

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND EDUCATION

**Social Work Education and the Marketisation of UK
Universities**

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~ Dr Gerry Davis and Dr Jane Akister ~

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I have chosen to dedicate this study to the many young people I was fortunate enough to work with in my 25 years of social work practice. It is for them and those like them that I remain committed to excellence in the education of social workers, because they each deserve the best.

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY**FACULTY OF HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND EDUCATION****Social Work Education and the Marketisation of UK Universities****Abstract:**

Social work practice and university provision of social work education in the UK have come under considerable public scrutiny during the past decade. Questions have been raised in the media, professional discourse and government inquires as to whether universities are delivering consistently high standards of graduates into the profession. During the same period structural changes to the provision and funding of universities in the UK have transformed higher education. The rapid expansion of the sector alongside the introduction of fees-based funding has resulted in a 'market' in higher education. Students are now consumers, with greater numbers of universities competing for their custom. However, as the sector continues to expand a growing body of critical literature is emerging raising doubts as to the efficacy of this newly marketised university structure.

This research therefore asks how marketisation is influencing social work education in UK universities. Although it is acknowledged that there has been an expansion of alternative routes to qualification, this research is exclusively focussed on university provision. Using a dual-stranded study involving a national sample of social work academics, questionnaire and interview data is analysed to present emerging themes based on the expressed views and reported experiences of those working directly within the sector.

The study highlights a level of concern regarding the changing academic relationship with students and particularly the role of the National Student Survey (NSS). It raises questions in relation to standards of admissions, teaching and assessment in some institutions. Findings indicate that academics are very aware of the influence of a market-culture within universities but that experiences differ across the sector. There is evidence that consistency of standards may be compromised in some instances but that social work academics feel unable to speak out about this topic whilst working in this highly competitive and uncertain environment.

Conclusions have a transformative focus pointing to a need for open, critical and reflective discourse to assist the development of future practice, policy and regulation in this area with the ultimate aim of improving standards of higher education. The study may therefore be of interest to those working in other disciplines, particularly comparable professional courses such as teaching and nursing.

Key words: Social Work Education; Universities; Marketisation; Higher Education.

Contents:

<u>Introduction</u>	1
1. <u>Contextual Background</u>	5
1.1 Locating myself within the study as a practitioner researcher.....	6
1.2 Socio-Economic and Political Context.....	9
1.3 The expansion of the UK university sector as an emerging global industry and the increasing role of marketisation.....	13
1.4 The rise and fall of professional social work and social work education...	22
1.5 Chapter summary and reflection.....	27
2. <u>Literature Review: What is known about the quality of social work education in the UK</u>	29
2.1 Scope and search method.....	30
2.2 Literature summary.....	31
2.2.1 Academic publications.....	34
2.2.2 Government reports.....	39
2.2.3 Social work media and the popular press.....	44
2.3 Discussion of literature.....	46
2.4 Themes emerging from review of literature.....	49
2.4.1 Consistency in Regulatory Framework.....	49
2.4.2 Standards in admissions criteria.....	51
2.4.3 Curriculum content.....	51
2.4.4 Quality of student assessment.....	52
2.5 Chapter summary leading to a research question making an original contribution to knowledge.....	53
3. <u>Methods and Methodology</u>	54
3.1 Methodology: Ontological and Epistemological Considerations.....	57
3.2 Early reflections on choice of research methods.....	60
3.3 Ethical approval.....	64
3.4 Methods of data collection: General Design.....	66
3.5 Methods of data collection: Questionnaires.....	68
3.5.1 Reflective account of Questionnaire design.....	69
3.5.2 Piloting of questionnaires.....	71

3.5.3 Administration of questionnaires	72
3.5.4 Limitations of questionnaires.....	74
3.6 Methods of data collection: Interviews.....	76
3.6.1 Pilot interviews.....	78
3.6.2 Reflective account of Interview design.....	80
3.6.3 Delivery of interviews.....	83
3.6.4 Limitations to the interviews.....	86
3.7 Data Analysis Method.....	89
3.7.1 Reflective account of Thematic Analysis design.....	90
3.7.2 Validity and Reliability.....	93
3.7.3 Limitations of methods of analysis.....	95
3.8 Chapter summary.....	97
 4. <u>Research Results</u>.....	 98
4.1 Questionnaire Data	99
4.1.1 Questionnaire Sample.....	99
4.1.2 Scaled question responses.....	101
4.1.3 Examination of responses by category of university.....	104
4.1.4 Summary of emerging picture based from scaled responses.....	111
4.1.5 Qualitative comments on questionnaires.....	112
4.1.6 Summary of Questionnaire Results.....	116
4.2 Results from Interview Data	117
4.2.1 Interview Sample.....	119
4.2.2 Emerging themes from interviews.....	121
4.2.3 Summary of results arising from interviews.....	138
4.3 Chapter and Data Summary	138
 5. <u>Discussion, Analysis and Findings</u>.....	 140
5.1 The process of interpretation and analysis	140
5.2 The question of generalizability	144
5.3 Summary of Research Findings	145
5.3.1 The influence of marketisation on institutions.....	146
5.3.2 The influence of marketisation on students.....	147
5.3.3 The influence of marketisation on academic staff	148
5.3.4 Synthesis of findings suggested by this study.....	150

5.4 Contextual Discussion of Findings.....	153
5.4.1 The influences of market forces within the university environment...	153
5.4.2 Institutions are not all the same.....	156
5.4.3 Consistency of standards may be compromised.....	160
5.4.4 The influence of marketisation on academic and professional discourse regarding social work education.....	164
5.5 Chapter summary.....	168
 6. <u>Conclusion and final reflections</u>.....	 170
6.1 Summary of the research journey.....	170
6.2 Contribution to knowledge.....	172
6.3 Research dissemination and impact.....	173
6.4 Future research objectives.....	175
6.5 Final reflections.....	176
References.....	184
Appendices.....	214

List of Tables and Figures:

Tables:

Table 4.1 Academic Position of Participants.....	99
Table 4.2 Years Employed in Higher Education.....	100
Table 4.3 Geographic Location of Participants.....	100
Table 4.4 Era in which employing institution gained university status.....	101
Table 4.5 Staff time to spend with students.....	105
Table 4.6 Student numbers.....	106
Table 4.7 Systems and staff dedicated to marketing.....	106
Table 4.8 Use of performance management tools and targets.....	107
Table 4.9 Use of formal complaints procedures.....	108
Table 4.10 Direct input from service users.....	108
Table 4.11 Quality of students on intake.....	109
Table 4.12 Modularisation of teaching.....	110
Table 4.13 Use of part time and temporary staff.....	111

Figures:

Figure 4.1 Scaled Question Responses.....	103
Figure 4.2 Questionnaire Comments Word Cloud.....	112
Figure 4.3 Key to Participant Information.....	120
Figure 4.4 Quotations of views expressed regarding research topic.....	137
Figure 5.1 Research Findings Matrix.....	152

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Confirmation of Ethical Approval.....	214
Appendix 2 – Questionnaire Template.....	216
Appendix 3 – Conference Poster.....	218
Appendix 4 – Questionnaire Collection Box.....	219
Appendix 5 – Instructions to Interviewees.....	220
Appendix 6 – Images of Thematic Analysis.....	221

Introduction

Educating social workers is an important, complex and serious ‘business’ (Harris, 2003). Social work is among the most demanding of professions calling on a diverse body of applied knowledge sourced from across the social sciences. It requires skilled communication in a range of settings and relies on a sound professional value-base from which to make complex and potentially life changing decisions. It is also considered to call upon skills of intuitive and analytical reasoning (Munro, 2009) requiring practitioners to be confident in the application of both. Preparation for entry into such a profession is a responsibility not to be taken lightly.

From the outset of this doctoral journey I am aware that social work practice has much in common with contemporary social research; with both requiring clarity of thought and management of interaction and analysis through reflection and reflexivity. Both often require the practitioner to challenge their own and society’s assumptions and constructs. Both require an understanding and interpretation of human nature and acceptance of diversity of values. Both require a level of objective planning, time management and critical analysis; and it could be argued, that both have the potential to perform a ‘transformative’ role within society, where the practitioner or researcher might seek to address issues of social justice and inequality through their work, albeit at a micro-level.

This thesis is presented as both a professional doctoral study and an example of practitioner-research since I am currently a full time lecturer in social work and remain a registered social work practitioner. Prior to becoming a full time academic in 2010 I was a social worker in practice for over twenty years. Such experience has allowed me to develop my own ability to combine theory with practical application in context. Fook (2000), in describing the attributes of a postmodern profession points out that context is key, citing connectedness rather than objectivity as being the trademark of a professional in the 21st century. For me this means allowing service users and students alike to take a lead in their own service or education. It means a blurring of boundaries between the expert and recipient. Fook continues to explore the narrowing gap and status between scientific knowledge of the researcher and lived experience of the practitioner. Acknowledging that both roles offer potential insight she highlights awareness between the two sources of knowledge as essential. This interrelationship between what might be described as hard scientific knowledge and knowledge that is acquired through practice and experience will

form something of a theme and part of my personal reflection and reflexivity throughout this work. There is an immediate alignment with feminist approaches to research embedded within this perspective, which recognises the importance of lived experience and the link between the personal and the political. The position adopted in this study has also been influenced by pragmatist philosophers and specifically the seminal work of C. Wright Mills (1959). Mills' work is used as a practical guide rather throughout this study and its specific relevance to the current day researcher is developed as part of the methods employed.

Moving then to the question of *conceptual framework* using the definition set out by Miles and Huberman (1994) as being that which:

‘...explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables - and the presumed relationships among them’ (p. 18).

The topic of marketisation in the UK university sector has been growing, in terms of attention and concern in literature, since this study was first conceived in 2013. In addition, public and government focus on the quality of social work education has been consistently spotlighted during this period. Writing now in the summer of 2017 I am conscious that developments in both areas have yet been played out in full and that new legislation in relation to both aspects of this study were approved by parliament a matter of weeks ago (*The Children and Social Work Act 2017* and *The Higher Education and Research Act 2017*). However, the trajectory for universities became apparent however in the years prior to this study, with the rapid expansion of university institutions and places in the 1990s and the subsequent changes to the funding regime before and since the Browne Report in 2010. Universities in the UK now function according to market principles with the lion's share of funding coming through student fees which are largely financed through a system of government loans. At the start of this study there was speculation regarding the expansion of the role of the private sector in the provision of higher education and in relation to the student loan book. The now emerging role of the private sector in relation to both indicates that this expansion is inevitable, although this issue has attracted relatively little public debate (McGedigan, 2013).

Conversely questions regarding the quality of social work education, or more specifically the standard of social work practice particularly in child protection work, have been highlighted intermittently in the public consciousness by the popular press over the past

decade and more. Apparent professional failure to act in cases which have ended in the seemingly preventable death of children has led both the government and sections of the media to question the quality of social work practice and therefore education. Since professional entry-level social work education currently entails either degree or post graduate study, usually provided by universities although alternative pathways into the profession are emerging, this criticism falls largely at the door of the expanded university sector.

The framework and focus of this study then is to ask if there is a relationship between these two factors; between the marketisation of universities and standards of university provision of social work education.

It is not my purpose to consider the relative ideological merits of a marketised and consumer based model of university provision against alternatives. Whilst this is a well-documented cause for concern within academia (Holmwood, 2011; Collini, 2012; Giroux, 2014), the purpose of this study is simply to consider if standards, delivery and quality of social work education have been practically influenced by the expansion of marketisation within the university sector. Since the study is qualitative by design, this potential inter-relationship will be explored experientially utilising the views and experience of those working in the field.

As a social work academic in practice my method is a pragmatic one in that I have chosen to gather data from other social work academics; asking them to give their views, insight and experiences on the topic. The study has a broadly quantitative element in the first instance involving survey data from 78 participants which is supported by qualitative comments in some instances. The substantive data has then been gathered from 18 unstructured interviews with academics from across the sector. The total study presents findings that convey the lived experience and voices of a sample of social work academics working within UK universities. From the outset I am conscious that as such, the perspectives and reported experiences of participants are a subjective interpretation qualified insight rather than any claims at quantitative measure.

The structure of the work which follows is in traditional form with an initial discussion of the contextual backdrop (Chapter 1) to the study in relation to both the higher education sector and the development of professional social work in the UK. A full review of current

literature in relation to the quality of social work education in the UK will then be presented (Chapter 2) identifying a gap in existing research in relation to this topic and therefore the original contribution made by this study. At that stage the emerging research question will be clarified in full.

Methodological stance and choice of methods will then be examined (Chapter 3) focussing on the rationale and processes which have been adhered to in this study including ethical considerations. As a piece of practitioner-research I have been particularly conscious of the need for absolute transparency and the use of a wholly systematic approach. Using guidance from the American philosophical school of Pragmatism, I have developed my own mix of methods although using largely traditional data gathering techniques based around the needs of the topic. In so doing I have looked to develop my skills as a researcher through experience and critical reflection which is also documented in this chapter.

The results of the study have been set out (Chapter 4) with minimal discussion in the first instance to allow the voices of participants to stand alone without undue interpretation, giving consistent recognition to the contribution and experience which they bring. Survey data is presented in accessible terms before thematic organisation of interview results which places emphasis on direct quotations from participants. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of this topic anonymity of participants has been identified as a key ethical factor and therefore strictly respected. As such, no data has been collected from my employing institution. Whilst this data is presented with minimal discussion and overt interpretation, it is acknowledged that interpretation on the part of participants as well as my own interpretation through thematic analysis will have influenced the presentation of results.

Analysis and discussion of key findings then takes place (Chapter 5) in relation to existing critical literature regarding the marketised higher education sector. Finally, the concluding chapter (Chapter 6) will consider dissemination, future work and provide a reflection regarding of what has been learnt during the doctoral journey. This thesis is presented as both a detailed write-up of the research undertaken and a record of my own learning. As such, limitations and retrospective reflections form an important part of the conclusions reached.

Chapter 1:

Contextual Background

‘Who am I as I write this book? I am not a neutral, objective scribe conveying the objective results of my research impersonally in my writing. I am bringing to it a variety of commitments based on my interests, values and beliefs which are built up from my own history...’ (Ivanič, 1998. p.1).

The aim of this contextual summary is to locate the topic of research in relation to the current socio-economic climate as well as highlighting relevant contemporary and evolutionary factors in respect of both social work and higher education in the UK. However, initially I will locate my own position in more detail in relation to this work to enable any potential bias to be transparently acknowledged. In addition this personal detail is set out in order to clarify my position as a practitioner researcher and to emphasise the potential insight which I am therefore able to incorporate. Indeed, this research acknowledges the important alignment of research, theory and practice and the blurred boundaries that exist between them calling on Friere’s analysis (1970) and need for some level of ‘praxis’ rather than academic ‘ivory-tower isolation’ (p.58) in research.

This chapter will therefore include four summaries relating to:

- 1.1 My own position as a researcher in relation to this area of study.
- 1.2 The socio-economic and political context to this study and the rise of what is referred to as ‘neoliberalism’.
- 1.3 The UK university context and the increasing role of marketisation.
- 1.4 The professional development of social work and social work education in the UK and the apparent crisis of confidence in both.

The chapter will end with a summary discussion (1.5) synthesising these four contextual strands.

It is first necessary to clarify the geographic scope of this study which is set in the UK. However, since the four nations involved (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) have differing regulation and regulatory bodies overseeing social work education, there are notable differences in context and indeed historic development. It is therefore a pragmatic decision to concentrate on provision in England but to also consider university provision of social work education in the other nations where possible.

1.1 Locating myself within the study as a practitioner researcher

Reflexivity has been described as:

‘...the ability to locate oneself squarely within a situation, to know and take into account the influence of personal interpretation, position and action within a specific context’

(Fook, 2002 p. 117).

My construction of context is of course a subjective account. Perhaps my own background as a first generation scholar, born to Irish immigrant parents in the mid-1960s has played a part in my perception of context. In addition, my academic experience was initially located in the undergraduate study of Applied Social Sciences with a psycho-dynamic casework model of social work training attached to a four year degree. I then studied Critical Criminology at Masters’ level and spent twenty-one years in front line social work practice in London and the south-east of England before becoming a lecturer full time in 2010. I have since completed my training as a teacher in higher education and am now an established and well-regarded academic lecturer in social work. This doctoral study then presents a contradiction from the outset in that I am on the one hand a seasoned practitioner and professional academic, and yet in research terms I am a novice. Practically this means that I have both the confidence and insight that experience brings, and yet I am very conscious of the relative simplicity of my approach which results from being a relative newcomer to this form of work. However, the ability to take an uncluttered and relatively straight-forward approach in itself requires a level of confidence that I certainly did not possess in my earlier years of academic study.

The role of the mature early career researcher is then an interesting one. My years in social work practice allowed me the privilege of working with a diverse group of individuals and families located in some of the most deprived communities in the country and enabled me to witness first-hand the reality which they experience. My recent years as an educator continue to enhance my experience through interaction and understanding of students and within the university setting. I am additionally a parent and have had experience as what appears to be now termed, a ‘co-consumer’ (Williams, 2011) of higher education in that capacity.

This information is of more than just autobiographical interest. All of the facts listed have relevance to the interpretive lens through which I view my subject area. Were objectivity

possible, it would certainly be less insightful since experience is perhaps the place where most learning takes place. It is rich soil where knowledge can be propagated and is too often undervalued as such (Stanley & Wise, 1983 & 1993). My experience is an invaluable source of theory-development, knowledge and inspiration for reflection. It enables me to make sense of the ‘macro’ through the examples in the micro detail of lived experience. This theme which allows ‘micro’ or personal experience to shed light on the ‘macro’ political, social and economic milieu, is one which will be explored throughout the thesis and is attributable to the ideas set out in the seminal work of C. Wright Mills (1959) in *The Sociological Imagination*. His work has become an unexpected source of almost ‘contemporary’ guidance at an early stage of my doctoral journey. Many scholars point to Mills’ work as a source of inspiration but I would contend that it is a practical guide for researchers which is specifically relevant to the current climate in academia. To emphasise my use of Mills’ work in this study it may be useful to pay the first of a number of visits to my own research diary in the hope that such extracts may add to the authenticity and auditability of my approach.

Research Diary Extract: 13.1.14

‘I have spent the best part of today reading ‘The Sociological Imagination’ however, and have no regrets at all regarding that decision. Mills endorses and legitimises so many of my own views regarding academic pursuit. The fact that the book was first published in 1959 is quite bizarre, given the relevance and indeed contemporary views he expresses. The final chapter is written as guidance to the novice scholar, the advice Mills gives is so useful and his observations are so wise. Specifically the critique of those who get lost in highbrow debate: semantics rather than syntactic discussion. How they seek to avoid engagement with practical questions and get lost in theoretical debate. He goes on to criticise abstract empiricism, obsessed with the process and methodology of research, striving to emulate natural sciences and but failing to consider anything worth considering. Mills talks about the quest to broaden knowledge in a meaningful, practical way and finally he criticises those who get lost in exclusive and encoded language of research. Music to my ears!’

There is of course an irony here in that the glaring criticism of Mills’ work is that he very explicitly writes to a male audience of young Americans. However, given the utility of his analysis, his antiquated terminology written to an audience of young male scholars seems a small price to pay. The fact that he was blinkered to the notion of an older female scholar

is a deficit of the age in which he was writing, but this should not detract from the invaluable content of his work. Indeed, there may well be parallels in his analysis with classic feminist thought regarding the interrelationship between the personal and the political, highlighted by Young (2011). Mills sets the tone for my overall academic approach which leans strongly towards a critical, sociological but pragmatic discourse concerned with substance of analysis and topic rather than strict adherence to semantic positioning or methodological purity. In addition I embrace my own position as a practitioner researcher and my own narrative within the university context. However, I seek to use transparency as a means by which to give insight to my area of study to avoid any subjective or covert bias.

After some reflection, it also appears necessary to give an indication to the reader (beyond the inherent 'hints' set out in the brief history above) as to my ideological and political stance which will undoubtedly impact on every aspect of my work. I am committed to the ethics of my first profession and to socialist principles of equality and social justice which remain at the heart of my analysis as well as my own values. I have a very clear sense of class, gender and identity consciousness and whilst I choose not to align myself specifically to any specific radical or critical movement, I am likely to call upon authors who adopt a 'critical' stance. Political consciousness does appear to have changed significantly in the past twenty years with the observed apathy of many, feelings of disenfranchisement among some, and outright rejection of established political structures by others. I can relate to all three positions. It is though my firm intention to avoid semantic debate to precisely 'label' my position. Calling again on Mills (1959) for his support and academic legitimacy in taking this stance, such a discourse appears to me to be a largely fruitless activity which diverts from the real subject of analysis. I am interested in 'substantive problems' (Mills, 1959 pg.64) and not becoming involved in positioning my ideology syntactically in what he calls 'the fetishism of Concept' (Mills, 1959 p. 74). The alignment between my own position and that of feminist research also appears worth highlighting at this stage. Although this study is far from a piece of feminist research, it is influenced by relational perspectives to inquiry; the 'praxis' between theory and practice; and in linking personal experience with political positioning (Stanley and Wise, 1983 & 1993; Stanley, 1990; Reinharz, 1992).

Since my analysis must also be grounded in the lived experience of academics, students and social work recipients, it must have relevance and meaning as such, a sense of critical

‘realism’ will also be apparent. Accessibility and use of clear (yet precise) language also remains important and by design I hope to resist any temptation to become involved in the type of wordy, sometimes unintelligible analysis which is often associated with academic research. This will allow maximum impact and accessibility (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Guest et al, 2012). Again, Mills (1959) supports this position and attributes the practice to a lack of academic confidence and experience in a discipline which seeks validation in aligning itself with practices of the ‘scientist’ including the encoded and mystified use of language. In social work it is referred to as ‘jargon’ which tends to inhibit clarity in communication and is likewise associated with creating the impression of specialist expertise, although not necessarily possessing it.

Finally, since I come from an academic background of eclectic study in social sciences, among which the study of Education is the most recent, I am likely to call on authors from across disciplines and indeed generations. Writing within an era of post modernity this is now a well-established position allowing pluralist concepts and values to coexist within the same discussion. However, my academic leaning is located within the critical study of sociology, education and social work, and it is these disciplines which will therefore form the main basis of my background reading. This is very typical of a social work academic approach which combines and utilises work from throughout the social sciences. However, what is perhaps unique to academic social work is that theory must be applied and relevant making a pragmatic and indeed practical stance inevitable.

The role of self-awareness, reflection and reflexivity is central to the process of any research but particularly so in relation to practitioner based research within the social sciences. The potential bias of preconceived notions must be mitigated against and in this study I have sought to use absolute transparency, a reflective diary and specific self-management techniques within my methods which will be highlighted in Chapter Three. The use of supervision has also been an important feature of the approach taken where any potential bias has been actively challenged.

1.2 Socio-Economic and Political Context

Just as it is necessary to locate myself as an individual, it is essential to consider the wider political and socio-economic framework in which this research is located. Prevailing ideologies permeate all aspects of society and therefore need to be examined in context;

none more so than in the current era perhaps, with the widening role of the free-market and the rise of ‘neoliberalism’. To offer an initial definition appears necessary, although the implications of neoliberal policies will be more fully delivered through example in the discussion in Chapter Five. Crouch (2011) offers the following as an initial definition:

‘There are many branches and brands of neoliberalism, but behind them stands one dominant theme: that free markets in which individuals maximise their material interests provide the best means for satisfying human aspirations, and that markets are in particular to be preferred over states and politics, which are at best inefficient and at worst threats to freedom.’

(Crouch, 2011 p.vii)

Whilst the classic notion of ‘liberalism’ has been characterised by the freedom of the individual, the ‘new’ aspect within neoliberalism proposed by Foucault’s analysis in the late 1970s (Gane, 2008) is seen as encompassing a legitimate role for the state to regulate and create a climate for market conditions to flourish. In this way traditionally ‘public’ services and institutions are being transformed into self-contained bureaucracies run on market principles. Private investment motivated by potential profits has replaced the need for direct state funding in the railways, utility provisions and increasingly parts of the health, social care and education sectors. Some have argued that the ideology of neoliberalism has become so embedded within modern society that it has been accepted as a ‘common sense’ approach to service provision which has eclipsed any alternatives (Giroux, 2014). Others have argued that it is indicative of the power and influence of private investors to put private gain before the public good (Reay, 2011) since services run by the private sector prioritise the need for profit above quality of provision. Whilst a competitive market environment might be thought to *increase* standards, this has been a topic of some debate and indeed doubts, pertinently so in relation to UK universities (Collini, 2012).

Writing this chapter initially in a year which saw the passing of both Margaret Thatcher and Nelson Mandela I was transported back to the politics of the 1980s, a time when my own political consciousness was in its developmental stages and a time which has cast its shadow to the present day. The legacy of Mandela is perhaps located in his struggle for equality, freedom and unification through both resistance and forgiveness. Thatcher has come for many to represent the promotion of self-interest through her dedication to neoliberal economics, specifically the work of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, and her

belief in the unhindered ability of market forces to self-regulate and create maximum growth and prosperity in any given society (Fisher, 2009). Guided by this mantra the UK witnessed an unprecedented period of ‘de-industrialisation’ during the 1980s, perhaps best remembered for the demise of the coal industry which was deemed to be no longer viable according to market forces. Since then there has been a steady decline in manufacturing in the UK alongside the rise of service industry including the banking sector and of course, higher education. My use of the term ‘neoliberal’ is then located in this economic backdrop rather than a popular leftist short-cut encompassing everything from privatisation to globalisation, I see it as an economic ideology which has been transposed into the organisational consciousness throughout much of the world. It is the arrival of the ‘market’ with the accompanying structures and ideology, in all aspects of society and on a global scale. However, I also use the word critically and in keeping with the following account:

‘Four decades of neoliberal policies have resulted in an economic Darwinism that promotes privatization, commodification, free trade and deregulation. It privileges personal responsibility over larger social forces, reinforces the gap between rich and poor... and it fosters a mode of public pedagogy that privileges the entrepreneurial subject while encouraging a value system that promotes self-interest, if not unchecked selfishness’. (Giroux, 2014. p.1).

In addition, the last three decades have witnessed the polarisation of extreme wealth and extremes of poverty characterised by a new ‘underclass’ who many would consider to be socially excluded from both the labour market and the social institutions of society (Jones, 2011; Hill et al, 2013). Disaffection and disenfranchisement among large sections of society has therefore become the subject of much debate and concern (Taylor, 2013). Where previously UK industry called for unskilled labour located in ‘working’ class communities, such jobs are now scarce as the needs of the new global and technologically advancing economy have altered.

In spite of the financial crisis of 2007/2008 which, many argue, can be attributed to the pitfalls of this neoliberal model of capitalism, the political commitment to this ideology remains steadfast. It has also been suggested that the banking crisis was fuelled not only by a lack of regulation and the competitive pursuit of short term profit in the form of high bonuses but also the prevailing ‘male’ culture within the sector which favoured high stakes and risk taking (Cook, 2011.) It is interesting to note that there has been a deliberate and significant rise in the number of women on UK banking boards since the crisis (Silveron,

2013) and that this issue is now widely recognised in mainstream analysis. The relationship between neoliberal principles and male-centric expectations and organisation is something which may also be relevant here, considering the imposition of such structures to the delivery of education and social work, which are both traditionally female professions. However, the question remains as to why, aside from something of a backlash against bankers, there has not been more criticism of the economic principles which created the crisis and how neoliberalism has survived financial meltdown (Chakroborty, 2008; Crouch 2011). Commentators (Apple, 2007; Ferguson, 2008; Giroux, 2014) have noted the way that neoliberal ideology has become embedded into mainstream consciousness, interactions and behaviour to such an extent that any alternative discourse appears almost irrational. Apple (2007) specifically stresses the conceptual difficulty of challenging such a now deeply embedded construct. However, Ferguson (2008) is keen to highlight that alternative, anti-neoliberal discourses are emanating largely from South America, pointing out that

‘neoliberal globalisation is not the only show in town’ (p. 12).

There is little doubt that recent and current governments from across the traditional political spectrum in UK politics have been committed to the notion of the ‘free-market’ and in order for it to flourish they are equally committed to rolling back state intervention to a greater or less extent. Initiatives are now developing expanding privatisation in the health service, parts of social care, the probation service and indeed across the public services. The question of privatisation in higher education will be considered in detail later but it is pertinent to note that throughout public services there has been a steady evolution towards consumerist models of service delivery, characterised by managerialist structures, quantification of outcomes, target setting and the ‘opening up’ of services to private providers. This is exemplified particularly in two policy initiatives; the first is the ‘Open Public Service’ reforms set out initially in a White Paper in July 2011 and still remaining as a legislative *work in progress* (last updated in a progress report in 2014) with the objective of opening up all public services, aside from policing and security services, to private providers. The slow progress of any legislation relating to this agenda is perhaps indicative of the cautious yet methodical approach being taken towards this ideological and irreversible set of reforms. The second is the very recently passed Higher Education and Research Act 2017 described in a recent newspaper editorial as ‘the culmination of the long road to complete the marketisation of the sector’ (*The Guardian*, 2017). Whilst introducing a new and extremely powerful regulator in the form of the creation of the

Office for Students, the Act paves the way for more private providers to be awarded degree granting powers and sets out a commitment to the creation of greater competition in the sector with only targeted regulation where necessary (s.1). In addition a new layer of university ranking is introduced in the form of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which is apparently designed to enhance the consumer protection of students. However, this has been a controversial piece of legislation which has struggled through the parliamentary process with much concern raised regarding the potential impact on university standards. Outspoken figures in the House of Lords alongside the National Union of Students (NUS) have raised real concerns for the trajectory of the sector.

My position with regard to the inculcation of the neoliberal paradigm in relation to this study is however a pragmatic rather than ideological one, in that the model has proved to be dysfunctional in other sectors with countless examples of where it has failed. The financial crash of 2007/2008 is perhaps the most obviously disastrous. The consequences of this model's flaws were also apparent in the conclusions of the inquiry into over 200 avoidable deaths in a two year period at Mid-Staffordshire Hospital (Francis, 2013). Likewise in the *Munro Review of Child Protection* (2011) where it was evidenced that the target led culture and short termism, which had developed in the provision of children's services, was diverting the priorities of social work professionals away from fundamental issues of welfare concern. There is considerable debate as to the utility of economic principles in the provision of health, social care and education services, which even Friedman (1970) did not endorse. The central question then is whether such a market based model exported to the structure and organisation of universities can ever be expected to function without impacting on the quality of education provided. There is growing body of critical literature examined throughout this thesis which suggests not.

1.3 The expansion of the UK university sector as an emerging global industry and the increasing role of marketisation:

‘Universities across the world in the early twenty-first century find themselves in a paradoxical position. Never before in human history have they been so numerous or so important, yet never before have they suffered from such a disabling lack of confidence and loss of identity.’ (Collini, 2012 p. 3).

Within the evolving knowledge based economy (Holmwood, 2011) the role of the higher education sector has taken on a new form. There has been an incremental lifting of regulation in the UK university sector (Holmwood, 2011; Collini, 2012; McGettigan, 2013, Molesworth et al, 2011; Williams, 2013) which has seen an unprecedented rise in the numbers of university places through the transformation of former polytechnics into new universities characterised by their modern campuses. Higher education provision has become part of a global industry and UK universities seek to compete in terms of performance in international league tables, and for students from across the world. This transformation continues with impending legislation likely to open up degree awarding powers to more private providers in the very near future.

To exemplify the changing face of the higher education sector within a new economy at a personal level, it has recently occurred to me that the space occupied by the university where I am employed is land which was once the site of industry. I refer to my initial thoughts on this topic below.

Extract from Research Diary: 13.10.13

'Today I have become preoccupied with an analogy that came to me yesterday. I realised that the site of the University was a traditional industrial area of Chelmsford where manufacturing took place... The analogy is that the production lines have been recreated in the name of Anglia Ruskin University. We now produce knowledge and sell and indeed export education on the site. The visibility of ethnic minority and international students confirm that once again Chelmsford is attracting immigrant communities, but now as buyers of this new commodity, Education. The marketisation of the education system is at the core of my analysis and the transformation of the academic profession as a result is something that I have been reflecting on.'

The ball-bearing factory which occupied most of the site had a significant role in the local economy and eventually closed its doors in 1989. So significant was the work of the factory that it was bombed in December 1944 when workers and families in the nearby street lost their lives ('My War' by Olive Cox, 1995). In my lifetime I recall generations of families working in that factory and I have memories of a sea of bicycles filling the roads outside minutes after the bell rang-out signalling the end of the working day. Indeed, the bicycle shop founded in the 1930s to meet the needs of those workers is still opposite the university, now trying to muster some student trade. But this not a traditional town of

academic cyclists, it is a 'working city' on the outskirts of London now mostly home to a large number of city commuters. Yet a university now fills an important place in the local landscape. The site is once again attracting migrants to the town, no longer to work but to study. Young people from 'working class' families, who would in a previous era have gone straight into work, are now occupied in higher education with the numbers of school-leavers attending university now standing at approaching 50% compared to 1962 when only 4% went to university (Williams, 2013). My suggestion then is that higher education has literally taken the place of manufacturing in the economy not only locally but nationally and that the university is starting to emulate the factory floor in its organisation, process driven policies and highly marketised structure. This is a comparison which I am not alone in making in relation to the expanding university sector with Pickard (2014) suggesting that universities are to the deindustrialised economy what coal mines were in industrialised times.

I realise too that this is not a lone example and that neighbouring 'new' universities also occupy sites of previous industry and old docking areas. This issue raises questions regarding the role of the university within de-industrialised economies and indeed communities. It also potentially questions the relevance of traditional analysis of capitalism from the academic 'left', since the new university appears to be emerging as a *means of production* in its own right. As Apple (2007) states in his analysis, we 'need a much more nuanced and complex picture of class relations and class projects to understand what is happening' (p.14). For example, where previously working class school leavers may have got a job in the local factory, many now attend a local university. Many of these are first generation scholars who are becoming indebted in order to pay for their university attendance (Holmwood, 2011). Indeed Holmwood (2011) argues that the vast expansion of the sector and the development of former polytechnics as new universities has potentially created a two tier system with first generation students from less affluent households more likely to attend newer universities where standards, academic reputation and future employment prospects may not be as high as in more established institutions formed in earlier eras. Holmwood therefore suggests that the expansion of the sector is likely 'reproduce and solidify inequalities, rather than dissolve them' (p.13).

In terms of the national economy, it is widely recognised that the higher education sector is a valuable source of revenue (Kelly, McLellan, McNicoll 2009.) In a 2009 report Professor Steve Smith, president of Universities UK, described the higher education sector

as ‘one of the UK’s most valuable industries.’ (Kelly, McLellan, McNicoll, 2009 p.3) Like the former factory whose sites it now occupies, the university continues to export its product worldwide. This has of course been accompanied by unprecedented advances in technology, globalisation and communication which enable knowledge and learning to be transmitted globally through many different means.

The large-scale expansion of the UK university sector in the past 50 years can perhaps be attributed to three significant policy developments (Holmwood, 2011), although it is true to say there have been many policy initiatives during that time. The first of these being the *Robbins Report* (1963) proclaiming the principle that university places should be available to all who are qualified ‘by ability and attainment.’ This shift from the elitist traditional university saw the rise of the ‘plate glass’ institution and heralded a huge expansion in the numbers of universities and places available. The second was the *Further and Higher Education Act* (1992) which granted university status to institutions offering higher education courses and saw the transformation of polytechnics into what we now of as ‘new’ universities. To give an example of the magnitude of this expansion in the UK. McGettigan (2013) cites the expansion of student numbers at the now University of Hertfordshire (previously Hatfield Poly) from 5,000 to 30,000 since gaining new university status. This ‘massification’ of student numbers, a worldwide phenomenon (Apple, 2007), brings with it doubts regarding the maintenance of educational standards (Altbach et al, 2010; Brown and Carasso, 2013). The third policy development followed the recommendations of the *Browne Report* (2010) and saw a three-fold increase in tuition fees, the expansion of the system of student loans and the abolition of block grant funding to universities. This final shift is seen by many commentators as the final stepping stone towards privatisation in the sector and the demise of the *public* university (Holmwood et al, 2011; McGettigan, 2013; Halsey and O’Brien 2014). UK universities would now be funded primarily through a fees-based system with students reinvented as paying customers in a market environment.

The idea of a university as an institution committed to both teaching and research and ideally free from external pressures or political influence has its foundations in the liberal notion of self-cultivation and the ‘Humboldtian’ tradition of the nineteenth century, reinforced in Europe in the Bologna agreement in 1988 described as the ‘magna carta of European universities’ (Anderson, 2006). However, alongside academic commitment there have been significant changes to university funding and student finance which have had

huge impact on the nature of the new found status of the student as consumer and therefore on the delivery of education (McGettigan, 2013; Williams, 2013). There has also been a shift in the demographics of students (Molesworth et al, 2011) perhaps reflecting the changing economy and need for new opportunities, with the numbers of 18 year olds choosing to go on to higher education approaching 50% (Williams, 2013). This increase has been throughout the university sector including vocational courses like social work. Brown and Carasso (2013) highlight the expansion of student numbers in the UK between 1979 and 2011 to have been around 320%

As with other institutions of society, neoliberal ideologies have permeated the delivery of higher education globally. Assisted by the introduction of student paid tuition fees in the UK in 2003, the 'student' has been transformed into 'consumer'. McGettigan's analysis (2013) gives a comprehensive overview of the components of this transformation which he sees as being on a policy driven trajectory to the privatisation of the sector; typified by increased marketisation, commodification, independence, internal privatisation and outsourcing, with predictions of changes in governance structures and the introduction of private capital investment in the not too distant future (pg.10). McGettigan highlighted the initial systematic avoidance of primary legislation by the government, although the pace of change has been swift, which has resulted in a lack of public awareness and debate on the issue. He also notes that the 'backers of the Conservative party have an interest in opening up the HE sector to private equity' (p.102). McGettigan calls for lessons to be learnt from the USA where some 'for profit' educational establishments spend more on marketing than instruction, resulting a drop in standards to the point of what he refers to as a 'sub-prime degree market' (p. 103) in that the qualification is worth less than the debt incurred to gain it. This has to be a real question for prospective students in this country particularly those from less financially secure backgrounds where debt perhaps carries a heavier burden. In addition some may realistically have limited academic potential and despite the rhetoric of meritocracy, the price of the degree may prove to be more than the gains it brings to some young people. Research and commentary is emerging to support these concerns (Chakraborty, 2016; CIPD, 2015; Weale, 2016) and questioning whether the profound rise in numbers of graduates is good for the economy or individuals (Elliot 2016). There is also considerable dissent emerging among student and academic groups and recent opposition to a fees-based university system from the Labour Party. Movements such as *The Campaign for the Public University* (publicuniversity.org.uk, 2011) and *The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts* (anticuts.com, 2017) appear to be gaining support

alongside the action of the NUS campaign for a return to a system of free higher education (NUS, 2014).

However, within this changing sector, the once autonomous academic has become a part of an organisational system of 'service' delivery. In 2010 the policy document '*Securing a sustainable future for Higher Education*' handed the lion's share of university funding over to the student consumer through the increase of tuition fees to up to £9000 per year, covered initially by student loans. Students and parents have been incentivised to become discerning customers since they, after all, are paying for the education they receive.

Furedi (2011) describes the characterising features of a 'marketised' university where academic education has itself been transformed into a commodity, referring to this as a government led initiative to create a market scenario which can compete for new markets at a global level that can generate significant income. He refers to increased systems of quality control, auditing, ranking, increased micro management and state intervention through quangos and policy. McGettigan (2013) supports this analysis stating: '...the combination of regulatory and market reform could serve to 'de-professionalise' the sector' (p. 93), warning that our internationally admired system of education is at stake in this *university gamble*.

Furthermore, as Olssen and Peters (2005) state:

'The ascendancy of neoliberalism and the associated discourses of 'new public management', during the 1980s and 1990s has produced a fundamental shift in the way universities and other institutions of higher education have defined and justified their institutional existence. The traditional professional culture of open intellectual enquiry and debate has been replaced with institutional stress on performativity, as evidenced by the emergence of an emphasis on measured outputs: on strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits.' (Olssen and Peters, 2005 p. 313)

Performance measures are additionally governed by nationally published league tables such as the National Student Survey (NSS) which further empowers the student-consumers but has potentially negative implications for academic study (Locke, 2014).

This is a familiar scenario and one which is impacting on professional identity of academics within the sector (Sabri, 2010; Williams, 2013 & 2016). Indeed, the analogy of the factory which referred to above resonates here also, and with my own experience of

formulaic practices replacing autonomous teaching, open plan spaces and individual workstations replacing individual offices and desks, time and motion studies, and ‘them and us’ relationship with managers (Gill, 2010).

Holmwood et al (2011) set out a critique of the developments in UK university provision as a call for the maintenance of the ‘public’ university. The collection of work is highly critical of the lack of public debate that has accompanied the changes in the UK which seek to emulate American models of university provision despite the documented problems (Buraway, 2011). There is also a further warning that the Anglo-American model is being rolled out globally and risks an international demise in standards of university education provision, at least in parts of the sector (Pickard, 2014). These critical accounts and indeed predictions will be revisited later when analysing the data emerging from this study in Chapter Five, since it will be interesting to see if this small scale study reflects the concerns that have been raised. However, Smith (2011) adds his voice to the above cited volume stating that the fees based system was inevitable and necessary at a time when universities would otherwise have been starved of funds. One cannot help but ask if this ‘Hobson’s Choice’ position is not the same as that now facing a depleted health service and social care provision in the UK and if this was a policy adopted by fiscal necessity or governmental design?

The primary concern at this stage however relates to the quality of educational output in the form of the ‘product’ which institutions actually deliver. Whether or not the student consumer and the role of the NSS is a reliable guide to quality is a highly debated issue (Collini, 2012; Holmwood, 2011). There is even some indication (Furedi, 2011; Molesworth, 2011) that ‘student consumers’ do not view their education as the ‘product’ but rather the attainment which they expect to receive at the end of it; that is, the qualification. There has additionally been a significant power shift as universities strive to win-over new markets, especially internationally. International markets are influenced by league tables (Sabri, 2010) as well as research profiles and performance in international leagues.

League tables have the potential to provide a distorted view of performance and at the same time to misdirect priorities. For example, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which seemingly assesses the quality of research output of an institution may have become a target driven exercise which encourages staff not to advance knowledge through

research, but to hit REF benchmarks and so improve their own contribution to the university's overall performance and developmental targets. Buraway (2011) states that this has led to a 'gaming system' (p.30) where British academics devote their time and energy to hitting targets for publication which encourages the distortion of output through the publication of similar work in different outlets and the devaluing of books as a source of knowledge. This audit driven culture is often also linked to contractual performance targets causing academic researchers to prioritise 'quick gains' over substantive pieces of work. The introduction of a similar Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) clearly has implications of which have yet to be seen, although one of the parliamentary concessions of the 2017 Act is that the TEF must be fully reviewed before it is in any way linked to fee levels.

Likewise the National Student Survey (NSS) which notably measures undergraduate student satisfaction towards the end of their final year has become a dominating preoccupation of university life (Sabri, 2010) since it placed institutions and courses within a league table structure. Keeping students 'happy' and practices that could appear to be student appeasement strategies are widely practiced (Molesworth et al, 2011; McGettigan, 2013; Williams, 2013; Locke, 2014). However, it could be argued that many disciplines like social work need to challenge students' values and thinking during the course of their studies and this can cause a level of appropriate 'uncomfortability' which may be problematic within a culture of appeasement. Indeed, a performance-led mentality and climate of student complaints may well discourage any form of real challenge by academics.

In addition, there may be a danger that by concentrating on assessment primarily of that which is easily quantifiable, whilst negating the value of qualitative skills which may be lost within a target driven culture. In professions such as social work this could have serious implications as to the standard of our graduates and their preparedness to carry out complex and 'high-stakes' professional duties within society. The distinct impact that the forces of marketisation and managerialism may be having on the 'caring' professions is an area of specific concern, particularly within the current social climate of scepticism regarding the practices of some 'caring' professionals including social workers and nurses (see *Francis Report* and *Munro Review of Child Protection*). There is a gender element to this issue; managerial processes are aligned to and constructed from a patriarchal, male-centric viewpoint (Smart, 1992; Fook, 2000 & 2002; Harlow 2004) although applied here

to what have traditionally been ‘female’ professions, traditionally dominated by women in terms of workforce numbers but not decision making positions (Hugman, 1991). Some may argue that an ethic of care is a primary human trait which women are likely to be socialised to pursue. Emphasis on such an ethic seems vital for those entering a caring profession and has been succinctly defined by Gilligan (2011) in interview:

‘An ethic of care directs our attention to the need for responsiveness in relationships (paying attention, listening, responding) and to the costs of losing connection with oneself or with others. Its logic is inductive, contextual, psychological, rather than deductive or mathematical.’

Cultivating such subtle skills in trainee care professionals perhaps requires a system which itself mirrors this ethic rather than the current massification of student numbers and managerialist structures rife within higher education

During the course of this study mainstream debate in higher education has begun to acknowledge the problem which marketisation may be having on universities in the UK and beyond with a significant number of articles and text books being published exploring this problem. The work by Browne and Carasso (2014) is particularly useful since they set out to summarise the research currently available in this area. Their conclusions can be glimpsed here:

‘...higher education in England (and, to a more limited extent, in other countries of the UK too) is now the subject of a ‘real time’ experiment which is being implemented without any control or fallback position. This is in spite of the copious evidence from America, Australia and now Britain... showing the very clear limits of the markets as a means of providing an effective, efficient and fair higher education system’(Browne and Carasso, 2014 p.179).

The same authors additionally cite research by Smith et al (1993), York and Alderman (1999), Naylor (2007), Alderman (2008, 2009, 2010) and Gibbs (2012) all of which challenge the government assertion that market logic and competition will raise the standards of quality in higher education since each study indicates concern that standards could be failing. In this respect a study conducted well over a decade ago for *Times Higher Education* (Baty, 2004) is enlightening as it surveyed the experiences of 400 academics:

- 71% said they had experienced inappropriate admissions practices
- 48% said they had on occasion felt obliged to pass work that did not warrant passing

- 42% said that they had experience of universities over-turning academic decisions to fail students
- 80% said that the lack of resources impacted on standards
- 70% said that the rising numbers graduating with higher degrees (first or upper second class) did not necessarily mean rising standards.

The studies mentioned all appear to indicate that institutional pressures exist within the marketised university structure that potentially encourage a lowering of entry standards, increase student numbers, to function in a more resource efficient manner, retain students and facilitate as many as possibly graduating with a ‘good’ standard of degree. This is indeed of concern but perhaps more potently so when applied to the delivery of entry level professional courses.

Educational commentators have long debated the difference between liberal and vocational education but since the merging of universities and polytechnics post 1992, the same standards have been applied to each. Differences are now widely acknowledged by educational commentators between ‘new’ and more established universities (Holmwood, 2011; Browne and Carasso, 2014). However, the notions of potentially falling standards of delivery, grade inflation and even an inability to fail students have serious implications for professional courses like social work where standards on all fronts need to be maintained.

It is worth reiterating at the end of this section that the expansion of market forces into the university sector in the UK continues with the awaited implementation of new legislation largely affecting English universities. Embedded in the rhetoric of choice, quality and value for money; the Act sets out the pathway to allow private companies the right to award degrees. The march of privatisation continues and at some speed it would appear. McGeddigan’s prediction (2013) that the UK will follow the lead of the USA in terms of privatisation appears to be very valid, without any indication that lessons have been learned from America’s experience.

1.4 The rise and fall of professional social work and social work education:

‘The construction of the present always owes something to moments from the past.’

(Harris, 2008 p.677)

I am conscious that the history of social work in the UK probably deserves more attention than I have space for in this thesis. Significant moments in the evolutionary formation of the profession echo in present day practices however and these necessitate mention here. The start of what we have come to know as social work is commonly located in the mid-nineteenth century and the great philanthropic drive of the era, alongside the development in administration of the poor law. It is interesting to note that charitable movements adopted a 'casework' based model of involvement which paralleled developments occurring across the Atlantic and were primarily led by key women in the philanthropic movement. Casework models which located 'problems' experienced as individual in causation necessitated a solution that would involve:

'...regular visiting that was rooted in a personal relationship, which combined friendship and surveillance and was intended to be individual, personal, temporary and reformatory.' (Harris, 2008 p. 666)

In 1869 the unregulated administration of charitable efforts became regulated with the formation of the Charity Organisation Society (COS) which took an oversight of casework investigations and made decisions as to whether they were morally 'deserving' of charitable assistance or whether they would be better sent to the workhouse. It is again interesting to note that those carrying out casework were usually charitable women, but those who made up the COS were men, usually from the newly developed professions, who acted to regulate what was previously seen as unskilled philanthropy into something of an 'expert' activity (Jones, 1983). Recipients of services soon became known as 'clients'. This split between the masculinised managerial techniques and structures as opposed to the practice and often feminised delivery of social care perhaps mirrors a broadly 'quantitative v qualitative' discussion as well as perhaps the split between the neoliberal discourse and the ethic of care. It is a split noted by authors such as Fook (2000, 2002), Harlow (2004) Dominelli and Hoogvelt (1996) which continues to the present day and in which the neoliberal mode may be seen as directly aligning to those masculinised ideologies imposed upon a sector which is based on the delivery of care. Such a comparison may also exist within the delivery of social work education in which parallel 'masculinisation' of method, quantifiable processes of delivery and assessment which are indicative of a neoliberal and market-led approach, have taken priority over relationship based delivery.

This system remained substantively unaltered until the post war era when a culture of welfare and assistance appeared to have developed and the *Beveridge Report* (published 1942) paved the way for the welfare state as we know it with the 1944 Education Act, the 1945 Family Allowance Act, the 1946 National Health Service Act, the 1948 National Insurance Act and the 1948 National Assistance Act. I make no apology for listing each of these pieces of primary and milestone legislation on which our welfare state is based. The ‘Beveridge Principles’ are embedded in the developments which followed to support increasingly urbanised communities but significantly those on the margins of society with social work acting as a facilitator in meeting needs at the extremes of society. It is again worth noting that women continued to play an important role in the delivery of welfare with prominent groups like *The Women’s Group on Public Welfare* who were instrumental in the formation of specialist children’s services after the killing of Denis O’Neill by his foster carer in 1948. Social work continues to involve the transmission of welfare based on relational delivery involving largely qualitative skills and objectives which do not easily transfer into quantifiable structures.

The 1960s and 70s saw the establishment of formal social service departments as well as the introduction of university based training for social workers overseen by the newly formed British Association of Social Work (BASW) in 1970 and the Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Work (CCETSW) in 1971. This was an eclectic and exciting period for the profession with models of working beyond that of ‘casework’ being advocated such as systems-based approaches and community based social work. It also saw the rise in more radical forms of social work (Leonard, 1975; Brake and Bailey 1980) and the rise of the feminist social work movement and anti-racist initiatives which sought to redress some of the inequalities in the fabric of society rather than just administer to what were seen as the casualties of that system in the form of the poor. During this era Biestek (1961) published his classic text in the UK, listing seven core principles of the social work relationship, upon which the values of the profession are still based: *Individualization; Purposeful expression of feeling; Controlled emotional involvement; Acceptance; Nonjudgmental attitude; Client self-determination; Confidentiality*. These principles and the social worker’s ability to remain true to them in a changing environment is for me the ultimate quality assurance checklist for the profession and are embraced in both national and international codes of social work ethics (BASW, 2012; IFSW, 2012).

Mainstream social work services saw a change in direction in the 1980s however, which ran parallel to changes in the economy and prevailing ideology. The Thatcher government was staunchly against state intervention in the lives of individuals where at all possible; not only for financial reasons, but due to feared social implications and ideological objections. Local government funding was therefore undermined, under the guise of modernisation, and social workers became involved in 'care management' with involvement of the private sector, purchaser-provider split in the form of marketisation and the introduction of new managerial systems and processes. A consumerist model of social welfare provision was being constructed, the 'client' became 'service user' and this trajectory continued to be under the Blair administration from 1997.

The New Labour government were responsible for much expansion in regulation, inspection, the use of league tables and surveillance of local authority practices with the hope of standardised processes replacing individual professional judgement. Harris (2008) argues that the push to quantify and measure social work 'performance' led to narrower approaches to practice. I would take this one step further, having been in practice from 1989 to 2010, and contend that focus on performance targets actually 'skewed' the priorities of practitioners at times to the point where very basic thinking and judgement of practitioners could become distorted. So much so it was often the case that managerial demands prioritised detail such as timescales or key indicators, while seemingly overlooking significant need or cause for concern. This is a theme that reemerges in 2011 in the highly regarded *Munro Review into Child Protection*, commissioned by the current government. It additionally mirrors findings in the 2013 *Francis Report* into failings at the Mid-Staffordshire Hospital. Such practices form part of what might also be seen as the neoliberalisation of welfare delivery, the move away from relationship based services and towards a case management approach.

Munro (2011) in her substantive and government initiated review of child protection services, calls for a return to 'relationship' based social work and professional judgement rather than compliance to a culture of targets. She suggests that systemic processes and interactions between and within organisations be examined since many work against the promotion of good practice and best outcomes. Francis (2013) documents a lack of focus on basic standards of care, of misguided priorities, of professional disengagement, of secrecy and heavy handed managerial process. He calls for a return to what is truly important in nursing, in the form of values and standards of care which include compassion

and commitment from staff to patient. These are qualities not easily taught or indeed measured within a performance based culture. It is worth noting that Osgood (2006) describes a very similar picture within the provision of early year's education, with increased managerialism distorting the priorities of well-established practitioners. Osgood draws explicit attention to a theme of this discussion, in that she highlights that managerial initiatives have 'masculinist overtones' (p.190).

Since publication of the government commissioned *Munro Review* (2011) few of the recommendations for policy have been enacted, but the sentiments and sense of her analysis has permeated pockets of practice in local authorities around the country who are trying to refocus their priorities. At the same time, austerity and cuts to public spending is requiring councils to do more for less. The government push towards greater charitable and volunteer involvement as part of a strong neo-conservative (Apple, 2005; Hill, 2006) agenda, and a call for more philanthropy (Watt, 2012) is becoming a necessity in some services and local authorities are preparing for greater outsourcing of potentially all provision. Indeed, The Care Act 2014 actively encourages the utilisation of informal carers to meet the growing demand of an aging population with the possible consequence of driving women who may have otherwise been employed in caring professions, back into the home as unpaid carers with the burden of such strategies falling squarely at the door of women.

The College of Social Work (TCSW) newly formed in 2009, which sought to rejuvenate the profession was disbanded in 2012 as part of an apparently money saving initiative to abolish unnecessary publically funded quangos. It had just enough time to re-establish priorities in the form of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) which has replaced what were a list of professional 'competencies' to be met at the point of qualification, with a framework of capabilities based on domains for continuous professional development. The overseeing body previously the General Social Care Council (GSCC) has additionally been dissolved and social work now takes its place under The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). It is also pertinent to note that the British Association of Social Workers (BASW, 2012) has updated professional ethical codes which include commitment to human rights, social justice and professional integrity and that these were also reflected in TCSW ethical codes (2011).

However, the media and public response to high profile cases involving child death cases raising questions of professional competence on the part of social service departments and individual professionals appear to be now leading the debate and agenda in social work (Lonne et al, 2009). There is a level of public concern reflected in the popular press with regard to standards in the profession and as a consequence entry level social work education has been in the spotlight. Detail of this discussion will be explored as part of the literature review in the next chapter but it is noteworthy that during the course of this study there has been two government reviews into social work education (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey 2014) and a further report produced by the Education Committee entitled *Social Work Reform* (House of Commons, 2016) which put the topic of social work education under close scrutiny and continued uncertainty. Alternative work based routes into the profession have also been introduced alongside traditional university education some of which are now delivered by the private sector. This may be seen to be increasing competition in the market and indeed putting additional pressure on universities to perform. The newly passed Children and Social Work Act 2017 additionally introduces greater professional regulation for social work and social work education which is likely to see an introduction of new standards in relation to professionally qualifying courses. The topic of this study is then both timely and pertinent.

1.5 Chapter summary and reflection:

Within this first chapter I have set the scene for the study which follows. I have acknowledged my own professional background and interest in this topic as both a registered social work practitioner and working academic.

In addition, this chapter has laid out some of the contextual detail in relation to the climate in higher education in the UK. With the emphasis on influential and current policy developments I have set out what is now a highly marketised university structure in the UK funded by individual fee paying students and supported by government loans. Details of the expansion of university places has been emphasised together with a new reliance on performance in league tables at a national and international level in what has become a competitive market for students. I have set these developments within their global context where the organisation of UK universities appears to be following that of the USA and forms part of an international academic industry. Finally, in relation to the organisation of UK universities, I have set out the apparently inevitable trajectory towards further

investment from the private sector and the potential demise of the ‘public university’ as it has been traditionally regarded in the UK.

The other key variable in relation to this research relates specifically to the professional education of social work practitioners. In this respect I have set out a very brief history of the development of professionally recognised social work. I have sought to emphasise the shift from relationship based philanthropy to the state organised system of welfare and protection and the subsequent changes that have taken place. Attention has been given to the role of women in the development of the profession and in to the role of a qualitative and relational skills base. More recent public and governmental concerns regarding possible failures and falling standards in the profession have also been highlighted which have led to a focus of attention on the quality of social work education. Two government reports were published in 2014 regarding the quality of social work education in the UK and pending legislation seeks to pave the way for greater regulation of standards in the future. Further discussion in relation to academic debate regarding the quality of social work education will be examined in the next chapter when a full review of literature is presented prior to the clarification of the research question.

Reflecting on this contextual summary I am mindful of my own critical focus. Developments which have led to the marketisation of higher education in the UK have come under significant academic criticism, some of which has been highlighted in this chapter. For the most part that critique concentrates on ideological concerns regarding the changing nature of the university system and relationship with students as consumers. Concerns regarding social work education appear to be much more practical, regarding how well equipped social work graduates are to practice in a highly demanding professional context. Any potential interrelationship between changes in the structure of universities and the nature of social work education appears somewhat tenuous at this stage and yet as a social work academic this is the overriding area of concern and has been so since the start of this doctoral study in 2013. Having come from professional social work practice in 2010 I am conscious that the priorities of the university environment have a different emphasis to those in the professional social work workplace.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review: examining what is known about the quality of social work education in the UK

This chapter provides an analysis of relevant literature contributing to recent debate regarding initial training/education of social workers at higher education establishments (HEIs), although since the vast majority of HEIs are now universities, the terms will be used interchangeably. Whilst some of the work included will relate to the wider UK, because policy and governance structures vary slightly across the four nations the discussion presented here will be focussed predominantly on England. A future project to produce a comparative literature review relating to social work education in all four nations would indeed be a worthwhile task, but not realistic or necessary for the purpose of this study. International literature has not been purposefully collected in this review but rather examples which specifically parallel the debate in the UK will be referred to.

Contextual and historic background relating to the social work profession was examined in the previous chapter alongside a summary of developments within the university sector in the UK to date. This has set out the emerging public and governmental concern that something is awry regarding the current quality of social work education. The opening chapter also considered the wider emerging critique relating to the expansion and marketisation of higher education in the UK. This critical discourse, particularly among educationalists and some critical theorists within academic social work (Schraer, 2014; Ferguson, 2017) will be further examined in Chapter Five and used as a lens through which to examine research findings. Building then on the contextual outline set out above, the focus of this second chapter is to specifically consider what is actually *known* about the quality of social work education in UK universities in terms of existing research, reports, policy documents, reviews and commentary. In so doing the review will then seek to highlight that which is *not currently known* and look to develop a research project which makes an original contribution to the knowledge base in the field which fills an existing deficit or gap. The chapter will initially set out the search method used before summarising literature from a variety of sources. Discussion of the emerging themes will then be presented before identifying the specific research question.

To avoid cumbersome word use, the general term ‘*social work education*’ will be used within the body of the thesis with the implicit assumption that it refers to initial social work

education provision which includes graduate and post-graduate entry level courses. Here the definition of literature review used relates broadly to that offered by Finfgeld (2003) to produce ‘new and integrative interpretation of findings that is more substantive than those resulting from individual interpretation’ (p. 894). In other words, by collating the literature relating to the topic of social work education it is anticipated that the review will present an overview which will provide more than the sum of its constituent parts leading to the emergence of key themes from a variety of literature sources.

2.1 Scope and search method:

This review looks at literature produced predominantly in the past ten years. This time frame was specifically chosen to incorporate evaluations of what has been referred to as the ‘new’ social work degree (introduced in the academic year 2003 – 2004) which were published since 2008. However, because much of this work now reads as outdated due to the shifting policy debate in the past five years, the emphasis will be on current publications including peer reviewed research, government reviews, reports, as well as blogs, press reports and on-line publications. It will become clear that the debate surrounding social work education is very much a live and changing one in terms of professional and government commentary. Indeed, this is an area where research and academic publication has been unable to keep up with the changing debate. It is therefore a matter of concern that popular opinion and not empirical evidence may be leading policy developments in this field at the current time.

The search methods for this review began with a broad-brush use of library search engines specialising in both social work (*ProQuest Social Sciences Premium Collection*) and higher education (*EBSCOhost Professional Development Collection*) using key phrases ‘social work education in the UK’ ‘evaluations of social work education’ and ‘marketisation in universities’. Books, grey literature and journal articles have also been included collated from targeted search of key journals; ‘*The British Journal of Social Work*’ and ‘*Social Work Education*’ and another searching for key authors in the field. Rather than approaching the task in a purely technical manner, which has been criticised by some for displaying an absence of scholarship (Trafford and Lesham, 2008), I have adopted a ‘snowballing’ methodology (Greenhalgh and Peacock, 2005) with a starting point of most current literature and debate. In addition I have engaged in current debate through the use of social media, particularly *twitter* which has become an efficient means of disseminating and receiving current work within a specialist field. Attendance at

conferences both national and international has also alerted me to particular work within the scope of my interest.

The inclusion criterion for literature in this paper involves research and analysis relating to structural issues regarding the overall quality of entry level social work education. Literature and research investigating individual components of courses has not been included and neither has the large amount of literature which specifically relates to the micro detail of placement provision and practice learning opportunities embedded within social work training. Whilst placements particularly play an important part in social work education, my emphasis is on the overall nature and quality of what is provided within the university setting. This is to by no means negate the role of practice learning, the quality of which may well be impacting on overall standards of social work education. However, this research seeks to take a wider perspective rather than examining individual elements of courses. This is in keeping with the theoretical model adopted setting social work education in its broadest political, social and economic context. Practice learning and placement opportunities are therefore considered as one component in the overall performance of social work education within the university setting and the scope of this literature review is to consider studies at this wider and more macro level.

The analytical framework employed to synthesise and examine this literature is likewise at a structural level, viewing education in its wider context rather than a narrowly focussed vacuum. In the tradition of Apple (2010) and Ball (2008) I take a critical and counter-hegemonic overview of social work education within a developing neoliberal framework. This work therefore looks at education policy through a largely sociological framework in line with Ball's notion of *policy sociology* (2008). However, social work academia has a long tradition of borrowing theory from an eclectic mix of disciplines rather than being confined to any one tradition (Kitley and Stogdon 2014) and as such I welcome the academic freedom that such 'fuzzy' (Mills, 1959) parameters allow with the emphasis on application to the real world which the study of social work necessitates.

2.2 Literature summary:

Orme (2012) describes an interesting paradox regarding what is known about the quality and efficacy of social work education: Despite the fact that there are now what some would describe as intrusive layers of evaluation that take place (NSS, QAA, HCPC, and [as was] TCSW) in universities, alongside a large number of published small scale studies relating

to evaluation of individual modules and course content, there is still little substantive longitudinal research as to the effectiveness of social work education. Taylor (2013) also stresses the absence of outcome based evidence in this area.

Despite the above observation which remains the case to the present day, the government have seemingly formed a view that all is not well with university provision of social work education. In a speech in 2013 to the NSPCC Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for Education, condemned social work education as having too much focus on '*theories of society*' at the expense of the functional tools to carry the primary tasks of the job, stating that: '*Idealistic students are being told that individuals with whom they work have been disempowered by society*' and that '*Social workers overly influenced by this analysis not only rob families of a proper sense of responsibility, they also abdicate their own.*' Finally he pledged that the government will '*strip this sort of thinking out of the profession*'. (Cooper, 2013).

Gove's evidence and starting point for this analysis was the then unpublished report carried out by Sir Martin Narey (Narey, 2014). The report will be considered critically below but it is worth highlighting the tone and strength of Gove's attack on social work education, which built directly on the vilification of the social work profession in the popular press. The attack directly was targeted at the commitment to social justice which has been embedded in social work principles both nationally (BASW, 2012) and internationally (IFSW 2000) throughout the history of the profession.

Responses from within social work academia were scathing and are exemplified in a letter to *The Guardian* (2013) signed by over thirty professors of social work and other eminent academics who rejected his analysis of the problem within the profession as being one of learned doctrine, but rather locate challenges facing social workers within a climate of increased poverty and decreased public spending. The letter describes Gove's speech as '*little more than a cover for attacking the social science and ethical basis of the profession.*'

In the period which followed this press release there has been much debate and examination at governmental level about social work education with a clear assumption that it may not be fit for purpose. In addition to the Narey Report (2014) commissioned by Gove in the Department of Education, there was a parallel review of social work education

commissioned by Norman Lamb in the Department of Health (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014) and published almost simultaneously. The reasons for two separate reviews have never been made clear with suggestions of a governmental power-struggle seeming quite probable. However, the separation perhaps represents an important distinction as to whether social work education should be guided by educational or practice goals. The reviews have also been set within a wider critique of social work practice with high profile child death cases (eg. ‘Baby P’, Victoria Climbié, Daniel Pelka see Peachey, 2013) leading what appears to be something of a media led moral panic regarding failures in social work. It is interesting that this relatively recent public discourse is not confined solely to the UK however, with other countries around Europe having similar headline cases leading to criticism of the profession (e.g. ‘Savana’ in Netherlands, reported in *The Guardian*, Edmarian, 2008; ‘Kevin’ in Germany reported in *Deutsche Welle*, Winter 2006).

In the UK it was the Department of Education who were selected to pursue the agenda after the publication of the above named reviews in 2014 and the ‘Social Work Reform’ report (Education Committee, 2016) was published in July 2016 placing social work education as a central part of proposed agenda for change. This has since formed part of recent statute (Children and Social Work Act 2017) in which a new independent regulator is to be formed to oversee social work and social work education in England from 2018 (Social Work England, s.36). The stated objectives of this body are greater public protection, enhanced confidence in the profession and improved standards through greater regulation and ongoing assessment of practitioners (s.37). The Act, which was again seemingly rushed through at the end of parliament in late April 2017 alongside its higher education counterpart, is more tempered than some of the earlier statements by the Department of Education appeared to suggest (Brindle, 2017). The new regulator will be independent of government although Secretary of State retains the right to impose standards which include those for education and training (s.43). In addition, alternative work-based methods of training have been emerging alongside the traditional university degree (namely ‘Step-up’ see Baginsky & Manthorpe, 2015; and ‘Frontline’ see Scourfield et al, 2016; and more recently *Skills for Care*, 2017 proposals for work based apprenticeships, see Stevenson 2017). Whilst this study will not consider these alternative programmes in any detail, their emergence has created additional competition within the sector and has almost certainly had an impact on university providers of entry level courses as they are seen as potential rivals in the market. Such schemes also appear to have a strong level of government support as part of creating widening market conditions and

introducing private providers. There is also a potential change in ideological emphasis emerging however, where social work education could be moving away from a broad-based educational grounding at a professional level, and moving towards task-related training for the workplace. Indeed, within the language of the Act, ‘social work training’ has been purposefully used to encompass both education and training (s.46 (5)).

2.2.1 Academic publications:

The substantive amount of available academic literature examining the overall nature and quality of social work education is still based on reviewing the impact of the ‘new’ social work degree which was introduced in 2003 to replace the Diploma Social Work which was the main, though not the only qualifying route into social work (Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2013) in the preceding years. The ‘new’ degree introduced in 2003 was designed to address the concern at the time relating to the standard of social work education and a government commissioned evaluation was published five years later (Moriarty et al, 2008). It introduced consistent standards for core curriculum content and competencies, and its introduction coincided with the formation of the General Social Care Council (GSCC) as well as parallel councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland under the Care Standards Act 2000. This included the requirement that practicing social workers and students were required to register as professional practitioners and was in part an initiative to give social work a more solid professional foundation. In England the GSCC was disbanded in 2012 as part of an apparent government bid to scale down the number of publically funded quangos, and regulation of social work and social work education was transferred to the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC). This produced a significant disparity between England and the other nations which make up the UK who have retained their own regulator.

Critical accounts (Laming, 2009; Ayre and Preston-Shoot, 2010; Social Work Reform Board, 2010; Munro, 2011) of social work performance have highlighted concern about education in the intervening period since the degree was introduced. However, the initial report reviewing the new social work degree commissioned by the Department of Health and produced by the Social Care Workforce Unit at Kings College London (Moriarty et al, 2008) offers a largely uncritical summary of the degree. Statistics of student numbers rising by well over a third, a 70% course completion average, a growing number of younger students and a rise in the number of non-white students as a proportion of the total were all presented as favourable. Data statistics identified that non-white and disabled

students were significantly overrepresented in the numbers who failed or left courses and this has been a worrying trend that has continued. However, the review summary concludes:

‘Overall, the results from the evaluation suggest that the decision to implement the social work degree qualification represents a policy success and comprises an important part of the government’s overall objectives to modernise public services. The evaluation provides evidence that students appear to become more analytical and critical over time and that they acquire skills from a combination of classroom-based and practice learning’. (p.15).

Indeed the only significant area of criticism in the degree identified by the Department of Health Review (2008) and by The Social Work Task force (2009) a year later was that there seemed to be a significant disparity between the expectations of employers and that of educators regarding what a graduate social worker might need to know. The dilemma is summed up by Orme (2012):

‘Employers’ requirements for beginning practitioners to be moulded to the immediate requirements of a particular agency at a particular time can be at odds with an educational process that prepares practitioners to be critically reflective on, and challenging of, the systems they are joining, but also to be able to respond to the inevitable changes in policy practice and organisation.’ (p. 17)

This is, however, a particularly important part of the evaluations in that it is perhaps the only external consideration regarding the actual ‘quality’ of those graduating and their ability to practice in the profession. The views of employers may well be subjective and driven by expediency but their views are at least considering the ‘application’ of the degree and not simply its internal functioning within the university structure and in terms of policy expectations. On the other hand, this may be seen as indicative of duelling priorities with academics interested in producing graduate professionals who are critical thinkers and analysts and employers requiring ‘work ready’ graduates who can get on with the job in an increasingly demanding organisational climate. However, at this stage I would simply want to raise the question as to whether or not these objectives need to be mutually exclusive?

Further sizable changes prompted by the work of the then newly formed (but now disbanded) College of Social Work (TCSW) and the HCPC, were introduced in most HEIs in September 2013. Despite the level of more recent concern culminating in the formation of a new regulatory body for England, these changes have never been independently

evaluated. They include the introduction of a professional capability framework (PCF) incorporating a career-spanning continuum of professional development replaced a competency based approach. University courses have also required revalidation by both overseeing bodies (GSCC & HCPC) with an expectation that new standards of proficiency would be embedded in a revised curriculum.

These changes additionally brought new and competing layers of regulation in England which both Narey (2014) and Croisdale-Appleby (2014) highlighted as problematic. This view has some support in relation to the problem of inconsistency in the new regulatory framework which has guided social work education to date. Taylor and Bogo (2013) identify 'fault lines' appearing within social work education and pointing to the duplication of regulatory bodies and the maze of regulation to which higher education providers need to comply (from the HCPC, QAA and TCSW) as of primary concern. They equally highlight the apparent disparity between the expectations of employers and educators of social work graduates. In a second paper Taylor (2013) sets out her examination of sixteen policy documents relating to social work education drawing out themes of consistency, curriculum content, partnerships with key stakeholders and the question of initial training remaining generic or becoming specialist. Her conclusions echo Munro (2011) and highlight the potential erosion of professional confidence and judgement which may well be a consequence of over-prescription/regulation, creating less and not more consistency in the sector. Taylor calls for an educational lead alignment of curriculum, for better partnerships with employers and for an approach which focuses on outcomes rather than prescriptive course input. Whilst this study takes a useful overview, its conclusions remain narrowly focussed in that they do not explicitly examine the often competing factors which guide policy makers, employers, universities, professional and academic social work. In addition the contextual changes within the higher education sector and the introduction of a fees based structure are not examined in her analysis.

Moriarty and Manthorpe (2013) take a more fundamental approach to curriculum content, asking what is taught on initial social work training courses and why? They also call for greater emphasis on skills of assessment, risk management, communication, managing conflict and multi-agency working and criticise the vague guidance given by the Department of Health (2002) in relation to degree course content. In so doing there does seem to be a consensus emerging that national curriculum guidance is inconsistent and overly complex. Moriarty et al (2011) looked at graduate transition into practice and found

that employers really looked for those who could immediately do the job, which is hardly surprising in times of rising need and reduced resources. Conversely Wilson and Campbell (2013) focus more directly on the views of social work academics with regard to curriculum content. Acknowledging the public/media concern regarding the professional calibre of social work education they highlight the point that research to date has tended to focus on the views of students and service users (for example, Orme et al, 2009; Agnes and Duffy, 2010; Parker, 2010). Using email questionnaires, they elicit the views of social work academics, 67% of whom are men and only 4% non-white. This in itself seems an interesting demographic since women vastly outnumber men (GSCC figures in 2010 suggest only 13% of social workers are men) in all but the most senior of positions. Their findings indicate some level of dissatisfaction among academics that they have little time for research and that teaching is too weighted towards functional tasks without enough emphasis on the ‘craft’ of social work, relationship based work, social justice, and critical reflection:

‘many academics clearly believe government and employer interests are increasingly influencing course curriculum in a way that has limited the scope of developing more critically reflective and emancipatory forms of practice’ (Wilson and Campbell, 2013 p.1019)

There is also evidence of concern regarding the lack of attention given to global consistency which echoes the findings expressed in the Croisdale-Appleby (2014) review. Unfortunately Wilson and Campbell’s study is restricted to universities in Northern Ireland but the scope to repeat a similar study in HEIs in England has the potential to fill a gap in research to gain wider insight from social work academic staff. This study does seem to be one of the few that appears to locate issues in a more structural discourse and questions the impact of managerialist structures.

There is little empirical evidence regarding admissions standards to initial social work training, although the issue of ‘suitability’ to the profession is one that is explored in relation to existing students (Holmstrom, 2014; Currer, 2009). There is also no apparent research relating to pass rates on social work courses aside from the 2009 Select Committee concern that social work had only a 2.5% failure rate (quoted in Narey, 2014). In addition there is some indication that student drop-out (attrition) rates for social work are high in comparison to medical professional courses (Tickle, 2010).

Although social work education in the UK apparently ‘leads the way’ in terms of service-user participation (Beresford, 2014) and several studies have looked at the ways in which service users are involved in social work courses (Robinson and Martin, 2013; Allain et al, 2006; Angel and Ramon, 2009; Baldwin and Sadd 2006), there are few examples of involvement in curriculum planning (Molyneaux and Irvine, 2004) or policy consultation. There are a small number of studies looking at student perceptions of initial education (Moriarty 2010, Orme et al 2009, Wilson 2012) as well as evidence from the National Student Survey (UNISTATS) that raises concern about levels of overall student satisfaction with some provision.

Reviewing the literature so far, there is a lack of broader analysis and critical overview of the challenges levied against social work education in the UK with responses from academics and practitioners being largely defensive and piecemeal. Social work academia has a strong radical tradition apparent in the work of contemporary critical authors such as: Beresford (1997); Harris (2003); Ferguson and Lavalette (2006); Ferguson (2008); Carey (2009); Garret (2009); Rogowski (2010) who do provide a counter-neoliberalist analysis of developments in social work practice. However, few have considered the direct implications of the rapid expansion of managerialist structures in higher education and the inevitable impact on social work education (one exception: Ferguson, 2017). For example, whilst Rogowski (2010) considers social work education policy and the increasing functionalist emphasis, he does not examine this with the marketised backdrop of the changing structure of HEIs. Moriarty et al (2012) consider the key issue of changes to student finance but their emphasis is on the impact to the student demographic rather than the impact on HEIs and the quality of educational provision. The few documents identified which directly address this issue came from outside the UK, including Preston and Aslett (2013) who looked at the manifestation of the neo-liberal agenda on social work curriculum in Canada; Morley and Dunstan (2012) who look at the same issue in Australia and Yven and Ho (2007) who consider the challenges of marketisation in the provision of social work education in Hong Kong. These studies and their conclusions will form part of the discussion below. Likewise in mainstream educational analysis there is now a growing body of critical literature relating to the implications of increased marketisation in universities and yet this does not appear to take the explicit focus of enquiry regarding the quality of social work education. Work such as that of Sabri (2010) exploring the diminishing role of the academic in higher education policy, and Locke (2014) which examines the influence of league tables on decision making discourse within the university

will be included later in the discussion of findings. This is in addition to broader commentaries published by educational theorists such as Apple (2007), Ball (2008), Friere (1970), Giroux (2014), Furedi (2011), McGedigan McGettigan, (2013), Molesworth et al (2011), Williams (2013), Brown and Carasso (2013) which do not appear to have been utilised in the examination of social work education and its reported failings. Additionally work of critical theorists in social work such as Fook (2000, 2002) will be used as a lens through which to examine the findings of this research.

2.2.2 Government reports:

It remains unclear as to why two parallel reviews into social work education were commissioned by separate government departments (Education and Health) during 2013. However, in January and February 2014 both were published (Narey 2014, Croisdale-Appleby 2014). It is equally unclear as to why either should have been called for within such a short period of changes brought about by The College of Social Work (TCSW) with the introduction of the new Professional Capability Framework (PCF) in 2012 and the newly installed overseeing body, the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC) with new Standards of Proficiency (SOPs). As already observed these changes to the core curriculum had not been given time to take hold, never mind be evaluated but a view was clearly forming in government that the quality of social work education was in need of attention.

In reviewing both documents it is immediately apparent that there are issues regarding the partiality of both, Professor Croisdale-Appleby's review being commissioned by Liberal Democrat MP Norman Lamb in the Department of Health, with tone intent on up-grading the quality and professionalism of social work through education; recognising the practitioner, the professional and the social scientist as part of the social work role. He emphasises the complexity of the social work education as:

‘an extraordinarily complex subject because it draws upon a wide range of other academic disciplines, and synthesises from those disciplines its own chosen set of beliefs, precepts, ideologies, doctrine and authority’ (p.15).

Using his scientific background and independence as Chair of *Skills for Care* he approaches the task using explicit methodology, moving from open-ended interviews to focussed questionnaires, widening his scope to incorporate service users, stakeholders at all levels as well as an international dimension to data gathered. Croisdale-Appleby asserts

that social work education in this country is ‘no longer world leading’ (pp.80) and concludes with focussed recommendations for improvement.

Sir Martin Narey, previously associated with his work in the prison service and at *Barnardos*, produces his own ‘report’ rather than an enquiry, about a third shorter in length and definitely the more accessible of the two documents. Then employed as a government adviser to Michael Gove, his report is based on undisclosed interviews and consultations, citing anecdotes from interested parties who are largely unnamed. Sometimes using emotive and sensationalist language Narey’s data is accepted on reputation as authentic but his presentation is selective, introducing new topics such as pre-degree level training for social work assistants as an idea rather than being guided by data systematically collected. Narey’s emphasis is on the production of technically competent workers and his report is more based on opinion and judgement than generalisable fact. One cannot help but speculate that this is part of a wider neoconservative agenda of Gove and others to de-professionalise social work in all but heavy-end risk management. The neoliberal agenda is having an organisational impact on the delivery of social work (Ferguson 2008) as much as it is in education and the fragmentation of duties into technical tasks, rather than calling for a professional and autonomous overview may be part of this agenda. Healy and Meagher (2004) summarise the concern that there may be a ‘de-professionalization’ of social work occurring, describing:

‘...the fragmentation and routinization of social work and the concurrent loss of opportunities for the exercise of creativity, reflexivity and discretion in direct practice (p. 92).

However, it would be inappropriate and possibly unwise to dismiss Narey’s findings totally, although an evidence based approach with verifiable sources does still appear to be needed. His findings do echo some of the more subtle messages from within other literature and professional dialogue in the social work press in very recent years which will be highlighted below.

The reports are very different with different emphasis and conclusions, but there are core common threads which appear in the two documents:

1. Social work education in England should be guided and overseen by a single regulatory body.
2. Clear curriculum content expectations and more rigorous course endorsement processes should be introduced.

3. Admissions criteria for entry-level courses should be raised.
4. Academic standards and course pass levels should be reviewed.
5. Better national workforce planning should take place with fewer students graduating.

Significant differences include Narey's challenge to the theoretical emphasis of social work training, his questioning of the commitment to social justice embedded in the definition of social work and his strong endorsement of fast-track or employment based routes of qualification. Narey also gives a strong steer towards allowing students to specialise at first degree level particularly in children's work calling for more emphasis on the tools to do the job in terms of direct knowledge.

Croisdale-Appleby draws attention to the fact that 42% of all social work graduates are now at masters level, that many universities no longer offer undergraduate courses and that questions need to be raised in relation to alternative routes of qualification to ensure that they 'equip students for a career and not just a job in social work' (p.33) and that they additionally comply with the Bologna Accord (EU 1999). He calls for all educators to be trained in teaching, for more emphasis on interdisciplinary learning and appears to raise concern that social work education in the UK does not have the same academic focus as many other countries. Finally, he strongly recommends that entry level education remains generic. This review is presented as a well thought through and apparently researched document which shows independent insight into the profession. At this stage one is minded to question Michael Gove's motivation when appointing Narey to carry out a parallel review within weeks of Croisdale-Appleby's commission. The prevailing policy trajectory to date has been based on neoliberal reforms towards privatisation which would typically include increased managerial control, regulation and deskilling of the workforce (Carey 2009, Harris 2003, Jones 2001) and it is apparent that Narey's conclusions fit more comfortably with this agenda than those of Croisdale-Appleby.

To date there is little formally published material responding to the two reports mentioned above, highlighting perhaps the time lag in the current system of academic review and publication which is often well behind debates in practice. One of the few exceptions is a useful study by Higgins (2014) which refers in its title to a 'struggle for the soul of social work in England'. Seeking the views and experience of a number of academics, students, service users and practice educators he concludes that there is now an active struggle

between the broad based international definition of what social work is based on values and ethical principles, and the narrow paradigm given voice in the Narey Report (2014) which defines the profession by its agency to the state and functionary tasks. Garrett (2016) also highlights that Narey's Report was commissioned by the then Secretary for Education, Michael Gove and whilst it is 'lazily assembled and startlingly lacking in detail' (pg.877) it nonetheless affirms Gove's already expressed negativity towards social work education and indeed educators.

An examination of a selection of professional blogs and on-line publications in reaction to Croisdale-Appleby and Narey identified surprisingly little overt criticism. Professional bodies HCPC and the now disbanded College of Social Work (TCSW 2013) largely welcome the reviews stressing the commitment in each to continue generic training at entry level. It is worth noting that the interpretation by both organisations of what the reports have said, concentrates significantly on regulatory and course approval issues raised rather than entering the debate about curriculum content or the strength of evidence in each review which has to date attracted very little direct criticism from within the profession with a few note-worthy exceptions (Cleary 2014).

Responding to a blog on TCSW website Burgess (2014) does offer more of a critique of the duplicate reviews and the fact that they come to inconsistent conclusions, calling for the government to role-model joined-up thinking. She also makes the useful observation that since recent changes in structure and governance of courses has yet to take effect, the reviews are dealing with outdated material. The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) seems to offer a more critical platform to bloggers such as Stark (2014), who challenges Narey's rejection of social justice and the international definition of social work and Norman (2014) who is extremely critical of Narey's rhetoric, lack of evidence and manipulation of the definition of social work, reminding readers that it is not in the power of Narey or the government to define what is an independent profession and discipline (BASW 28.2.1014). Reaction to Croisdale-Appleby is less critical and his academic rigour and 'deep understanding of the social work profession' is noted (BASW 2014). However, there appears to be a perception that whilst Narey concentrated on services for children, Croisdale-Appleby had an adult-service centred approach. This is not borne out in the content of either report.

However, the soundbites and sometimes sweeping statements made by Narey appear to have been given more favourable attention in the press, and have clearly resonated with the government since publication (see Nicky Morgan MP speech January 2016). Indeed, it was the Department of Education that was then chosen to pursue the agenda further publishing the findings of their sub-committee review on social work reform in July 2016 (Education Committee, 2016). Narey's uses unnamed sources for anecdotal evidence regarding issues such as the possibility that efforts to widen access to more of a diverse range of students could be leading to a compromising of standards on entry, that some students are barely literate and that some courses are all but impossible to fail. Alongside this he questions principles of human rights and social justice as contributing to an inadequate academic definition of social work, saying 'we need a definition that makes plain what governments, employers and TCSW expect from social workers.' (p.13). Since the college of social work was disbanded shortly after his report, it is concerning that the expectation of the profession may now be defined by government and employers leading to a more functional rather than professional role.

As mentioned above the education committee report (Education Committee, 2016) into social work reform was published in July 2016 after consultation with professional and academic bodies through written submission and public scrutiny panels. The tone of the report is measured with one section dedicated to the issue of social work education and reaching the following conclusions regarding what is referred to as initial training:

- That the initial social work qualification remains generic in content embracing preparation to work with both children and adult client groups.
- That long term research is commissioned to examine the outcomes of *Frontline*, which is work-based post graduate training commissioned by the government and run by a private company targeting students with a high performing academic background.
- That Frontline work closely alongside universities and the Joint University Council for Social Work Education Committee (JUCSWEC).

The fear that social work education will be removed from universities altogether (Ferguson, 2014) appears to have been allayed by this report, viewing schemes like *Frontline* as an addition to rather than replacement of university degree courses. The views of academics such as Professor Brigid Featherstone are credited many times within the report expressing the importance of the international and research dimension to social work within universities and that this should sit alongside teaching. Whilst the initial evaluation

of the 'Frontline' elite graduate training initiative (Scourfield et al, 2016) is very positive, the scope of the evaluation is acknowledged as limited and some of its methods unconvincing. The committee also make a clear recommendation for a new recognised professional body for social work but question the government's own proposal that a new regulator be identified, stating: *'The government has already spent too much money changing regulatory bodies'* and calls for a *'rethink'* on this issue (p.35). Despite this, the eventual statutory conclusion of this discussion has now come in the form of The Children and Social Work Act 2017. There is an appointment of a new regulator for England which is to be formed with the same status as that of the other parts of the UK. There is a clear emphasis within the provision of the Act on the professional standards, social work 'training' and the ongoing assessment of those entering and working in the profession. How this impacts on the actual delivery of social work education and how it is eventually implemented, of course remains to be seen (Simmonds, 2017).

A final report worthy of mention in this review is the 'Skills for Care' Report on Social Work Education in England produced by the Department of Health in 2016 (Skills for Care 2016) into social work education in England. This summarises some statistical data from the academic year 2013 -14. The trends identified indicate numbers slightly falling on undergraduate courses with post graduate numbers remaining more constant. The report also identifies a trend towards more students under the age of 24, 85% of students being female, and 70% described as white. Around 6.5% of enrolled students failed to qualify, most of whom dropped out during their first year and were more likely to be from a younger age group with older post graduate students most likely to complete successfully. At least 65% of qualifying students took up social work posts within six months and this figure appears to be rising with more than 3000 new social workers entering the profession in 2014. Despite the debate and the apparent criticism social work remains a popular discipline within universities and employers are taking-on university graduates.

2.2.3 Social work media and the popular press:

It is important to again stress the rising role of social media and indeed the popular press which all make a contribution, whether viewed as legitimate or otherwise, to the unfolding perception of social work and social work education because this is impacting on policy developments. There is no dispute that current drivers in social work education are fuelled in part by stories in the tabloid press relating to extreme and tragic cases, often where there has been an abusive death of a child and where failings in social work pre-emptive action

has been highlighted as inadequate. Indeed, as a legally mandated and publicly funded profession, social work legitimacy relies on consensus support in the same way as the police service, and a free press has a key part to play in holding the profession accountable (Clark, 2000). Contrary to tabloid represented views, in a recent poll *Guardian* readers were asked ‘Is social work education fit for purpose?’ (*The Guardian* 2014) Just over 50% of those who responded said they thought it was, with just over another 20% saying it was but it needed minor revisions, with the remaining 28% feeling it was not fit for purpose or they weren’t too sure about it. However, the readership of *The Guardian* is no less subjective than perhaps that of its tabloid counterparts.

The role of social media is also worth mentioning which certainly plays its part in public perceptions. For example, the insertion of the words ‘social worker’ into a *YouTube* search produces some shocking examples of anti-social work propaganda and even hate-based material, often uploaded by disgruntled and disempowered parents and those who have experienced removal of a child from their families. Perception is also influenced by the portrayal of social workers in TV coverage and dramatic depictions, which often seem to hang on to stereotyped images of ineffectual do-gooders.

Public perception, whether contrived or otherwise, is having a level of influence over current debate regarding initial education and the current government may also be seizing upon this perception to forward its own agenda. As Apple states (2001) neoconservative views such as those expressed by Gove are appealing precisely because they often ‘connect to aspects of the realities that people experience’ (p.193). As such it would be reckless to dismiss the validity of publically held views simply because they are not necessarily empirically founded. However, there are also murmurs of concern appearing from within the profession. In an article in *The Guardian* (Butler, 2014) Alan Wood, president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, was quoted to have referred to not being impressed by ‘all these academics turning out crap social workers...’ which is in keeping with the tone and detail of Narey’s findings.

The social work press is additionally playing a more significant part in debate perhaps because it is more responsive to the immediacy of issues than academic journals. It allows not only for information and opinion to be circulated widely but also for a dialogue to take place. One such event is particularly relevant to this study following the on-line publication of an anonymous blog published by *Community Care* (2015) and written by a social work

academic who had resigned her post due to being unable to fail a student who had consistently plagiarised. During the following week there were an unprecedented number of comments to the weekly social work publication. This prompted a follow up piece (*Community Care* 26.8.16) under the heading ‘What’s the problem with social work education?’ in which highlights from the discussion were summarised including comments made by the chief social worker and Sir Martin Narey. The debate regarding the potential fault lines within universities was briefly aired in public but the tone of many of the comments made by senior professionals and academics was that the author of the blog should have gone to the HCPC and perhaps not done her professional ‘laundry’ in public at a time when university provision was under such scrutiny and competition. Such has been the defensiveness of academic social work over the years of this review which I will consider further in the conclusions of this chapter.

2.3 Discussion of literature:

Criticism directed at the profession of social work recently and historically has been charged by emotional reaction to extreme and tragic cases where workers would appear to have been at fault for not reading the signs and ‘thinking the unthinkable’ (Haringey Local Safeguarding Children’s Board). However, is it enough that as a profession social work simply refuses to see these tragedies statistically inevitable when dealing with the unpredictability of human beings? This would appear to be the crux of current popular professional analysis fuelled by the Munro (2011) analysis and now being cited in findings of some high profile serious case reviews (Bradford Safeguarding Children Board, 2013) that some child deaths are simply unpredictable and therefore unpreventable. However the media, the public and the government do not seem to be satisfied that this response is sufficient (*‘Hamzah Khan: Social services review into boy who starved to death blasted by family, MPs and even Government’* in *The Daily Mirror*, Thornton, 2013).

On reflection, I wonder if there may be a parallel here with the responses of the police force during the 1980s and 90s; when faced with charges of bad practice the set response from the force was to refer to it as a one-off, a case of ‘one bad apple’ (*Scarman Report* 1981). This level of response continued until The Macpherson Inquiry (1999) which eventually identified an *institutional* problem in the force. The social work profession could indeed have an *institutionalised* problem of some sort and were this true then the attention given to social work initial education would indeed be warranted since it would form the bedrock of rooting out such a problem. By accepting this possibility and

becoming less defensive in trying to understand the disconnect in popular and professional perception of what social workers do, there seems to be an arena in which to meet the neoliberal and neoconservative agenda on something of an even playing field. Currently, the political right are tapping into this public perception in a way that the professional discourse in social work, portrayed as an institutional state of denial, is not. However, discussion channels are opening up and it is perhaps unsurprising that an academic and professional field that has historically been so undervalued does not have the confidence in itself to undergo a public exercise in self-reflection.

Undoubtedly, the impact of austerity and cuts to services since the financial crash in 2007/2008 equally play their part in diminishing the ability of social workers to do a good and professional job. Evidence of fundamental fault lines in the neoliberal economic philosophy were played out explicitly with the collapse of Leman Brothers and some have questioned why sociologists have not used this to forge a stronger challenge (Chakraborty 2008) to consumerism. During the boom years the strength of worldwide economies had been inflated largely without substance, rather based on unsustainable debt at both individual and national levels. The result was the near collapse of the banking sector which only survived with the support of public finance and subsequent years of austerity.

Similar fault lines are occurring as the government seeks to recreate consumer based systems for the delivery of welfare, of health as well as the delivery of higher education. Apple (2013b) considers the commitment to the neoliberal ideology to have become something of a religion, since it is 'immune to empirical arguments especially, but not only, in education' (p. 6). Recent fault lines strike at the quality, integrity and *substance* of the work that these agencies seek to perform and when that is the delivery of social work services to the most vulnerable in society, this can have devastating consequences some of which we have seen already in the health service (*Francis Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry* February 2013, *Department of Health: A national response to Winterbourne View* December 2012, 'Southern Cross's incurably flawed business model' Wachman, 2011). These issues do not appear to be one-off occurrences of 'one-bad-hospital', group of nurses or care homes, but rather *institutional* failings based on a faulty working model which skews priorities and misdirects scarce resources into profits. It would be naive to believe that this market driven culture is not impacting on the substance of what is delivered in social work and social work education and more evidence is needed to tease out the nature of this impact. Indeed, it is interesting to note when

considering the failure of the *Southern Cross* care-home company mentioned above, that the 2014 Care Act has incorporated provision to address ‘market oversight and provider failure’ in a direct response. In this way, the neoliberal model of state intervention when necessary to offset the prospect market failure can be seen.

Munro (2011) additionally identifies target driven systems and market modelled processes as undermining the value base and good judgement of social work practitioners. In addition the rapid increase of privatisation and outsourcing of services has redefined the role of the social worker from that of an empowering care-giver, to a form filling assessor in some areas of work especially with older people, where larger numbers make it almost impossible to develop any form of meaningful relationship. This is the subject of much concern within the profession with calls for a return to relationship based working from all quarters. Carey (2009) and Harris (2003) take this a stage further suggesting that social workers have become a bureaucratically compliant workforce increasingly deskilled and disenfranchised within managerialist structures, suggesting even that this may be part of a what Braverman’s analysis of capitalism would view as a ‘proletarianised’ workforce (Carey 2009.) Ferguson (2008) explicitly examines the rise of neoliberalism and its impact on the delivery of social work. There are many factors which may be influencing the quality of social work practice, but it must not be ruled out that one of those factors is the delivery of entry level education particularly at a time when educationalists are expressing serious concerns regarding the impact of marketisation.

In addition there is a need to involve the voice, insight and experience of academics within the sector who are expressing concerns. At a conference in 2014 Joint Social Work and Education Conference held in London (JSWEC reported in *Community Care*, Schraer, 2014) these discussions regarding the impact of consumerism in HE were taking place among educationalists and yet they have not, as yet, been the focus of research. There may be issues of self-preservation at stake here where ‘*one avoids controversy*’ (Apple 2013a: p. 925) since throwing critical light on fundamental fault lines could have consequences to individuals and institutions.

To summarise, whilst the literature set out above examines the nature of social work education against internal benchmarks and in terms of the degree to which graduates are fit for the social work job itself, there is very little examination of the potential impact that consumer based university processes may be having on the actual quality and nature of the

education being provided. Within the academic field however, concerns regarding this topic continue to grow.

2.4 Themes emerging from review of literature:

In relation to analysis of literature so far regarding what we know about the quality of social work education, four broad themes arise as target areas of concern. Within the literature these are very much seen as isolated issues and not set out in the critical contextual framework of the neoliberal university. They are:

- 2.4.1 Consistency in regulatory framework
- 2.4.2 Standards in admissions criteria
- 2.4.3 Curriculum content
- 2.4.4 Quality of student assessment

None of the literature examined is profoundly contradictory but the difference of emphasis in the recently published government commissioned reviews, best play out the key dilemma regarding which direction social work should now take. Is it to become downgraded by the introduction of non-degree level courses, more technocratic emphasis on the tools of doing a job including specialisms at first or are social workers to be up-skilled to work comfortably alongside their medical counterparts as part of a global and evidenced based profession with initial training remaining a generic grounding followed up by high quality continuous developmental education? The outcome of these questions may well be based on political will but can also be influenced by a strong academic and professional discourse. Apple (2010) emphasises the need to not only highlight the structural problems in education but also to point the way ‘to spaces of possible action’ (p.15).

It is additionally necessary to locate this discussion in a global context since educational policy is increasingly influenced by its location within a global economy and as Apple (2010) states:

‘Neoliberal, neoconservative and managerial impulses can be found throughout the world cutting across geographic boundaries and even economic systems.’ (p.7)

Taking each of the identified themes in turn:

2.4.1 Consistency in Regulatory Framework:

Croisdale-Appleby (2014), Narey (2014), Taylor (2013) and Taylor and Bogo (2013) all identify the duplication of regulatory bodies (HCPC, TCSW, QAA), with separate

standards and approval as creating confusion in curriculum planning and management on social work courses, with some suggesting that endorsement and inspection processes are not rigorous enough. On a purely practical level the adherence to and mapping of different regulatory expectations does make curriculum planning significantly more cumbersome. However, the role of regulation, standardisation and audit processes has an impact on the both the content and pedagogic style of what is taught and in addition feeds into the production of performance based league tables and other apparent quality assurance measurements (Molesworth et al, 2011). Comment has already been made above regarding abundance of subjective evaluation in higher education and yet the lack of outcome based evidence (Orme, 2012) which firstly begs the question regarding the worth of such measures and secondly questions the way target based systems skew professional practices and priorities.

Innovation and attention to creative teaching may in fact be inhibited and constrained by the existence of over prescriptive regulation and high-stakes auditing processes. In addition, tight regulatory structures appear to encourage the use of modularised and surface learning promoted in the type of 'tick-box' and competence based culture which has been historically criticised in social work education. It is debatable as to whether skills and abilities less easily quantifiable can be given due credit in such restrictive learning environments, I refer specifically here to more subtle intuitive based knowledge viewed as of central significance to social work but undervalued and perhaps overlooked in a regulation based system. Other skills such as the ability to show care and compassion or build relationships with service users additionally run the risk of being marginalised. Morley and Dunstan (2012) examine the impact of neoliberalism on social work education in Australia and identify the devaluing of these type of skills and knowledge.

By not including the more qualitative based skills/knowledge in curriculum provision, simply because they are not easily measured to fit into performance based systems of quality assurance, students are given an implicit message that such skills are not important as evidence suggests that student learning is led specifically by what is assessed. An analysis of the neoliberal challenges to social work in Canada (Preston and Aslett, 2013) suggests the need for resistance through 'an activist pedagogy' integrative principles of social justice and anti-oppressive practice. Apple (2010) equally stresses the need to teach more critical theory as a counter hegemonic act.'

2.4.2 Standards in admissions criteria:

Concern regarding admissions criteria and standards of entry onto initial social work courses has been raised as a matter of concern in both government documents and wider professional debate. Suggestion that the *widening access* agenda incorporated as a priority at the introduction of the social work degree in 2003 in order to encourage applicants with practice experience and perhaps less academic qualification has been focussed on as the driver behind many universities dropping their academic standard requirements. Croisdale-Appleby (2014) does additionally refer to the possibility that some universities may be driven by the financial benefits of drawing in more students to courses which are popular, like social work. Indeed, the current system of finance is based on such a model of supply and demand. Students have been reinvented as consumers (McGettigan, 2013) armed with government based loans with which to purchase their education. Universities generate income by selling places based on demand which in the case of social work (a degree which has relatively good employment prospects) appears to be high. This enables universities to *sell* many places without any incentive to restrict student numbers or maintaining a low staff to student ratio.

However, this situation is not unique. Yven and Ho (2005) describe the challenges that occurred in the provision of social work education on Hong Kong (post the transfer of sovereignty back to the People's Republic of China in 1997) and the privatisation and mass marketisation of higher education. They list the areas of concern to include high levels of marketing and competition between institutions, duplication of courses, market driven curriculum, the lowering of admissions standards and overall concern regarding the quality of programmes. They state: '*whilst in the past students had to compete fiercely for limited places in higher education, the universities are now competing for their enrolment*' (p. 554).

2.4.3 Curriculum content:

Much of the analysis and overview examined in this paper looks at the content and quality of curriculum content in social work education with government reviews asking for a single source prescriptive document. Recent headlines have captured the idea that Narey is against too much theorising and emphasis on social justice in social work education and the suggestion that the UK might pull away from the international definition (Truell, 2014) of social work to a much more functionalist model since the international definition has a strong emphasis on the promotion of social justice as central to what the social work

profession stands for. It is worth noting that research by Hawkins, Fook and Ryan (2001) found that there was minimal use of the language of social justice in social work education in the UK, even at that stage.

Revisiting the comparison to developments in Hong Kong, Yven and Ho (2007) describe a curriculum that has become '*technical training without any sense of vocation*' (p.555) designed, they add, to produce technocrats with no commitment to social change or social justice. This is the challenge ahead for social work in the UK embedded in the new vision of social work education purported by Narey (2014) which must be met in the strongest possible terms with a confident professional discourse and clarity of purpose. As Yven and Ho (2007) state in relation to Hong Kong:

'If we are not clear about our direction, then we will be easily engulfed by the tidal waves of marketisation and managerialism.' (p.557).

2.4.4 Quality of student assessment:

There is an explicit suggestion within the Narey report that social work degree courses are too difficult to fail at the current time in universities in England. Portrayed as seemingly part of the overly liberal urge among social work academics to tolerate any level of ineptitude, he refers to employers being unimpressed with the standard of performance by graduates entering the workplace. Returning again to criticisms levied against changes to higher education and the re-invention of the student as consumer (Molesworth, 2011; McGettigan, 2013) this is a factor which has been of widespread concern across all disciplines with the rise of a complaints and litigation culture among students together with their new found consumer-power vested in them through the National Student Survey (NSS) and its significance to future institutional marketability.

This point is made forcefully by Williams (2011) referring to Socrates and Plato's position that payment for teaching compromised the learning relationship. There is a suggestion that a culture of student appeasement (Molesworth, 2011) is forming and that rather than being able to challenge students. This may be especially pertinent to those set on embarking on a career in social work where challenges will occur on a daily basis. The suggestion that academic staff are encouraged by institutional processes to perpetuate a 'consumer fantasy' of student ability which could well be leading to the inflation of grades (Williams, 2011) is indeed a concerning one.

2.5 Chapter summary leading to a research question making an original contribution to knowledge:

Having examined the question of quality in social work education in universities in England, I have argued that current research and literature is narrow in focus locating problems of quality and delivery within the confines of the social work curriculum content and delivery alone, rather than locating problems within a wider critical discourses and structural analysis of universities. Neoliberal philosophies are seen by many critical theorists as having given rise to a flawed working model which is now being rolled out across the higher education sector based on consumerist and market driven principles. In the case of the education of social workers fault lines are already appearing which left unchallenged could have consequences both to the long term future of the profession and potentially the vulnerable individuals on the receiving end of services. Specific research in this area concentrating on structural issues related to marketisation of universities and the quality of social work education does not currently exist despite an emerging discourse of concern among social work academics.

There are murmuring academic voices regarding this topic, potentially with too much at stake individually to speak out. This could therefore be a useful role for critical research to give safe voice to the views and experiences of academics that are unable or unwilling to speech publically. The fact that a doctoral study allows me independence of funders or other interested parties to select my own area of study is an opportunity not to be wasted. The original contribution to research which I therefore seek to make is a study of the views and experience of social work academics regarding the marketisation of universities in the UK and the influence of this neoliberal agenda on social work education. The specific question that this study proposes to ask then is: *How is the increased marketisation of universities in the UK influencing the delivery of entry level social work education?*

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

‘It is the political task of the social scientist as of any liberal educator- continually to translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for a variety of individuals.’

(Mills, 1959 p.187)

Having located the topic of study within the arena of the English/UK university system, focussed on the growth of neoliberal market led practices, I now turn my attention to question of methodology. The expansion of student fees as the main source of university funding and the reinvention of the student as consumer (Holmwood, 2011; Molesworth, 2011; Williams, 2013; Locke, 2013; Brown and Carasso, 2013) may well be the beginning of a much longer journey towards privatisation (McGeddigan, 2013) of the sector but the pertinent question for this inquiry is to explore what influence, if any, increased ‘marketisation’ is having on the delivery of entry level social work education.

Gill (2010) offers an insightful glimpse into the current climate within the higher education sector setting out the ‘toxic conditions of neoliberal academia’ (p. 239) which she describes as being defined by professional overload, lack of work-life boundaries, role extensions and increased demands for target reaching and efficiencies. Referring back to Negri (1989) she describes the university sector as a *factory without walls*. At a time when the quality of initial social work education has been under increased scrutiny, it is appropriate to consider the implications which this changing university structure is having on the education being delivered. Gill's work is presented in an edited collection exploring research into issues which people are reluctant to talk publically about and it has become apparent that this topic may well be one of those issues. Gill's work has therefore contributed to the methodological design.

It would be futile and indeed misleading to purport that my study can ever be detached or objective. As a senior lecturer in social work I have already made subjective observations, gained perceptions, views of what is taking place but have no idea if these are widespread or replicated within other institutions. I have identified this as an area of specific concern not just from an educationalist viewpoint but as a significant social issue with potential to impact on the lives of people who come into contact with social workers. I am also very aware that my teaching day-job is located in a ‘new’ university in the south east of the

country and that this aspirational position may account for some of the practices that I observe which may not be replicated in more established academic institutions. The task then is to find a method by which to establish if the growth of market forces and ‘neoliberal’ practices are influencing entry-level social work education, to try and understand the systemic processes which may be affected and to consider if any issues are widespread throughout the sector? However, the aim of this project is not simply to produce a formal catalogue of results, it is also hoped that this work will add to a dialogue within the field and develop as a professionally reflective piece which will engage others in a throughout the research process. This focus on meaningful practitioner dissemination is very much at the heart of the research design.

As a social worker of twenty-five years, my instinct is to approach any problem in as practical and resource efficient a way as possible. My chosen method of inquiry will additionally need to be supported by a coherent and empirically established ontology, epistemology and methodological viewpoint which will allow any findings to stand alone at least in part as credible, reliable and trustworthy truths. In turn my contribution may then be called upon by others in the research community and perhaps even impact on future research and practice at universities. In order to enter into this research *house of cards*, I must first establish that my contribution is compatible in terms of depth, weight, analytical coherence and that it can stand the test of peer review and academic scrutiny. Before any of this however, my approach must be true to my own belief system. At this stage I need to make it clear that I reject the notion that methodology can be ‘adopted’ or chosen like a suit of clothes. In order for research to be authentically ‘crafted’, methodology must reflect and be compatible with the views of its author. Calling once again upon Mills as a specific guide rather than simply a source of reference:

‘Be a good craftsman: Avoid any rigid set of procedures. Above all seek to develop the use of the sociological imagination. Avoid the fetishism of method and technique...

Let every man be his own methodologist: let every man be his own theorist; let theory and method again become part of the practice of a craft.’

(Mills, 1959 p. 225)

In addition, this form of emphasis on a ‘metaphysical paradigm’ has come under criticism by Morgan (2007) who makes a powerful argument that such an approach has grown in popularity since the 1970s, with the demise of positivism and the expansion of constructivist epistemologies and qualitative research methods. Some suggest that like

many activities influenced by the inculcation of neoliberal thinking, research is now seen as primarily a technically driven process made up of rituals, process and detail (Gill, 2010; Young, 2011; Sayer, 2014). Since my overall position in this work is critical of such a stance in social work practice and the delivery of education, I extend these criticisms to many approaches in research. This was at the centre of Mills' critique in 1959 but the march of the technocratic social scientist strides-on in the twenty-first century, determined to emulate the natural sciences in terms of rhetoric and prestige. There are still echoes of *physics envy* (Mills, 1959) and approaches to social research more determined than ever to adhere to a pre-prescribed, 'off the peg' processes chosen from the many manuals of methodology. Like the very neoliberal structures which this study questions as potentially stifling creativity and the unqualifiable within social work education, the technocratic research culture with all its checks, balances, measures and process-driven details, may well be responsible for a deficit of imagination among novice researchers like myself at least according to Mills (1959) and those who followed in his tradition (Young 2011). Indeed, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) process has come under strong criticism (Buraway, 2011; Sayer, 2014) for inhibiting potential work, narrowing intellectual horizons and cramping the imagination. According to Sayer (2015), numbers now potentially speak louder than quality of words in research and target driven processes have permeated what is produced in the name of scholarship and he concludes that most academics are aware that this is happening but are 'too cowed, cowardly or self-interested' (Sayer, 2015 p.93) to challenge it, echoing the experiences set out by Gill (2010).

The call for the use of the sociological imagination continues therefore to be pertinent, perhaps even more so in the current climate. Breaking free from the dictates of bounded methodological approaches, adopting a 'made-to-measure' paradigm and retaining a respectful level of criticality regarding the prevailing research culture is an approach I therefore intend to introduce in this paper as the bedrock to my study. This position is somewhat supported within the pragmatist tradition of American philosophy but also aligned strongly to a critical realist perspective which I will set out as my main epistemological or paradigmatic position. However, as Morgan (2007) argues, the concept of the paradigm is not clear-cut and whilst it is often now used to offer a metaphysical framework within which to locate research, it can also be more simply the approach taken. However, the relationship between ontology, epistemology, methodology and method is a complex and messy one calling into question the potentially dualist positions of theory as opposed to practice. I take the position that this distinction is unhelpful as did pragmatists

such as Dewey (1938) and later Schön (1992) who identified the links between the two as being the key to inquiry. Similar arguments have been made by feminist thinkers who identify the basis of knowledge within the ‘praxis’ (Stanley & Wise, 1983; 1991) between theory and practice. For the purpose of this doctoral outline however, I have chosen to break these issues down into distinct sections to give general overview of my stance prior to reflecting on the methods to be used.

3.1 Methodology: Ontological and Epistemological Considerations:

What is reality and what can be ‘known’?

‘I accept responsibility for my own thinking without pretending for a moment that thinking ever proceeds without contexts much broader than even (or perhaps especially) the thinker can know.’

(Minnich, 2005 p.54)

My own ontological and epistemological position remains ‘unfinished’ (Friere, 1970 p.65), being aware of the complexities of such issues and the development which still lie ahead. Learning daily through reading and experience, through dialogue and challenge is part of this process as Minnich (2005) is keen to emphasise, as well as realisations coming from a variety of often unexpected sources. Having the confidence to accept uncertainty and non-absolutes for example, is something I am becoming more aware of particularly through teaching undergraduates who are always keen to give the ‘right’ answers and seem constantly perturbed when told that usually there is no such thing. Minnich’s position is also enhanced by calling upon Kant (p. 270) and suggesting the need to combine both intimacy and universality in research, recognising that personal experiences can often be a lived reflection of universal issues. Here a feminist position, seeing the personal as the political, clearly overlaps with that of pragmatists and the work of Mills. Glimpses into wider shared and lived realities can be gained through the eyes and insights of individuals and experiences of individuals can be illuminated through study of the universal.

Friere (1970) additionally advocates a ‘praxis’ in approach to research and rather than dismissing the notion of a given reality, as constructivists would, calls for researchers to:

‘...investigate people’s thinking about reality and people’s actions on reality which is their praxis. For precisely this reason, the methodology proposed requires that

investigators and the people (who would normally be considered objects of that investigation) should act as co-investigators' (Friere, 1970 p. 87).

My position is anti-positivist is a given, but alongside pragmatists such as Dewey, Schön and Morgan, I am sceptical of a purely constructivist standpoint and hold that there are, as Dewey noted, 'observed facts' (Dewey, 1938) to be collected and that the process of inquiry should be driven by the practical considerations related to the subject and not some grand ontological stance. Whilst I wholly acknowledge that reality is pluralistic and experienced in a multitude of ways by different individuals and communities, there are common realities in people's material experience which should not be dismissed. To exemplify this further:

'When we read a final demand for payment of our electricity bill and the accompanying threat of disconnection, we could play endless parlour games running through diverse constructions of what this text says, showing off our ability to construe it in imaginative ways. Nevertheless, which of the many possible meanings is supposed to apply, is usually pretty clear; if it isn't, it might register when the lights go out.' (Sayer, 1999 p. 40).

This project is a critical piece of research which calls additionally on analysis from a critical realist (Collier, 1994; Bhaskar, 1998; Sayer, 2000; Lopez & Potter 2001) tradition locating changes within higher education firmly within the construction of the capitalist and neoliberal economic enterprise, which can also be seen to reflect traditional models of masculinity and set against a backdrop of patriarchy. Indeed, recent analysis of the neoliberal agenda by Davies (2014) draws analogies with the competitiveness of sportsmanship and the alignment with classic concepts of masculinity seem unavoidable. This alignment additionally extends to managerialist approaches which are now being adopted within the traditionally 'caring' and predominantly female professions such as nursing and social work. There is a useful argument that 'masculinising' such professions through managerialist approaches is potentially devaluing and diluting the emotional content:

'...the masculinity of new managerialism is leading to the repression of the feminine, emotional content' (Harlow, 2004 p. 174).

Minnich's (2005) analysis questions also the patriarchal assumptions within of academic traditions whilst Mahowald (1987) views pragmatism as 'more feminine than masculine' (p. 10) in its perspective.

In addition this work recognises the intrinsic and historic contribution which women make to social work and education and the important contribution to research method and design that feminism has made. However, this is part of the overall critical approach taken and there are no claims that a 'feminist' methodology has been adopted in this study. Pragmatism and critical realism offer an important strand to consolidate my own thoughts regarding reality, knowledge and to some degree methodology at this stage in my doctoral journey. There are some almost obvious links between pragmatism and feminism which must be acknowledged (Seigfreid, 1991; Rorty, 1991; Singer, 1999; Riley, 1988; Whipps, 2013), highlighting interesting ideological and practical overlap in analysis and approach. Indeed some of the early female pragmatists such as Jane Addams (1902) open up discussion which has timely links to the present day; the ethic of care, the role of the worker which has relevance to the nature of social work education and could form the basis of future analysis. However, I am reluctant to get drawn into the semantics of the different stances, particularly in feminist writing. My position and thinking can best be clarified through the use of a couple of extracts from my own research diary:

Research Diary Extract: 13.10.2013

'Today I began with revisiting some classic sociology and feminist research theory. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993)... Their view of feminist sociology is not one of gender or women's studies but the reframing of the whole discipline rejecting the prevailing masculinised agenda and constructs. This is very close to my own position.'

Research Diary Extract: 12.1.2014

'Naturally, my views are built on strong socialist principles with affinity to schools of thought within feminism and critical realism. However, I question the utility of such labels which hold little meaning for most people within society and perhaps come to form the exclusive jargon of an academic elite who often seem to spend more time discussing allegiances or semantic differences, rather than making any real progress or suggestion for action. I refuse to be part of such debate and whilst I may use terms such as 'feminist' I do so from very much a standpoint position and at this stage I see no reason to refine or defend this further, not because I am unable to do so but because it is to me, and to many women particularly those living with significant disadvantage and oppression, a simple waste of time and valuable energy.'

Writing mainly in the 1930s Dewey spoke of knowledge and reality as a shared and most importantly contextual experience thereby rejecting the pluralistic split between theory and practice. He saw the nature of inquiry as located in experience and the indistinguishable link with knowledge. In turn this gave rise to the work of Schön (1992) on reflection which has an explicit and daily influence on both learning/teaching and social work practice. The idea that knowledge must be embedded in experiment and practice, that the inquirer must investigate the very notion of inquiry in a practical sense, provides for me as a social worker, a teacher and a scholar the potential to synthesise with the a coherent affiliation each of my professional identities. In terms of my research it equally presents the potential to link with my practice as an educator and in turn to link to the social work practice. For me then the nature of reality and knowledge must pass the test of being not only applicable but accessible to the experienced realities of practice. They must stand the test of not only intensive academic peer review but they must make sense to those on the receiving end of social work education and indeed social work. Accessibility of language and tone therefore has epistemological significance to my study and its content, or in the timeless words of Mills:

‘I know you will agree that you should present your work in as clear and simple language as your subject and thought about it permit. But as you may have noticed, a turgid and polysyllabic prose does seem to prevail in the social sciences. I suppose those who use it believe they are imitating the ‘physical sciences’ and are not aware that much of that prose is not altogether necessary’.
(Mills, 1959 p. 217)

The production of knowledge therefore, is not only viewed as a social and reflective task involving a significant degree of interpretation (or hermeneutic/double hermeneutic), but it is deeply rooted in the language used (Lopez & Potter, 2005) since language and perceptions of reality are deeply interconnected (Tallis, 1988). Dissemination, delivery and interpretation of the audience also then become an important factor and a significant part of method and approach.

3.2 Early reflections on choice of research methods:

This section is largely work done at the planning stage of the research and as such envisages the link between the methodological positioning and the planned methods of data collection. The bridge between the methodological stance and conceived methods of

study seems an important part of the coherence of approach to capture and therefore this section is included to give insight into the study design. The final methods of data collection employed are written up in full below in section 3.4 of the chapter.

After some thought I have chosen to locate the discussion relating to ‘pragmatism’ within the ontological/epistemological section of this chapter as distinct from methods to be employed. This is largely because the version of ‘neo-pragmatism’ that has become part of the established menu of methodological approaches, popular since the 1960s and captured in the work of Rorty (1983) and others appears slightly at odds with Dewey and the classic thinkers. As a philosophical tradition, pragmatism offers a view of knowledge which is critical of adopting a firm allegiance to a given methodological approach. Viewing the subject of study as central to any mode of inquiry, to some extent this renders the need for any named methodology as irrelevant. I am resistant to adopting any rigid approach and set out to remain fluid in my research design concentrating on the subject matter and taking guidance from a number of methodological traditions, very much including pragmatism aligned closely to the position adopted by Morgan (2005) as a ‘pragmatic approach’ rather than worldview, paradigm or dogmatic methodology.

In the pragmatic tradition guided by the work of Cherryholmes (1992), Morgan (2007) and Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003) this project seeks to employ a variety/mix of methods in order to give both a qualitative insight and snapshot overview of what might be happening with regard to the influence of organisational changes on social work education within universities in the UK. Pragmatism allows the research design to centre on ‘what works’ to give the best understanding of the subject under investigation. As Creswell (2009) writes:

‘...pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis’.
(p.11)

However, I am very conscious that this should not be misinterpreted as aligning with the more formulaic ‘mixed methods’ approach to research which has become a popular choice on the menu of methodologies.

The research will have a transformative agenda however, as also espoused by Mills but often forgotten by those who seek to follow his guide (Young, 2011). Mertens (2003) highlights the potential for studies using a combination of methods to be transformative

and in this case practice and policy around the delivery of social work education will be the focus of any change.

In terms of method of inquiry, it was my initial thought to solely examine curriculum content in social work education with a view to observing the impact of the neoliberal agenda. However, not only has this to some extent now been covered by other work (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014) it has become apparent through the literature review that this would not give a full picture of what is taking place, systemic subtleties and the lived experience of those who deliver social work education. As seen in other examples, such as failures in the child protection system (Munro, 2011) or the provision of compassionate health care (Francis, 2013), subtle and systemic processes can influence the delivery of services within a neoliberal framework which are not obviously identified through examination of policy and documentation. It therefore has become clear that I need to focus on the lived-experience, that is to say (again using the terminology Mills) the ‘personal troubles’, of academics in the field and to involve them directly in the study. The nature of ‘silence’ has also emerged as a possible factor to be considered in a sector where academics may feel unable to speak out publically (Gill, 2010) and this must be considered in the overall research design.

The early design of the research was then of a qualitative study using anonymous data from academics located at universities throughout England and possibly the wider UK depending on participation levels. Access to a convenience sample of nationally based social work academics was made available to me during a national conference in July 2015 and organisers were supportive gatekeepers who assisted in facilitating this study.

Qualitative research was considered to enable richer and more nuanced data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Bryman, 2012) which would include the words and lived experience of social work academics. At the early stage two data streams were planned for this research:

1. Data will be gathered via the use of survey/questionnaire collected primarily at a national academic conference in July 2015 with the possibility of some postal questionnaires also being sent out.
2. Semi structured interviews used to gain qualitative insight and experiences from a minimum of twelve academics from different universities.

Thematic analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al, 2012) of data was chosen to form the basis of organisation of findings using reflexive dialogue throughout the process. Conversation and collaboration was also to be encouraged from participants and others working within social work education. This would be enhanced through my own conference presentations and poster delivery, acknowledging that the process and dialogue throughout are just as important as the final analysis and written results. Dissemination throughout the research process was therefore recognised as an important part of the impact of this research since it will involve as participants the academic community in which it is located. In this way it was anticipated that this research would have potential to contribute to discussion in the field from the outset. Since the national conference was to form the main platform for accessing participants and its organisers would act as gatekeepers to participation, it was considered to be a useful part of engagement to present a paper alongside collecting data to facilitate awareness of the topic among conference attendees.

I am aware that this doctoral study has the potential to add to the current debate surrounding social work education and to consider the impact of the managerialist, neoliberal agenda on higher education in general and social work education in particular. However, there is also a wider arena to consider; the impact that neoliberal processes are having on health and social care, on the economy and the distribution of wealth within a global society. My position asserts, along with many others (Davies, 2014; Peck, 2010; Chakroborty, 2008; Crouch, 2011), that the neoliberal model may be flawed, with the potential to distort the quality of output in any arena in which it is employed. This is an important debate within higher education and one which needs to be openly entered into within social work education. However, the purpose of this study then is also to contribute to the wider debate around the neoliberal agenda within services and institutions, remembering Dewey's stance that:

‘...there is no such thing as a final settlement.’ (Dewey, 1938 p. 106)

The test of any methodological approach is perhaps to be found in a synthesis and synergy of the theoretical position and the practical approach taken; where world view, understanding of knowledge and methodological stance are reflected in process and detail of approach. In this way although there will undoubtedly be those who query the approach taken here, it will at least be received as coherent and indeed authentic. Whilst I have chosen not to use a step-by-step pre-prescribed method, I have presented this decision with

thorough and coherent methodological rationale which is supported by the well-respected school of pragmatism. At the planning stage of the research then it was my conscious decision to remain fluid in terms of precise detail of the methods to be employed since it must be allowed to evolve depending on a number of factors including resources and participation levels. I am also mindful that this will additionally be a learning process where research method and technique will be developed through experience and reflection. Here I am using the work of Schön (1992), Huberman and Miles (2002), as well as Mills (1959) who encourage the development of research method through active engagement with the process. My planned methods, aside from the outline set out above, therefore remained fluid at the preparatory stage and have only been documented in full retrospectively.

So far, my examination of methodological approach has been largely theoretical with only a sketch of planned methods presented. However, in moving on to look at the actual methods employed this work will shift from the theoretical planning and preparation stage to the practical field work. As such my method will be explored through the reflective lens of hindsight as I write-up the details of the field work for this study. Whilst the pragmatic stance taken has allowed a fluid approach to method, the approach used will be set in context of established methods of sampling, surveys, interviews and the thematic analysis. As a practitioner researcher, particular focus will also be given to management of any potential bias through transparent reflection. The plan set out above has no doubt developed and been adapted as part of the reflexive and pragmatic approach adopted. I am also very much aware that this doctoral journey is one of learning and development and as such will call heavily upon reflections from experience and a developing understanding of process as well as any significant findings. Calling upon Huberman and Miles' (2002) reflections and advice set out in the epilogue of their final publication, I am reassured that this approach is a well-trodden path for qualitative researchers new and old:

‘...*doing* qualitative analysis is the way you get better at it - and we believe that holds true not just for novices and new entrants to qualitative work, but for wise old dogs as well.’ (p. 394).

3.3 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was granted for this research study to go ahead by the internal Education and Social Care Department Research Ethics Panel for a period of three years dated 23rd

April 2015 (Appendix 1). The outline plan detailed above was submitted as part of that application together with draft questionnaires, consent information and proposed semi structured interview questions. Ethical considerations additionally will be considered in the detailed write-up of methods below. The areas of ethical focus are outlined here.

It was recognised that anonymity and confidentiality would be key to this research in order to encourage participants to contribute honestly. Integrity of the researcher and respect for any potential risks to participants were therefore seen as central to this study. Gill (2010) highlights some of the potential issues within the current climate in academia which could impact on participants' willingness to share information. Allowing participants to limit the views they choose to share, respecting their silence, acknowledging their fears and the potential for individual ramifications of anything disclosed in this study will be central to the approach taken. As such, no data will be gathered from the 'home' university where I am currently employed. Data protection has been an integral part of planning and design with all data securely held throughout, coded and anonymised and compliant with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Although there may be some merit to using a covert approach within some social research, this study will place emphasis on openness and transparency, acknowledging the role of participants as peers who are able to make appropriately informed decisions regarding consent and choice in terms of how much data they share. Given the insight and awareness of participants as academics in the field, it will also be acknowledged that some level of collaboration will be involved in the approach. However, such an approach does open up potential for inadvertently drawing participants in to the researcher's agenda and this must be guarded against. It may also have an impact on those who volunteer to participate as being those who already have their own critical agenda to exercise.

Since this is not funded research there are no specific issues relating to sponsors. However my own role as an academic employed within one institution and the potential critical aspect of the data, could give rise to subtle influences being exerted from within the institution regarding the tone of the research and the implications of any findings. Indeed, on a wider level, professional social work bodies may have concern about the impact of this research on wider perceptions of social work and social work education and therefore seek to influence opportunities for presentation and publication. This is particularly relevant at a time where social work education is under government review.

Gatekeepers of participation in terms of conference organisers have been consulted and given approval for this research to take place at the annual conference in July 2015.

3.4 Methods of data collection: General Design

Having set out the methodological stance, a sketch of the planned research design and ethical issues in the sections above, this section will move on to examine the methods employed within the research project. The approach remains in keeping with the seminal guide of Mills (1959) where research is viewed as a combination of both art and science (Huberman and Miles, 2002) and as a developing ‘craft’ rather than a technical process. One of the defining factors of this approach is the need to think through every stage of the process rather than using a predefined guide. This has both positive and negative consequences in that it allows flexibility, giving the researcher more control, but it also gives greater responsibility in terms of research design and need for absolute transparent adherence to systematic rigor and self-criticality (Bassey, 1999). For this reason the methods used are written-up below as they took place using a highly reflective tone in places in order to give the reader a sense of the learning which has taken place. Using this form of approach to the development of skill requires *reflection in practice* as Schön’s seminal work so eloquently states:

‘...it does not stretch common sense very much to say that the know-how is in the action – that a tight-rope walker’s know-how, for example, lies in and is revealed by, the way he takes his trip across the wire... There is nothing in common sense to make us say that the know-how consists in rules or plans which we entertain in the mind prior to action’ (Schön, 1983 p.50).

The project is designed as having two primary data streams, the questionnaire and interview. These will be examined in turn (sections 3.5 and 3.6); exploring the decision to use each method as a data gathering tool; the design and any ethical considerations relating to each; the use of pilots; the delivery and data gathering stage before considering limitations and hindsight reflections. Section 3.7 will then examine the method of data analysis employed using much the same format but with added emphasis on the steps taken to ensure that academic rigor was adhered to and that any possible bias was mitigated against.

Although this study has not been defined by any one ‘method’, it must be stressed that it is very much underpinned by both systematic and intuitive processes which have been guided by a number of established research methods. The study is unique in design, however even research that adheres strictly to one prescribed method usually has its own unique focus and takes on an adapted form of that approach (Guest et al, 2012). In this way, research as a ‘craft’ is viewed as more than a series of processes. Perhaps in the same way that Schön (1983) describes professional competence as ‘the application of privileged knowledge to instrumental problems of practice’ (p. 37), the researcher reflects and adapts through *application* of techniques rather than theorising about them (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015). This view again has echoes of Huberman and Miles (2002) that the best way to learn how to research is to *do research*, because it is a multi-dimensional process requiring knowledge, values and practical skills.

Mixed Methods approaches (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) have clearly been influential to this work, although the study is perhaps best described as using a mix of qualitative data collection techniques. Whilst this may appear to be a semantic distinction, I have become aware that to the technocrat of method the term ‘mixed-methods’ appears to have become synonymous with a process driven approach which seeks to balance the use of the qualitative with quantitative in the quest for further apparent scientific rigor. This is certainly not the purpose here, where focussing on the topic of investigation and its examination seeks to pragmatically utilise multiple and complementary methods as required. Indeed mixed methods as a ‘formal subfield’ in research has only really developed since the 1980s (Guest et al 2012 pg. 187) and during examination of general literature on qualitative methods, the term is also still used by some in a very broad sense (Bryman, 2012; Briggs et al, 2012; Denscombe, 2014).

Other methods which have guided the work of this research will additionally be explored in the sections below including the possible influence of qualitative methods on the use of questionnaires; the insight from feminist methodologies particularly in relation to the interview techniques employed; and the guidance from grounded theory alongside classic thematic methods of data analysis. In this way, although the research does not adhere to any one pre-prescribed method it is very much supported by a strong, established and coherent foundation.

Moving on then to examine the data collection methods employed in this research, the techniques used are in themselves unremarkable but when applied to this topic of study by this researcher at this stage with these resources, the approach is unique in design and embarked upon with a fluid and ‘unfinished’ approach. Since methods are recorded in detail both here and in my own reflective diary then the research process could be replicated.

3.5 Methods of data collection: Questionnaires

It has been suggested (Basit, 2010) that a common misapprehension among inexperienced researchers is that the questionnaire provides an easy method of gathering a lot of information quickly. This may well have been an early motivator for considering this method of data gathering but the decision then developed in relation to the needs of the topic of study as well as the resources available.

In terms of the topic, it was identified at an early stage that there was both a sensitive and a potentially controversial element to this study and if the research was going to focus on potential fault lines occurring within university delivery of social work education then it would need to present convincing data showing that this issue is not isolated to a small sample. Feminist researcher Reinharz (1992) makes a valuable contribution here as to how the use of a quantitative survey can add strength to the work of qualitative research stating:

‘...survey research can put a problem on the map by showing that it is more widespread than previously thought’ (p. 79).

She adds that statistics can be a powerful way of demonstrating a message immediately because they are concise. The message that, for example ‘*eight out of ten cats prefer...*’, is a strong tool in marketing and useful method to convey research in an easily digested format. In relation to this study there was also some consideration that there may also be added ‘safety in numbers’ (Reinharz, 1992) particularly in relation to anonymity in order to avoid the identification of any one participant or institution.

Additionally the use of an initial questionnaire would seek to confirm if the problem identified at the outset was a real one (Menter et al, 2012) and worth investigating. There was undoubtedly a convenience aspect here too in that the idea of collecting data at an academic conference became viable through discussion with the conference organisers and the use of a questionnaire seemed a useful and logical way to engage a large number of participants and a means by which to identify a sample for subsequent interview.

To avoid the criticism that findings are particular to only a small number of institutions, a broader snap-shot using a questionnaire as a wider lens seemed a useful approach. This would also enable increased awareness of the research among conference attendees, remembering that the aim of this research was ultimately transformative and that this goal could be embedded throughout the process.

3.5.1 Reflective account of questionnaire design:

The initial naïve misapprehension that the use of a questionnaire might be easy to formulate or administer was quickly dispelled in the first instance at the design stage. This took place after the completion of the initial literature review and prior to the application for ethical approval. At this stage much of the exercise was still conceptually an academic task with little real focus on the way the questionnaire would be delivered. I was however conscious that the participant sample would involve some leading academics in the field and that my design would therefore be scrutinised by an experienced audience. I was guided by general method texts such as Gomm (2008), Basit (2010), Bryman (2012) and Denscombe (2014) in particular. Denscombe (2014) highlights three factors that can make or break the use of a questionnaire in research:

- The rate of response
- The rate of completion
- The validity and accuracy of responses

He also highlights that design must take into account the capability and motivation of the respondents as well as the sensitivity of the topic. The aim of the self-administered questionnaire design was therefore to maximise the response rate by making it engaging and by minimising the burden of completion. The idea developed that it should therefore be confined to two pages and that participants could complete, if necessary, in ten minutes or less. Basit (2010) supports this approach adding that the design should be simple, uncluttered and broken down into easily identifiable sections which flow rationally throughout. My own experience of presenting professional reports and the sense of audience I have developed were also helpful here. In addition, experience of attending many conferences allowed me to be mindful of the windows of opportunity to engage the participants.

The content and eventual questionnaire design is included set out in Appendix 2. The aim was to gather as much information as possible in the two pages available as well as

providing clear guidance and detail to the participant, a space for them to indicate possible willingness to be interviewed and contact details if applicable.

Participant variables were kept to a minimum and related to areas that would form part of later data analysis. These were the current job title of each participant, the number of years spent working in higher education to that point and the ‘age’ of the employing institution. This last variable was viewed as important to allow specific analysis as to whether or not the influence of market-led processes was different in new and more established universities. Reviewing the total population of UK universities that teach social work (based on the *Guardian University Guide 2017*) it is interesting to note that of the 89 universities listed, the majority of social work courses are now provided by newer universities. Based on the categories used in the questionnaires, the total population of universities listed as providing social work education in the UK breaks down as follows:

- Universities founded **pre 1960** - 14 institutions teach social work
(**16.09%** of all providers)
- Universities founded between **1960 and 1990** – 15 institutions teach social work (**17.24%** of all providers)
- Universities founded **post 1990** – 58 institutions teach social work
(**66.67%** of all providers)

The focus of questions was on the changes in educational climate that the sample may have experienced since the increased marketisation of the university sector. The areas of inquiry listed within the questionnaire were informed directly by the themes identified in the literature review (such as standards of admissions). These were interspersed with issues which I viewed as innocuous or indeed positive changes that I associate with increased marketisation from my own experience (such as improved library and IT facilities). Sequencing of topics was planned to divide up factors which could be seen as potentially negative with those which were seen as neutral or positive. However, no attempt was made in the questionnaire to inquire regarding causal link between marketisation of the sector and the factors listed. Participants were simply asked to say if they had witnessed certain changes during the time that they had worked in higher education. Bryman (2012) refers to the ‘types’ of questions as being factual, attitudinal, belief based, value based or knowledge based but I would categorise the questions used as experience or observation based.

A grid was devised for the main body of the questions and a scaling system created asking participants if they had experienced an increase, decrease or no change in relation to the factors listed. This was loosely based on a Likert-scale approach (Denscombe 2014) but adapted for purpose. Reliability of responses was not tested and this is considered retrospectively as a limitation in design. There was then a small space for optional qualitative comments and a question regarding willingness to be interviewed and contact details. At the questionnaire design stage it was considered plausible that some of the interviews could be conducted at the conference so participants were asked if they would prefer that as an option or an interview at a later date.

The layout of the form was carefully considered with eye-catching colouring and font usage. The language was clear and polite with my details and those of the study set out clearly at the start (again following the advice of Bryman, Denscombe and also Carey, 2013). An expression of gratitude for participation was also emphasised. I was able to assume that a sample of academics would have a high level of capability to comprehend the form and instructions and that the topic would be one likely to be familiar to them. My aim was to produce the questionnaire using good quality print and paper and I spoke to the conference organisers about adding them to the welcome pack for attendees, all of which was to add gravitas to the study and in so doing encourage participation. Good practice in relation to questionnaire design such as that set out by Bryman (2012) was followed.

3.5.2 Piloting the questionnaire:

There is a strong suggestion within the literature relating to the use of questionnaires advocating the use of piloting as a means of knowing if and how the document works as a data gathering tool. For example, Bryman (2012) recommends that questions should always be pre-tested. Fortunately I was offered the opportunity to do this among fellow doctoral candidates and tutors during one of the taught sessions where I presented my research design and at the same time asked colleagues to pilot the draft questionnaire. Whilst not all those present were employed within the university sector, and none within academic social work, as a pilot sample of educationalists they could relate to the meaning of the topic, the questions and could respond using their own experience in their respective educational settings.

The piloting task was extremely valuable and enabled me to gather feedback regarding the way that the form was set out, the wording of the instructions and the meaning of the

questions. In some instances what appeared very clear to me as the author of the document was far from clear to the reader and I was therefore able to make suitable adjustments. As such I welcomed the opportunity to pilot the design and was able to improve the questionnaire as a result.

However, presentation to the eventual research sample at the academic conference was to present a different level of challenge and this will be examined below in detail. Before doing this it is necessary to emphasise the ethical considerations in relation to the use of the questionnaire which primarily relate to confidentiality, anonymity and transparency since the participants were viewed as being able to give informed consent from the outset. A clear and explicit statement was set out in red at the start of the document regarding consent and anonymity. The purpose and status of the research was also clearly highlighted in the displayed poster at the conference which was made available in reduced size format (see Appendix 3). The tone of the questions and the information requested was not considered particularly sensitive at this stage and the sample was asked to complete in a safe and mutually supportive environment surrounded by peers.

3.5.3 Administration of the questionnaire:

The delivery and administration of the questionnaire took place primarily at a national social work education conference in July 2015. This was with the full cooperation and support of the conference organising committee who additionally encouraged me to set up an on-line version of the questionnaire which they linked to the conference website and advertised during the period of registration prior to the conference. I also attended an additional international social work education conference in August 2015 where I collected a very small number of completed questionnaires, again with the permission of the conference organisers.

My original plan was to collect all data at the initial national conference in July and only to try and collect more at the second conference if the numbers had not been forthcoming. Using the sample categories set out by Gomm (2008) it is true to say that the attendees at the conference were something of a 'cluster' sample, although there was undoubtedly an element of 'convenience' and indeed 'self-recruitment' among those who chose to participate. I was aiming for between 70 and 100 questionnaires to be completed, with a view at that stage to conducting between 8 and 12 semi structured interviews. This sample numbers were selected with a view to maximising numbers within the time and resources

that were available to me. Bryman suggests that although a greater sample tends to be more representative, ‘time and cost considerations’ are also relevant (Bryman, 2012 p. 198) and must therefore legitimately be taken into account. My approach was to remain fluid however and to adapt to the field of study as it presented itself.

In advance of the initial conference I communicated with the conference administrators about putting the questionnaires in the conference packs. However, due to administrative difficulties on their part this did not happen. Questionnaires were therefore handed to delegates on arrival as they entered the opening plenary session. I also designed and crafted a questionnaire returns box (see Appendix 4) to provide a focal point for the research as well as a practical and anonymous method of return.

This start felt more rushed and ad hoc than I would have liked but most of the delegates started the conference with a copy of the questionnaire which was the main objective. In addition, the research was given a significant presence at the conference both on-line and at the venue. I then spent the remainder of the first day networking personally and encouraging participation. The table where the returns box was located was staffed at all times which allowed me full flexibility and I checked at regular intervals to see what numbers had been returned. The conference was due to last for three days but from experience I was aware that it would be useful to try and engage people early and whilst they were still reviewing the conference paperwork. Against this backdrop I was disappointed to find that only a dozen questionnaires had been completed, including only one on-line, at the end of the first day. I removed those that had been left in the box and these were stored securely in my personal room.

At the start of day two therefore I arranged to make an announcement about the questionnaire prior to the key note address in the main auditorium where all delegates would be present. I was kindly introduced by one of the main presenters and I spoke with personal conviction explaining my topic very briefly and suggesting that people should not participate because they took pity on me as a doctoral candidate but because the topic was important and as such people might want to make a contribution. Many people congratulated me on the approach taken which was delivered with good humour but poignancy. The approach was successful and by that afternoon there were around fifty completed forms in the box. It is also an approach that is advocated in many core texts

suggesting that engagement often depends on convincing the sample population that the research is important and that their contribution will count. As Basit (2010) states:

‘Respondents are more likely to complete the questionnaire if it is relevant and comprehensible to them and if they view it as a tool to improve the status quo.’ (p. 98).

In addition she recommends that the researcher needs to:

‘...convey to them how important their views are and how the study is likely to contribute towards generating knowledge, or improving policy and practice.’ (p. 93).

By instinct this is clearly what I had managed to do because many experienced academics congratulated me on my approach and by the end of the conference I had 69 completed questionnaires. An additional four questionnaires were completed at the second conference and five people had completed on-line giving me a total number of 78 questionnaires completed and 34 viable offers for interview. It was a journey and a learning experience which managed to produce far more than I expected in terms of data. Key texts used suggest that a postal questionnaire might expect 25% as a good return rate (Bryman 2012) and taking into account the sample group from both conferences the rate of questionnaire return was approximately 30% and out of that number 44% agreed to be interviewed. This felt like a positive outcome although the energy required to engage participation in such a short window of opportunity was more challenging than I had anticipated, although the literature clearly spelt this out. This will form part of the reflective commentary at the end of this section because whilst my administration was largely done intuitively, there are lessons supported by established methods which are transferrable to future projects.

3.5 4 Limitations of the questionnaire:

No research is without limitations, that is to say there are bound to be factors beyond the control of the researcher which may influence or produce shortcomings in the methods and even the findings. This section will briefly examine the limitations related to the questionnaire whilst overall limitations of methods will be examined at the end of the chapter.

One of the inherent drawbacks to the use of self-completed questionnaires is the possibility that terminology will be ambiguous and open to interpretation. Words, after all, are a subjective representation of one person’s account and it is never a certainty that the written word will be given the same meaning by the person who reads them. Likewise with

comments and responses presented on the completed forms, these are equally open to interpretation on the part of the researcher. Whilst piloting alerted me to any obvious ambiguities or misinterpretations and I was also available to clarify any questions that arose during completion, it is possible that some participants did not fully interpret the questions as I had intended. Although the academic ability of the sample was not a concern, there may have been possible access issues among participants which were not taken into consideration. However, since an on-line version of the questionnaire was available, software would allow full and inclusive access.

Whilst no time restrictions were imposed by the researcher and in theory possible participants had up to three days to complete, it is probable that they were completed quickly since this was largely the design of the questionnaire. However, this may have resulted in rushed responses. A small numbers of the questionnaires had clearly been completely thoughtfully with time taken; this was evident from the engagement with qualitative comments and even handwriting. Others were clearly written and completed at speed with responses not given to all questions in a small number of instances. Whilst it is unlikely that any of the responses were bogus or deliberately inaccurate, it is possible that those completed in a rushed manor may have misinterpreted the question or the scaling grid, or simply that they did not stop to reflect for long enough to give an accurate account of their own experience. This is a recognised draw back in the use of questionnaires and summarised by Denscombe (2014) as:

‘Bogus answers or mistaken answers are perhaps worse than no answers at all.’
(p.167).

It is then a balance between wanting to make the form resource efficient, placing as little demand on participants; and seeking clarity and precision in responses. In retrospect it may have been possible to test the reliability of responses using a differently worded duplicate question for example.

There were additionally obvious limitations with the sample used. Although there was representation from the majority of universities who teach social work at the conference, there is a question as to the potential ‘sample bias’ (Gomm 2008) among academics who attend summer conferences and the idea that they be among the most critical is not without merit. However, what is possible is that they are the most professionally engaged and motivated towards best practice. The geographic location of the conference in central England may also have limited attendance among some academics, particularly those

based in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There may have also been an overrepresentation of those without childcare responsibilities and therefore fewer part-time or female staff able to attend a summer conference. Equally, academic staff on part-time or temporary contracts may be less likely to be funded to attend such an event and therefore possibly under-represented. There were also a small number of the participants who were not based in UK universities and these were discouraged from completing questionnaires where possible. However, two questionnaires were discounted from the numbers given since they did not meet the inclusion criteria, one being completed by an academic who worked outside the UK and one by a person who worked for an organisation in the voluntary sector, not an education provider.

3.6 Methods of data collection: Interviews

The decision to use interview as a method of data gathering is not an unusual one in the study of sociology, education, health studies or indeed social work. Whilst my initial plan was to undertake face-to-face semi structured interviews, it became apparent from the pilots that this needed to be adjusted and eventually the substantive part of the data was collected via unstructured telephone interviews.

Since the turn of the twentieth century the interview is a method which has gained momentum and popularity (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015; Fontana and Frey, 1998; Reinharz, 1992), with a significant shift in emphasis occurring in the last 40 years from a more rigid and survey-based structured approach, to a qualitative emphasis on in-depth ethnographic and unstructured interviews. This change in emphasis within the social sciences may well be aligned to a rise in postmodern thinking and feminist contributions where the researcher is no longer positioned as the ‘expert’ and the participant the ‘subject’ and where the interview is seen as a much more egalitarian exchange.

In research terms the interview can be viewed as a conversation, but unlike conversations that occur naturalistically in everyday life, it is a conversation with some level of structure and always a purpose (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). It also requires significant planning, expertise and indeed ‘staging’ on the part of the researcher (Leyard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). As a method of data gathering it is said to offer the researcher flexibility since there are various ways the interview can be adapted with few hard and fast rules. Use of such a

‘highly eclectic method’ (Basit, 2010 pg. 100) therefore requires a significant amount of skill on the part of the researcher however, but it is probably worth noting that:

‘Interview research is a craft that, if well carried out, can become an art’ (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015 pg. 19).

The decision to use interviews in this study was identified as a way of gaining insight from the views and experiences of social work academics regarding the increasingly marketised culture in higher education and the influence this may be having on the delivery of social work education. Qualitative interviews are widely acknowledged as being useful where data beyond the descriptive is required (Basit 2010; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Bryman 2012; Menter et al 2012). Since systemic influences can be subtle and unidentifiable in policy and set procedures, this experiential contribution appeared vital to gaining some understanding or new knowledge regarding what is occurring as universities adapt to the changes in funding, infrastructure and emphasis. Whilst the questionnaire was designed as a tool to engage participation and obtain a general ‘snap-shot’ of views and experience from a wider sample, this was very much deductive and researcher-led tool. The second stream of data therefore set out to use the interview as a more inductive method where participants would be encouraged to openly share their own experiences and views to add depth and potentially highlight new areas not considered at the outset of the research. The notion of then synthesising a number of interviews into themes regarding the systemic influence of marketisation, giving more depth of understanding was then the driving rationale.

There was also consideration of the practicalities and resources available and it appeared realistic that using a population sample of social work academics at a national conference, I would be able to gain access to a suitable number of willing participants with the approval of the organisers as gatekeepers, and my initial target was to carry out between 8 and 12 interviews. The expertise required to conduct interviews was somewhat taken for granted at the planning stage of this project since my experience as a social work had given me considerable expertise in conducting interviews, building rapport and eliciting information for assessments. I additionally have some experience of interviewing in commissioned research (Akister and Cleary 2014, Cleary and Akister 2014). Ethically, plans to interview a small sample of social work academics did not present any major challenges. Informed consent was viewed as immediately achievable since the sample group were experienced professionals who were very research-aware. The emerging issue

of sensitivity around this topic was considered and assurances particularly regarding anonymity were embedded in the design at all levels.

However, following-on from the reflections above regarding the administrations of questionnaires, the administration and delivery of the initial interviews proved more challenging than I had anticipated. Therefore, whilst two face-to-face semi-structured interviews were carried out at the conference these formed an initial pilot as I was able to quickly identify that they lacked the depth and naturalistic quality which I was aiming to achieve. Therefore to give the reader chronological perspective, the pilot study is detailed below before setting out the actual design of the substantive interviews which followed. Some authors suggest that the best way to learn the skills of interviewing in research is to carry out interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015; Leyard, Keegan and Ward, 2003) and my learning from the pilot experience was indeed useful in this respect.

3.6.1 Pilot Interviews:

The research plan was to both administer the questionnaire and carry out a small number of semi structured interviews at a three-day national social work academic conference in July 2015. I planned to then conduct the remaining face-to-face interviews over the months which followed, having hopefully gained access to an appropriate sample group of participants. The interviews that took place during the conference were then something of a pilot from the outset, allowing me to ‘get a feel for’ the tone and topic under discussion. However, I was very aware that this would not give me any opportunity to review the questionnaire data in advance of starting the interviews but since they were two separate data streams this was not a concern. My rationale was that participants would perhaps be more willing to talk openly during a conference environment when they were away from their employing institutions and within a climate of academic criticality. It was also seen as a resource-efficient way of fully utilising the opportunity to gather data. However, I had not fully factored-in the amount of time needed to properly engage in the interview process or the planning involved. In short, I was over-confident that using six basic prompt questions and an audio recorder, I could elicit rich and valid data from a 30 minute face-to-face interview. Hindsight again provides a very useful source of material on which to reflect and from which to learn.

A semi-structured interview format was planned in advance to give some boundary and consistency to the topics to be covered. In addition participants were given an information

sheet and asked to sign a consent form before the interview. A pro-forma to record basic key information was designed setting out an opening statement regarding the research and then asking for comments on the following areas:

- Admissions
- Course content
- Support and student development
- Student assessment
- Areas of future improvement
- Any other issues identified by the interviewee

Interviewees were asked as an overarching question to describe any changes which they have witnessed in the higher education sector relating to this area of study before prompting in the key areas set out above. Both interviews were audio recorded and took place in public but secluded spaces at the conference venue campus. Both interviews were very different with the first appearing to say almost what the participant thought I wanted to hear and the second giving what appeared to be a glowing advertisement for their own university. Having said that, once the recorder was switched off the second interviewee shared rich anecdotes regarding concerns which were unfortunately not captured for this research. Both interviews last less than 30 minutes due to time constraints and lacked the naturalistic factor which good qualitative interviews should possess (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). In addition, I was immediately aware of a lack of depth indicated by short and non-spontaneous answers. I also took little opportunity to probe or to build up a good rapport during the recorded interview. Whilst the areas set out above were broad, I became aware that they were nonetheless very leading and therefore not wholly useful. However, the data from the pilot interviews has been used as part of the overall findings. The interviews were far from ideal but the data they produced were of extremes with the first pilot interview being very critical and the second very passive and ambivalent. In this way the interviews somewhat counteract each other and I am left to reflect that my initially naïve, clumsy and direct approach produced equally direct but perhaps shallow responses.

During the weeks which followed I had the opportunity to reflect on this process. I attended another international conference where I became focussed on specific approaches to research and methods, prompted by presentations given. I was particularly struck by the immediate impact of one piece of narrative research and another where participants had been asked to take photographs to demonstrate their experience on a given topic. Both the short narratives and the collection of photos gave a rich and immediate glimpse into the

lived experience of participants which, when presented, immediately illuminated the topic under investigation with very little input needed from the respective researchers. They were authentic and powerful insights which linked the *micro* to the *macro*, or perhaps as Mills (1959) might say, the '*personal troubles*' to the '*public issue*' and it was this factor that I had failed to achieve in the pilot interviews. What I was hoping to achieve from interview participants is what Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) describe as:

‘...a self-reliant story that hardly requires additional explanations’ (p.192).

After reflection, I made the decision that this would require less direction on my part and more control on the part of participants to share their own experience as they chose to, with as little filtering as possible. My new focus was therefore to elicit a narrative ‘snap-shot’ into the academic lives and experiences of participants with a general reference to my research topic; and then to give them an opportunity to actively share their views. In this way I was moving towards a much more exchange based model of interview, with much less structure and direction from me as an interviewer. The redesign of the interview as a qualitative unstructured dialogue therefore became necessary.

3.6.2 Reflective account of interview design:

Having taken the lessons from the pilot and become aware through the example of colleagues of what could be achieved through data collection, I then had a clear aim for the interviews and was able to set about planning and ‘staging’ them with regard to the resources I had available. I used supervision as an opportunity to reflect verbally which was very useful during this stage one of my supervisors made the very practical suggestion that telephone interviews might be more resource efficient and also that participants might be offered to submit a written piece rather than be interviewed. This idea required reflection because if I wanted to achieve more depth and quality of data I was concerned that this would not be achievable without face-to-face contact. Indeed, Leyard, Keegan and Ward (2003) suggest that an in-depth interview is extremely difficult if there is not a physical meeting and Bryman (2015) highlights that the telephone is rarely used for qualitative interviews. However Menter et al (2012) list some of the benefits in conducting telephone interviews including the lack of any visual bias and the possibility that power differentials are in some ways offset.

Making pragmatic decisions, weighing-up of priorities and resources are also essential in any planning research and in addition I was becoming aware that this is a sensitive area for academics where anonymity was going to be a significant issue. I therefore considered that

this may be assisted by a lack of face-to-face discussion and the partial feeling of anonymity which a telephone exchange would bring. The other factors for consideration were my own time and the cost of travelling to interviews throughout the UK. In the end the decision was a balance of convenience, pragmatism with the potential for creativity in my use of the telephone as a means to conduct unstructured interviews or rather conversations on a potentially sensitive topic. Taking all factors into account (Menter et al, 2012) I therefore decided to offer participants the opportunity of a telephone interview, or to submit a written statement as an alternative. In both instances my aim was to hand over as much control as possible to participants.

Although there had been a time delay in contacting volunteers for interview the potential sample I had was much bigger than I had originally planned so in December 2015 I set about selecting a sample for interview. The demographic information on the questionnaires was limited to the professional role and time participants had worked in higher education alongside the era in which their employing institution had gained university status. Since I now had contact details for those willing to be interviewed, I was also aware of their geographic location and gender. I carried out a methodical sampling task of trying to achieve a mix of experience and geographic spread throughout the UK but also had a view to getting a contrast of both new and older universities and some diversity in terms of gender. However, since I was also concerned that participants may have lost interest due to the time delay so was also guided by convenience and send out twenty four invitations just before the Christmas break in 2015. At the start of 2016 very few of the sample had responded and I therefore sent out a reminder email which resulted in a further total of 15 participants agreeing to be interviewed and one who agreed to provide a written statement. Whilst this, together with the pilot data, was far more than I had set out to do I decided to follow-through on all opportunities which were going to be less resource intensive over the telephone.

Planning then became central to my task and I set up a schedule of interviews in February 2016. My aim was to carry out two or three interviews on the days I had available and to leave at least two hours between them for reflection. Dates and times were arranged via email and I agreed to send participants clear instructions and consent forms closer to the time of their interview. During the email exchanges I became aware that I could recall conversations with virtually the entire sample from the conference. The emails were very friendly in tone and it was clear that I had already engaged the participants as individuals.

They appeared actively interested in my research topic and glad that I was progressing. I worked out a way of using the speaker system on my own mobile phone which allowed me to digitally record onto my PC at home where only I have access and where I could password protect audio files for safe storage. Most importantly, I carried out a test interview with a teaching colleague prior to the first interview. This was with a view to testing the recording device but proved invaluable to the approach I subsequently took. During the test I did a long introductory speech where I reaffirmed the purpose of the research and the scope of the interview. However, this proved a cumbersome way to begin during which time I lost the attention of the test-participant and any subsequent rapport. This allowed me to reflect and decide to send out all ‘preliminaries’ by email the day before the interview including general guidance to ‘*get the ball rolling*’ (Denscombe 2014 pg. 189). I additionally sent out consent agreement for them to respond to in writing, confirmation that ethical approval had been granted and that anonymity was assured as well as restating the time and date and a reminder that the call would be recorded from the outset. I stressed that the interviews would be unstructured and that the participant could choose what they wanted to share and that my interest was in the following:

How is the increased marketisation of universities in the UK influencing the delivery of entry level social work education?*

*(*Marketisation is characterised by the expansion of student fees as the main source of university funding, the public student loan system, the expansion of the university sector, published league tables, a business-like approach and increased competition between institutions).*

The interview will be largely unstructured with an opportunity for you to:

1) Share your own experience at your current university - I would be interested in such issues as your working environment, staff morale, available staff time and resources at your institution. You may also wish to consider issues mentioned in the original questionnaire such as student numbers, admission criteria, university facilities, managerial processes, the influence of the NSS and any other factors which you might associate with increased marketisation.

2) Make some general comments and give a view on the research question

The full template of the directional email sent out is provided in Appendix 5. In this way I was able to begin the interviews in a more comfortable and conversational way with a simple reminder of the two factors listed above and to then hand over to the interviewee to talk. The aim was to limit the power differential in the interviewer – interviewee relationship, to allow participants to set the pace of what they chose to share and to instil trust and confidence in me as the interviewer through clarity, professionalism, good time keeping and organisation skills.

3.6.3 Delivery of the interviews

All fifteen telephone interviews took place as scheduled, together with one additional participant forwarding a written statement. Therefore all data collection for this research was complete by the end of February 2016. As a resource efficient means of gathering data this method was a great success but what I did not entirely expect was the richness and apparent quality of the data which I quickly became aware I was obtaining. Basit (2010) describes this as the sort of data to aim for which is:

‘...spontaneous, candid, rich and profound’ (p.112).

Something about the approach taken and this topic, together with the use of the telephone as a medium, induced participants to share their thoughts and experiences in what appeared to be an open and candid way. Each interview last between 30 and 45 minutes. I was also aware that the depth of data was improving with every interview and whilst I initially put this down to coincidence in the order in which I had interviewed, I now realise that I was honing my interview skills to produce a better depth of response as I progressed, as identified by Basit (2010). This will be reflected upon in more detail at the end of this section but it is true to say that much of the techniques employed are well documented (for example, Corbin and Straus, 2008) as best practice in carrying out qualitative interviews.

Leyard, Keegan and Ward (2003) describe the interviewer themselves as being an instrument of research, stating that it is the personal and interpersonal skills employed that potentially make the difference between a good and an average interview. They continue to list the professional and personal qualities of a good interviewer which include possessing good listening and comprehending skills, quick thinking and a logical mind, a good memory, curiosity and the ability to build rapport. They cite the importance of interviewer confidence, inducing trust in the interviewee, of adaptability and credibility, of efficient and careful preparation and also possessing a tranquillity and ‘inner stillness’ including the ability to use humour to ‘foster a sympathetic interview environment’ (p. 143).

Finally they add that at no stage during the interview process should the interviewer look to perform any level of analysis which is likely to detract from the engagement with the interaction itself. I did adhere to all of these factors when conducting the telephone interviews and therefore consider this to be in part at least responsible for the depth of outcome. I also think that the topic was one which is of concern to the participant sample and where they actively wanted an opportunity to talk anonymously. Denscombe (2014) describes one of the possible benefits of a qualitative interview as being almost therapeutic through offering interviewees this type of opportunity to offload. However, calling again on the very useful and detailed guidance of Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) on the ‘craft’ of qualitative research interviewing:

‘In the end, however, the integrity of the researcher – his or her knowledge, experience, honesty and fairness – is the decisive factor.’ (p. 97).

This issue of ‘the use of self’ in research is one which is very much aligned to the role of a social worker trained as I am in psychodynamic casework and relationship based working. Whilst I was extremely comfortable to manage the interviews in this way, I was also conscious that my role and aim was different to that of a social work practitioner. I was very aware that the purpose of the interview was to meet *my* needs and that of the research, rather than me offering anything in return. This felt slightly uncomfortable and ethically very new to me and I think I consolidated that feeling by committing myself to doing something useful with the data I had been given as an act in return to the participants as much as anything else.

The transferability of skills has emerged as an unexpected theme within the methods employed. Other factors employed which are strongly advocated in qualitative interviews include the appropriate use of prompts and probing; the ability to use both open and closed questioning; to use repetition or mirroring; and significantly to build a ‘rapport’ with the interviewee. Whilst the telephone interviews did not involve face-to-face contact, I had met all of the participants at the conference and in most cases had already started to build something of a rapport prior to conducting the interview. I was able to extend this during the conversation by initially asking about the weather in their part of the UK in some cases, or their own office environment and the available space to talk confidentially. This started to give me a glimpse into their world and lived experience as well as building a rapport. Whilst I did not use self-disclosure, I did use my own position as a peer researcher to

identify with their experiences through empathy. I remained non-judgemental on all of the accounts given and was suitably polite, professional and extremely thankful for their time and contributions.

Over and above the potential impact of the data produced by this study, the method of in-depth telephone interview may present a contribution to methods and I would like to develop this further in a future publication. However, perhaps *the proof of the method is in the data*, to coin a phrase, and I will therefore leave the reader to judge on this basis when that data is presented below.

It is suggested (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015) that the less structured the approach adopted in interviews the greater the skill required by the interviewer but in addition that a research culture that has developed from a positivistic perspective has traditionally prioritised the idea of ‘method’ over ‘skill’. This position is clearly evolving in research terms and I would suggest that the work of feminist research emphasising the skills of communication and exchange during the interview process has aided this development. Aligned to the ethic of care discussed earlier; the interest in the personal to illuminate the wider context; and as a counter discourse to the masculinised neoliberal agenda which prioritises route processes over relational exchanges, the approach adopted in this research has focussed on the fine tuning of the researchers skills rather than the technocratic method.

Whilst some feminist researchers (discussed in Rienharz, 1992) may well advocate the use of self-disclosure, it was not a position I chose to take nor would I see it as particularly appropriate as it may limit the contributions offered by the interviewee. In addition the interview in research is constructed so as to provide the researcher with data, but there might also be something offered in return and which could be the opportunity for the interviewee to talk about themselves. Why then should they be interested in the researcher’s disclosures? In social work there is a balance where the practitioner shares just enough to present as a real person, but not so much as to skew the nature of the relationship or the interviewee as the priority. It is what Leyard, Keegan and Ward (2003) refer to as empathy without over-involvement. My reflection then is that the confidence, experience and skills I have gained as a social worker were all employed during these interviews and amount to what is also well documented as good research interview practice.

The other unexpected consequence of this experience in interviewing was that many of the participants chose to share their feelings, their anxieties and their fears. As such, at the end of the interview process I was left with a strong sense of those feelings and indeed commitment to the people who had given me their time. There are apparent parallels with feminist ideas for interview based on an ethic of commitment (Reinharz, 1992) which is also noted to be liable to expose interviewers to stress (p. 34). Indeed, it is interesting that I recall saying to a colleague at the end of the interviews that I felt like I needed '*social work supervision*', in that I wanted somewhere to take the feelings I had been left with by the interviewees. This is a common tool in social work practice, but not necessarily something I expected to need at the end of research interviews. It is also true to say that the feelings I was left with stayed with me, long after the conversational detail. Reinharz (1992) documents such reactions through the use of feminist research interview techniques stating that:

'...these reactions occur, I believe, because feminist researchers discover there is more pain in the interviewee's lives than they suspected' (p. 36).

The benefits of telephone interviews were additionally enhanced through the opportunity to not only record and store the data immediately in digital form, but also the lack of eye contact required and the use of a hands-free speaker phone allowed the additional taking of field notes throughout the interviews. Taking my own notes both assisted my focus on what was being said and gave me a secondary form of data record as recommended by Basit (2010) and Denscombe (2014). I was additionally able to conduct the interviews in comfort and confidentially at my own desk at home where recording was done with relative ease.

3.6.4 Limitations to the interviews:

It is not suggested that the interview sample here is necessarily representative of the population of social work academics in the UK. It is a snap-shot of interview data from self-nominated volunteers who have come forward to be interviewed for this study. It is more than possible that interview participants with a background of working in the delivery of social care will themselves hold critical views towards the introduction and expansion of a business model within the university system. It is likely that the population will hold critical views about the use of student fees and market tactics in the administration of higher education. Whilst this does not negate the validity of their reported experience or views expressed, it would be naïve as a researcher not to

acknowledge these factors. However, as insightful and self-aware academics and in the main ethically driven social work professionals, it is also possible that the participants spoke candidly and openly in this research out of a genuine sense of concern. Indeed, as the content and data from the interviews will later demonstrate the main driver for those being interviewed in this research appears to have been a concern for the quality and future of social work education and its impact on the profession to which they are highly committed. There is little in the data that indicates any of these individuals had a specific political or philosophical axe to grind.

Another potential drawback often cited regarding the use of interviews as a means of gathering data is the risk of interviewer bias or ‘the interviewer effect’ (Denscombe 2014 p. 189). In this instance the possibility may be magnified by my role as researcher-practitioner. However, it is fully acknowledged that the method of interview used here did not set out to create an objective or quasi-scientific exchange between researcher and subject. It is equally acknowledged that the interview is

‘...a subjective experience’ (Basit 2010 p. 115).

It has also been highlighted by feminist researchers in particular (Oakley, 1981; Rienharz, 1992; Hesse-Biber, 2011) that it is specifically within this subjectivity that real relational dialogue is able to take place in an interview situation and therefore more likely to produce fruitful and valid data, as well as a mutually beneficial experience. Women’s speaking to women researchers for example, has often been suggested to be a useful way of obtaining rich data where sensitive topics are being considered. Using the same rationale I would suggest that using peer research as a means of investigating sensitive professional issues, such as the topic under examination here, is more and not less likely to elicit valid and reliable data where interviewees have felt comfortable to speak openly and spontaneously to someone who identifies with their situation.

That being said I was very aware of the potential for my own experience and views to potentially influence the data through the use of leading questions and prompts for example. Indeed, even the chosen research question may have made inherent assumptions and with hindsight might have been worded differently. In an effort to manage any bias and after discussion with my supervisors it was suggested that I make my written own statement detailing my experience and views on the topic as if I were a participant. In this way I would be able to identify my own biases in advance of conducting the interviews and through that awareness guard against them as Basit (2010) suggests. This was a useful

exercise although it must be stressed that my own statement is recorded confidentially and purely for my own use with no intention that it would be incorporated into the data.

In the same way that the possible methods of interviewing exist on a continuum between the detached-structured approach and the relational-unstructured conversation, there is a parallel continuum between the role of the interviewer as an objective-observer and an involved co-curator of the interview. Clearly the approach taken here is more aligned to the latter end of the continuum which highlights the benefits of aiming to create an interview situation which is a naturalistic and two-way exchange between two people. This perspective is summarised by Fontana and Frey (1998) in their account of the interview as an art of science, they state that interviewers:

‘...no longer remain objective, faceless interviewers, but become human beings and must disclose ourselves, learning about ourselves as we learn about others... to learn about people we must remember to treat them as people, and they will uncover their lives to us’(p. 73).

The final limitation which I would like to highlight is in relation to the nature of the interviewees in this particular study as insightful academics who are very ‘research-savvy’, that is to say they are a population who are aware of how the research might be used and how to present themselves to create a desired outcome. Indeed many of those who were interviewed were far more qualified and experienced in research terms than me. This presented a different possible power dynamic than in most interview situations and there is the possibility that interviewees presented their data in a less than naturalistic way to exaggerate their own agenda. For the few interviewees who had clearly prepared what they intended to say in advance there may have been an element of them stamping their own mark on the data and given the way the research was designed this opportunity was fully open to them. So then, the implicit limitation to all methods of data gathering from individuals is that the data shared will only ever be the interpretation that they choose to present through the use of language which is itself an ambiguous medium to be then interpreted by the researcher and subsequently by the reader of the study. The contribution of the interviewees is therefore a version of their lived experience which is undoubtedly presented within the research context in a way which may represent their reality to a greater or lesser extent, but there can never be guarantees on this. Giddens’ notion (1986, 1987) of a ‘double-hermeneutic’ acknowledges the layers of interpretation that exist within

social research where participants bring their own interpretation of events and experiences which are in turn further interpreted by the researcher.

3.7 Data Analysis Method

Data analysis in qualitative research seeks to shed light on the topic of enquiry through the amalgamation, interpretation and presentation of material provided by the research sample. In this case data has been provided by way of 78 completed questionnaires and 18 spoken interviews or equivalent. There is some debate as to whether decisions regarding method of analysis should have been made in advance of data collection with thoughts on the one hand that it may have narrowed the scope and parameters of the questions raised (Feldman, 1995) and on the other, that being aware of the method of analysis in advance may have created more focus and clarity with regard to the data required. It was however my aim to avoid narrowing the nature of the data gained, to allow participants to set their own agenda in interviews and therefore in keeping with the methodological stance throughout this work, my method of data analysis has evolved with a focus on the original research question and a consistent plan to present the eventual findings in thematic form. I am mindful that no method of analysis is without limits or some level of researcher influence:

‘...no research is totally value-free as all research is carried out by humans. Even when sophisticated tools are used to gather and analyse data, it is an individual who interprets the findings of the research and conveys them to an audience’. (Basit, 2010. pg. 7).

Transparency, self-awareness and criticality is therefore central to the approach taken. I reiterate though that this section examines the analysis methods employed *so far*, since I adopt the position that the process of data analysis begins during data collection and continues throughout the write-up stage and potentially beyond. Briggs et al (2012) state of the writing-up of research:

‘As you construct an argument based on what you have done, the things you have seen and heard, the people you have worked with and the data you have handled, some more analysis is not just permissible, it is inevitable’. (p. 394).

Indeed, the processes of organising, describing, interpreting, analysis and presenting findings appears to be a continuous, non-sequential and dynamic task in qualitative research rather than a one-off activity (Basit, 2003; Cohen et al, 2007, Richardson 2003, Wolcott 1994). In this sense, initial analysis will not be complete until the thesis is finished

and even then there will undoubtedly be potential for further analysis later when writing for publication.

3.7.1 Reflective account of Thematic Analysis design:

I made the decision to approach the process of data analysis in a systematic and transparent way and to look towards strategies involving minimal interpretation on my part. In short and as far as possible I would like the data to speak for itself (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Invariably there was a need to reduce, summarise and organise the data and I fully acknowledge that some level of interpretation is inevitable. However, the data sample were an informed and articulate group of academic professionals who were asked to give examples and views relating to the research question rendering additional interpretation, search for hidden meanings or inference on my part somewhat inappropriate. I am aware that the data did reach a deeper level and in some instances participants shared their feelings and anxieties with me which produced data beyond the remit of the research question. The data analysis method adopted then is primarily as set out by Guest et al (2012) and referred to as ‘Applied Thematic Analysis’ with additional guidance from the work of Basit (2010), Briggs et al (2012), Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), and Miles and Huberman (1994, 2002).

Although there is not any one approach or systematic process assigned to the use of thematic analysis in qualitative data, Guest et al (2012) highlight that to convince other researchers and policy makers of the validity of findings requires the demonstration of an evidence based process rather than simply the telling of a good story using quotations is required. They liken the approach to many of the core aspects of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) with links to phenomenology (Husserl, 1982) being noted through the emphasis on *giving voice to the other*. They also describe the approach as pragmatic, systematic, somewhat positivistic as well as being efficient in terms of resources. For the purpose of this study therefore the method provided a suitable guide, although applied critically rather than rigidly in keeping with the needs and stance of this project.

Like all approaches to thematic analysis of interview data the method involves the initial transcribing of audio data to written form which can be done verbatim, can involve the use of computer software, may involve the services of a commissioned transcriber or can be done by the researcher. To transcribe is by definition an interpretive process. Whilst the use of computer software is considered optional in this method it is also noted that for small studies the use of facilities such as Nvivo may be time consuming involving training

and may also risk meaning and context being lost through the isolation of words using what is a highly positivist process. Although such technically driven processes appear extremely scientific, in many ways they seek to quantify qualitative data and in so doing may lose a great deal of nuanced meaning. It was therefore my decision to both transcribe and analyse the data manually which involved a great deal of physical cutting and pasting and the use of large cardboard displays on which to organise the data segments (Appendix 6 provides images). This process also proved to provide an added degree of data immersion and emphasises the ‘crafting’ research process in action.

Both Guest et al (2012) and Miles and Huberman (1994) additionally advocate the design and use of a ‘Contact Summary Sheet’ as a means of standardising and abbreviating the data recorded in the transcribed interviews. In relation to my project I made the decision to transcribe the interview data myself which would also serve as a method of immersion. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) highlight that the process of transcribing literally means ‘to transform... from one state to another’ (p. 204) which invariably requires an element of interpretation. After some reflection I became concerned that simply isolating the spoken words of participants without context and the meaning ascribed by me as the listener may be misleading (Mills et al, 2010) and that since I was party to the conversations, I was best placed to carry out any necessary interpretation. Breaking down the process adopted into stages, the method of analysis is set out as follows:

1. Back-up copies of audio recorded interviews were made and stored securely under coded and fully anonymised names.
2. All subsequent transcriptions and written records were additionally anonymised using the same coding and cross-referenced to the participants questionnaire.
3. All consent emails are retained electronically and securely stored for reference if required.
4. A contact summary sheet was designed.
5. Interviews were listened to once in full and the contact was summarised under standardised headings on the designed sheet.
6. Interviews were the listened to and transcribed excluding any ‘small-talk’ or conversation unrelated to the research question. Full dialogue and researcher interventions were not routinely recorded but rather the spoken words of participants, with prompt questions only added where it was necessary to give context to the comments made. Dialogue was set out in chunks/segments rather

than line by line and later identifying codes were ascribed to each of these interview segments.

7. As a first stage of rudimentary coding, each interview was then colour coded to broadly identify at a glance where the data set out positive experience (green), negative experience (red), the participants opinion (purple) and overtly expressed feelings (blue).
8. Field notes were additionally typed up as a third form of written record and source of possible cross reference/clarification of meaning.
9. Working initially with the data summary sheets which set out data in standardised format, it was quickly possible to identify recurrent broad themes by cutting sections and from each interview and grouping under headings.
10. Using the colour coding system it was equally possible to cut each interview into coded segments and organise data into broad categories of positive and negative experiences, of opinions given, and of expressed feelings.
11. Stages 6 & 7 listed above therefore enabled initial broad findings to be identified. This formed the basis of a conference presentation in July 2016 and an article submitted for publication in October 2016.
12. Using a further copy of the transcribed interviews again cut into segments open coding was then used to extract more detailed thematic groupings or clusters.
13. Clear definitions of each code were recorded to ensure a consistent rationale for organisation.
14. Finally core themes and subthemes were identified based largely on repetition and typologies identified from within the segments, with some selective attention also given to isolated topics which appeared of specific interest. Here I am aware that my insight as a practitioner-researcher was used subjectively to give focus to issues which I felt may have significance within the field based on my prior reading.
15. In the final write-up of findings themes will be considered and explored alongside current theories and other research relating to the marketisation of universities.
16. Implications, conclusions and recommendations from this research will then be set out.

Moving then to the analysis of questionnaire data, again it was my decision to display the results in as clear and accessible form as possible with minimal initial interpretation on my part. Since the questionnaire design was largely deductive, closed coding of answers was

possible and organisation in to diagrammatic form. Using Survey Monkey as a storage facility additionally enabled the use of appropriate software to produce the statistics and tables displayed in the next chapter. This also allowed for safe and confidential storage of data. Qualitative comments are additionally organised thematically using an abbreviation of the process set out above. All questionnaire data recorded in paper and electronic form has been fully anonymised, coded and securely held.

3.7.2 Validity and Reliability

‘The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness and “confirmability” – that is, their *validity*’. (Miles and Huberman 1994 p. 11)

‘...reliability relates to the probability that repeating a research procedure or method would produce identical or similar results’. (Briggs et al 2015 p.76)

Having defined the concepts of data validity and reliability it is important here to note, as Guest et al (2012 p.83) do, that the concept of reliability is often held as less significant in relation to qualitative studies since the possibility of repeating procedures with any real exactitude is practically impossible. However, they emphasise the notion that *dependability* and *accuracy* should be embedded into the research design. Likewise in relation to validity, terms such as *credibility* or *trustworthiness* are discussed as giving a slightly different emphasis whilst maintaining the principle to aim towards. Every method of research is however bound to have limitations, the *swings and roundabouts* of any research project means that in order to enhance some features it may be necessary to compromise others. It is through the acknowledgement of these design-led decisions that the reader is enabled to make an informed decision regarding the credibility and accuracy of any findings.

Limitations of the methods of analysis will be discussed in the next section but Guest et al (2012) give clear guidance in relation to processes which can be embedded into a project to enhance the objectives of validity and reliability which have been incorporated into the methods of analysis used here in the following ways:

Transparency

Alongside the clear and detailed record provided of the methods used in this study, a detailed research diary and audit trail of processes has been maintained. Authenticity has

been sought through the honest and reflective account of evolving methods in relation to analysis of raw data provided.

Triangulation

Although this was not part of the purposeful study design, since data is provided from two distinct streams in this research, a level of triangulation will be expected when presenting findings, with echoes of the themes emerging from the interview data also being present in the responses and comments on the questionnaires. In addition, establishing four records of each interview (audio recording, field notes, summary sheets and transcriptions) also provided some degree of triangulation as well as depth of context and data immersion.

External review

As a recommended part of the process (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Guest et al 2012, Miles and Huberman 1994) it is suggested that peers who are not involved in the project are asked to review the processes of analysis and ‘probe for potential biases’ (Guest et al pg. 93). This took place in November 2016 using a group of peer researchers who were briefed to carry out this role after a brief presentation. Details of that exchange were audio recorded, used to review the methods used and kept as a source of reference. Embedded within the doctoral research process is also review from supervisors and a critical reader who have each examined the process of analysis in detail.

Respondent validation

Initial findings of this project were presented to the same conference forum where the data was gathered in July 2016 (12 months after data collection). Many of the participants were in the audience and the findings presented were received as credible and authentic. In addition, initial findings have now been written up and submitted for publication in the *British Journal of Social Work*. Participants will be notified directly when results are published.

Negative case inclusion

To avoid the possible criticism that the researcher may be drawn by examples which supports their own position, Guest et al (2012) recommend that within the coding process the researcher should actively seek out ‘deviant cases’ or contradictory data. This has been explicitly done during the data analysis process and interviews or questionnaires where the data is *against the tide* of the general findings will be highlighted and discussed.

Management of personal bias

Finally as a practitioner and peer researcher I have been very aware from the outset that my own experience and views could be criticised as having an impact on the data analysis, particularly relating to selective attention and the possibility of confirmation bias. This is something that was reflected on at an early stage within doctoral supervision and the suggestion made that I make a written record of my own responses to the interview task *as if I were a participant* was made. In this way I made a conscious record of my own position and possible bias which was used as a source of reference whilst reviewing the interview data and in relation to the emergence of themes. The use of a consistent, systematic and positivistic process of thematic analysis rather than an interpretivist and highly inductive model was also designed to eradicate this possibility and allay any such criticism. As an academic in the field, I am very aware of the potentially controversial nature of disseminating the findings of this study and the possibility that those findings could be negated due to the perception of researcher bias was one which I have guarded against from the outset however, I am involved and working in the field where this research took place and this is an undeniable reality. Whilst any potential bias can never be fully eradicated, there is also the potential that as an insider, I have been more sensitive to and indeed aware of the implications of the data.

3.7.3 Limitations of method of analysis:

There is an inherent problem regarding the analysis of words both in interview data and qualitative comments on the questionnaires in this study. That problem related to the fact that words are themselves a subjective interpretation (Cohen et al, 2007) spoken or written, which is then reinterpreted by the researcher to form something of a ‘double hermeneutic’ (Giddens, 1979) effect. Written-up or presented findings are additionally interpreted by the reader or audience with an equally subjective focus. In short, communication using words is a flawed medium to start with and the words spoken by participants can be interpreted very differently by the time they are disseminated. The rationale of the method used in this research is that as an active participant in the interview conversation, attuned to the tone and context of the comments made, I am better placed to give meaning to those words than someone considering them alone and without context or indeed a piece of computer software. Words are indeed context sensitive, nuanced and can carry many meanings which may operate by different rules and traditions depending on the age, gender, class or race of the user for example. Such nuances can only really be picked up using the

sensitivity of involvement in a conversation which is a two way process. The words the participants chose to use during telephone interviews were selected with Me as the audience, having met or at least heard me speak at the earlier conference and engaged in a level of communication with me prior to sharing their data. I maintain then, that the subjectivity of my interpretation is potentially the most accurate. Words as a means of communication may well be flawed, constructed and indeed limited but they serve as a pretty effective communication tool in most walks of life some of which are technically, academically or emotionally sensitive.

However, the analytic method did not seek to look explicitly for deeper or hidden meaning in this research. Pauses and intonation were not explicitly considered and responses of participants were in the main recorded literally. Methods of subjective interpretation, the detailed study of 'Hermeneutics', a method originally used for the interpretation of biblical passages, may well be something that was possible with this data but not considered appropriate or necessary. However, the method of transcription employed clearly involved a level of interpretation as well as incorporating the initial stages of analysis. This method of transcription chosen was specifically to allow context to be included at an early stage of analysis. Through my own role as transcriber and repetitive listening to the interviews I was able to revisit the context and conversations and in so doing reproduce the words in written form with as much of the original meaning as possible. Since the analysis was only planned to be literal, it was considered unnecessary in the main to record my own interjections in interview, or any discussion that was not focussed on the topic. General niceties, opening and closing dialogue was therefore omitted from the transcription. However, the field notes, summaries and retained audio recordings did provide additional source material for more detailed examination as required.

Briggs et al (2015) raise the question as to whether spoken words should be tidied-up when transcribed. There were rare grammatical corrections made in the transcriptions, where it was considered necessary to eradicate any possible misinterpretation of meaning. Denscombe (2014) fully supports the notion of selective transcription, although he states that any level of 'tidying' tends to detract from the authenticity of the words spoken.

Since the research results will be written-up in their final form in the next chapter, reflections on the chosen method of data analysis relating to research findings will be

considered later when further discussion and contextual analysis takes place in chapter five.

3.8 Chapter summary:

This chapter has set out the methodological stance which is at the core of my doctoral study. Using a highly reflective approach to the documentation of methods, it has exemplified the learning-in-action that has taken place whilst designing this research project. Such an approach has sought to demonstrate, in a very practical sense, the influence of the American school of pragmatist philosophy focussing particularly on the seminal guide of C. Wright Mills, and the influence of models of critical reflection. As such the chapter has sought to communicate the research ‘paradigm’ in an applied sense, without the need to predefine or label this.

No single approach or pre-prescribed ‘method’ has been used in this project and my stance has remained consistently critical of such a position. Although the research adopts a combination of methods, I have not sought to produce what has become known as a ‘mixed methods study’.

The study has been presented as an evolving piece of research and critically reflective learning at this doctoral level which will use questionnaire and interviews to gather primary data from a sample of social work academics. It should be stressed that the former of these two data streams is intended largely as a means by which to engage participation from the sample cluster. As such, greater emphasis will be placed on interview data in the presentation of results which will be set out thematically in the next chapter. A decision has been made to set out the results as they were chronologically collected in chapter four, prior to analysis of meaning and discussion of findings which takes place in chapter five.

Chapter 4: Research Results

‘...an event or process can be neither interpreted nor understood until it has been well described. However, the age of objective description is over.’

(Denzin 1998 p.323)

This chapter will present an outline of research results collected from both questionnaires and interviews. Results from each data stream are displayed in turn before summary from across the sets. Chapter five will then continue the process of analysis and extract the suggested research findings which will then be each discussed in full focussing on contextual implications. In this way the links between the ‘micro’ detail of the personal experiences and opinions provided in the data set out in this chapter will be transposed into their ‘macro’ policy implications in the next. A clear method, rationale and theoretical thread will be maintained throughout this process and discussion.

The rationale behind the use of two separate data streams was primarily to use the brief questionnaire to engage awareness in the research and seek interview participation. It was intended that the questionnaire would also provide supplementary data using a ‘broader lens’ perspective but that the qualitative interviews would form the basis of substantive data.

Although no statistical significance has been sought from this questionnaire (see Appendix 2) some differentials are examined by way of setting the scene for the interview results which follow. Participant information gathered was therefore limited but focus is given to the ‘type’ of university in which each participant is situated based on the era in which the institution gained university status. Questionnaire data has additionally been divided into two parts; firstly setting-out the results from the scaled section of the questionnaire, and secondly from the qualitative comments made in the space provided by some participants. A more detailed analysis of the profile of participants who made qualitative comments has also been presented, considering this cohort as a small subgroup among respondents which does allow some profiling to take place.

The primary aim of the interviews was to allow more detailed and nuanced data to emerge through the voice and experience of participants. Interview results are presented thematically using key topics as they have emerged from the research question using the process of analysis set out in the last chapter. There is a strong focus on the use of direct

quotation with as little filtering as possible in the display provided here. Whilst such an approach may not always be engaging in qualitative research, this was a design decision to allow the data to stand alone in the first instance with minimal discussion. This is to enable the reader to begin to form their own analysis based on experience and is in keeping with the overall methodological stance of the study where audience and participants are seen as active parties to the research process. In addition, given that this was a well-informed group of participants who were asked directly about the research topic, authenticity is added allowing their own words to stand alone with minimal filtering in the first instance. As the findings and contribution to knowledge will eventually suggest, giving voice to a group of social work academics on this topic will emerge as a very important element of the study. Such an approach also acts to validate the suggested findings.

4.1 Questionnaire Data

4.1.1 Questionnaire Sample

Questionnaire data was gathered from a convenience sample of social work academics attending a conference in summer 2015. The total eligible population cluster was 320 spanning across two conferences, out of which 78 eligible questionnaires were completed by a self-selected convenience sample.

Academic position of participants:

As table 4.1 below indicates, the sample of participants covers the core spectrum of academic roles within universities with by far the highest representation being from lecturer and senior lecturer level. Two participants did not respond to this question.

Table 4.1 Academic Position of Participants

Academic position (self-defined)	Number	Proportion of sample
Senior Lecturer	33	42.31%
Lecturer	15	19.23%
Teaching Fellow/Tutor	8	10.26%
Course Lead	4	5.13%
Head of Department	3	3.85%
Researcher	5	6.41%
Principal Lecturer	2	2.56%
Professor	6	7.69%
Unknown	2	2.56%

Years spent working in the higher education sector:

There was a wealth of experience among the questionnaire respondents with few early-career academics included in the sample as seen below in table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Years Employed in Higher Education

Number of years employed in higher education	Number of participants	Proportion of sample
Less than 5 years	15	19.23%
5 to 10 years	27	34.62%
More than 10 years	30	38.46%
Unknown	6	7.69%

Geographic location of university in the UK:

It was considered important that the study had representation from across the UK and participants were therefore asked to indicate in which of the four nations they were located giving the following results set out in Figure 2 indicating some level of representation from across the UK:

Table 4.3 Geographic Location of Participants

Location of University	Number	Proportion of sample
England	69	88.4%
Scotland	2	2.6%
<i>Wales</i>	2	2.6%
<i>Northern Ireland</i>	1	1.3%
<i>Not known</i>	4	5.1%

The era in which the participants' employing institution gained university status:

From the outset of this study there was a question as to whether or not different 'types' of university provide the same experience and response to marketisation. Some literature suggests (Collini 2012) that there may be differences between the climate of marketisation in new universities, most of which are former polytechnics, and longer established institutions. It was decided that this variable could be captured by the year in which each institution was established and these were divided into three categories (Pre 1960; Between 1960 and 1990; Post 1990). As Table 4.4 below indicates, participation in the questionnaire had a high level of representation from all three categories of university with more participation from the newer sector that now provide most places for the university based study of social work (see page 70 for full breakdown of university provision).

Table 4.4 Era in which employing institution gained university status

Era in which university status was gained	Number of respondents	Proportion of sample
Pre 1960	21	26.92%
Between 1960 and 1990	21	26.92%
Post 1990	31	39.75%
Not recorded	5	6.41%

It is also useful to note the number of average number of years participants have spent working in the sector based on the age of employing institution. Details listed below show that those academics based in older institutions tended to have more years experience in the sector:

- Pre 1960: 13.9 years
- 1960-1990: 12.06 years
- Post 1990: 8.52 years

4.1.2 Scaled Question Responses (set out in full in Figure 4.1):

The substantive questionnaire data were collected from questions asking participants to indicate using a tick-box scaling system if they had experienced ‘less’, ‘more’ or ‘no change’ in relation to the factors listed in Figure 4.1.

Whilst some did not answer all questions, all participants engaged in this part of the questionnaire. Responses indicate that a majority of participants report an increase in factors which are associated with growing marketisation within institutions. This includes observed increase in emphasis on *income generation* where 93.42% of participants have reported an increase, and *emphasis on the NSS/ league tables* with 93.33% of respondents stating this had increased since they joined the sector. The *use of performance management tools* was reported to have increased by 81.33% of respondents as well as *systems dedicated to marketing* reported by 73.61% of respondents. *Difficulty finding placements* was reported to have increased by 69.86% of respondents and *more prescriptive curriculum* was also reported to have increased by 67.57% of the sample. More use of *modularised teaching methods* was noted by 65.28% of those who responded and the *use of part time/temporary staff* by 60.27%.

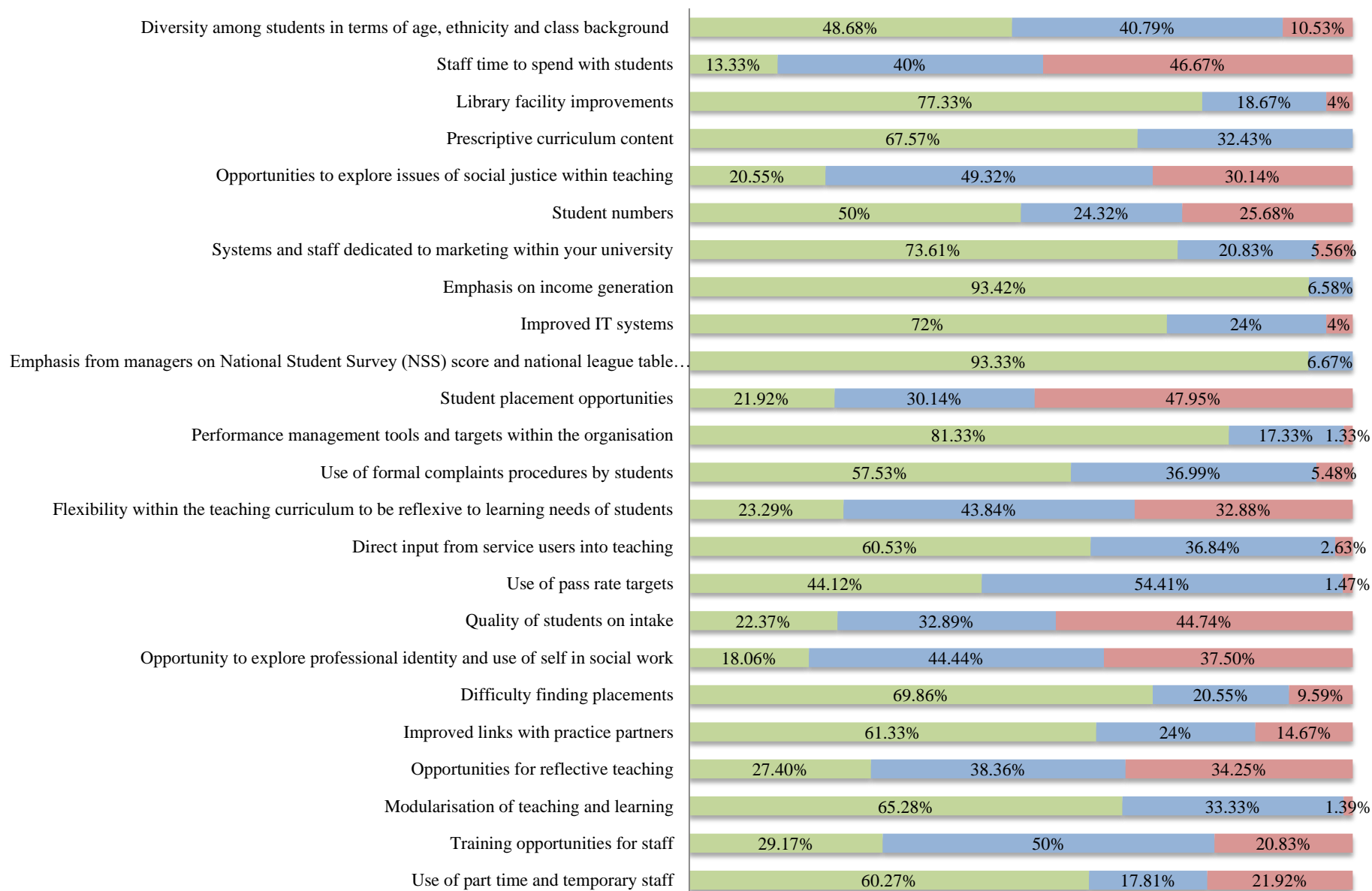
Responses also indicate an increase in improved facilities associated with marketisation including *the quality of library services* where 77.33% of respondents reported an improvement, alongside *improved IT facilities* reported by 72% of the sample. Improved *links with partner agencies* were also reported by 61.33% of respondents.

Additionally there are a relatively high number of respondents who have reported a decrease in *student placement opportunities* where 47.95% observed a fall and *staff time to spend with students* was seen to be decreasing by 46.67% of participants. A similar number (44.74%) of participants also reported an observed fall in the quality of students on intake.

These data also provide an opportunity to explore if factors are experienced at the same levels across the university sector using the three categories of institution set out in Figure 4.1. Examining each of the factors in turn, any notable differences in reported experience are highlighted in the following section.

Figure 4.1 Scaled Responses

■ MORE ■ NO CHANGE ■ LESS



4.1.3 Examination of responses by category of university:

This section seeks to examine each of the factors set out in Figure 4.1 and to break down any notable differences in the responses from those working in the three chosen categories of university (pre-1960, post-1960 to 1990 and post-1990). There is some difference in the number of participants from each category which can be seen in Figure 4.1. This has been taken into account in the discussion below which uses percentages of respondents from each category. Considering each of the factors listed in Figure 2.1 in turn:

Diversity among students in terms of age, ethnicity and class background

As Figure 4.1 shows, the majority of respondents indicated that they have observed more diversity (48.68%) or no change in the student demographic (40.79%) whilst working in the university sector. It is perhaps worth noting however that a small number conversely indicate less diversity among students (10.53%) during the time they have worked in higher education. Here it appears worth pausing to cross reference to the interview data (pp.132 – 134) where some academics have discussed their concerns regarding the lack of diversity of students. This would appear to be concentrated in older universities whose admissions policy is academically higher. Here the student intake is reported by some interview participants as becoming younger, and made up of predominantly white, female students. This topic focuses attention on the issue that institutions are not necessarily a homogenous body and that they potentially cater to the needs of different populations. This will be expanded upon in detail in the next chapter.

Staff time to spend with students

Almost half the total sample (46.67%) indicated that they have experienced a decrease in the time they have to spend with students. However, when comparisons are made across the three categories of institution, there is some disparity worth highlighting. Among respondents from both categories of institution established prior to 1990, there was an equal figure of around 30% of participants who report that they have experienced a decrease in the time they have to spend with students. However, in the case of those employed at newer institutions 66% of respondents report a decrease in time to spend with students indicating that this change may be felt strongly in this part of the sector. Details are set out in the table 4.5 below. It is again worth noting that conversely between 6.6% and 20% of participants report having more time to spend with students. There is a general similarity in results within the first two categories of

university and a marked difference which emerges in responses from those based in post 1990 institutions.

Table 4.5 Staff time to spend with students

University established	More	Less	No change
Pre 1960	20%	30%	50%
1960 - 1990	19%	28.6%	52.4%
Post 1990	6.6%	66.7%	26.7%

Library facility improvements

There is a high level of consensus from participants across the sector that library facilities have improved and this appears to have been most markedly experienced in the longest established pre-1960 institutions where 95.24% of respondents report an improvement. This was notably higher than in universities established between 1960 and 1990 (65%) and after 1990 (76.67%).

Prescriptive curriculum content

There is some agreement across the sector that there has been an increase in the prescriptive nature of curriculum. The reported levels do differ however, in that participants from newer universities established post 1990 report the least change (62.07%). Alongside this 80% of respondents from universities established between 1960 and 1990 experienced more prescriptive curriculum and 71.43% from the oldest institutions.

Opportunities to explore issues of social justice within teaching

This was an issue raised in some literature as being potentially a cause for concern with some suggesting that too much emphasis was being placed on social justice and others indicating that such opportunities were diminishing. Just over half of respondents from each category of university indicate no change has been observed in relation to this issue (see Figure 4.1). 30.14% indicate a decrease in opportunities to explore social justice and just over 20% say opportunities are increasing. This therefore appears to be an issue where there is little consensus or pattern across the data set.

Student numbers

Half (50%) of the total sample indicate that student numbers have risen during their time working in the university sector. However, although that proportion is consistent across all three categories, there is almost the same proportion of respondents indicating that student numbers have fallen in universities founded pre 1960 which is not reportedly the case in the other two categories of institution. Details are set out in table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6 Student numbers

University established	More	Less	No change
Pre 1960	47.6%	42.9%	9.5%
1960 - 1990	47.6%	19%	33.4%
Post 1990	55.2%	20.7%	24.1%

Systems and staff dedicated to marketing within your university

Within the total sample 73.61% of respondents indicate an increase in systems dedicated to marketing and this figure is largely echoed (75%) among respondents from pre 1960 universities. However, a disparity appears in the newer, post 1990 institutions where a higher proportion (83.4%) indicates a greater focus on marketing. In universities established after 1960 but before 1990 only 57.9% of respondents indicate experiencing such an increase. Details are set out below in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7 Systems and staff dedicated to marketing

University established	More	Less	No change
Pre 1960	75%	5%	20%
1960 - 1990	57.9%	10.5%	31.6%
Post 1990	83.4%	3.3%	13.3%

Emphasis on income generation

This is the area where a very high level of consensus is reported with 93.42% of respondents from across the sector indicating experiencing an increased emphasis on income generation which given changes to funding, appears unsurprising and consistent across the sample.

Improved IT systems

IT systems are identified as having improved by the majority of those working in the sector with a higher percentage of respondents (85.71%) from pre 1960 universities indicating that they have witnessed such an improvement. This stands out against the newest universities (68.97%) and those established between 1960 and 1990 (66.67%) which were very similar.

Emphasis from managers on National Student Survey (NSS) score and national league table placement

Alongside income generation this was an area where consensus was high in that 93.33% of all respondents indicated increased emphasis on the NSS and league tables which was consistent (with less than 2% variation) throughout the sample groups.

Student placement opportunities

47.95% of respondents indicate that placement opportunities are falling. This factor appears to be most significantly experienced in the older established universities (75%) whilst respondents from the other two categories report 38.1% (1960-1990) and 38.10% (post-1990) respectively.

Performance management tools and targets within the organisation

81.33% of all respondents have reported experiencing a rise in the use of performance management tools and targets. There is some disparity in this response from across those working in different categories of university however, with those working within newer universities appearing to note more change as set out in table 4.8 below:

Table 4.8 Use of performance management tools and targets

University established	More	Less	No change
Pre 1960	80%	20	0
1960 - 1990	71.43%	28.57%	0
Post 1990	86.67%	10%	3.33%

Use of formal complaints procedures by students

The use of formal complaints is reported to have increased by 57.53% of total respondents but this percentage is 71.4% of respondents from universities founded prior to 1960. Details are set out in Table 4.9 below.

Table 4.9 Use of formal complaints procedures

University established	More	Less	No change
Pre 1960	71.4%	4.8%	23.8%
1960 - 1990	55%	0	45%
Post 1990	48.3%	10.3%	41.4%

Flexibility within the teaching curriculum to be reflexive to learning needs of students

Results in this area indicate mixed experiences which are evenly spread throughout the sector with similar numbers having experienced more, less and no change and that pattern repeated in responses from each category.

Direct input from service users into teaching

Again, this is an area where a high proportion of all respondents indicate having experienced an increase in service user input. This figure appears to be experienced more widely by those within older establishments as set out Table 4.10.

Table 4.10 Direct input from service users

University established	More	Less	No change
Pre 1960	65%	5%	30
1960 - 1990	71.43%	23.81%	4.76%
Post 1990	50%	50%	0

Use of pass rate targets

The increase in the use of pass rate targets is something that is experienced by 44.12% of the whole sample, although this is somewhat lower in the middle band of universities established after 1960 but prior to 1990 where 36.84% indicate an increase. Responses are mixed in each of the categories however, indicating no clear pattern of experience.

Quality of students on intake

The findings here indicate that 44.74% of all respondents feel that admissions standards are falling and this figure is similar throughout the sector. However, another 32.89% reported no change in this respect and 22% of all respondents indicated that the quality of students on intake had increased. A breakdown of responses from each category of university is provided in Table 4.11 below.

Table 4.11 Quality of students on intake

University established	More	Less	No change
Pre 1960	20%	45%	35%
1960 - 1990	23.81%	38.1%	38.1%
Post 1990	20%	46.67%	33.33%

Opportunity to explore professional identity and use of self in social work

Responses to this question appear evenly spread among the three possible answers and replicated closely across the sector. 37.50% of participants felt these opportunities had fallen although 44.44% reported no change, with 18.06% of respondents feeling that these opportunities had improved.

Difficulty finding placements

There is a high level of experience indicating difficulty finding placements throughout the sector (69.86%), which is a well-documented problem at the current time with increased student numbers and diminishing resources within social work practice settings. Findings here indicate that this may be more strongly felt by the oldest universities where 78.95% of respondents from those working in universities established prior to 1960 report more difficulty in this area.

Improved links with practice partners

Improved links with practice partners is reported as having increased by 61.33% of academics in this data. Reports are marginally higher from those working in newer universities (66.67%) and lower from those in the other categories with 55% (pre 1960) and 52.38% (1960-90) reported respectively.

Opportunities for reflective teaching

Reports of academic experience relating to the opportunities for reflective teaching appear to be well spread across the three possible answers with no consensus emerging. This pattern is repeated throughout each category of university.

Modularisation of teaching and learning

This is reported to be increasing by 65.28% of all respondents but expressed more strongly by those in the older institutions, where 85% of respondents report more modularisation. This is counteracted by the middle tier of institution founded after 1960 but before 1990 of whom only 52.6% report increased modularisation. Details are set out table 4.12 below.

Table 4.12 Modularisation of teaching

University established	More	Less	No change
Pre 1960	85%	0	15%
1960 - 1990	52.6%	5.3%	42.1%
Post 1990	65.5%	0	34.5%

Training opportunities for staff

Differing responses are reported by participants to this question with conflicting experiences which are evenly spread throughout the sector. 50% of participants reported no change in training opportunities, with 20.83% reporting more and 29.17% reporting less.

Use of part time and temporary staff

There appears to be some consensus of experience indicating more use of part time and temporary staff throughout the university sector although there is some disparity of reports from across the sector with the middle group (1960-90) appearing to have experienced more change in this respect. Details of each category are provided in table 4.13 below.

Table 4.13 Use of part time and temporary staff

University established	More	Less	No change
Pre 1960	52.63%	21.05%	26.32%
1960 - 1990	70%	15%	15%
Post 1990	60%	26.67%	13.33%

4.1.4 Summary of emerging picture based on scaled responses:

The scaled question responses from the 78 completed questionnaires offer an important contextual backdrop to the other data in this study and show trends of experience across the university sector as reported by social work academics. The total responses set out in Figure 2.1 indicate that those working in academic social work within UK universities have experienced a changing climate and increased evidence of marketisation in the sector. This is most profoundly felt through the emphasis on income generation, the focus on league tables, performance management tools and systems dedicated to marketing,

However, responses also indicate a diversity of experience among participants and a lack of consensus regarding many of the factors listed. Patterns of experience do emerge in different parts of the sector with those employed in the oldest institutions reporting greater improvements in IT and Library facilities alongside greater difficulty finding placement and more modularised teaching. Those from older universities also report more use of formal complaints among students.

Trends in responses from those employed in newer universities show the greatest reported increase in student numbers and use of performance management tools. They also have more participants who report a decrease in the quality of students on intake and time to spend with students.

Respondents from universities founded between 1960 and 1990 were the most likely to report an increase in the use of temporary and part time staff, an improved quality of student on intake, and slightly less reporting of increased marketing and use of performance management tools.

years in higher education for each respondent it was possible to work out average number of years in the sector for respondents in this sub group as follows:

- Pre 1960: 11.4 years
- 1960-1990: 7 years
- Post 1990: 5.6 years

In keeping with the details of the total sample set (see page 102) this appears to suggest that, at the current time at least, academics that are more established in the sector are more likely to be employed within older institutions. This will be a factor considered later when examining the data findings as a whole. Qualitative comments were then looked at again, and organised into groupings based on the type of institution where the author of each was employed. This was to consider if there is any notable difference in the qualitative observations from within each type of institution. However, on the whole qualitative comments were similar from each category and evenly spread across the sector, although comments relating to lack of diversity among students came from those working within the longer established institutions (pre 1990).

Five themes have emerged from qualitative comments on questionnaires: 1) League tables and the NSS; 2) Competing demands; 3) Student demographic, relationship and quality; and 4) General comments regarding the research topic. Each of these themes is set out in turn using samples of quotations from this small data set. Questionnaire response code is included alongside each quotation:

1) League tables and the NSS

Over a third of all qualitative comments made on the questionnaires included mention of the NSS and the word ‘obsession’ was used by three respondents. Others added exclamation marks and expressive wording to the multiple choice question where the NSS was mentioned. The tone of the general comments made in this respect is exemplified in this quotation from a Senior Lecturer employed in a newer university:

‘Everyone is obsessed with the NSS!! Isn’t necessarily a positive as students can be less satisfied with difficult and challenging content but this is necessary for them to understand the challenging practice environments’ (Q6).

Alongside the NSS respondents also commented on the demands of research targets in terms of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and pressures to gain publications in high impact journals:

'The current focus on numbers is not new. The obsessive focus on student survey scores is and the extreme focus on the REF is recent' (Q30)

'The pressure from my university is both getting good teaching scores... and also improving submissions in high impact journals' (Q8).

There was some commentary regarding the view that social work as a discipline appears to do less well in terms of research and income generation and one respondent felt that the nature of social work courses makes it more difficult to score highly in league tables. The demands of such measuring tools, the pressure they produce and criticality regarding the limits of their utility were the most consistent findings from the qualitative comments made:

'Social work academics perform less well compared to other colleagues... The problem is that placements etc. tend to make heads of department question SW's worth as the professional part of the course reduces research output' (Q8).

2) Competing demands

Linked to the pressure from league tables and targets was the sense from comments made that some participants were facing competing demands and stressors:

'As a teaching team we are expected to develop more programmes without additional staff – this is increased pressure and stress' (Q9).

Some respondents linked this to the demands of the NSS and commented that this was at a time of increased demands in other areas such as finding placements, student retention and research output. One commented that:

'...increasing teaching demands and more work needed to secure quality placements means that support offered to students becomes inconsistent and they feel unhappy about this and potentially undervalues – poor modelling of good practice really. This also means less time on research etc.' (Q31).

Although another respondent stressed that there is:

'...still some focus on values and producing high quality students!' (Q21)

The general tone of the comments made was that academics felt that they were facing competing demands and that this was stressful. One also commented on the working environment saying:

'The culture in HE is self-serving, individual and competitive.' (Q28)

3) Student demographic, relationship and quality

A number of respondents made reference to the student body in terms of numbers, diversity and quality. Three respondents commented on the lack of diversity among students which was not the majority view reflected in the rest of the questionnaire data. One referred to the lack of 'lived experience' among students and another stated:

'The major change is age. Many more 18 year olds wanting a job rather than seeing social work as a vocation' (Q4)

'I have worked in the UK for the last five years so replies are based on this. No diversity among students' (Q12).

A small number of respondents referred to the quality of students on intake and two mentioned that it was becoming difficult to fail students:

'Students are getting academically weaker' (Q3)

'I feel as social work academics we are under pressure to placate 'customers' (students) as they – and managers expect higher marks/pass rates despite less ability' (Q10)

'There are lots of issues. Difficulty failing students is one' (Q32).

4) General comments regarding the research topic

Two respondents added qualitative comments which specifically addressed the research question presented as a direct opinion. These comments are captured here in quotation:

'Marketisation of HE is linked to increased tuition fees, aim to increase numbers and less concern about the quality of the HE experience. Students have become customers and not learners' (Q17)

'Customer focus within the organisation since the introduction of course fees. Increased focus on meeting organisational key targets within the wider corporate world' (Q7).

4.1.6 Summary of Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire data presented in this section has offered a wide lens perspective regarding the academic experience in social work education in relation to marketisation of the university sector based on the responses of 78 participants.

The questionnaires themselves were also designed as a tool to engage awareness and participation with a specific view to engaging volunteers for interview. It is apparent from this early data that there is no universal experience and that there are reported differences among individual experiences in different institutions although some interesting patterns in responses and qualitative comments have emerged. These will be considered later alongside results emerging from interview data.

The level of response rate, engagement in the research as well as the individual responses given all indicate a strong level of awareness regarding increasing marketisation within universities and potential sources of academic concern are set out in the themes arising from the qualitative comments above. Another indication of the level of concern among social work academics from within the target population for this study was the number of questionnaire participants who offered to be interviewed (34 in total). It must be noted however, that since this process provided a strong element of self-selection on the part of participants, it may be those with the most ‘concerns’ who chose to take part. This is an apparent limitation of the study and data provided throughout. Results are from questionnaires are summarised here:

Data identifies a reported **increase** in:

- Emphasis on income generation (93.42%)
- Emphasis on the NSS/ league tables (93.33%)
- Performance management tools (81.33%)
- The quality of library services (77.33%)
- Systems dedicated to marketing (73.61%)
- Improved IT facilities (72%)
- Difficulty finding placements (69.86%)
- Prescriptive curriculum (67.57%)
- Modularised teaching (65.28)
- Links with partner agencies (61.33%)
- The use of part time/temporary staff (60.27%)
- Use of formal complaints (57.53%)

- Student numbers (50%)

Data identifies a reported **decrease** in:

- Student placement opportunities (47.95)
- Staff time to spend with students (46.67%)
- Quality of students on intake (44.74%)
- Student numbers (25.68%)

Themes arising from qualitative comments:

1. League tables and the NSS
2. Competing demands
3. Student demographic, relationship and quality
4. General comments

4.2 Results from Interview Data:

Interview results are organised below using the applied thematic analysis method set out in the last chapter (Guest et al 2012). Presentation has sought to give a sense of the range of views and experiences spoken about including opposing views and negative results to the overall trend.

The substantive data included presented here were obtained from unstructured telephone discussions, with participants given scope to contribute what they felt to be appropriate in relation to the research question. In addition, two face to face pilot interviews and one written submission have been incorporated. Direction given to participants asked them to focus on:

- i) Their experience from working within the university sector and
- ii) Their own views regarding the question: *How is the increased marketisation of universities in the UK influencing the delivery of entry level social work education?*

Despite this level of scope given to each participant there was an unanticipated consistency in the structure of conversation and topics discussed. Most of the interviewees addressed issues of admissions, student demographic, teaching, assessment, the NSS and university facilities. In addition most shared something of their own views and feelings regarding the climate in which they were working. The strength of feeling, expressed emotion and depth of engagement in telephone interviews was somewhat unexpected but the data presented is focussed on the research question as it is set out above.

In a small number of cases participants were less involved with teaching and therefore the focus of comments was at the more macro level. However, there was again strength of feeling expressed by these participants in relation to their own career decisions and current working environment. Where the depth and pattern of the data was notably different was in relation to the two pilot semi structured interviews and the written submission. Whilst these contributions did not differ in terms of the topics covered there was undoubtedly less depth and expression in the interview data gathered.

What also should be stressed, as it may be diluted by a thematic summary, is that there was no universally expressed experience or view regarding the influence of marketisation on social work education. What came across strongly from the core 15 telephone interviews were reports that each institution is unique with each having a different emphasis and approach within the overall market environment. However, there were core themes and common threads which emerged from within this level of diversity. As each of these themes is presented, differences in the range of results will be additionally exemplified alongside the strength of similarities. In order to give a strong sense of the data, quotation has been used extensively in this outline of qualitative results. Whilst guidance on the presentation of direct quotation in qualitative research offered by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) has largely been adhered to, it is noted that their suggested eight guidelines (pp.313-315) are presented as a *rule of thumb* with acknowledgement of room for stylistic and research-specific differences.

Five key themes have emerged from analysis of the interview data and each will be examined in turn:

- 1) Academic relationship with students as consumers
- 2) Competing demands and academic vulnerability
- 3) Perceived changes in student demographic
- 4) Academic standards and the ability to fail students
- 5) Expressed views regarding the research question

The order of themes has been chosen to present a coherent and interconnected pattern of the results, giving some indication of the collective expression of participants. The interview data has emerged as presenting a complex inter-relationship between the institution, the academic and the student body. Therefore starting from the micro position of the academic relationship with students as consumers, the results' lens is moved outwards to the final presentation of the macro views expressed in relation to the broader

research topic. Again, in keeping with the overall stance of this work, the expressed *personal troubles* will be set out and contextualised alongside the *policy issues* expressed by participants. These interconnections will be examined further in the next chapter and results considered alongside existing literature regarding the marketisation of the university sector.

4.2.1 Interview Sample:

An individual profile of each of the eighteen interview participants has been avoided to ensure full anonymity is maintained. Therefore general detail of the interview sample is listed to give some indication of the range of participation. Quotations used have been identified by the interviewee code number to indicate the range of quotations used from across the sample of participants.

The sample includes representation from social work academic staff from the following regions of the UK in the numbers indicated:

- Scotland: 1
- Wales: 1
- England (North): 6
- England (West): 2
- England (South): 5
- England (London): 3

There is no representation from Northern Ireland. One participant had been identified to be interviewed but due to ill health had to withdraw.

The sample includes representation of the following academic roles in the numbers indicated:

- Senior Lecturer: 11
- Lecturer: 4
- Principal Lecturer: 1
- Professor: 1
- Teaching Fellow: 1

The number of years those interviewed had been employed in the higher education sector ranged from just one year to over 20 years with a mean time period working in the sector among participants of 8.8 years. Within this 13 of those interviewed had been employed in higher education for less than 10 years and five participants for 10 years or more. Since the

nature of interview has allowed me to identify the participants it is possible to give a breakdown of gender with 11 females and seven males being included in this interview sample. No information was requested regarding ethnicity or any other demographic factor relating to participants.

The sample has representation from the following parts of the university sector categorised by the era in which the institution gained university status:

- Pre 1960: 3
- Post 1960 – 1990: 3
- Post 1990: 12

It is apparent that there is an unequal distribution of participants within those interviewed with a much greater proportion from newer universities (66%) and only 17% from each of the other institution categories. However, based on the analysis of universities who provide social work education (set out on page 70 above) these numbers are representative of the sector as a whole. Managing this inequality of distribution will be taken into account within the overall analysis however. Whilst the recorded themes emerged from across the sample as a whole, ‘outliers’ in the interview data have been considered in terms of the category of university from which they emerged as well as which part of the UK the university was based in some instances. Categories of university can be easily identified alongside quotations detailed below using the colour system set out in the key in Figure 4.3.

Participant information signifiers have been used against each quotation in the thematic discussion which follows and a key is therefore provided:

Figure 4.3 Key to Participant Information

[Employed in university founded post 1990]
 [Employed in university founded 1960 – 1990]
 [Employed in university founded pre 1960]

L = Lecturer or Senior lecturer
 T = Teaching Fellow or Tutor
 P = Principal Lecturer or Professor

Participants in the main sample are coded by number 1 – 16 and pilot interviews are coded as P1 and P2. These codes appear after each quotation with a letter from the above list indicating the academic title of each participant and appearing in colours to indicate the category of institution as above.

4.2.2 Emerging themes from interviews:

Theme 1) Academic relationship with students as consumers

All interview participants expressed a level of awareness regarding the status of students as fee-paying ‘customers’ and particularly the significance of the National Student Survey (NSS) within the purchaser-provider relationship. Indeed, discussion of this topic was focussed solely around the NSS in a number of the interviews, examining the power dynamics which this influential survey has created. For many participants this was the issue that was raised first by them in interview having taken on board the guidance given. Many participants described the measures which universities have put in place in the pursuit of a ‘good’ NSS score with over half the sample giving descriptions of the NSS ‘action plan’ within their employing institution with one stating:

‘Our university always aims higher and offers incentives to complete. If more people fill it in you tend to get a better score’. (3L)

Another example of how the NSS is managed:

‘When I started they didn’t let me tutor the third year as it might upset the NSS.’ (11T)

Such examples were commonplace within the interview data and most participants described some level of NSS result management strategies within their employing university which was described as part of the academic workload. Details of this aspect will be fully exemplified within the next theme since it relates more specifically to the competing demands which were expressed by participants. In short, participants expressed a pressure from within the university to ensure that ‘student satisfaction’ was optimised alongside participation in the survey itself. There was a sense within many interviews that this was not in itself a negative thing with one participant clearly expressing this sentiment:

‘In some respects students feel more empowered. They feel they have more rights to complain when standards are below par or when they get a poor service... The NSS has given students a greater voice to articulate their views on quality’ (13L)

However, the same participant adds what appeared to be a well-planned caveat to this opening section of interview, stating:

‘...but education is not just about satisfaction.’ (13L)

A small number of participants articulated a similar challenge to this NSS benchmark measure and went further in suggesting that for social work students in particular, it was important for them to experience challenges within the education process which were likely to make them feel uncomfortable from time to time:

'Social work is about managing life events but universities now smooth the path and take out the challenges and complexities. We should keep those in. The ruffles in the path are important. More mature students can manage a bumpy journey...' (7L)

Another expresses a perceived contradiction in the pursuit of maximising student satisfaction which again relates directly to social work students:

'You will be aware that we are trying to create critical practitioners, people that are able to analyse situations and provide grounded feedback of strengths and weaknesses... which shoots ourselves in the foot when it comes to the NSS. We invite critique and look to student to bring their own experience to the learning environment and we want to learn from them. We welcome critical feedback!' (9L)
[Exclamation mark was added in field notes].

The expression of many participants echoed a similar view and discomfort with the notion of working specifically towards improving their respective NSS scores. One participant expressed the view that to do so was *'essentially coercing students'* (2L) and therefore counter to the values of the social work profession. Another articulated a position which was alluded to in a number of interviews though not expressed so explicitly:

'I am not sure how honest students can be. The NSS informs league tables and the students are aware of that and don't want to devalue their own degree.' (11T)

However, within a highly marketised environment 'keeping the customer satisfied' was identified as an important factor in the academic relationship with students, driven by the university's ambition to be well placed in the NSS league table. The emphasis on the student experience which the survey promoted was mentioned by a number of participants as potentially problematic. For example:

'The NSS has a massive impact. Increasingly students are told it's all about the experience and not the quality of the course.' (7L)

The same interviewee then highlighted the emphasis on the national survey in relation to student recruitment:

'On admissions day the NSS score is the issue.' (7L)

The other side of this equation was expressed by many participants in terms of *'student demands'* although in other interviews this was phrased as *'student expectations'*. Almost universally there was a sense among interview participants that students are aware of the

consumer power which they now possess and this manifests itself on a number of levels. The notion and terminology of ‘demand’ was often mentioned and this was expressed by many participants as a highly pressurised part of their work. The demands or expectations of students described within the interviews are broken down into three; firstly those which relate to students seeking ‘value for money’ from their university experience; secondly the student empowerment to challenge academics; and thirdly the use of complaints processes and appeals. In themselves these consumer-based rights do not appear problematic. However, within the context of the provision of social work education they have been identified by a range of participants as having negative implications on their ability to perform and in relation to the academic-student relationship. Unrealistic student expectations have also been identified by some participants.

Examples of students expecting and in some cases demanding value for money were cited by a number of participants where students have stated *‘I pay £9000 for this...’* (P2L, 4L, 8L, 11T) and indicated that they expect more in terms of course or lecture quality or facilities. As fee payers who had usually taken-on a debt to study there was sympathy expressed with the notion that students should get good value and quality of education. Some described students who do not get a bursary and the real financial hardship that this can bring and there was certainly no criticism of students who expected to see the value in what they had paid for. However, the implications of such a view point was expressed as concerning in some cases due to the way that students perceived the notion of ‘value’ from a social work course. Some examples:

‘The relationship [with students] has changed. Now they are consumers this has shifted and fundamentally affected the way we have to negotiate and work with students. Many of them are explicit “I’ve paid all this money and I want a 2:1” but it’s not their responsibility, it’s up to me to tell them the information they need to get it. This has really changed in the last maybe three to five years.’ (14L)

‘...students are angry with the level of fees; we now charge the full amount. Students are hyper-aware of value for money and they use it when sessions don’t meet their expectations’ (9L)

‘Definitely students are demanding more now they are fee payers. They think they should be coming out with A grades and they complain.’ (P1L)

'The NSS has encouraged an enormous investment in facilities which is a good thing, but that shows up old buildings' (13L)

'Students expect to get a 2:1 or above or they consider that as failing' (3L)

There appeared to be some sense emerging from the data that students equated 'value' with quantifiable assets in terms of teaching and tutoring input, with facilities and with the level of degree at which they graduated. There was no suggestion from the data that students equated quality or value for money with their own learning or development. This appeared to concern participants.

The second area of student-consumer expectation which was identified in interviews with academics was the growth in students challenging academic decisions and judgement. In a climate in which pursuit of student satisfaction is given notable attention it may be probable to anticipate that students have become aware of the power of their own voice. Again, within the interviews there was no suggestion that student empowerment and criticality was in itself a negative thing, but again examples were given as to when this has been perceived as actively disempowering the academic role. Indeed there is a suggestion by some that this has an impact on the academics' ability to challenge students and therefore changing the dynamic in the student-academic relationship:

'In one lecture a student at the back said she couldn't hear me so I suggested she come and sit at the front where there was space. There was an immediate dynamic in that, she was really affronted as if to say I was the service provider and should therefore just speak louder. This dynamic now exists.' (12L)

'I'm really wary of challenging poor conduct issues with students...' (15P)

'They talk to each other on social media, they question academic judgement.'
(P1L)

'We have to be careful in feedback [regarding academic work] because if we are too harsh they complain... we don't want to upset them and this puts pressure on us.' (1L)

'A student just said to me "because we are now fee payers you guys [academic staff] have limited powers". So if someone [a student] is not exercising their professional standards we are less in a position to do something about it.' (13L)

Concern among participants regarding the avoidance of 'upsetting' students (and this was the terminology used in at least five interviews) or creating a dissatisfied cohort was tangible. Avoiding student challenge where possible emerged as the status quo position described by many. However, this was not universal:

'I had a group of students who really struggled because they were challenged... they graduated this year and they were just fantastic' (12L)

'We have to think about the end user of services so if there's a question about someone's practice we won't let that go.' (8L)

'We place a higher expectation on our students to be independent. The nature of the institution is that they come in at a higher standard and we can be more economical about support as the students are more academically able to start with' (3L)

Finally, some data emerged regarding the use of formal complaints processes by students and although this was mentioned only by a small number of participants, comments were strongly expressed:

'Behaviours in lecturers concern me, using Facebook and talking. But if I throw them out of a lecture I no longer feel that the university will support me. Do you know what, if I was to do that and a student complained I no longer feel that the university would support me... and on a social work course this about me enforcing professional standards and expectations. So what can we do in the new world where they're paying for my services?' (14L)

'...complaints and appeals against poor conduct issues are increasing... but university processes favour the student and not social work practice... There are more complaints from students and threats of legal action and the university caves under pressure.' (15P)

Some academics interviewed described feeling that they were in a precarious position in relation to student complaints within a university environment that actively seeks to achieve high satisfaction levels. Whilst few explicitly mentioned formal complaints there was a sense among many that the institution would not take favourably to staff who regularly challenge students since this could lead to the disquiet or dissatisfaction of an individual or cohort.

In summary then, the interview results indicate that the relationship between academic and students has changed in a climate of increased marketisation. Academics have expressed the view that the role of the NSS has specifically created a demand from within institutions to enhance the student experience and maintain high rates of student satisfaction. Some academics interviewed have expressed a new reluctance to challenge students as there is a perception that in some institutions processes and power balance may now be weighted in favour of the student voice and not that of the academic. Many participants have questioned the position regarding the NSS ethically and practically. They suggest that 'challenge' and the promotion of criticality may be a very necessary part of students' learning as they prepare to join the social work profession and that in many instances this is being actively discouraged within the current climate.

Theme 2) Competing demands and academic vulnerability

This second theme has an immediate link and overlaps with the first in that the primary demand and source of academic vulnerability which emerged from the interview data was the pursuit of a high NSS score and therefore the maintenance of high levels of student satisfaction. Other factors also emerged and will be exemplified in this section including the pressure to undertake research and doctoral study, to generate external income on behalf of the institution, workload management processes, administrative tasks, general workload pressures, staff sickness, and in some cases rising student numbers.

Starting then with the overlap issue from the preceding theme regarding the influence of the NSS: This pressure was described as impacting on two levels, firstly in that NSS management and action planning often required dedicated time and resources, and secondly that the implications of receiving a poorly perceived score has left some academics feeling that courses and therefore their own position could be vulnerable to deletion at any stage. The following quotations provide a sample of these widely expressed concerns:

'In key areas we are underperforming and I am charged with improving this ...decisions about whether programmes run or not depend on those scores. We run on economic motives now. The traditional academic ethos has gone' (13L)

'Student power and the NSS threatens my job, simple as that.' (9L)

'It makes social work courses more vulnerable and certain things about us they [the university] are not keen on – placement time, and the fact that placements can upset the NSS score. The answer to flagging scores can be to just get rid of the course... we are vulnerable as a team if the NSS score drops. Both universities I have worked at have had that.' (3L)

'...there is a bit of a spit between those who want to work up the NSS scores and those who feel that doing things specifically to get a higher score conflicts with social work values. I come from practice and I feel uncomfortable with prompting students for a good score...' (2L)

'I said once that we can't all be in the premier league you know, and they all looked at me as if I had sworn or something' (10P)

This pressure was not universally expressed however. Interviewees from Wales and Scotland reported being feeling that they were less vulnerable than colleagues in England (5L, 8L). Another expressed the fact that the NSS has little impact since the employing university does not run an undergraduate programme (16L). However, even in these instances participants showed awareness of the issue that courses and jobs could be vulnerable to deletion by universities if NSS scores were not good enough. This very personal pressure was seen as impacting on different academic staff differently. One mentioned that they were close to retirement so that this pressure did not affect them, but expressed a worry for younger colleagues (10P). Another mentioned that their mortgage was paid and that they therefore did not feel that they had to worry personally but colleagues with young families did (15P). Another two described having a wider skillset in social sciences and research which could be redeployed and that they therefore felt less vulnerable (3L, 4L). Inherent in each of these discussions was the widespread view that on the whole social work courses were extremely insecure within English universities and that they could at any stage be closed down. Placements were described as resource intensive and difficult to

predict in terms of quality of student experience and these factors led to the feeling that social work courses could be more vulnerable in a marketised climate. Some academics therefore felt under pressure to meet the demands of the university's market plan and expressed what appeared to be genuine insecurity in their jobs and their own professional identity. Others acknowledged this tension but felt ethically and professionally bound to resist pressure from the universities to placate students regardless of the consequences and some felt that those consequences were personally although not universally mitigated. Mention of alternative entry level programmes such as 'Step-up' and 'Frontline' were additionally alluded to as a source of competition and therefore pressure for many participants (P2L, 6L, 10P, 12L, 16L).

Other demands expressed by participants included pressure to meet research and income generation targets. This was expressed by some as a high source of stress in their workplace and one of the competing demands on their time. Again, the following quotations represent the views expressed by eight of the interview participants:

'People at all levels are saying we need some people to teach and some to do research as the skill set is different. But it's mainly because we don't have the time to do both. Three years ago I'd have said "no way" to that split. Now though, if I was offered it today I might take it. Some of our customers just want you to teach them but other customers want research at a top quality in a timely fashion. They won't accept that we're snowed under with marking. We are stuck in the middle of trying to do a good job for all those people and we probably don't do a good job for any of them.' (14L)

'Income generation and research is an issue...a momentum to bring work and business in. Social work needs to do more for sure... one or two academics do, but the team overall needs to evidence their attainment in 2020.' (13L)

'Colleagues are supportive of my PhD but fitting it in is difficult without it impacting on my personal life, just trying to find ways of doing things quicker. Weekends are spent on my PhD and I am trying to use the summer.' (11T)

'There is a constant push to apply for research but no time given to do it. Seems like you have to do that in your own time but I have a young family so that isn't an option.' (2L)

'The university commodifies everything. They love my profile but they also measure my time a finite commodity... I need to get my four publications for the REF but I want to do research I care about.' (10P)

In addition workload management procedures were mentioned by some as having become more prevalent within their employing institution and provide another source of pressure. These were described largely as a cumbersome exercise which seeks to quantify activities that may not be easily measured in time:

'The other thing is a work-based management system that I hate with a passion... it doesn't build in for the time we need to spend with students or downtime. Workload management is a real challenge because what we do in academia is hard to capture' (8L)

'We are given certain hours and tasks in our work plans but it's difficult to quantify the time you spend with students... if all the students took up the opportunities for meetings there wouldn't be enough hours available. Then there is the issue of staff sickness. This put extra pressure on us... core of people running around and sometimes I don't know how we'll get through the day.' (1L)

'A workload management tool is newly introduced and we are still finding our feet with that...' (4L)

Other general workload pressures were also referred to as coming from within the institution. Two interviewees described having 'aged' since they came into academia and others described feeling tired and overworked. Others mentioned having to teach bigger classes (P2L, 6L, 8L, 12L), teach in small teams and combine cohorts to manage the workload. Rising student numbers did not appear at all universal however. Some participants also described a drop in numbers for a variety of reasons within their employing institution. A sample of the comments made regarding general pressures is given below:

'We have to do more for less' (6L)

'I try to keep aware of practice issues in social work education but it's hard to keep up. You become paralysed and insular by the demands of the university and that adds extra pressure...' (9L)

'There is much more work involved with struggling students and the situation has got worse in the past few years... students who are flagging are really time consuming and they expect us to support them.' (7L)

'I worry for young academics... the demands on them are enormous. There is less pressure in social work practice in some ways than academia.' (10P)

These views were counterbalanced with a small number of positive comments regarding the relative privilege that many participants felt to be working in higher education as opposed to colleagues in practice. A number of others paid reference to their good working environment and 'comfy office' (4L). Again, participants from outside England stressed that they felt relatively secure in their working environment and in particular that they were supported by the regional social work regulator (5L, 8L). These comments were rare however and I was conscious that participants may be using the interview as a space to sound-off about their own issues and concerns.

Finally, some participants mentioned the wider pressures that they felt as academics working within a university environment and the competing and sometimes conflicting demands of the social work profession and indeed the government agenda. This will however be covered more extensively in the discussion of Theme 5 below. One quotation perhaps sums up the sense of competing professional and institutional demands however:

'Looking back on my career I feel sad about what I have not done by trying to meet the needs of two masters or maybe even three; the government, the university and then the profession... We have been too compliant and not brave enough, beguiled by being academics and too compliant.' (10P)

A picture within this theme then emerges of an academic voice projected in interviews which is caught in the cross-fire of conflicting demands and pressures. Participants have described their own struggles in coming to terms with the reality of working in a business focussed environment where time and money potentially take priority over academic or professional priorities. However, the real conflict appears to arise from the personal

vulnerability expressed by many, should they fail to meet the expectations of their employing institution. This is exacerbated by the apparently widely held perception that social work courses within the English university system are at any point disposable. Set against the demanding and consumer conscious student population described in Theme 1 who must be kept satisfied, the potential for such a dynamic to influence the delivery and standards in social work education appears plausible.

Theme 3) Perceived changes in student demographic

An issue regarding the changing student demographic and the participants' emphasis on this area of discussion was something largely unexpected from this research. However, from the first unstructured telephone interview it was something that many participants offered as pertinent in relation to the influence of increased marketisation. Comments and concerns expressed were not universal with some participants reporting more diversity, and others being really concerned that there was less diversity among their student cohorts particularly in terms of age and experience. This difference appears to relate to the academic standing and expectation of the institution, where those based at universities who ask for higher academic grades on admission reported a very young, predominantly white and female demographic. Conversely, those based at universities who set a lower academic bar for admissions spoke about attracting more diversity in every respect aside from gender. All of the participants who mentioned this issue noted the wide imbalance between the high number of females and fewer males. This has been a consistent feature in those entering the social work profession (Galley, 2014) and nothing in this data suggests that this differential is changing in terms of gender balance.

Examples of comments regarding the issue of the student demographic are given here:

'There are few Access students here and a very different cohort to the other local university. Most of our students are in their teen and early 20s, very few mature students. The expectations and student cohort are very different to my last university... Young students worry less about debt but it puts mature students off. The bulk of students are young and mostly white.' (3L)

This participant then stopped to look at the current first year cohort's photographs which were in front of them on the wall. After looking through the pictures the following detail was given *'Four out of forty-five of them are non-white.'* (3L)

'We are a local university with a local intake but we are certainly getting less diversity in terms of lived experience' (5L)

'The BA students are different with thinner life experience to the post grads by a long way. Some youngsters are amazing though, but some just haven't got a clue.... Then there's an older bunch with care experience and somewhere along the line someone has told them they'll make a good social worker. Some end up counselled off the course but some scrape through after several attempts at different modules... The university is very keen that when someone gets on a course they have a good experience, and that generally means getting them through somehow.' (7L)

'The trend is towards younger and younger students... definitely fewer access students. The BME numbers vary between about fifteen and twenty five percent.' (11T)

'On the BA it's mostly young students now, but still some mature and diverse in terms of ethnicity... The MA students are older in their thirties and forties, with high BME numbers' (13L)

'The big difference is that we have 2 men on a course of 88 students this year. We usually have a high number of African and Asian students but that seems to have gone down...' (2L)

However, the issue of life experience is not confined to years and one participant encapsulates this issue in what appeared to be a well thought out and pre-prepared comment in interview:

'We need to decide who we want to become social workers. I came from a poor, dysfunctional and impoverished background, this [social work] all came late in life for me. So when I sat on a sofa in an impoverished area of... I know what it's like. I know what it's like to struggle and to do what you can to survive. That is very different from just bringing young people in who aren't yet living in the real world, who haven't got an applied understanding of the challenges that life brings but they are pole vaulted ahead because they've got an academic education. If we carry on this way then people like me would never become a social worker.' (12L)

The concern expressed regarding student demographics then appeared multi-faceted among participants. The most commonly expressed worry was however in terms of a much more youthful student number and the drop in the numbers of mature students. One participant explained this as potentially due to the deterrent effect that the student loan system may have created and another mentioning the demise of many part-time courses which were not seen as economically viable within their employing institution (P2L). There was certainly a sense among participants that diversity was a positive thing and that the question of resilience in the profession needed to be considered when deciding who should be attracted onto entry level courses. In addition, the need to develop a workforce that was capable of meeting the challenges and complexities of social work practice was at the fore of the issues raised regarding student demographics and the implicit anxiety that a purely educationally led market system might not be meeting the ongoing needs of the profession.

Theme 4) Academic standards and ability to fail students

Having detailed the participants' views on the university environment, the dynamic within their relationship with student-consumers and the concerns expressed by some regarding a potentially shifting student demographic, this theme will now address the very widely expressed issue of academic standards and their ability to fail students where appropriate. Again, the extent and level of concern expressed was not something that was anticipated at the outset of this study and the candid terms in which participants have spoken in telephone interview was not something that could have been predicted. My sense as a researcher as well as an experienced social worker and educator, is that some of the participants wanted a safe and anonymous space to share their experiences because they felt very uncomfortable with them. There was also a sense that some participants wanted this information to be in the public domain without any institutional or personal repercussions. This will be addressed in the findings and discussion detailed in the next chapter but important at this stage in order to contextualise this section and theme.

There was a strong sense of concern expressed by some participants regarding academic standards. Standards of admissions, teaching and assessment have each been mentioned by some participants but the strongest voice from the collective of interviews was in relation to the difficulty felt regarding the failing of students, or more specifically the reluctance to fail due to pressure from universities to maintain retention and pass rates. A sample of comments is set out below:

'As long as a student keeps paying they get another chance. For me something has to be done about this. For the social work profession we have to draw the line but for the university it's just a bit of a money spinner really.' (P1L)

'It is very rare to fail a student, certainly not after the first year.' (P2L)

'If we don't get enough applicants we lower the bar until we fill the course' (1L)

'For bigger groups teaching is shared. Someone prepares the material so for their students it's a good experience. Others then just read off the PowerPoint though... Managing these big numbers is really problematic' (1L)

'...we have a lot of pressure from outside our department to not fail students. The amount of failing students whose appeals are upheld is very high... Officially students get three attempts but some have constantly appealed and after six years they're still trying to get through. Within the university retention is seen as so important.' (2L)

'Let's just say that the university protracts the process of failing students...' (5L)

'There are some poor social work programmes around and that concerns me... I have questioned the content and the depth... When modules are broken down and the teaching is shared, the depth is lost... the thread is lost' (6L)

'Some of these people either end up with a third or perhaps a two-two but actually, you wouldn't want them sitting in your living room if you were a service user.' (7L)

'There are too many students in some universities with poor staff and facilities. I worry about the quality of social work education sometimes.' (10P)

'I see inflated grades and people not being given the criticism they should be... people work really hard to make sure students pass... But we aren't supporting students; we are enabling them to pass. We wouldn't do that as social workers with families would we? We are just paving over the cracks.' (12L)

'The agenda in the wider university is to standardise assessment and marking, but my personal opinion - which is not backed up by anything but anecdotal evidence - is that the criteria naturally inflates grades. So I question if the value of a two-one now has the same value as it did ten years ago.' (13L)

'...The university tells us a performance indicator is seventy percent of a cohort to get a two-one or first. So the university is essentially saying "design your assessment to achieve this".' (14L)

'Yes it's problematic. We are being asked to accept students that are not at the right level to start... but "if we don't get bums on seats we will go", to quote the head of department... There is a reduction in marking rigor through loss of staff...' (15P)

Examples to support this theme were plentiful within the interview data and the number of quotations used above has tried to give some sense of the spread and level of concerns raised. What was additionally said by four participants was that on undergraduate courses a small number of students either fail or choose to leave during the first year but that after this it is very unusual for a student to fail. Another issue that was raised by a small number of participants was what they perceived as falling academic standards of post graduate students with the suggestion that the standards of their first degree was poor. Likewise, one participant felt that the standard of teaching on access courses had also fallen. Three participants also alluded to a split in staff between those who prioritise the social work professional agenda and those who want to progress with their academic career and therefore choose to conform to the university's priorities. It must again be stressed that none of these concerns were universally stated or consistent in every interview, but nonetheless potentially important in relation to the task of professional training and assessment of future social workers. Two participants did comment that they felt social work was no different to any other academic course in terms of the impact of marketisation and made the point that similar concerns may well apply in other disciplines. The implications of falling standards on entry level social work courses as reported by a large number of participants in this study, may however have more immediate and concerning consequences and this will be considered in the next chapter.

This expressed concern was not universal however, and five participants (out of the total eighteen interviewees) did not raise any concern regarding standards. Indeed, one made the following comment:

'We are very keen here to only qualify those who can "do" practice, and if they can't we push them towards another degree. We are quite good at this university (although not at my last university) at not passing the ones who can't do it. You aren't doing your reputation or anyone else any good by passing them.' (3L)

Others stated:

'There is usually around two in each year who are marginally failing but no pressure to pass them.' (4L)

'Retention isn't such a strong push here... one of our externals recently commented that we're not afraid to fail students that need to be failed.' (8L)

This theme has summarised the issues raised by participants in relation to standards of admission, teaching and assessment of social work students which they locate as being part of the pressure of working in a highly marketised environment. Participants who described a more positive environment and more rigorous maintenance of standards appear to be those who are either located in older universities or outside England where participants have noted that they are subject of regional governance by a potentially more invested and supportive social work regulator.

Theme 5) Expressed views regarding the research question

The final theme arising from the interview data is a summary of the comments made specifically in response to the research question of: *How is the increased marketisation of universities in the UK influencing the delivery of entry level social work education?* Participants were invited to give their own views in the email guidance that preceded each interview. As previously stated, some participants had planned what they chose to share but others spoke unrehearsed and spontaneously. Whilst these comments have been arranged under one theme since they largely address the broader issue of social work education in macro terms, there is diversity and range in the comments made which are captured in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5 Quotations of views expressed regarding research topic

'The marketisation issue is totally dispiriting. Universities should be spaces to think, critique and reflect and now they are frantic places... Internationally we will be outlanders if this goes on... and fast track qualifications may not travel... then I think the message from the government is that we have massively failed and we are not to be trusted with social work education' (10P)

'I have been having a think about this [marketisation] and it has a high impact on the way we teach. But would it be different for social work than any other courses?' (3L)

'This topic is the elephant in the room... but people are wary of talking about it locally because they don't want to realise the fears of the profession' (7L)

'...it just feels like we [in Scotland] have a different relationship with the government. Our minister for social work was a social worker so has some sympathy and understanding for what we do so we don't have to worry. Michael Gove has not wielded any influence this side of the border.' (8L)

'Narey is thinking very narrowly about statutory social work alone... there is a mismatch between what the government want and what we think students should know....I worry about the role of everyone coming to university when they leave school, it's a little bit of a con for most of them... social work is oversubscribed 'cos it has a job at the end of it. Most degrees don't. Young people in social work will burn out sooner or later and it's likely to be sooner.' (1L)

'...at this stage students are now just learning for a job and not a profession' (14L)

'We need to discuss this as a profession rather than being reactive to policy. WE need to decide what social work education is and what it should look like' (12L)

'Different universities have different pressures. I have contact with the local college and their pressure is getting numbers, ours is standards and having time for research' (11T)

'The marketisation and privatisation issue is taking us towards teaching partnerships who want functioning staff rather than critical academics' (6L)

'Cuts could happen here [in Wales] but it would be via discussion and the regulatory process rather than pure Thatcherite economics' (5L)

This final quotation was not in keeping with the other comments made by participants but nonetheless was important to include:

'Ideologically it [marketisation of higher education] is just wrong... however on a day to day basis it's not something I experience as a major change. It doesn't have a huge impact on the way we organise teaching or marking. It has an influence on the university which I mostly see as positive with better organisation and accountability.' (4L)

It should be noted that many of the broader comments made by participants went into great detail regarding social work education and current policy but strayed somewhat away from the research question being asked here. In these cases it was a decision to not include too much of this data as it may divert attention away from the specific research question. The other broader issue that was raised by many participants was the role of work based training schemes currently being piloted by the government. Whilst these schemes may well form part of a market-led backdrop, particularly since they involve provision of education by private providers, they do not fall into the scope of this research but will be considered in the overall context in the analysis and discussion section which follows. What did come out of the general comments and indeed incidental remarks made by many of the participants was the endorsement of the overall research topic as something which was ‘important’ and which they had some concern about. The sample of comments detailed above go some way to indicating the nature of the views expressed which are likewise exemplified in the earlier themes with the aim of giving the reader a clear sense of the tone and content of the research interviews.

4.2.3 Summary of results arising from interviews:

Interview data indicates a level of concern among participants regarding the influence of marketisation on the delivery and quality of social work education based on their stated experience and views. In specific those concerns relate to the impact of the NSS, the ability to challenge students, the changing student demographic, the quality of admissions, teaching and assessment as well as difficulties to fail students where necessary. In addition, academics described working in a pressurised environment with competing and sometimes conflicting demands. However, as with the questionnaire data there is no overall consensus in the reported experience indicating a diversity of experience among institutions.

4.3 Chapter summary:

Results have been set out in this chapter with minimal interpretation or discussion and with a strong emphasis on the use of quotations. In this way the audience of this study are initially invited to form their own interpretation prior to extraction of specific findings, contextual analysis and discussion. This is in keeping with the overall methodological stance set out in chapter three where both the participants and those in the wider academic field are seen as co-contributors to this project. Whilst the next chapter provides analysis of

results and findings in response to the research question, interpretation of findings must emerge more fully through dissemination and discussion. This process will begin during the completion of the remaining part of the thesis with a view to developing a transformatory agenda based on future academic discourse.

Collectively the results from both data streams present a landscape in which social work academic participants are aware and familiar with the processes of marketisation which have now become an established part of the university organisation and structure. Participation levels in this study as well as results from both data streams indicate a level of concern among academics regarding the influence that such processes may be having on the delivery of social work education. Concern is emphasised in relation to the significance and role of the NSS. In turn concern has additionally been expressed regarding the academic relationship with students as consumers. Participants have also focussed on issues of student demographic changes, academic standards and particularly processes relating to the exiting of failing students as potentially problematic. Finally, there is evidence in the results displayed that participants are themselves facing competing and often conflicting demands in the workplace which may be impacting on the maintenance of standards and potentially their ability to reflect openly on the challenges being faced within the delivery of social work education.

Results indicate that the university environment is different among institutions and that this may have some level of alignment with the era in which they were established. Results also indicate that not all participants report experiencing the same pressures or concerns and that each experience is unique. The results additionally highlight that reports given by participants regarding practices and experiences within their employing institutions are in themselves subjective interpretations. In addition, an emerging limitation of this self-elected group of participants is that the nature of the study may have attracted those with the most concerns.

Chapter Five will now provide summary and discussion of findings from this study as they relate firstly to the research question and secondly in context of wider debate regarding higher education and the provision of social work education. Methods and processes of analysis will continue to be made transparent as the emphasis shifts from the thematic display of results to the findings of this study at both a micro and macro level.

Chapter 5: Analysis, Findings and Discussion

‘In the social sciences there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself. Confronted with a mountain of impressions, documents and field notes, the qualitative researcher faces the difficult and challenging task of making sense of what has been learned.’

(Denzin, 1998 p.313)

Having set out the results of the study with minimal interpretation in the chapter above, this core chapter will explore what light these results shed on the research question: *How is the increased marketisation of universities in the UK influencing the delivery of entry level social work education?*

The approach taken describes a systematic process which has been applied to the results in order to extract both primary and secondary findings moving into both a micro and macro discussion of implications. Since the study was motivated by a commitment to principles of social justice and the welfare of those on the receiving end of social work services as well as the recipients of social work education, the agenda remains transformative with a view to contributing to a consistently high standard and quality of entry level social work education in the UK.

This chapter initially set out a summary of the study’s four key findings based on the results set out above as they relate to the research question. A clear and systematic account of the process and rationale used in identifying the findings will be provided.

Contextual discussion then begins with some clarification regarding the sample used and the question of generalizability from the data gathered. Discussion of each finding and further analysis will be firmly set within the wider context of developments in higher education in the UK and existing literature on this specific issue. Using a model of critical reflection proposed by Fook (2004) the influence of marketisation on social work education and academia will be considered with a view to developing a critical and transformative agenda for change. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the overall contribution to knowledge made by this research project.

5.1 The process of interpretation and analysis

At the outset of this thesis I described something of my own world view, theoretical framework and an ontological and epistemological position. It is not often that I am required to put labels on such unconscious processes which call into question my own

history, value-base, cognitive approach, as well as personal, professional and political allegiances. It is only now at this final stage of interpretation and analysis that I return to these factors and the significance of my own perspective. Whilst I am aware that this has undoubtedly influenced my decisions, methods and approach throughout, it is at this stage that my own stance consciously determines the way I choose to now ‘make sense’ (Denzin, 1998) of the research results. In making my choice of interpretive framework a transparent one, I acknowledge the variety of perspectives that could be employed from the [pseudo] ‘scientific’ to the transpersonal (Rogers, 1998) or ‘artistic’ interpretation. Since I consider this to be a continuum rather than a mutually exclusive singular option, I have chosen to use a balance between inductive and deductive processes throughout this project. The ‘black box’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994) of analysis and making sense of results is undoubtedly for me one which involves emphasis on the inductive and indeed creative process with a view to adhering to the overall transformative objectives of the research project. Rogers (1998) eloquently describes the creative aspect of this process:

‘The researcher arrives at creative synthesis through solitude and a meditative focus on the topic. She extends herself beyond a restrictive attention of the data and allows herself to be led to a comprehensive expression of the essences or essential qualities of the experiences.’ (Rogers, 1998 p.198)

However, any extension beyond the results as they have been set out above is a tempered one since my position is equally (albeit critical) realist. I therefore acknowledge and ‘respect’ the reality of the experiences as they have been described to me by participants and do not seek to misrepresent or deliberately misinterpret. Since my own value-base has this form of ‘respect’ at its foundation, the following observation from Braud and Anderson (1998) resonates with my approach:

‘When we respect someone or something, we look again (*re-spect*), we pay special attention, we honor. The semblances of these words suggest that on some important level, *research* and *respect* are synonymous. Both imply fullness of attention, with minimal distortion, minimal filtering, minimal projection, and minimal preferences or biases.’ (Braud and Anderson, 1998 p. 26)

With this in mind a systematic approach has been adopted where I have reframed and interpreted the results set out above in order to answer the research question. The approach used is guided primarily by the work of Miles and Huberman (1994) and their seminal thirteen pointers for making sense of data and drawing meaning from results with a view to

the avoidance of bias. Their further guidance on ensuring that findings are valid and reliable has additionally been considered to increase confidence in the suggested findings presented below. Discussion of each of the key four findings will then take place developing contextual links between the reported experiences of participants and the general climate in higher education.

However, analysis must go beyond simply describing and if the research is to make any impact then findings must be made contextual and have clear and purposeful conclusions. As Glaser (1978) highlights, those working in the field do not simply want to be told what they already know, they want to be told how to ‘handle’ their collective experience ‘with some increase of control and understanding’ (Glaser 1978 p. 13).

In order to progress the discussion further and to begin to develop a transformative agenda, I turn will again to the work of Fook (2004) which calls upon an amalgamation of reflection, reflexivity, postmodernism/deconstructionism and critical social theory. It may also be worth pausing to trace my methodological thinking here by once again citing a short extract from my own research diary:

Research Diary extract: 21.11.2016

‘Today I was looking back at Jan Fook’s work from 2004 and the chapter she wrote entitled ‘Critical Reflection and Transformative Possibilities’. I was actually looking for a decent definition of the dimensions of critical reflection to include in my teaching. The whole notion of critical reflection in social work appears to have been somewhat ‘dumbed-down’ in recent years and stronger students particularly need a model which gives them the opportunity to create depth of analysis, particularly at a macro level. I always found Fook’s model useful and I also met her couple of years ago and realised we shared an admiration for Wright-Mills, which has drawn me to her work even more since. Anyway, I am now struck by the wording of Fook’s analysis and the common features which she describes in terms of my own research participants. Specifically I am drawn to the idea that people can be left feeling disempowered and fatalistic by managerial processes around them. Although it sounds relatively simple, I wonder if it would be useful to apply Fook’s transformative model of reflection to my findings in order to move beyond the notion of telling academics what they probably already know and suggesting a pathway for change. The idea of redirecting the model back on to the academic environment itself, perhaps to ask social work academics to ‘practice what they

preach' is what I am suggesting. I think I need to work it through stage by stage to see if it can be applied but at this point it makes sense to me.'

Fook sets out a framework for using critical reflection as a means of pursuing a transformative agenda in research and practice and as such offers a fitting analytical framework for this research project. Fook (2004) refers to a two-staged approach where firstly hidden assumptions are exposed, and secondly reframed into new ways of understanding practice and power with a view to promoting change. She focuses on the need for any transformative agenda to first counteract feelings of fatalism and disempowerment among participants. She refers to the need to reconstruct the identities of individuals as powerful and she suggests an example here which has compelling parallels to the participants in this research project:

‘Often people freeze into inaction because they have constructed their situation as involving unresolvable tensions. A common one is the conflict between social work values and bureaucratic/management/economic imperatives.’ (Fook, 2004 p. 25)

Fook’s model for using critical reflection as a tool in research is based on participation and as a practitioner-researcher who has been supported in and by those in the field to produce this data, such a model offers a constructive framework which resonates with my own stance and objectives.

The role of critical social theory focusses on power differentials, social change and ‘building bridges’ between personal experience and structural frameworks and provides a starting point for such reflective analysis. In addition critical social theory seeks to highlight structures of oppression and to give voice to those oppressed (Denzin, 1998). Having given this voice in so far as it is possible to participants through the results displayed in the last chapter I now move on to my own analysis. Denzin (1998) suggests that whilst no researcher can be objective, researchers as interpreters of data fall into one of two typologies as interpreters of data. I therefore emphasise that my role is not simply as the first ‘type’ he identifies as an ethnographer/fieldworker/well-informed expert, but rather as the second; as a practitioner-researcher who has my own experience of what has been described by participants and is seeking to contribute to a future agenda for positive change.

5.2 The question of generalizability

‘Generalizability refers to the extent to which one can extend the account given of a particular situation or population to other persons, times, or settings than those directly studied.’

(Maxwell, 2012 p.141)

There is no claim that any of the results in this study can be generalizable although suggested implications must be considered. The primary rationale for this statement relates to the sample used in both questionnaire and interview that were a convenience sample who self-selected to participate during an academic social work conference in the summer of 2015. As such, there are no claims that the sample was random and acknowledgement that those who are motivated and able to attend residential conferences may not be representative of social work academics in the UK as a whole. In addition, those who elected to participate may well be those who had the most concern to express and of those who participated in the interview stage of the research there is a high representation of those from newer (post 1990) institutions. Attempts were made to involve participation from a wide geographic spread and capture as much diversity as possible in terms of the categories of university but decisions of expediency and convenience had to be made. It is also acknowledged that selection and participant information did not capture factors such as race or gender, although the latter was identified at the interview stage.

Interviews are in themselves relational exchanges, taking place at a given time they may capture a view not necessarily representative of the participants’ constant view or experience (Briggs, 1986; Maxwell, 2012). For example, most of the interviews took place on the telephone during February 2016. Had participants taken part in the same process during the summer months, when they were perhaps less busy, their responses may have been expressed differently. In addition, participants were asked to share their own subjective experiences and opinions each of which was unique in context and perspective using different language and expression. Likewise questionnaire engagement involved some degree of interpretation (Bryman, 2012; Matthews and Ross, 2010) and whilst it is hoped that any instructions were understood as intended, this was not verifiable using the methods employed. The findings discussed and any inferences made are therefore based on my own interpretation of the results set out in Chapter Four but using a transparent process and auditable process which is additionally set out below. Findings are therefore set out as ‘suggestive rather than conclusive’ (Dey, 1998 p.263).

Although the views and experiences set out in this study may not be generalizable, it is emphasised that the level of expertise, qualification and experience of those who chose to participate should not be underestimated. Representative or not, this was a well informed and insightful group of participants directly involved in the delivery of university based social work education in the UK. Indeed, in the contextual discussion which follows the key findings presented below it will be further proposed that the trends identified by this group of participants are very much in keeping with much of the contemporary critical literature looking at higher education and that this research therefore contributes to a growing body of literature regarding the influence of marketisation in the UK university sector.

5.3 Summary of Research Findings

‘People are meaning finders; they can quickly make sense of the most chaotic events... The critical question is whether the meanings you find in qualitative data are valid, repeatable and right.’ (Miles and Huberman 1994 p.245)

This section will summarise the research findings based on the data displayed in chapter four. Taking the main aim of any research as attempting to achieve new insight (Briggs et al 2012), I will set about constructing meaningful response to the original research question: *How is the increased marketisation of universities in the UK influencing the delivery of entry level social work education?*

In order to do this in a trustworthy and auditable way, guidance provided by Miles and Huberman (1994) will specifically applied. In addition the analogy presented by Dey (1993) seems to provide a useful focus where he suggests it is the researcher’s task to set out ‘account’ of findings which is the equivalent to the summing up in a court case before the jury are sent out to reach their verdict (p.237). So, having set out the various pieces of evidence in the data sets provided in the last chapter I will now seek to sum up the salient points in relation to what has been learned in relation to the research question.

In order to do this I have returned to the collective data and set about forming clusters or groupings of based on particular factors or variables which will assist in formulating a response to the research question. In attempting to present this logically and in summation form, the ‘clusters’ which appear most useful in presenting findings are:

- The influence of marketisation on institutions

- The influence of marketisation on students
- The influence of marketisation on academic staff

Data has been weighted by counting the times factors have been mentioned by participants in interviews or qualitative comments made on questionnaires, and using the quantitative results of scaled responses. Within each of these groupings it also appears important to incorporate contrasts, comparisons and extremes in reported data. This has been achieved by considering both the positive and negative findings in each grouping which includes some of the ‘outliers’ in data which are not in keeping with the main trends presented. In this way, issues of unequal distribution of participants have been mitigated. Secondary findings have been identified by abstracting the specific data gathered and considering meaning at a higher or more abstract level. This includes inferred data shared by participants particularly around their willingness to talk about the research topic. By synthesising findings in each cluster and working logically with theoretical coherence, it has then been possible to consider the influence of marketisation suggested by this research on social work education within universities and to distil the data provided down to four key findings. In order to present the process of arrival at these key findings in logical and sequential form a summary matrix has been devised which is set out in Figure 5.1 at the end of section 5.3.

5.3.1 The influence of marketisation on institutions

Findings from this study indicate a strong awareness among participants of the influence of market forces within their employing institutions. This is shown starkly from the scaled responses in the questionnaire data and indeed in the tone of interview responses, where participants were able to engage immediately with the topic and quickly identify ways in which marketisation was visible within their university. There was a contrast between institutional changes which are largely viewed as positive and those which were framed as having a negative influence. Among the positive changes brought about by marketisation was a general trend towards improved facilities, libraries and IT provision for example and campus improvements (see Figure 4.1). Better links with partner agencies as well as a general notion that more spaces and student choice were all presented as positive shifts.

Those institutional changes that were identified as more negative related to a business-like focus which appeared to impinge on the academic and professional enterprise. The use of part time and temporary staff was highlighted and efficiency savings in teaching and assessment methods. Participants cited performance indicators and league tables as being

particularly dominant in terms of institutional priorities and felt that this detracted from academic and professional goals. Indeed, one participant described universities as having become ‘frantic places’ (see p.138) which are not conducive to the academic task. Findings strongly suggest that institutional focus on league table performance, particularly the NSS, detracts from professional priorities and in such an environment, social work as an academic discipline is often perceived negatively.

One of the outliers of expression which went against the main trend however was a participant (see p.138) who expressed the fact that the university was now better organised and that they had a much more ‘comfy office’ (see p.131). Reflecting on this in more detail, there was implication from other participants that they saw their own position as relatively comfortable and described feeling much more fortunate than colleagues in social work practice for example. What therefore appeared to be problematic was the uncertainty of the environment within a marketised university and the sense that social work was particularly vulnerable to the business model. Participants also voiced a real sense of personal vulnerability in terms of future employment.

5.3.2 The influence of marketisation on students

On a positive note there was a general suggestion that increased university provision meant greater opportunity for people to attend university. There was a trend towards seeing more diversity among students (see Figure 4.1) which was equally framed as positive. It was also acknowledge that students were more empowered as customers within a marketised university and that this in itself was a good thing.

However, there was a strong suggestion that student empowerment (particularly through the impact of the NSS) was also problematic. Students were described as having become increasingly demanding, some with unrealistic expectations and resistant to the challenges of a learning environment. There was also a suggestion that in some institutions’ admissions and assessment standards were perceived to have fallen to accommodate greater student numbers and produce more favourable institutional outcomes (see p.134). The academic ability to fail particularly poor students was also identified as a strong theme with one participants suggesting that some institutions appear to be ‘enabling students to pass’ (see p.135). There was therefore some expressed uncertainty at the standard of a minority of social work graduates from some institutions and that this was not identified

through current regulation. More confidence of regulation and regulators was expressed by participants located in Scotland and Wales however.

What does emerge when focussing on the influence of marketisation on the student body however, is a difference between institutions and what is taking place within them. Again, there are a number of useful outliers in the data which provide additional insight. One such issue is that there is reportedly less diversity among students in some universities. This was apparent in questionnaire data, but interviews suggest that this lack of diversity may be occurring within the older and more established institutions (see p. 132). Interview data gave more insight into this issue and there is a suggestion that more academically discerning institutions are now attracting mostly young, white and female students onto social work courses with notably less diversity among the student body. This was in contrast to the experiences of those in newer universities, particularly those with metropolitan intake areas. Maintenance of academic and professional standards, expressed in the confidence participants felt to fail students for example, appeared to be given greater priority in some institutions than in others.

It also emerged from the data that not all parts of the UK have been influenced in the same way and that reported experiences from Wales and Scotland in particular were different. Data suggests that this may be due to more professionally sensitive regulation and closer links between a small cohort of institutions.

5.3.3 The influence of marketisation on academic staff

Since all the data for this research was provided by social work academic staff it is perhaps not surprising that most of the findings relate to the influence that marketisation is having on them as individuals and as a collective body. The positive findings that have emerged relate to the growing opportunities which the marketised university sector presents for academics and the relative benefits of university positions. In addition, despite acknowledgement of an increasing modularised and prescriptive curriculum, there was suggestion that this did not impact on flexibility in teaching which included the ability to focus on issues of social justice.

Negative findings regarding the influence of marketisation on social work academics relate particularly to demanding workloads, conflicting priorities and perceived vulnerability. Heightened use of performance management tools was identified strongly by this study and

additional demands between teaching, academic research, bigger class sizes in many cases and less time to spend with students. However, perhaps the strongest finding of this study relates to the expressed conflict of priorities experienced by academics which was described as being split between meeting the priorities of the university and those of the profession. This was identified as being further exacerbated by the demands of the government and policy makers. Participants pin-pointed the NSS as being at the centre of this conflict where the university was focussed on improving student satisfaction rates with the future of courses possibly dependent on that score. This was seen as problematic and a diversion from academic and professional priorities by a majority of participants. Participants described being conflicted between the self-interest of maintaining their own positions through actively working to improve NSS scores whilst at the same time seeking to maintain a social work professional and ethical value base (see p. 128). In addition, the NSS was set out as the focus of a changing relationship between students and academics. Participants described feeling unable or unsafe in challenging students who were now much more likely to use formal complaints processes which were seen as favouring the student. Many of the academics in this study described feeling vulnerable within the university environment.

Leading on from these primary findings, a picture of the social work academic voice regarding this topic of investigation began to emerge. The take-up rate for interview was relatively high among those who had completed the questionnaire (34% - check). I was also very aware that during the telephone interviews particularly, participants had been very open and candid in what they chose to share. I initially developed the view that this was due to my approach as a peer researcher, also my sensitivity as an experienced social worker alongside the relative anonymity of the telephone. Many participants asked for assurances during interview that they would not be identified. All wished me well with my study and acknowledged the topic as important but there was a sense that they had left their experiences with me in the hope that someone would listen. What has become clearer as I have analysed this data and reflected over time, is that these participants wanted to talk about the topic and that they were not able to do so openly in a competitive academic climate. Indeed, as I have looked in more detail at the critical social work literature where there is a healthy counter-neoliberal emphasis and body of work, it is apparent that there is a void in discourse regarding the neoliberalism rife within the university structure and its potential impact on social work education.

Indeed, in terms of dissemination and feeding back to participants, I presented some of the initial data in 2016 at the same conference where I had handed out questionnaires a year before. With hindsight, my presentation was quite basic at that stage and the data was somewhat raw. However, there was an unusual silence after the presentation with virtually no follow-up discussion. Later I was approached informally by a couple of people who appeared to welcome the work and I asked one of them why he felt there had been so little discussion? He replied that the data had said what ‘we all know but can’t talk about’. The idea that this topic is indeed an ‘elephant in the room’ (see p.138) has then become more apparent during the process of analysis and that many of the participants were keen to use the research to share views and experiences which they have perhaps felt unable to speak openly about in public or indeed to write about in academic or professional discourse.

5.3.4 Synthesis of findings suggested by this study

Having presented a summary of the influence of marketisation on institutions, students and social work academics, this section will synthesise findings by way of four key points by way of responding to the research question: *How is the increased marketisation of universities in the UK influencing the delivery of entry level social work education?* Findings are additionally presented in matrix form in Figure 5 below.

The findings from this snap-shot of academic opinion and experience indicate that the marketisation of universities in the UK is influencing social work education in the following ways:

- 1) The establishment of a business-like competitive environment which has recreated students as consumers of education is now well established within universities. Within such a climate institutional priorities are focussed on securing a sustainable business which has at its core market indicators which are not seen as running parallel to academic and professional priorities.
- 2) Furthermore, the expansion of the sector has resulted in diversity between institutions with notable differences in student demographic, institutional priorities and student experience. This study does not show that any particular category or type of university is ‘better’ than any other in terms of the provision of social work education but that there are differences particularly between former polytechnics and more established universities.
- 3) The study also suggests that whilst facilities and student empowerment appear to be improving, there may be lapses in standards of admissions, teaching and

assessment in a climate which potentially gives priority to the student experience above graduate ability. The study indicates that current regulation in England in particular, is not addressing the issues highlighted and the complexity of regulatory needs presented by a diverse body of institutions to ensure consistency in standards.

- 4) Finally, the study gives strong indication that academic and professional discourse in relation to this topic has been muted by the presence of a market in social work education and that this may have implications for professional identity as well as the future development of social work education provision within universities.

Having set out the key findings of this study extracted from the results displayed in chapter four, the following section will seek to discuss and locate the first three findings listed above within the growing body of contemporary literature on higher education. The fourth finding will then be discussed using the model of critical reflection proposed by Fook (2004) with a view to suggesting a pathway for future transformative action within university provision of social work education. Figure 5.1 is presented below as a summary of research results and findings showing the logical thread which has taken place before going on to discuss each of the findings in turn.

Figure 5.1: Research Findings Matrix

Reported influence on:	Primary Findings		Secondary Findings	Findings suggested by this study
	Positive	Negative		
<u>Institutions</u>	Improved facilities, libraries, IT provision and links with partner agencies. Greater numbers of institutions and more choice. Better organisation, systems dedicate to marketing, transparency of provision and awareness of performance.	Busier & more 'frantic places'. Highly marketised and business-like environment seen as impinging the needs of the scholarly enterprise. More part time & temporary staff creates uncertainly. Competitive advantage sought through league table placement and published performance which is given central institutional focus. Social work viewed negatively in this environment.	Universities are providing a growing source of revenue, employment and occupation. Institutions are required to be cost efficient and self-sustaining. Improved facilities require funding through increased student numbers, development of income generating research and courses alongside efficiency savings through cost effective teaching and delivery methods. Performance and published league table placement is key to attracting students, research opportunities and income generation.	1)The influences of market forces are now highly visible within the university environment Evidence from this study suggests that the presence of a market based business culture is now prevalent within university environments. Whilst this has some practical benefits, institutional priorities do not give central focus to academic or professional excellence. Priority is rather given to the financial sustainability of institutions.
<u>Students</u>	Greater opportunity to attend university in terms of spaces available. More diversity of student cohort across the university estate. Greater empowerment through student-consumer voice and recourse to complaint.	Greater student numbers & demographic differences in each institution. Admission standards & requirements variable. Students more demanding, some reluctant to be challenged with unrealistic expectations of what is expected of them. Placement opportunities and experiences are becoming limited. Concern regarding standard of a small minority of graduates.	Universities are varied, with a different social work student demographic and different presenting issues. New universities may have less academically demanding admission criteria but attract much more diversity among student cohorts than older institutions which are attracting mostly school leavers who are white and female. Some graduates from across the sector may not have realistic expectations or be well enough prepared for the challenges of social work practice.	2)Institutions are not all the same This study provides evidence that the university sector in the UK diverse estate of provision with differing issues, focus and requirements in each institution. It is therefore suggested that institutions have responded differently to marketisation and that social work education is influenced differently across the sector. 3)Consistency of standards may be compromised Findings indicate that within the current climate a minority of social work graduates may have unrealistic expectations or be insufficiently equipped to meet the demands of practice and the challenges they are likely to face in practice. When viewed as part of an expanding and complex education market, consistency of standards of those entering the social work profession may be compromised.
<u>Academic Staff</u>	Comfortable working environment with better organisation & links with partners. Employment/ career development opportunities growing. Offers a relatively privileged position which is seen in the main as less stressful than social work practice. Modular/ prescriptive curriculum but still opportunity to control teaching & focus on social justice.	Conflicted, caught between the expectation of university, social work profession & policy makers. Vulnerability of courses & posts due to NSS and other performance indicators. Heightened performance management, use of part time staff, bigger classes, less time and competing workload demands between research & teaching. Relationship with students as consumers, means challenging or failing students can be difficult. Great use of complaints.	Social work academics have been largely silenced regarding this topic due to their own role in a competitive and performance aware industry. In many cases they are torn between the self-interest and career, & their commitment to professional standards. Many have become performance focussed giving priority to the demands of their employing institution whilst others have risked their own standing by raising concerns. Only under the protection of anonymity were some prepared to share their experiences on this topic. Academic discourse on this issue is therefore muted.	4)Academic and professional discourse regarding social work education has been influenced by a lack of open discussion on this topic This study suggests that professional self-reflection & academic discourse regarding social work education in the UK has been skewed by the absence of this topic in open debate and publication.

5.4 Contextual Discussion of Findings

In this section the four key findings will be examined in more detail as they emerge from the data in this study with a view to forming a link between the personal experiences described by participants and the policy and contextual issues which they mirror.

5.4.1 The influences of market forces within the university environment

‘...a Hayakian revolution in the economics of knowledge’ (Olssen and Peters, 2005 p.340)

Questionnaire responses have provided results giving an overview from the larger sample of 78 participants and their awareness of the processes associated with increased marketisation. Responses describe an almost universal acknowledgement (over 90%) that there has been increased emphasis on income generation and league table performance within their employing institutions. This is additionally reaffirmed in both qualitative comments on the questionnaire documents and in the themes arising from interview. Results additionally indicate a high level of agreement (over 70%) that there has been an increase in the use of performance management tools and systems dedicated to marketing. These changes have been accompanied by an equally high level of acknowledgement that library and IT facilities have improved, changes which emerge as most strongly felt within the older pre-1960 university sector. In addition results indicate that a large number of participants (over 60%) have witnessed increased difficulty finding placements; increasingly prescriptive curriculum and modularised teaching; increased links with partner agencies; and an increased use of temporary and part-time staff. Over half (50%) of all respondents also report an increase in the use of formal complaints procedures by students and a rise in student numbers. This final factor of rising student numbers appears most strongly felt within the newer post-1990 university sector and indeed results indicate that some of those working in more established universities have actually experienced a decrease in numbers. This will be discussed in the next section in further detail. Results also indicate that many respondents (over 40%) have witnessed a fall in time available to spend with students and the quality of students on intake. Both of these factors are most strongly reported from those working within newer post-1990 institutions.

These results describe the predicted (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Molesworth (ed), 2011; Furedi, 2011; Holmwood, (ed) 2011; Williams, 2011; Collini, 2012; Brown and Carasso, 2013; McGeddigan, 2013; Giroux, 2014; Pickard, (ed) 2014) emergence of a prevailing market environment which has developed within the UK university sector predominantly

since the Brown Report in 2010 and the transfer of block grant funding to universities to a fees-based system institutions are now required to generate their own income. University accountability is no longer based on bureaucratic principles but consumer based feedback and choices (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Focus on league tables and market reputation has become more prevalent alongside investment in facilities likely to attract more students. However, not only has the NSS become an overriding priority of universities, tables in relation to research output and REF status have also become important drivers in the perceived ability of an institution to generate income through research grants and commissions as well as institutional reputation. Detourbe (2014) considers the importance placed on NSS results with its focus on ‘the student experience’, highlighting that this is a MORI poll and an overt piece of market research. She suggests that such systems of evaluation may give insight into the values and power relations embedded in them. As such she asserts that the NSS and its American counterpart emerge not as the system of public accountability which HEFCE describe them to be, but as a tool designed to affirm the student as a consumer. Olssen (2016) is equally critical regarding the role and attention given to the REF, describing the notion of ‘impact’ as impossible to measure and universities ‘cherry picking’ their way to improve ranking.

In addition results of this study show that universities are developing efficiency conscious processes such as performance management tools, greater standardisation of teaching methods and use of part-time and temporary staff. Many universities appear to be demanding more from existing staff which is resulting in less direct time to spend with students particularly in newer universities. Brown and Carasso (2013) present corresponding data to that indicated by this study, identifying the overall rise in student numbers and a rise in staff to student ratios. The expansion of numbers across the whole sector as well as pressures within local government has created more competition for placement opportunities and newly empowered student consumers are more likely to use processes of complaint. In a climate where increased student numbers means more revenue, some participants have noted a fall in admissions standards which is again most strongly reported by those based at newer universities. Baty’s survey (2004) also indicated falling standards as reported by 400 academics, with 71% of those surveyed saying that they had admitted students not capable of benefitting from their university education.

The emerging picture from this study echoes that in the wider literature (Collini 2012, McGedigan 2013) which emphasises the creation of a ‘voucher system’ in UK universities since the expansion of student loans and increase in funding through student

fees. In line with the model developed in the USA British universities have now become organised using market principles. Writing in 2013 McGeddigan suggested that developments in higher education were a staged attempt to introduce the private sector into the public university market and that this was taking place subtly but would eventually require primary legislation. Writing now in 2017, such legislation has passed through parliament in the form of The Higher Education and Research Act 2017. This is the culmination of policies progressed since the early 1990s creating a suitable 'market' in the university sector which can accommodate more private sector provision.

Findings from this study confirm and describe the prevailing market culture within UK universities which is not improving equality in the sector. Sold to the public as an increase in choice and an expansion of educational opportunity it would appear as Olssen and Peters (2005), Holmwood (2011), Brown and Carasso (2013) and McGeddigan (2013) suggest, that these developments have had less to do with meritocratic principles and more to do with furthering the investment opportunities of multinational corporations and private investors. Reay (2011) states unequivocally that the focus of the Browne Report in particular 'is on higher education as a source of private profit rather than public good'. In the process, the transformation of values and principles under which an academic environment is governed may additionally be challenging the very nature of critical thinking and knowledge:

'This neoliberal, corporatized model of higher education exhibits a deep disdain for critical ideas, public spheres, knowledge, and practices that are not directly linked to market values, business culture, the economy or the production of short term financial gain.'

(Giroux 2014 p.138)

For social work academics this of course presents an additional ethical challenge and tension between the stated values of the profession and those of a corporate and competitive market approach. This study has then given a unique voice to the social work academic experience.

5.4.2 Institutions are not all the same

‘But while it may be true that the present system embodies an unnecessary pretence that all institutions called universities perform the same set of functions, it is no good deluding ourselves that simply leaving 18 years olds to cash in their vouchers at a university of their choice will lead to more intelligently conceived provision of diverse, high quality institutions. It may just lead to a few private jets and a lot of Ryanairs.’ (Collini, 2012 p.188)

Results from questionnaires have been analysed to give a breakdown of patterns of responses from different categories of institution. To summarise briefly the notable differences; it has emerged that more of those based at newer universities indicate increases in the use of performance management tools, systems dedicated to marketing and student numbers. Higher numbers of participants from newer universities also reported a decrease in time they are able to spend with students and quality of students on intake. Participants from universities established between 1960 – 1990 reported higher increases in prescriptive curriculum and use of temporary staff. Participants from older universities established prior to 1960 were more likely to have experienced improvements in the quality of library and IT facilities, more difficulty finding placements, more modularised teaching and more use of formal complaints. They were also more likely to report a fall in student numbers as opposed to a rise which was the most popular response. In short, from this data stream it has become apparent that universities experience different issues and that there is some pattern of responses based in the different categories of university. This is exemplified further in the results from interviews where each individual experience emerges different, although apparent common themes are present. However, what also emerges from the interview data is that there are many other differences between universities, how marketisation manifests itself and how this is experienced by individual academics. The influence that marketisation is having on each institution and in turn the delivery of social work education, emerges as diverse although there are common themes.

One important caveat should also be added to the data presented in this study which relates to the fact that participants have been asked to identify if they have experienced change which is based on the time they have spent working in the sector. However, the amount of time each participant has worked in the sector is another variable. Analysis of the total sample (see p. 70) and the questionnaire subgroup (see p.113) indicate that those with most time in the sector are likely to be working within the oldest universities and that they are

therefore reporting observed changes over a longer period. It appears uncontroversial that older institutions would have seen more improvement of facilities such as libraries and IT. It also appears plausible that the expansion of the sector would have resulted in more competition for older institutions which may account for the trend towards reported falling student numbers, competition for placements as well as changes in organisation of teaching and use of complaints. Conversely, data indicates that those in newest universities are likely to have been employed in the sector for the shortest period, suggesting that the changes they report are more recent and have been intensively felt over a shorter period. This perhaps adds greater weight to observations that possibly the worst effects of market forces (in terms of increasing student numbers, less time available to spend with students and the potential that standards of admission have dropped) have been experienced most notably in this part of the sector in very recent years. It is also worth stressing that 58 out of the 87 universities listed in the *Guardian University Guide 2017* as providing social work education are now newer (post 1990) institutions. What also emerges is the need for regulators across the UK to have an awareness of the differences among institutions in order to maintain consistency of graduate standards.

The suggestion that not all universities are the same has implications beyond the delivery of social work education however, as proposed by Collini (2012) and rather bluntly expressed in the quotation at the start of this section. Others (Holmwood 2011, Bekhradnia 2014) have supported the notion that a two tier system may be emerging and that different universities are in fact serving very different functions and sections of the population. Furthermore, some authors suggest that rather than creating more egalitarian opportunity, the newly marketised university sector is in fact reinforcing inequality (Holmwood (ed) 2011). Brown and Carasso (2013) argue that the new university regime is likely to create a three-tier system, pointing out that although student numbers are widening, access to elite and highly selective institutions is still unequal. Like many other authors, they suggest that the UK is following the American model which now has some outstanding universities but many others which do not appear to be delivering real opportunity to graduates and in some cases what have been referred to as ‘sub-prime degrees’ (McGedigan, 2013). Buraway (2011) expands upon the pitfalls of the American model now adopted in the UK saying that inequality is rife and that universities unable to generate income from research ‘initiate new ways of selling their teaching through on-line services that lead to dilution and lower costs...’ (Buraway, 2011 p.29). Pickard’s research (2014) suggests ‘a clear correlation between the status of the university and the socioeconomic background of the

student... lower socio-economic groups were concentrated in former polytechnics.’ (Pickard, 2014 p. 120) Others (Holmwood, 2011; McKay and Rowlingson, 2011) also suggest that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to be deterred by the idea of student loans and in order to reduce costs choose universities where they can remain resident at home and take up part time work. This is in stark contrast to the most elite universities where even the interview process is residential and students are forbidden from taking on employment of any kind whilst studying. Reay (2011) goes further still by suggesting a three-tier system from ‘premier league’ to ‘third division’ with Oxbridge at the top, redbrick institutions in the middle and post-1992 institutions forming the third division which increasingly cater for the lower classes and BME students. Reay (2011) also highlights the lack of diversity or ‘sameness’ in the top tier of university suggesting that they are becoming ‘white upper and upper middle class ghettos’ (p.122) which may be of concern within social work courses in particular. Such observations are noted in some of the interview results and will be considered in the next section in greater detail. However, a study by Ashwin et al (2016) produces evidence of transformative teaching and education in universities which are less prestigious in terms of reputation and league table placement, suggesting that current measures do not necessarily offer a clear picture or place the appropriate ‘value’ on the teaching and learning that is taking place. Indeed, it may be worth considering that locally based institutions with a community based diverse student demographic are potentially more likely to provide a richer climate for the education of those planning to enter the social work profession. However, there may be some question regarding the time and resources that newer institutions may have to offer alongside the other opportunities offered by more elite universities:

‘Through networking, confidence, unpaid internships, and most importantly attendance at the top universities, the privately educated upper middle classes run politics, the civil service, the arts, the city, law, medicine, big business, the armed forces and even, in many cases, the protest movements challenging these powers.’ (Monbiot, 2010 quoted in Reay, 2011 p.118.)

Collini’s (2012) analysis states that it is futile to pretend that all universities serve the same function arguing again that ‘different leagues’ need to be acknowledged, although it is worth remembering that most institutions now charge very similar levels of fees. This study supports the premise that universities are not all the same and contributes to the growing body of knowledge relating to this aspect of the expansion of higher education.

However, social work has a history of offering differing routes into the profession with some more academic and others more practically focussed. In many respects this adds to the diversity required within professional practice. Whilst this may not then be a bad thing, the results of this study show an emerging difference of environment expressed by different participants and certainly within the questionnaire results this does seem to indicate patterns of differences between the three categories of institutions recorded. Likewise different categories of institution appear to attract a different student demographic, who are likely to have very different learning needs. As one participant states, '*we can't all be in the premier league*' (10) and therefore it is important when considering the focus of discussion and indeed regulation that the professional body acknowledges these differences. From interview data these differences do not appear confined to the three categories of establishment explored however since there are additionally reported differences within each grouping.

The marketisation agenda has established itself firmly throughout the sector but in order to understand how it is influencing social work education in particular, it must be acknowledged that UK universities are not a homogenous entity. It is also important to consider that the marketisation agenda may be 'taking hold' at a different speed in different institutions. There is considerable suggestion in the literature mentioned that inequalities are rife within the university sector and that students from less advantaged backgrounds are getting the poorest deal although acquiring a similar financial burden. There is also suggestion (Collini, 2012; Pickard (ed), 2014; Olssen, 2016) that the actual quality of education within the hugely expanded new university environment may be compromised and this will be explored further in the discussion below. However, it is worth reminding ourselves that social work is not a purely academic profession and that the quality of degree or the reputation of the university from which a social worker graduated is unlikely to be taken as a measure of an individual's practice. Therefore what constitutes 'quality' of social work education may well be extremely difficult to pinpoint and unlikely to be captured within the current system and might well exist in newer institution as the study by Ashwin et al (2016) suggests. As the discussion in the following section will indicate, what appears to be emerging from the academics interviewed is a concern that the standard at which any graduate enters the profession needs to be maintained and monitored in all institutions across the sector. This issue is magnified when new and developing alternative routes into social work are also considered, work based training and graduate schemes may

provide different challenges and regulation needs to take account of these variations which makes the task of ensuring consistency of standards extremely challenging.

5.4.3 Consistency of standards may be compromised

‘...in the end there is really no market advantage accorded to institutions that provide extra-quality education. What matters in the market is not the quality but rather competitive advantage.’ (Zemsky, 2005 quoted in Brown and Carasso, 2013 p.164)

What is described by participants in this study is a tension between the demands of the newly empowered student-consumer; the insistence from universities that student satisfaction rates within the NSS survey are given the highest priority; that income generation through student fees or research grants is maximised; that REF performance measures are satisfied to ensure future funding; that high student retention and pass rates are maintained; that the needs of the profession are met with high calibre of social work graduates entering the profession; and that their own job security is maintained alongside a healthy work-life balance. These tensions are perhaps most profoundly exemplified within the issue of the academic ability to fail students raised by a number of participants and expressed here by one:

‘...we have a lot of pressure from outside our department to not fail students. The amount of failing students whose appeals are upheld is very high... Officially students get three attempts but some have constantly appealed and after six years they’re still trying to get through. Within the university retention is seen as so important.’ (2)

The quotations in Chapter Four give a good sense of those tensions which were described by most interview participants, and the interrelationship between themes also begins to emerge.

In a climate where universities have been forced to compete to maintain funding levels and indeed institutional survival, performance in league tables and research frameworks bring a ‘competitive advantage’ if positive and a potentially serious disadvantage if not. This is therefore likely to impact on future student numbers, commissioned research attracted by the institution and future ‘value’ of the university in market terms. As one participant explained, *‘...decisions about whether programmes run or not will depend on these scores’ (13).*

Likewise, student numbers may well have a more short term effect on income and the financial viability of courses and therefore temptation to drop standards during leaner admission periods seems a rational institutional response. However, all of these market-driven processes work against the objectives of the social work profession on many levels. Firstly, as participants highlight, chasing student satisfaction levels for the NSS can amount to student appeasement. The expressed inability to challenge students may be creating an unhealthy power imbalance between academic and student within the current climate. In addition it may mean lowering academic standards, albeit unwittingly, in some cases as one participant notes, *'I see inflated grades and people not being given the criticism they should be'* (12).

In turn, other pressures placing high demands on the personal resources of academics may well mean less time to build quality relationships with students and teaching and assessment methods which are resource efficient but not as robust as they could be in some cases. Pressure to maintain retention and pass rates may also mean lowering the bar for passing students in some, albeit rare, instances. In addition, results indicate that some institutions have seen a change in demographic, with much younger cohorts in some cases with little diversity in terms of race and gender in some institutions. Other courses, where academic entry requirements are lower, are attracting a more diverse group of students but there is some concern that the academic entry requirements may, in some instances, be too low.

On the other side of this equation are the pressures from within the social work profession, those highlighted in the media and indeed the ongoing government agenda. Cumulatively, there is a growing sense that social work education is somehow letting down an already tarnished professional identity by producing some graduates who are not always performing as well as they might. Added to that is the fact that the demands within the profession, due to severely limited resources and growing needs in every area of service delivery, are profound. In the midst of such competing pressures social work academics express feeling the tension where if the demands of the university are not met then courses may close; *'The answer to flagging scores can be to just get rid of the course...'* (3). However, if the government agenda is not met and the professional calibre of graduates is not *seen to* improve then the worst case scenario is that social work education could be removed from the university sector entirely. The tension is described as both a professional and personal one, where the stakes are high for social work as a profession and for individuals in terms of their own career and financial security.

This position expressed by participants is echoed not only in most of the interviews conducted in this research but also within the growing body of critical literature on the topic of marketisation in the higher education sector generally. Since the inception of my study, this body of work has grown considerably and continues to do so. Messages within critical literature suggest that the quality of education throughout much of the sector is being compromised (Brown and Carosso, 2013; Giroux, 2014; McGeddigan, 2013; Williams, 2013) since the advent of market processes. Despite the rhetoric of the market, where competition is *supposed* to encourage institutions to raise their game, there is a growing body of evidence that this is not the case. This research is an addition to such evidence and may be relevant not just to social work education but other disciplines, particularly professional courses.

It is worth noting however that there is also evidence that the more elite institutions continue to thrive (Reay, 2011). Indeed, within the results detailed above there is an emerging sense that longer established universities are not feeling the pressure in the same way as newer former polytechnics. Many of the interview comments which stand out as different from the main view expressed are made by participants working in older universities. For example, one participant from a post 1960 – 1990 institution expressed experience which was not in keeping with the majority:

'We are very keen here to only qualify those who can "do" practice, and if they can't we push them towards another degree. We are quite good at this university (although not at my last university) at not passing the ones who can't do it. You aren't doing your reputation or anyone else any good by passing them.' (3).

There is also some evidence that experiences outside England, in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, are different. This has been attributed to having a more invested regulator by some participants but may also relate to organisational factors such as the lack of fees in Scotland for domestic students.

Other evidence parallels that identified in this study, for example, grade inflation has been identified (Brown and Carosso, 2013) and the NSS and other league table based systems have been highlighted as creating misconceptions of quality (Jones-Devitt and Samiei, 2011) as they attempt to encapsulate the mark of a 'good' education into quantifiable and instrumentally driven measures (Furedi, 2011). Inequalities of opportunity are reinforced by the newly marketised sector (Collini, 2012; Reay, 2011) with new universities tending to attract more BME students and those from lower social classes. Others have highlighted

the change in climate within universities which supports the accounts of participants in this study that they are becoming business-like institutions using micro-management techniques to monitor staff and output (Buraway, 2011; Gill, 2012), ‘where teachers and thinkers are constantly surveyed and regulated in the name of efficiency’ (Miller and Sabapathy, 2011 p. 43) and academics are left feeling stressed and disempowered. This is very much in line with the data gathered from participants in this study with one describing ‘...a work based management system that I hate with a passion’ (8).

The emerging picture is a bleak one and one which is described throughout much of the higher education sector in the UK. It is also worth remembering that this market model has largely been imported from the USA and is now being rolled out internationally based on the Anglo-American example (Rust, 2014; Bekhradnia, 2014). Giroux (2014) writes of the neoliberal university:

‘...it will ensure the marginalisation and eventual elimination of those intellectuals willing to fight for public values, rights, spaces and institutions not wedded to the logic of privatization, commodification, deregulation, militarization and hyper masculinity.’ (Giroux, 2014 p.16)

Others offer equally fatalistic and pessimistic predictions but McGeddigan (2013) identifies the introduction of the market into higher education as ‘more a shambles than a gamble’ (p. 185) highlighting the lack of democratic debate around the topic. He foresaw the influence and interest of multinational organisations several years ago and calls for public interest journalism to continue to focus on this issue since the power of such companies to influence policy seems profound and coinciding with recent statutory developments. There is also a call for a return to radicalism from some (Neary and Hagyard, 2011); whilst others look for a way forward through engaging the student body in the debate with a view to utilising their power-base (Scullion, Molesworth and Nixon, 2011). Indeed, the National Union of Students (NUS) appear to have recognised their consumer power and are currently involved in an NSS boycott as part of their campaign against further increases in tuition fees (Pells, 2017). In addition, the 2017 general election campaign saw a surge in support for a Labour party manifesto which put the abolition of student fees at the heart of its policies. There is then some growing notion of resistance to the tide of marketisation in the sector but this is limited in the face of the now open government agenda to allow international conglomerates a place in the sector and degree granting powers which have been legislated for under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. Objections to marketisation of the university then are not solely based on

ideological preferences but on an emerging body of evidence that education is suffering. This study contributes to that body of knowledge.

5.4.4 The influence of marketisation on academic and professional discourse regarding social work education

Within social work education and the sample involved in this study in particular, there was little expression of resistance to the tide of marketisation expressed in any strategic sense. It is worth remembering that academic social work has a strong critical tradition and indeed some very current counter-neoliberal discourse (Jones, 2001; Dustin, 2007; Fergusson and Woodward, 2009; Fenton, 2014; Harris, 2014; Jordan & Drakeford, 2012). However, in the main this analysis has been directed outward at the working environment for social work practitioners rather than inward, at the climate within the university and academic milieu itself. In an article I have recently submitted for publication to the British Journal of Social Work, I suggest that this may be some form of academic dissonance or ‘othering’ of neoliberalism on the part of critical social work academics. To give one example, Harris (2014) provides an analysis of neoliberal practices in social work settings, breaking these down into constituent parts of *marketisation*, *consumerisation* and *managerialism* which equally describe the higher education sector represented in this study. He talks of the ‘tensions, dilemmas and contradictions raised in social work by marketisation’ (pg.19) and yet gives no mention to the parallel university milieu and the now well-documented existence of the same regime and tensions.

Perhaps the most profound expression of participants’ position regarding marketisation is implicit in their apparent inability to enter into a public discourse regarding this topic, whilst being very candid in their views under the protection of research anonymity. Whilst I initially credited my own interview technique with the depth of comments from participants, I have since reflected that this may have more to do with their own need to talk about these issues which has been stifled by the current climate. I therefore raise the question as to whether academic freedom itself is potentially at stake within the marketised university sector since individuals are prohibited from speaking out on an issue which may implicate standards within their own university and therefore have serious market implications.

Within the interviews there was strong expression of disempowerment and a reoccurring notion that ‘...*something needs to be done about this*’ (10). Participants stressed the

importance of the topic and yet seemed more than happy to leave it with me rather than seek follow-up involvement or association with my work. There was a clear expression of fatalism and resignation in the tone of most interviews, coupled with conflict between self-preservation and commitment to social work values.

Returning then to the model of critical reflection as a transformative tool proposed by Fook (2004), this form of what she refers to as ‘fatalism’ is not unusual:

‘In order to be transformative, the process of critical reflection needs to be able to counteract feelings of fatalism... Fatalism might refer more broadly to feelings of disempowerment, of lack of agency or ability to act upon and effect change.’
(Fook, 2004 p.22)

Indeed many of interview participants appeared to have resigned themselves to the probable decline of social work education within the university setting. Some identified impending retirement or alternative disciplinary expertise as a source of future refuge for themselves, but also described being ‘fearful’ for others in social work academia.

In order to fulfil the transformative objectives of this research project and indeed to offer knowledge in the field beyond what people very probably already know, this analysis will now look towards using Fook’s model to reframe this discussion. However, it must be noted that this form of critical analysis is an ‘inclusive method’ involving participants and those within the broader field. As such the analysis will not focus on me as the researcher to take forward change, but to seek to generate wider discussion and analysis using Fook’s two-staged approach. Fook (2004) advocates the first stage of the process as ‘laying all the cards on the table’ (p.24) with a view to deconstructing the power relationships and disempowered identities with a view to reconstructing these in a way which re-empowers participants as the second stage of critical analysis.

The collective narrative expressed by interview participants (largely supported within the results of the questionnaires) in this research describes the conflicting demands of the marketised university and the social work profession as in tension. Some described being resentful of the university’s agenda and others of colleagues who are seemingly more willing to work to that agenda than they themselves are. Some expressed worry for the profession and many expressed worry for their own position. One even described how she planned to ‘whistle blow’ due to concerns regarding possible grade inflation and unwillingness to fail students. However, in the main participants were uncomfortable about

speaking out about this topic. They expressed fear for their own position or the reputation of their employing university; they used the research as an opportunity to express their views and experiences anonymously. Although they were indeed willing to 'lay their cards on the table' to me as a researcher, this was not the case in professional discourse since they have been apparently disempowered as individuals employed within competing universities. Universities were described as holding a huge power-base, alongside students and the government. As a professional or an academic group there was no sense expressed of an identity of power.

'The reconstruction of powerful identities is based in part on exposing the oppositional thinking...' (Fook, 2004 p.25).

In terms of this group of participants their oppositional thinking to the notion that they are in any way powerful is apparent throughout the research results and in particular in the interview data. This can of course be reconstructed by me as a researcher: I may suggest that the very basis on which a neoliberal or market model exists is to break down the sense of collective, community and public values (Giroux, 2014). As such by creating a group of competing individuals involved in the delivery of social work education, those individuals have been disempowered to speak out and disempowered into professional silence with regard to their concerns regarding the delivery of social work education. In turn, such silence continues to disempower them as it becomes a source of private shame, tension and self-doubt.

'Freely circulating information destabilizes existing power structures.'

(Zerubavel, 2006 p.41)

As such, it appears imperative that the concerns expressed in this research are put in the public domain and that there is collective ownership of them from practitioners and professional bodies. Only then can such concerns be addressed and the identity and power of social work academics be reclaimed.

In addition, it appears necessary to reconstruct the power relations as they are expressed by participants to challenge the tone of fatalism. Universities are not responsible for the structural changes that have occurred; they did not choose the imposed market conditions as a means of funding and future survival. Students are likewise working to the same goals as most of the academic staff around them, wanting to be as well equipped for practice as possible and to feel they have received a meaningful educational experience. The same agenda is equally being pursued by practice partners in social work settings who want to

maintain the highest possible levels of practice and that agenda is reflected in the media and public opinion. Journalists are not the enemy, although often vilified by the social work profession, and neither are concerned members of the public who react emotionally when they perceive social work to have let down the most vulnerable in society.

Professional bodies such as the HCPC and BASW are equally committed to the same priorities and agenda as social work academics. Those from other disciplines may also be harbouring similar concerns particularly those involved with the delivery of professional education. These concerns are not only domestic but are also shared internationally both in academic discussion and in international social work discourse. The re-established political left in the form of Corbyn's Labour Party also provide an important ally to work alongside in developing future policy. In short, there are communities and collectives, some with considerable power, who are likely to share the concerns expressed by participants of this study. It is only through reengaging with the collective and speaking out through public discourse that the power base of those who seek to profit from a market in higher education will be exposed and challenged alongside the damage which these conditions may be doing to the quality of educational provision. There appears to be an emerging suggestion that the *neoliberal consensus* is breaking down (Jones 2014) as shown by the rise in popularity of a Labour manifesto calling for renationalisation, fiscal economic policies and the abolition of student fees. Such changes are however aspirational at the current time and present considerable challenges ahead for higher education and social work.

Returning then to the research question: *How is the increased marketisation of universities in the UK influencing the delivery of entry level social work education?* I refer to the results detailed above which summarise the concerns expressed by participants highlighting that in their view and experience market mechanisms are influencing their ability to deliver the highest standards of social work education. Perhaps more importantly the findings of this study also conclude that the processes associated with marketisation are seemingly resulting in the silencing of the very voices responsible for promoting critical discourse and professional identity within the profession of social work. Any strategy for a way forward then, must include the breaking down of that silence through collective expression and the forging of appropriate partnerships with other stakeholders as detailed above. Fook's model for collective critical analysis provides a useful starting point, not for me as a lone researcher but for those working within social work academia in the UK remembering that:

‘Transformative research traces the concealed links between the observer and the observed, makes visible the invisible, seeks to break down the barriers between the social scientist and their objects of study, its success is to defamiliarize the investigator and to facilitate change in the investigated.’ (Young, 2011 p.173)

In terms of a final note regarding the wider implications of this study, it may be worth reflecting on the diminishing professional identity within social work in the UK as set out in the initial literature review. There is no doubt that the profession has been put under considerable media, public and political criticism in recent years and it is widely acknowledged that this has taken its collective toll. However, if the public voices of the profession, in the form of social work academics, have been stifled and perhaps even muted in a climate which diverts their priorities away from those of the profession for whom they speak, is it any wonder that the collective sense of identity is becoming increasingly fragile? Furthermore, if these same conflicted and extremely vulnerable individuals are charged with the primary responsibility of preparing future generations to face not only the challenges of practice but to equip them to defend the very nature of the profession, is it any wonder that growing numbers are leaving social work? I note that very recently BASW has launched a ‘Respect for Social Work Campaign’ (Stephenson 2017) and while this seems a very worthy notion I am inclined to ask if *self-respect* should perhaps be the place to start.

5.5 Chapter summary

This penultimate chapter has taken the research results detailed in Chapter Four and distilled the content into four key findings forming a response to the research question: *How is the increased marketisation of universities in the UK influencing the delivery of entry level social work education?* Firstly, this study has established that the influence of marketisation is evident to social work academics working in the sector. Secondly, this research supports others and finds that universities are not all the same and appear to be influenced in different ways by the marketisation of the sector. Thirdly, there is concern among academics that consistency in standards of social work education may be compromised by a market environment and finally, that academic and professional discourse may be stifled as a result. The discussion within this chapter has sought to contextualise the experiences expressed in this research using current literature from within the field of higher education. In addition, using a model of critical reflection, proposals have been made to promote and develop a transformative agenda within academic social

work discourse which will be followed-up in future publication and dissemination of this study.

This study adds to the growing body of literature which highlights possible deficiencies in the quality and delivery of higher education within a market based structure. It is unique in capturing the views of social work academics on the topic and regarding its focus on the delivery of professional social work education.

The key findings indicate that marketisation has strongly impacted on the university environment across the sector in the UK. The research also highlights that not all institutions are affected in the same way and that universities are not operating as a homogenous group. This research suggests that consistency of standards on social work courses are being influenced by the marketisation and that current regulation is not addressing the needs presented by all universities in all parts of the UK. The study also provides evidence that within this environment social work academics feel disempowered and vulnerable and that this is potentially impacting on their work with students in some cases. The research suggests that the critical academic voice within social work has been stifled within a market environment and that academic freedom and professional identity may be under pressure as a result.

Conclusions of this study point to a need for collegiate action across the sector requiring open and critical reflection from within social work academia in the first instance with a view to self-empowerment and the formation of an agenda for transformative action. At a time of possible political change ahead, with a new social work regulator for England now in place, this study calls for social work academics to take forward the issues raised as part of the developing agenda regarding future provision of social work education in the UK.

In providing results which give insight into the views and experiences of a sample of social work academics in the UK this study has filled a void in existing research and opened up avenues for further research, discussion and action which will be expanded upon in the concluding chapter which follows.

Chapter 6: Conclusion, dissemination and final reflections

To conclude this doctoral study it is my intention to move metaphorically and grammatically away from the position of objective researcher back to that of a practitioner-researcher and social work academic. Whilst the last chapter has suggested that the responsibility for taking forward the findings of this study rests with the collective, I position myself within this grouping and therefore conclude that ‘we’ have a responsibility to take forward the agenda which has been illuminated in this research and in other recent work. This chapter will summarise the research *journey* before conclusively presenting the contribution to knowledge made by this work by way of five key pointers. The chapter will then look towards the process of dissemination and future work before presenting final reflections on what has been learned in relation to the topic, the research process and myself.

6.1 Summary of the research journey:

The research began with a survey conducted at a national conference of social work academics in July 2015. Participation in the survey required more work than anticipated by me as a researcher to engage interest and promote awareness of the study. As a result 78 questionnaires were completed, out of which 34 participants indicated a willingness to be interviewed. Questionnaire findings pinpoint wide scale awareness of processes of marketisation among participants which now appear well-established within the UK university sector. Qualitative comments made in this early part of the study indicate a level of concern regarding the influence of the NSS and institutional focus on income generation. Both the comments recorded on the questionnaires and the level of willingness to be interviewed for the study suggest that there was a level of concern among participants which was later expressed by the majority of the 18 participants who were then interviewed. Substantive interviews were conducted by telephone in February 2016. Interview findings focussed on the competing demands experienced by participants between pressures from universities and the social work profession; concerns regarding a changing student demographic; concerns regarding standards and particularly on universities’ lack of willingness to exit failing students in some instances.

Inductive analysis has sought to locate these findings within the broader context of developments in higher education in the UK. Concerns expressed by participants in this study are replicated across other parts of the sector and there is a growing body of literature

surrounding such concerns. This critical discourse is duplicated in America, where a market based organisation of university provision existed long before the UK and what is now seen as an Anglo-American model, is being rolled out across the globe (Pickard, 2014). However, it is a model with inherent difficulties and findings have emerged that standards of education may be compromised in some instances. Furthermore, as opposed to creating greater opportunity for equality of opportunity with more people having the option to attend university there is indication that the current structure of university provision in the UK may be perpetuating inequalities. In terms of social work provision it has been highlighted that not all universities are influenced in the same way by marketisation with more established institutions differing from former polytechnics, who now provide the majority of social work education in the UK. There is also indication that the influence of marketisation is varied in different parts of the UK and that this variation may in part be due to the differences in regulations and regulating bodies.

Methodologically this study has been a journey and by design a learning exercise. Taking my lead from the American philosophical school of pragmatism and using the seminal guide set out in 1959 by C. Wright Mills I have sought to ‘craft’ my own method, rather than use one pre-prescribed from the catalogue of methodological approaches and techniques now available. In addition the research has been guided by a critical stance seeking to locate the concerns expressed by participants within a wider policy context. I have sought to develop my own skill as a researcher through the process of reflection rather than seeking technocratic expertise. The research design has therefore been adapted for the topic, taking into account my own resources and objectives. As a result, my journey has been far from faultless and the study is certainly not without limitations which have been fully documented in Chapter Three. However, the methods used have been relatively traditional calling upon a mix of questionnaire and interview data as two distinctly separate streams.

The study has used a combination of deductive and inductive approaches, including unstructured telephone interviews which allowed participants to decide the focus of their contribution. Initial data analysis has been thematic using standard processes of data immersion through the taking of field notes, transcription and interview summary sheets. This was followed by coding and organisation of data into themes and patterns (Huberman and Miles 2009, Guest et al 2012) and the emergence of four key findings set out in chapter five. Final analysis of findings has sought to use a model of critical reflection as a

tool to progress a transformatory agenda (Fook 2004). This method of transformative analysis places the responsibility for taking forward the issues raised by this study back on participants and the collective of social work academics in the UK. With this in mind the issue of dissemination now becomes central to the approach taken.

6.2 Contribution to knowledge:

Findings of this study indicate that market processes and the restructuring of the university sector are influencing the delivery of social work education. At a stage when a new regulator is about to be appointed responsible for social work education in England, the nuances and systemic issues which have been highlighted by participants in this study have the potential for meaningful impact within the field. The study has presented concern expressed by experienced academic participants and findings pinpoint potential fault lines within the current structure of educational provision for entry into the social work profession. Whilst the sample of participants is not set out as representative of the whole, the voices and experiences described in both data streams should not be underestimated and the conclusions from this study have implications for other professional and academic disciplines. So then, to succinctly summarise the contribution to knowledge and practice made by this educational doctoral study. The following four points highlight how this new knowledge may be utilised within educational practice, academic discourse, professional development and future policy:

- 1) The study gives a unique voice to the experiences and insight of social work academics in the UK regarding the influence of marketisation within universities. This is particularly important since it has emerged that academic and professional discourse has been suppressed regarding this topic within the marketised environment. At a time of policy development regarding the provision of social work education this insight adds to an important dimension to the development of future policy and regulation as well as planning of individual courses.
- 2) This study provides additional evidence that the university sector in the UK is a diverse estate of provision with differing issues, focus and requirements in each institution. For example, one notable issue that has emerged is in relation to differing student demographics. Again, this provides an important focus for attention in relation to future professional reflection for those working within the university sector, as well as policy and regulation of university based social work education.

- 3) Findings indicate that a minority of social work graduates may have unrealistic expectations or be insufficiently equipped to meet the demands of practice. When viewed alongside the introduction of alternative qualification routes, also part of an expanding and complex education market, consistency of standards of those entering the social work profession may be compromised. This has immediate practice implications for educators, as well as the training and support needs of newly qualified social workers. Furthermore, implications of the study suggest that current performance indicators, quality assurance mechanisms and regulation particularly in England may be inefficient to ensure the maintenance of professional standards in a climate where greater priority is given to student satisfaction and educational league table placement. This knowledge gives valuable insight to future policy makers and regulators regarding the requirements of this complex estate of current providers of social work education in the UK.
- 4) Finally, secondary findings indicate that professional self-reflection and academic discourse regarding social work education in the UK has been skewed by the absence of this topic in open debate and publication. This research therefore has the potential to stimulate the development of open critical discourse based on the evidence presented. In this way the new knowledge provided by this unique study has the potential to inform future academic discourse regarding social work education and other comparable disciplines.

The remaining part of this concluding chapter addresses the topic of research dissemination, setting out a strategy which seeks to ensure that the findings of the study have impact within the field. I then consider my own development and future objectives as a researcher before offering my final reflections regarding this doctoral journey.

6.3 Research dissemination and impact

‘Too much research remains on library shelves, rather than in the minds of practitioners and embodied in their professional actions.’

(Southworth, 1998 quoted in Middlewood et al, 1999 p.167)

The design of this research project places dissemination and discussion within the field as central to the approach taken. Beginning that ‘conversation’ (Huberman, 1993) through

conference presentations at the outset, direct participation of colleagues working in the field has also been central not only to the gathering of data, but as a means of promoting further discussion. In so doing traditional boundaries between researcher, participant and experts in the field have been blurred. As a piece of practitioner research this project has therefore sought to utilise a somewhat interactive model which has likewise been extended to the form of critical analysis used. A future strategy for dissemination will therefore seek to promote the findings of the study with a view to prompting broader critical discussion regarding the influence of marketisation in universities. It has been argued above that a key part of this critical discourse is the breaking of silence around the topic as well as offering a model of transformatory critical analysis to counteract some of the fatalistic views that have been encountered.

However, as the project has developed I have become aware that a sensitive and thoughtful approach to dissemination is required. The vulnerability expressed by many participants regarding the viability of courses and the government agenda to take more control over social work education alongside the expansion of alternative qualification routes, means that social work education within the university sector as a whole may well be vulnerable. Data gathered within this study has the potential to be used not to transform and improve university provision of social work education, but to assist the case for the expansion of alternative work-based qualification routes. This research is not only relevant to social work education and has some relevance to university provision in general and the growing body of knowledge (both nationally and internationally) that a market structured university sector may be problematic. In particular it may have relevance to other professional courses such as teaching or nursing. At a time when the introduction of university fees has been seriously called into question by a strong political opposition, this addition to knowledge appears timely.

To date dissemination has taken the form of two conference presentations at a key national conference on social work education in two consecutive years (Cleary, 2015a and 2016), and an international conference in August 2015 (Cleary 2015b). A further international conference presentation is planned for April 2018. In addition, initial findings have now been written-up and an article submitted in October 2016 for publication in *The British Journal of Social Work*. Whilst revisions to the conclusion were advised by one of the reviewers, both commented on the importance of the research and publication in this high impact journal appears viable. Alternative journals have also been considered including

Social Work Education and *Radical and Critical Social Work* with a view to publishing a summary article in early 2018. Other articles are also under consideration to allow discussion of different aspects of findings to be explored in more detail; this includes the individual themes raised, as well as a piece focussing solely on questionnaire results. There may be some merit in considering a more international audience and through more generic educational publication to seek to contribute to wider discourse within critical education. I am also keen to explore the transferability of social work skills to research with a view to promoting social work practitioner research in the future. This is therefore an area I aim to work on further with a view to publication based on my own experience and reflections. The target journal for this piece is likely to be *Practice; Social Work in Action* and as the title suggests this is aimed at a social work practitioner readership rather than an academic one.

In consultation with my supervisors I have been advised to produce a summary briefing paper to submit to the *Chief Social Worker for England* and to the authors of the earlier cited government reviews (Narey, Croisdale-Appleby) into social work education.

My own preference for dissemination is however through conference presentation, policy development platforms and discussion in which dialogue and ideas can develop with more immediacy than through publication. Although within the academic accreditation structure less emphasis and prestige appears to be attached to conference papers than journal publication, the contribution to collective knowledge appears more tangible, networking is more stimulating and this is something I would wish to continue alongside any publications.

6.4 Future research and teaching objectives

During the course of this doctoral project there has been a growing interest and body of publication within education relating to the topic of university marketisation. Alongside this there is a growing need for more detailed research regarding the influence that the market model is having on education in other areas particularly comparable professionally qualifying courses such as nursing or teaching. However, the agenda appears to be changing daily and therefore a degree of flexibility and reflexivity must be a central tenet of future work in this area.

In terms of social work education in the UK in particular there is also a need for more research which focusses on the issues raised. Each of the themes detailed above could give rise to individual research projects and allow more specific examination of issues such as the NSS, the student demographic and the different categories of university to be explored using different methods than those employed here. This would allow a more detailed knowledge and understanding to develop.

In terms of my personal research goals, this doctoral journey has inspired me to develop my own skills as a researcher and to hopefully find opportunities to work on commissioned projects using a more targeted range of methods. Alongside this it is my ambition to work and promote the professional doctorate within social work practice as a means of professional development and opportunity to work alongside practitioners undertaking social work based research. I therefore welcome future opportunities to supervise doctoral work within the field of social work and in so doing bring together my own skill set and expertise as a social worker, a teacher and a researcher.

There is additionally room for reflection regarding the delivery and structure of individual courses arising from the data presented in this study. To that end it is also important to disseminate the findings within my own work place with a view to concentrating on finding solutions (Schofield 2016) to address some of the potential concerns raised rather than concentrating on the problems. This may well form the basis of future publication.

6.5 Final reflections

In considering my final reflections on this doctoral research journey it appears important for me to consider the learning that has taken place. Indeed, the very process of putting this learning into words and structures additionally enhances, reinforces and solidifies that development. For the sake of order and brevity I will organise this into three simple strands although I need to acknowledge that my learning during the course of this study has been far more multidimensional than these categories might suggest. However, the first strand of learning I wish to reflect on relates to the processes of research; the second to learning in relation to the topic of study; and the thirdly, to reflect briefly on what I have learned about myself. Taking each of these strands as questions I will provide a brief reflection on each before providing a final conclusion synthesising pertinent reflections. However, I would also wish to highlight that in the same way as my analysis will continue long after this

thesis is written-up and submitted, so too will my learning, development and reflections continue in relation to this journey.

What have I learned about the processes of research?

As with all development, learning in relation to the processes of research has taken on various levels during the course of this doctoral study. There has been significant learning in relation to the mechanical means and methods by which research is conducted. In formulating my own approach I have considered, critiqued and discounted other approaches to research which remain popular within the social sciences. I have become familiar with the array of methods aligned to different approaches and some of the work of the leading protagonists. I have developed a deeper understanding of the processes of research both through the guidance provided by others but perhaps more importantly by working my own way through this process from the inception of an idea to the delivery of findings through dissemination within the field. Studying in the twenty-first century, I have been fortunate to have access to a world-wide mass of supporting literature. In addition I have had the guide of an outstanding supervisory team, to have had personal contact with some of the key authors used in this study and to have developed my insight using some of the wisdom shared by participants. My understanding of the research process is now well embedded and already I have noted improvements in my own ability to teach dissertation students for example. Any intimidation I may have felt regarding the language and mystique of research has largely been removed although I remain committed to avoiding it where possible.

In addition, the continuous and coherent process required to conduct a research project of this size has also been something of a learning curve. Studying part time has meant that the project has been conducted over a four year period which has been in itself a challenge. It is only in these final stages that I am comfortable to accept that it has been impossible and probably undesirable to remain focussed. This is because focus shifts as a result of reading, development, experience and reflection. Managing this shifting positioning whilst remaining focussed on a single project of study which must retain a logical and coherent thread throughout has presented a challenge, particularly during the lengthy period of writing-up. Not only is there a continuous stream of literature being produced on this topic, but policy and practice are a developing entity. Alongside this my own thinking and analysis has continued to develop and my focus of interest has changed at different stages. The thesis acts as a method of imposing structure and coherence on the whole process

where loose ends are tied up and a symmetry is sought. This stresses the importance of any writing-up of research as part of the overall process as well as the tangible end result.

On a more macro level, my understanding of the methodological philosophies, ontological and epistemological considerations have also developed. My decision to adopt a position of pragmatism was based on a clear understanding of the spectrum of methodological stances but my rejection of both the pseudo-scientific and the constructivist positions. In any future discourse I feel confident to engage in dialogue in relation to my own position which is grounded and well supported in the American philosophical tradition which has informed my thinking. However, I remain committed to the rejection of inaccessible language in relation to these topics and the notion that true understanding of even the most conceptually complex ideas can be delivered using clear terminology.

At another macro level I have also learned a great deal about the structure and organisation of research, and even the 'market' which now exists in this area. I have developed an awareness of the drivers behind research which go beyond commissioning, resources and funding and are also related to performance tables and individual career accreditation objectives pursued by individual academics. Alongside this the process and bureaucratic organisation of publication has also become clearer to me. I have yet to decide the extent to which I would wish to become part of this 'house of cards'.

On perhaps a deeper level I have also developed a greater awareness of the different conceptual levels of analysis and critical reflection, particularly during the writing of these final chapters. I have become aware that the process of thematic analysis itself involves detail at a micro level which then needs to be transposed to a more macro discussion, relating the personal issues expressed by participants to a wider policy context for example. However, I have also developed awareness of a deeper and higher order of analysis which relates trends in policy to dominant narratives, philosophies and driving ideologies. In recognising these as distinct layers or levels of analysis I feel more able to engage in each as appropriate and to apply the use of critical reflection to each to develop my own understanding. This has been a significant piece of learning which has embedded a far clearer awareness of the concept of critical reflection as a superior means of learning and analysis. In short and in the simplest of terms, what appeared to make sense to me in the work of early pragmatists now makes sense to me due to my own experience in this study.

Over and above the limitations of the study which I have detailed in chapter three, I have decided to address the issue of what I would have done differently based on what I have learned. In terms of my chosen method, although I have no regrets for not using a specific pre-prescribed approach in that I have been forced to work through each stage of the process to develop a real understanding of method, it would certainly have been easier had I chosen to follow a set method. In any future research I am therefore likely to be more specifically guided in this respect and possibly to use some form of *grounded theory* would suit the method I have eventually adopted. Secondly, I think I could have been more measured and realistic about the scope and size of the project. Choosing to use both questionnaire and interviews has produced an unnecessarily large amount of data and has perhaps meant less depth of analysis at times. The idea of using a questionnaire to engage participation was a good one, but the form itself could have been much simpler with a view to asking a smaller number of closed questions. The scaled response element was lengthy and overly complicated for the purpose of this part of the study and could have been reduced and simplified considerably. However, I would certainly not change the use of telephone interviews and would argue that there is a depth within the data despite the lack of face to face engagement. I also feel personal engagement of the sample population was a strength of the method used. In terms of analysis, the survey tool used was somewhat limited in the displays and analysis it provided and I was somewhat naïve in my selection. The experience has taught me what to look for in software however, and I suspect there are much better packages on offer which I would like to investigate in the future. Manual thematic analysis of interview data was useful in terms of learning and development of skill but it may well be that I could adapt to use other methods in the future particularly in projects where I was not working alone. My decision to separate out results in chapter four from findings and discussion in chapter five was appropriate in this case but I could easily envisage presenting the two side by side in future research reports. In short, this doctoral research has taken a ‘back to basics’ approach which was by design to assist me in developing my craft as a researcher. Having done this with some degree of success by way of the production of a finished doctoral study, I now leave myself open to use more resource efficient methods in the future.

What have I learned about the research topic?

To a great extent what I have learned about the topic of research is well documented in the findings and discussion detailed above. It is not therefore my intention to repeat or

paraphrase this in any way. However, I do feel that at the widest possible level my understanding of the topic has changed in a way which is perhaps not fully documented in the findings since its evidence base is less clear to me. Whilst I would not then include such learning as part of the findings of the study, it is undoubtedly an emerging development in my own understanding.

Looking back to the start of this project I am struck by my own naivety with regard to the topic of marketisation within the university sector. Although words like ‘gamble’ and ‘experiment’ were used by important authors in relation to the expansion of a market within universities, I did not fully understand the literal nature of this terminology. What I have learned is that the driving political and economic philosophy behind this expansion and market trajectory of the university sector sees it as an exercise in innovation alongside being an opportunity to incorporate private investment into the sector. Such a philosophy which is aligned to neoliberal thinking as well as a more pure form of capitalism, incorporates the notion that innovation and progress requires an element of uncertainty, chaos even. It understands that flaws and errors may occur as any new innovation develops. The by-product of this initial marketisation of the university sector in the UK may well be falling standards in some instances for example, but these are potentially seen as acceptable in order to create a more globally suited system of education which responds to the needs of a changing economic and social world. Policy makers may well be aware of the potential problems such as those which have been highlighted within this study but are reluctant to regulate for fear of restricting innovation in the university sector. It is only through an understanding of this philosophy that a counter discourse can be developed.

At the outset of this study two government reports were reviewed, both produced in the same month in 2014 and both examining social work education. One had been initiated by Norman Lamb in the Department of Health and one by Michael Gove in the Department of Education. The former appeared to have at its core the objective of seeking to improve social work education within the university system through regulation; the latter appeared to question whether universities could in fact be relied upon to deliver social work education and with a strong suggestion that seeking alternative means of qualifying social workers might be preferable to tampering with the newly marketised university sector through regulation. It should be noted that regulation is a concept which is far removed from the political ideology of Michael Gove for example. In a speech in 2012 he made the following observation:

‘Far too often the Whitehall machine is risk averse. Media commentary rarely allows early errors to be seen in context as experiments that will generate improvements.’ (Civil Service World, 2012)

So then what emerges is that these two government departments present competing priorities; on the one hand the needs of the profession which call for regulation and on the other the needs of the new and innovating university structure which resists any such hampering. This same tension is replicated in the results of this study and the reported experience of the social work academics who participated remain torn between meeting the needs of the university and those of the profession. Therefore what is played-out at a policy level within those two reports appears to be duplicated in the personal experience of the individuals.

My learning in relation to the topic then has led me to believe that parts of the government are fully aware of the fault-lines that exist in a marketised system of higher education and that this may be influencing overall delivery of social work education in the UK. The question remains as to what current and future governments intend to do about it. Some action has already been taken such as the introduction of alternative work-based post graduate schemes for qualification into the profession. Alongside this there has been a recent reduction in the numbers of bursaries awarded to social work students which may well be impacting on overall recruitment onto social work courses, particularly for more mature students for example. As well as reducing numbers qualifying at university the dual effect of these changes may be to decrease diversity among those qualifying into the profession and promote the qualification of those from more traditionally academic backgrounds who are more likely to be young, white, middle class and female. The suggestion that a future Labour government would abolish the system of fees is also an interesting one given the power of the lobby which is now invested in this growing university market. Whether the tide of marketisation in higher education is reversible remains to be seen, if and when a socialist Labour government is elected in the future.

What have I learned about myself?

‘One must still have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star’

Turning then to what this study has taught me about myself I am drawn to the quotation above which is attributed to Frederick Nietzsche and sets out the premise that in order to produce anything creative or original, an element of chaos or disorder is necessary. During the course of this doctoral study as a relatively mature student in terms of age, this has been my most important piece of learning. Up until this point academic study has been a relatively safe and well organised process in which I have given very little of myself and my own thinking away. At doctoral level this has not seemed either possible or indeed desirable. At times I have allowed confusion, messiness and what Mills refers to as ‘fuzzy’ ideas to emerge without any initial attempt to pin these down. Furthermore, I have learned to enjoy the uncertainty and the greater depth of analysis I have been able to achieve which I hope is demonstrated in these pages. I have also become aware of the importance of detail and precision in the course of this study and the need to create order of complex analysis so as to make it accessible and presentable to an external audience. I would like to believe that beyond anything else this is the essence of ‘doctorateness’. However, I am undoubtedly more aware of the process of critical reflection and even more committed to this approach as the key source of analysis, development and learning. In relation to my own work I have concluded that what is gained from experience and thoughtful pauses is often more useful than what is found in the pages of books.

In addition I have become aware of the transferability of skills between social work practice, teaching and qualitative research. The relational aspect in each of these skills is perhaps the difference between an efficient technocrat and an experienced craftsperson. I very much aspire to use the skills I have acquired in all three in future work.

This thesis has delivered a study relating to social work education and the marketisation of universities in the UK. Through the examination of context and literature within the field the study was designed to elicit the qualitative views and reported experiences of a sample of social work academics. The results of the study have been recognised as having importance within the field and I will now be embarking upon a full course of dissemination and engagement with future practice and policy initiatives. My understanding and views in relation to the topic have advanced considerably in the last four

years and I now feel confident to contribute my own academic and dual-professional voice to discussion within the field. In relation to my contribution to research, I feel equally able to pursue future studies and perhaps more importantly to supervise others along this doctoral journey particularly practitioner researchers. I have also learned that innovation, originality and creativity do require uncertainty, error and the ability to learn from mistakes. This thesis has allowed me to work through the research process stage by stage, alongside the presentation of the study which I have undertaken. As ever, my own work and learning remains unfinished.

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Appendix 1 – Confirmation of Ethical Approval

23rd April 2015



**Anglia Ruskin
University**

Cambridge & Chelmsford

Teresa Cleary

Cambridge Campus
East Road
Cambridge
CB1 1PT

T: 0845 271 3333
Int: +44 (0)1223 363271
www.anglia.ac.uk

Dear Teresa,

Re: Application for Ethical Approval

Reference Number	ESC-DREP-14-171
Project Title	Social Work Education: Exploring the impact of marketisation and neoliberalism within the English University System
Principal Investigator	Teresa Cleary

I am pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Panel (FREP) under the terms of Anglia Ruskin University's Research Ethics Policy (Dated 23/6/14, Version 1).

Ethical approval is given for a period of 3 years from the 23rd April 2015.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you comply with Anglia Ruskin University's Research Ethics Policy and the Code of Practice for Applying for Ethical Approval at Anglia Ruskin University, including the following.

- The procedure for submitting substantial amendments to the committee, should there be any changes to your research. You cannot implement these amendments until you have received approval from DREP for them.
- The procedure for reporting adverse events and incidents.
- The Data Protection Act (1998) and any other legislation relevant to your research. You must also ensure that you are aware of any emerging legislation relating to your research and make any changes to your study (which you will need to obtain ethical approval for) to comply with this.
- Obtaining any further ethical approval required from the organisation or country (if not carrying out research in the UK) where you will be carrying the research out. Please ensure that you send the DREP copies of this documentation if required, prior to starting your research.
- Any laws of the country where you are carrying the research and obtaining any other approvals or permissions that are required.

- Any professional codes of conduct relating to research or requirements from your funding body (please note that for externally funded research, a Project Risk Assessment must have been carried out prior to starting the research).
- Completing a Risk Assessment (Health and Safety) if required and updating this annually or if any aspects of your study change which affect this.
- Notifying the DREP Secretary when your study has ended.

Please also note that your research may be subject to random monitoring.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. May I wish you the best of luck with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Jeffrey Grierson (Chair)
For the Education & Social Care Department Research Ethics Panel (DREP)

T:
 E:

Copy to: Gerry Davis

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire Template

Social Work Education and the marketisation of Universities

Educational Doctoral Research by Teresa Cleary, Chelmsford, Essex

follow on twitter: @ARUCleary

Please Note: By completing this document it is understood that you give consent for the information to be included in the stated research project and that all information will remain anonymous

General Questionnaire: Please take 5 minutes to complete and deliver to box provided - many thanks
Please confirm:

- Your Job Title: _____
- The number of years you have worked in the higher education sector: _____
- In which era was your employing institution established? *(tick applicable box)*
Pre 1960 ☐ Between 1960 and 1990 ☐ Post 1990 ☐
- Geographic location of your university? England/ Scotland/ Wales/ Ireland/ other *(circle as applicable)*

LESS	NO Change	MORE	<i>From your own experience of working in higher education, please consider each of the items listed and tick in either the MORE, LESS or NO CHANGE column to indicate whether there has been a change since you started working in the sector.</i>
			Diversity among students in terms of age, ethnicity and class background etc.
			Staff time to spend with students
			Library facility improvements
			Prescriptive curriculum content
			Opportunities to explore issues of social justice within teaching
			Student numbers
			Systems and staff dedicated to marketing within your university
			Emphasis on income generation
			Improved IT systems
			Emphasis from managers on National Student Survey (NSS) score and national league table placement
			Student placement opportunities
			Performance management tools and targets within the organisation
			Use of formal complaints procedures by students
			Flexibility within the teaching curriculum to be reflexive to learning needs of students
			Direct input from service users into teaching
			Use of pass rate targets
			Quality of students on intake

....continued over page

LESS	NO Change	More	Please indicate which of the following you have experienced within your institution:
			Opportunity to explore professional identity and use of self in social work
			Difficulty finding placements
			Improved links with practice partners
			Opportunities for reflective teaching
			Modularisation of teaching and learning
			Training opportunities for staff
			Use of part time and temporary staff

Question 4. Please use this space to add any other comments or issues which you find important for this study to consider:

Many thanks for your participation
Finally, would you like to be interviewed for this research?

- Please indicate if you would be willing to participate in a short informal interview (20 – 30 minutes)? **Yes / No**
- If yes, would you prefer that interview to take place here at conference or at a later date when I could visit you in your workplace? **Conference / Workplace**
- If yes, and you prefer to be interviewed at conference please provide your first name and mobile phone number:
- If yes, and you prefer to be interviewed later at your workplace please give a contact email, a contact phone number and the geographic location of your university:

Please note: personal details will be deleted from data immediately after any interview to ensure total anonymity


Appendix 3 – Conference Poster

Social Work Education and the marketisation of Universities

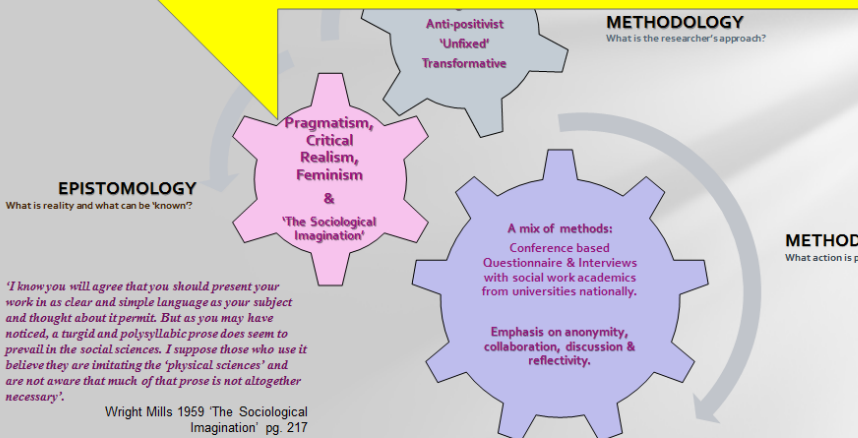
Educational Doctoral Research by Teresa Cleary, Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford. Essex
teresa.cleary@anglia.ac.uk follow on twitter: [@ARUCleary](https://twitter.com/ARUCleary)

Context to study: The university: a factory for the production of education?

- For over a decade universities in England have experienced a rising impact of market forces due to policy changes introduced by successive governments (Collini 2012).
- Changes to funding streams and the introduction of student fees in 1998 has redefined the student as a 'consumer' with increased emphasis placed on gaining expressions of high *student satisfaction* and on rights of redress where the institution fails to meet student expectations (Molesworth 2011).
- Universities are encouraged to compete to recruit students both nationally and internationally and in many cases forced to increase student numbers to sustain workable levels of finance (McGettigan 2013).
- Managerialist approaches to institutional organisation have brought about increased use of performance targets in higher education, efficiency saving initiatives and the growing impact of national league tables.
- During the same period social work education has come under public, professional and government scrutiny. Questions raised as a result of perceived high-profile failures in practice have fuelled debate (Taylor 2013).
- Developments introduced to social work education by the College of Social Work in 2013 impending policy in 2014 and calls for further reform continue. (Narey 2014, Croisdale-Appley 2014).



NOW! PLEASE take 5 minutes to
COMPLETE a QUESTIONNAIRE
MANY thanks – TERESA



EPISTEMOLOGY
What is reality and what can be 'known'?

'I know you will agree that you should present your work in as clear and simple language as your subject and thought about it permit. But as you may have noticed, a turgid and polysyllabic prose does seem to prevail in the social sciences. I suppose those who use it believe they are imitating the 'physical sciences' and are not aware that much of that prose is not altogether necessary'.
Wright Mills 1959 'The Sociological Imagination' pg. 217

METHODOLOGY
What is the researcher's approach?


Anti-positivist
'Unfixed'
Transformative

METHOD
What action is planned?


A mix of methods:
Conference based
Questionnaire & Interviews
with social work academics
from universities nationally.
Emphasis on anonymity,
collaboration, discussion &
reflectivity.

Scope of Research:

- Current literature and debate regarding social work education appears focussed on prescribed curriculum content, placement experiences and individual aspects of teaching content.
- There is little research currently that captures the impact of ideological, structural and systemic changes to higher education and the impact this may be having on professional social work education.
- Locating myself firmly in this new milieu, the research will reflect on the nature of this 'silence' (Gill 2010) and consider if this is as a result of a new power dynamic between academic and institution, and between institution and policy maker.
- The focus is on professional entry level social work courses (undergraduate and postgraduate) at universities in England.
- This research sets out to consider the systemic impact that the ideological and practical changes in higher education may be having on the nature of social work education.

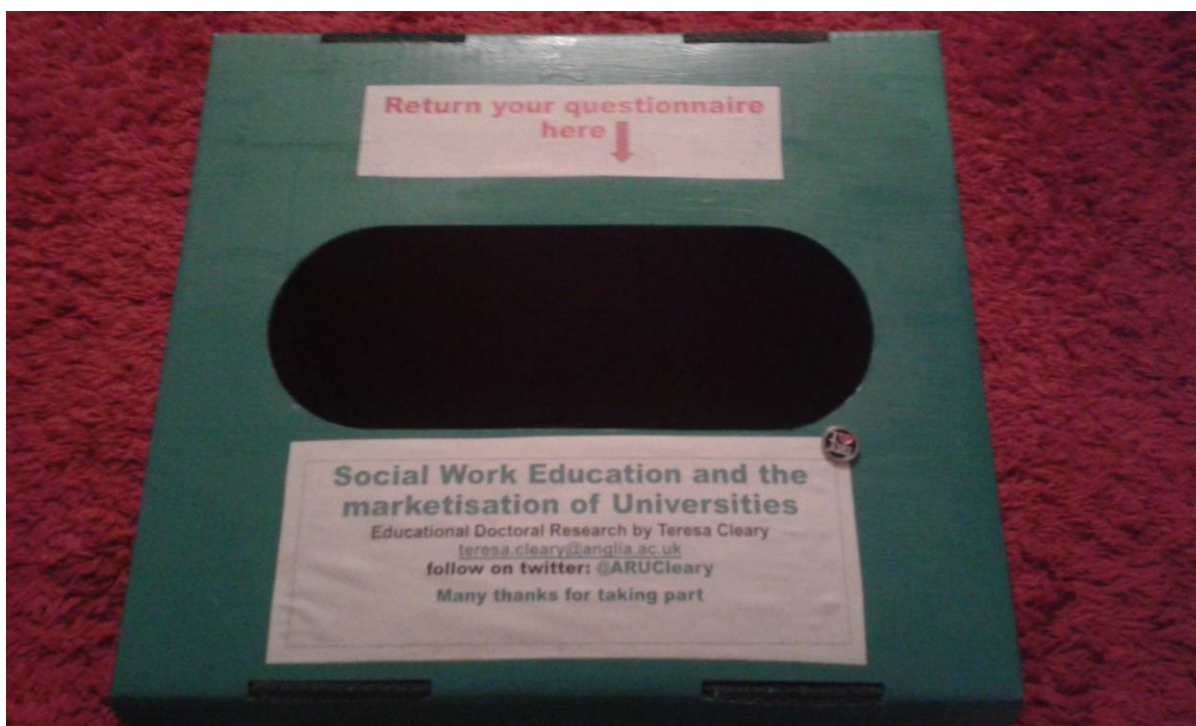


Social Work
JOBS



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Appendix 4 – Questionnaire Collection Box



Appendix 5 – Instructions to Interviewees

I am looking forward to our telephone interview... I will try not to take up too much of your time, 20 - 30 minutes is my aim.

I thought it would be easier to set out a few of the 'preliminaries' in an email in advance and you might find it helpful to read through this email in advance and/or have it open when we speak.

I need to confirm the following:

- - That the interview will be conducted on speaker-phone at my end and voice recorded, there may therefore be a slight echo on the line.
- - All details shared will be fully anonymised to ensure that neither you nor your institution can be identified.
- - Ethical approval for this research was granted in April 2015.
- - The interview will focus on the research question:

How is the increased marketisation* of universities in the UK influencing the delivery of entry level social work education?

(*Marketisation is characterised by the expansion of student fees as the main source of university funding, the public student loan system, the expansion of the university sector, published league tables, a business-like approach and increased competition between institutions).

- The interview will be largely unstructured with an opportunity for you to:

1) Share your own experience at your current university - I would be interested in such issues as your working environment, staff morale, available staff time and resources at your institution. You may also wish to consider issues mentioned in the original questionnaire such as student numbers, admission criteria, university facilities, managerial processes, the influence of the NSS and any other factors which you might associate with increased marketisation.

2) Make some general comments and give a view on the research question

- - The interview is likely to take around 20 minutes but please let me know in advance if there are any restrictions on your time.
-

Finally, I will need you to indicate your informed consent to participate via a return email and I enclose the participant information sheet. If you can confirm you have read this and consent via an email that would be fine.

Many thanks again for agreeing to participate and I look forward to speaking to you tomorrow.

With best wishes, Teresa

Appendix 6 – Images of Thematic Analysis

