3		
	Sector Endorsement Where Appropriate- is the DFES (now CWDC) Children's Workforce Development Council for Early Years?	1		
	Totals	4	2	
Graduate Attributes	Graduate Attributes	1		
	Totals	1	1	
Awards	Assures Award Standards	2		
	Transcripts	1		
	Certificates	1		
	Totals	4	3	
Documentation	Documentation	1		

	Totals	1	1	
Understanding	Engagement with and Understanding of University Policy and Process	1		
	Totals	1	1	
Key Activity Group	External Frameworks as Quality Activities	Total Engagements for Each Activity for all Colleges	Number of HE Activities	Number of HE/FE Activities
Use of and Understanding of External Frames of Reference	Supporting Professionalism in Admissions	1	1	
	SEEC Descriptors	1	1	
	Occupational Standards	2		1
	PSRB	5	1	
	Sector skills council	1		1
	National Credit Framework	1		1
	Subject Benchmark	11	1	
	FdA Qualification Benchmarks	7.5	1	
	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications FHEQ	10	1	
	Quality Code	6	1	
	FDAP	1	1	
	Totals	46.5	8	3

2. Example of the first page of the summary of quality activities by group of activities and relative engagements with the activities in the group. Number of HE or HE/FE activities by group-final version

Column Number	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
Programme level Key Activity Group	Total Number Programme Level Quality Activities Overall in Each Key Activity Group	Relative Frequency (%) HE Programme Level Quality Activities Overall in Each Key Activity Group	Totals Number of Engagements for Programme Level Quality Activities in Each Key Activity Group for All Colleges	Relative Frequency (%) Of Engagements for Programme Level Quality Activities in Each Key Activity Group for All Colleges	Total Number HE Programme Level Quality Activities in Each Key Activity Group	Total Number HE/FE Programme Level Quality Activities in Each Key Activity Group
Planning	3	5	8.5	2	1	2
Writing documentation for approval and for use throughout the programme of study	16	9	44	9	16	0
Externality for Development and Approvals	4	2	12	4	4	0
Validation	7	4	14.5	3	7	0
Agreements	2	1	6	1	2	0
Modifications	1	1	6	1	1	0
Revalidation	1	1	5	1	1	0
Reviews	8	5	27	6	8	0
Programme Committees	3	2	6	1	2	1
Information	5	3	5	1	3	2
Admissions	8	5	8	2	3	5
Handbooks	4	2	19.5	4	1	3
Leads	2	1	13	3	2	0
Assessment writing	11	6	38	8	3	8
Marking and associated activities	13	7	40.5	8	6	7
External Examining	11	6	39.5	8	11	0
Support	11	6	30.5	6	5	6
Additional Support	3	2	2.5	1	0	3
Resources and support	5	3	8	2	0	5
Student Representation	5	3	21	4	4	1
Student Evaluation/ Surveys	7	4	15.5	3	5	2

3. Extracted example of part of a page of log 1 the spreadsheet of all quality activities extracted and notional points- final version.

Key Activity Group	Programme level quality activities	Totals for each activity	1 Alpha	2 Beta	3 Gamma	4 Delta	5 Epsilon	6 Zeta	7
Planning	Curriculum Planning	3.5					0.5		
	New Programme Proposal/Business Case Internal or External	4		1	1	1			
	Due Diligence	1							
Writing documentation for approval and for use throughout the programme of study	Module Learning Outcomes	2							
	Mapping Learning Outcomes to Assessment	2							
	Module Specifications	4	1						
	Module Descriptors	5.5	1		1		0.5		
	Module Handbooks/Module Study Guide	3							
	Definitive Module Documents	2.5		0.5		1			
	Module Guides- NAB? Add to Module Study Guide	0.5							0
	Programme Development	2							
	Mapping Programme Content to Programme LOs	4			1	1			
	Programme Aims	1							
	Programme Learning Outcomes	2							
	Writing Learning Outcomes at the Correct Level	1	1						
	Mapping to Benchmark Statements	1							
	Programme Specifications NAB Programmes	4.5	0.5				1		
	Programme Specifications/Definitive Record- university. Sometimes written by University e.g., for PGCE. Sometimes written by College using University templates	8	1	0.5	0.5	1			1
Contextual Documents	1			1					
Externality for Development and Approvals	Engaging with Employers for Programme Development	2							
	Engaging with Employers for Approvals	5				2			
	Externals on Validation Panels	4							
	External Examiners Report on Appropriateness of New Programmes	1					1		
Validation	Internal Validation of NAB Programmes/Standard Module Specifications/Programme Structures	2					1		
	Scrutiny for Work based or Placement Learning at Validation and Periodic Review	1							
	Staff to be Approved by the Recognised Teacher Status Panel	1							
	New Programme Approval NAB	0.5					0.5		
	Programme Validation	8			1	1	1	1	
	Validation Reports	1							
Responding to Conditions made at Validation	1								

4. Extracted example of part of a page of Log 2 the spreadsheet of specific quality activities and total activities- contextual information-final version.

	College	Review date	1. Success of the review					2. Longevity of HE in FE					3a. Number of HE students					3b.	
			Requires improvement /does not meet	Successful meets expectations	Meets expectations no recommendation	Good Practice	Commended	2010>	2000-2009	1990-1999	1980-1989	<1980	<100	100-499	500-999	1000-1499	1500-1999	2000>	Number
1	Alpha	Mar-14		1		1	1							2					138
2	Beta	Mar-14	0			1			2				1						53
3	Gamma	Apr-15		1		1					3			2					296
4	Delta	Jun-15		1		1								2					337
5	Epsilon	Oct-15		1		1								2					280
6	Zeta	May-13		1		1		1*						2					300
7	Eta	Jan-16		1		1									3				655
8	Theta	Feb-14		1		1	1							2					400
9	Iota	Apr-13		1		1									3				528
10a	Kappa 1	May-16			2	1	1									4			1300
10b	Kappa 2	Sep-15		4												4			1164
11	Lambda	Feb-16		1		1									3				851

5. Interview questions

The research project outline was sent to all participants and all participants signed a consent form.

Main interview questions version for HE in FE Heads/Directors of HE in FE

a. Quality models HE in FE

To prepare prior to the interview: Visualise all the activities that occur at programme, school/faculty and cross-college* that relate to the quality of higher education in your institution. Please draw a diagram to illustrate how these activities relate to each other.

*For federated or merged colleges include activities that are common across all colleges.

b. Background for HE in your institution

Could you give me a little background information to introduce the HE provision in your college?

For example, when was HE introduced? How has it grown?

c. Quality systems and processes

Are HE quality systems and processes differentiated from FE?

If so to what extent?

Can you think of any factors that might have influenced your approach to quality in your college?

What works well in your approach to quality?

d. Quality HE in FE and HE in a university

How do you see your approach to quality as compared to what you might see in a university?

e. Quality concepts

I am interested to know what your perception of HE quality is. Do you think this differs from FE quality or quality in a university?

Main interview questions for University participants e.g. Heads of Quality/Head of Collaborative Partnerships

a. Quality models HE in FE

How do you perceive quality management activities for HE in FE colleges?

To prepare prior to the interview: From your experience in working with colleges of FE, visualise all the activities that occur at programme, school/faculty and cross-college. Please draw a diagram to illustrate how these activities relate to each other.

b. Background

From a quality perspective, could you give me a little background information on your relationships with your partner colleges?

How many HE in FE colleges do you work with?

Outline the ways in which you work with colleges?

c. Quality systems and processes

How do HE in FE quality activities differ from your own?

What do you see as key influencing factors for FE colleges when developing their own HE Quality activities?

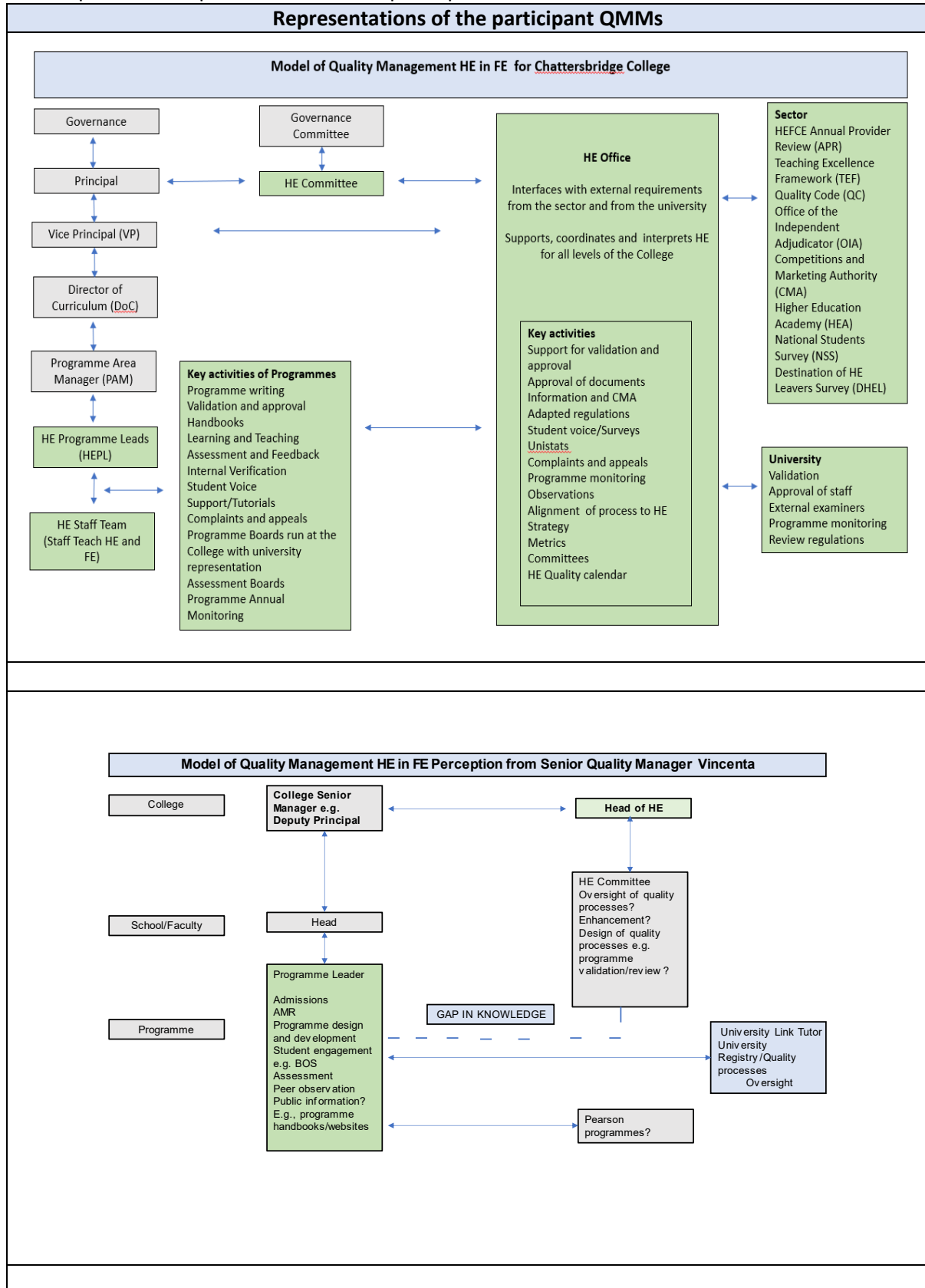
d. Quality HE in FE and HE in a university

How do you see your approach to quality as compared to what you might see in a college?

e. Quality concepts

I am interested to know what your perception of HE quality is. Do you think this differs from HE quality in a college or FE quality?

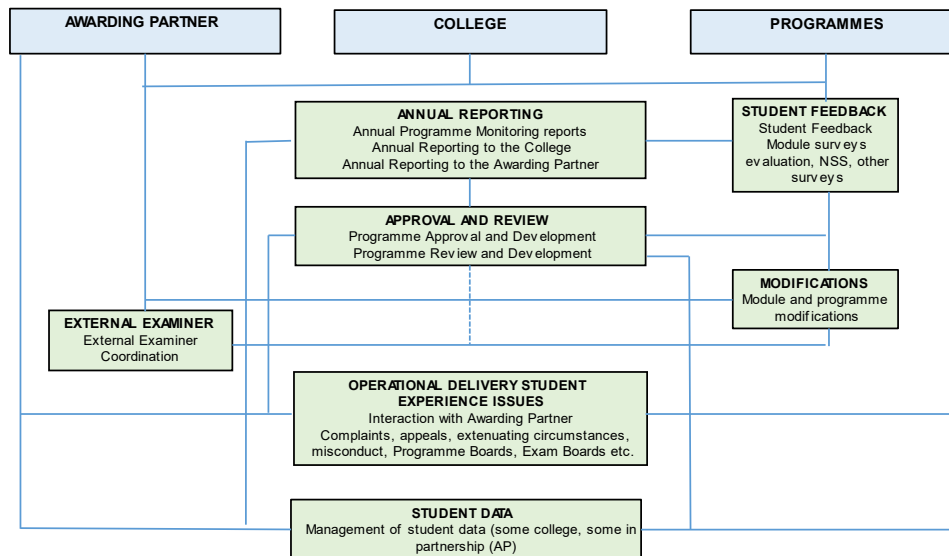
6. Examples of the representations of the participant QMMs

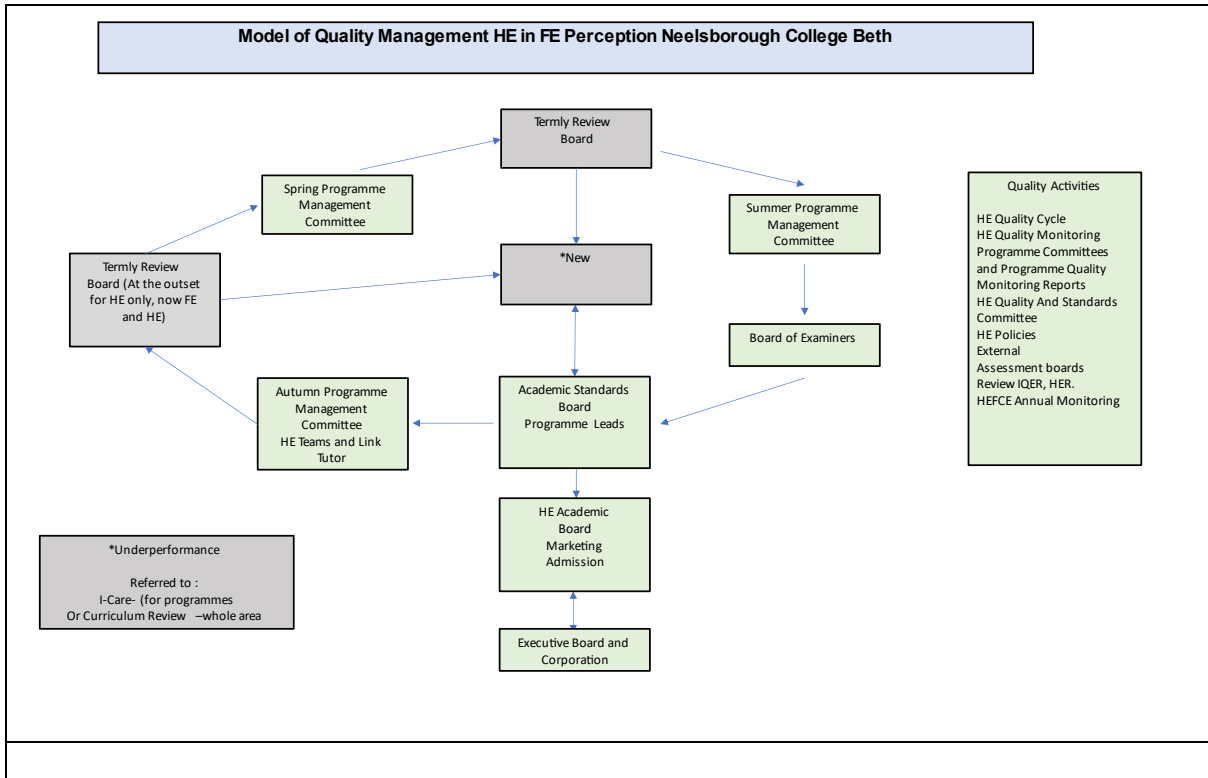


Model of Quality Management HE in FE for Teemshire College

	Programme Level	Faculty Level	College Level
		Monthly: HE Executive Board Student Voice	
Autumn	Reconvened Exam Boards Annual Programme Evaluation(APE) (Complete) + Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)	Exam Boards Faculty Board? HE Executive Board	NSS Results Analysis External Examiner Reports Reviewed and Summarised Annual Provider Review Academic Quality Standards Committee Academic Board Governors
Spring	Mid/Module surveys Course Team Meetings QEP Review		HE Self –evaluation Report +QEP from Annual Partner Report Partner Institution Academic Board QEP Monitoring
Summer	Mid/Module surveys Course Team Meetings QEP Review Exam Boards	Exam Boards	Academic Board QEP Monitoring Feedback from Partner Institution Academic Quality Standards Committee QEP Monitoring Academic Board QEP Monitoring
Preparation for Autumn	Course Planning Draft Annual Programme Evaluation		Governors

Model of Quality Management HE in FE Perception from Senior Quality Manager Olivia





7. Example of part of the Initial outline plan as an example of the themes and storyboard linking themes

Extract as an example of the themes and sub themes with broad definitions. Each theme includes codes seen through the different perspectives of the colleges and the universities-see NVivo Codebook. Where links to the literature review are evident, these are indicated, as well as potential area of new knowledge.

What are the QMM HE in FE and how do these function

Main Theme	Broad meaning	Links with	Sub-theme	Links to literature review
QMM Activities What are the quality activities making up QMMs HE in FE?	Key quality activities of HE in FE. What are the perceptions of quality activities and QMMs HE in FE seen from the different perspectives of the colleges and of the universities	Knowledge and understanding Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key activities seen from the College perspective Key activities seen from a university perspective 	Quality frameworks of reference. Quality Code and European Standards Guidelines. Analysis of HER Review reports.
HE Management Where does the QMM HE in FE sit?	The organisation of HE and infrastructures that support the working of a QMM	Knowledge and understanding Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management of the QMMs for HE from a college perspective. Management of the QMMs for HE from a University perspective. 	Partially new knowledge-linking HE Management to QMMs
Who Drives or Engages with a QMM?	Within the HE Management where and who are the key drivers engaging with a QMM?	HE Management knowledge and understanding Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying the key players of HE QMMs Where are the gaps? 	New knowledge? Look at other subject areas to look for other theories on knowledge and understanding and engagement? Links to institutional theory?
Knowledge and understanding	Who engages with and is knowledgeable of HE QMM HE in FE? Who has the experience?	HE Management and QMM for HE Who drives and engages with QMMs? Tensions-impact on engagement Perceptions of HE in FE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge and understanding from a college perspective. Knowledge and understanding from a university perspective. Where are the gaps? 	New knowledge

How did colleges build QMMs- Learn HE in FE QMMs?

Main Theme	Broad meaning	Links with	Sub-theme	Links to literature review
How did Colleges know what to do?	What are the sources of knowledge used by HE in FE to develop QMMs for HE?	External drivers Knowledge and understanding Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector expectations and training University instruction, support and training Experiencing reviews Professional development Networks Adopting or mimicking Role models Student demands 	Background of HE in FE. Institutional theory. New knowledge

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own learning and knowledge as an HE provider • Experiential learning • Just another Awarding body • HE in FE experience and recognising HE in FE is different- adaptations • Own drivers 	
College can do it too	Taking ownership/uniqueness/bespoke	Perception Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics of mature QMM HE in FE 	New knowledge

Internal Tensions impacting on QMMs

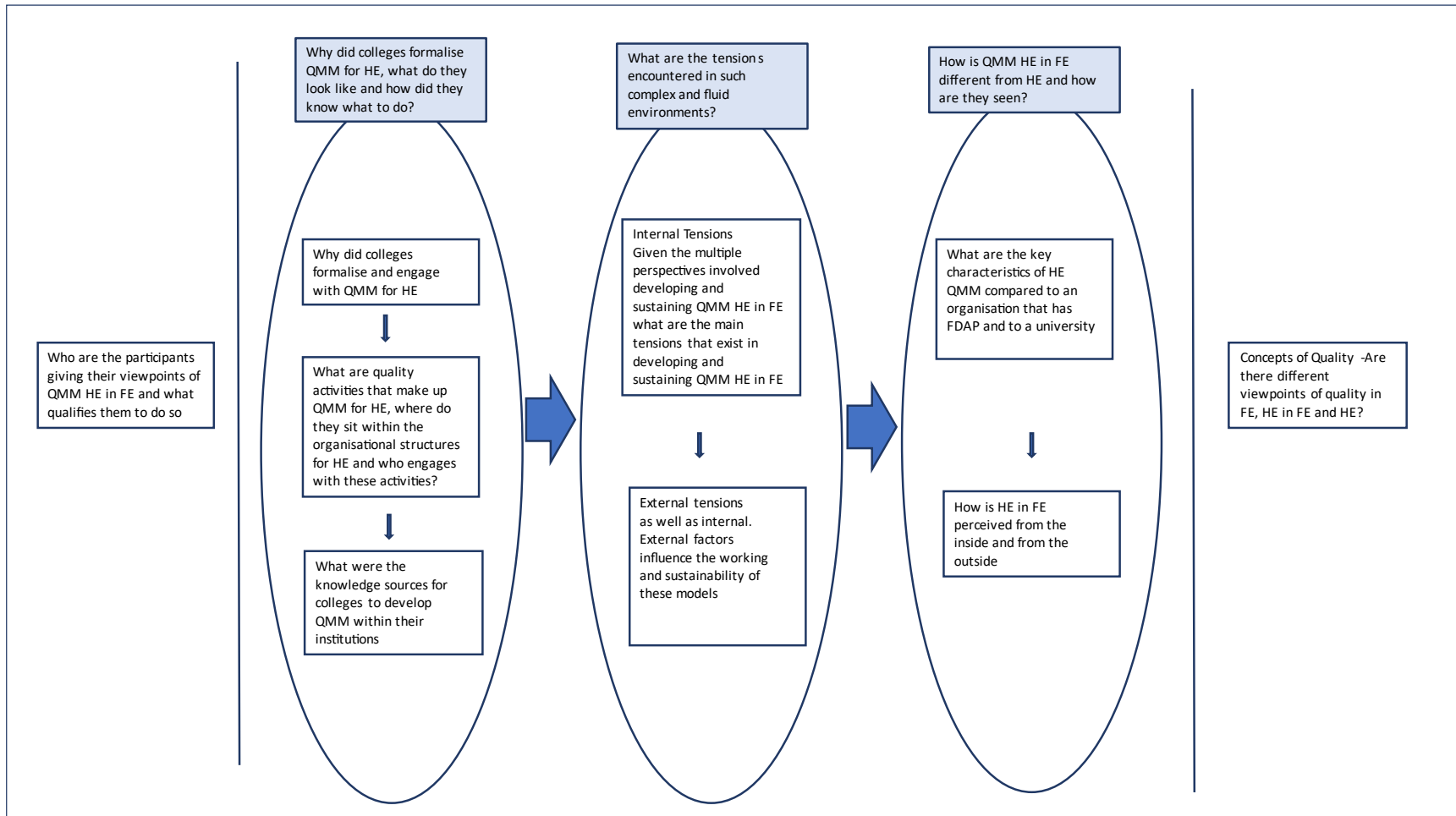
Main Theme	Broad meaning	Links with	Sub-theme	Links to literature review
Internal Tensions Existing tensions in QMMs that impact on the feasibility, clarity and sustainability of QMMs HE in FE	In mixed-economy institutions there is a constant internal struggle to make the voice of HE in FE be heard and understood. This key section illuminated these tensions and illustrates the impact on the feasibility, clarity and sustainability of QMMs HE in FE.		<p>Multiple quality perspectives Whose systems and processes? Whose policies? Management and culture: Data Students Staff HE Focus-competition for time and resources and varying focus Partnerships and change Mergers Impact of student numbers Issue of fairness and parity New demands Challenges due size Challenges due to knowledge and understanding Challenges due to capacity and engagement Adapting processes Changing demands Knowledge banks diminishing-staff moving on Clarity and separateness of an QMM Sustainability of QMMs</p>	New knowledge Although some tensions are known e.g. markets and competition for numbers. However, when all the various tensions are seen in one frame this gives a new vision of QMMs HE in FE

External Tensions impacting on QMMs- Drivers, barriers and tensions

Main Code	Broad meaning	Links with	Sub-code	Links to literature review
Changes in External Quality Drivers and impacts	Changes in drivers of quality over time: Reviews, TEF, CMA, OIA and the impact of change.	Why did colleges formalise QMMs? Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes of quality drivers over time. • Impact of change 	External quality demands e.g. Quality Code or HER New knowledge impact on colleges

External National Policy and impacts	Policy changes and impacts	Why did colleges formalise QMMs? Tensions External quality drivers and impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number cap removal • Fees • Competition • Lowering entry requirements • Competition for qualifications types • How competition impacts on QMM • Policy and students and the focus of quality 	National policies widening participation or Removal of numbers cap/marketisation and impact on colleges National views
External Change and impacts	This is other external changes and impacts e.g., changes at the university	Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the impact on a college QMM when change happens at the university 	New knowledge

Concept flow



8. Codebook 2. Interview analysis HE in FE.

Nodes\\SHEM1 Nodes Code book 2

Name	Description/Quotes/counter arguments	Theme -sub themes will include the different viewpoints from the college and the university
Who's quality systems and processes	Tensions in systems and processes-Colleges HE or university Developing HE in FE processes or using those of the university? Tension or best of both worlds	Tensions and QMM
Learning HE Quality Professional Development	How did the college know what to do? Supporting professional development CPD	How did college know what to do
Learning HE Quality Adapting processes	Adapting and simplifying what was needed to better fit	How did colleges know what to do
Learning HE Quality Guidelines and frameworks	Interpreting guidelines and frameworks	How did colleges know what to do
Polices-Shared policies HE/FE	Adding HE policy to FE policies sharing or add on?	Tensions and QMM
HE criteria -Annual Provider review	APR one set of criteria	External Quality Drivers
National Policy and student numbers-apprenticeships	How apprenticeships may influence HE in FE student numbers moving forwards	External National Policy
Polices and attendance	Tension of HE and FE views on attendance: Problems, solutions and revelations	Tensions and QMM
Which quality systems-Avoiding duplication	Whose quality systems? Avoiding duplication when there are less resources. 'I think it [the Quality Model] has to be bespoke... we have efficiencies to find.' 'we've got a unique way of doing it.'	Tensions and QMM
QMM HE in FE Same Drivers	HE and HE in FE conform to the same external criteria	QMM HE and HE in FE -Compare
QMM HE one system	University has one quality system across the institution. In HE in FE there is HE and FE	QMM HE and HE in FE -Compare
QMM HE in FE Less resources	Less staff resources for QMM	QMM HE and HE in FE -Compare

Name	Description/Quotes/counter arguments	Theme -sub themes will include the different viewpoints from the college and the university
QMM HE in FE-Different	Has to be bespoke 'I think it [the Quality Model] has to be bespoke... we have efficiencies to find.' 'we've got a unique way of doing it.'	QMM HE and HE in FE -Compare
Cultures of management	Culture differences-Tensions with FE managerialist cultures	Tensions and QMM
Between FE and HE demands	Trying to drive an HE culture against the FE backdrop together with the demands of the university	Tensions and QMM