The Management of Strategic Change: Case Studies of UK Students' Unions

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A THEIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHYLOSOPHY, OCTOBER 2011

ACKNOLEDGEMENT

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Frank Worthington and Dr. Michael Cole, for their guidance and encouragement throughout my research. Without their professional comments and advice, this study would not have been completed successfully and timely.

I also wish to give my appreciation to all the respondents from those Students' Unions used in the case studies, who took time out of their schedules to help me fulfil this research work. Without their willingness to participate in the study, none of this would have been possible. In particular, thanks to Nick Smith.

My former colleagues from the Management School supported me in my research work. I want to thank them for all their help and support. Especially Dr. Fang Cao was of great help in difficult times.

Finally, I am especially grateful to Jimmy and my parents who encouraged me when the challenge was great. Without their endless love and moral support, I could not have this chance to enhance my education in Liverpool and finish this research.

ABSTRACT

This research examined the management of strategic change within the students' union in the UK and the associated governance issues. This agenda was undertaken through an evaluation of the pressures for and responses to change within contemporary students' unions. As a prelude to this analysis of strategic change, the study also undertook a scholarly assessment of the roles and development of UK students' unions.

Empirical studies were undertaken to obtain first-hand data to develop findings about strategic changes and the management of such changes in students' unions. Five students' unions were chosen for the case studies. The choice of case studies was based around a city-centre theme and contrasts in terms of factors such as old and new universities, finance and governance status issues. Methods for collecting data in this research incorporated questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis. This study also used a diverse collection of scholarly literature from both management and political science. The research shows that students' unions in the UK had been through, or were in the process of going through, a process of strategic changes during approximately the last decade. Such changes were triggered by both external and internal pressures.

The study identified a highly problematic strategic management process within students' unions. Although each change situation was unique, there were common obstacles and constraints occurring during the process of change. The analysis of the data obtained from the empirical research suggested that the success of strategic management depended significantly on whether there was an effective partnership between student officers and the management. However, the effectiveness of the partnership, as implied in the previous governance structure, was questioned. The study also discussed the consequences of recent governance reform within students' unions, identified consequences for democracy and accountability and showed that at one students' union these changes had dismantled the democratic inheritance, which had been replaced by weak scrutiny and consultative arrangements.

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Introduction

This Chapter outlines the aims and objectives of this research and delineates the context of the thesis. This is also a coherent justification for the study which, in particular, outlines the potential value of this research agenda. In the final section, the themes and objectives of the subsequent chapters are identified and associated with the overall aims and objectives of the thesis.

1.1: Aims and Objectives of the Research

This research examines the management of strategic change within the students' union in the UK and the associated governance issues. This agenda is undertaken through an evaluation of the pressures for and responses to change within contemporary students' unions. As prelude to this analysis of strategic change, the study also undertakes a scholarly assessment of the roles and development of UK students' unions.

There are four core objectives of this research:

- To chronicle and evaluate the development and roles of UK students' unions.
- To consider and evaluate the pressures generating strategic change within contemporary UK students' unions.
- To consider the process of strategic change within UK students' unions.
- To assess the impact of strategic change within UK students' unions, especially in relation to governance issues.

In pursuing these objectives, the study uses a range of research methods, especially semi-structured interviews and case studies, and uses a diverse collection of scholarly literature from both management and political science.

1.2: Research Background

During recent decades organisations in the public, private and non-profit sectors have been experienced substantial organisational changes, for instance the privatisation of

public organisations (see, for example, Coram and Burnes, 2001) and large-scale mergers and acquisitions of corporations (see, for example, Fay and Luhrmann, 2004). Amongst the diverse factors driving these changes are intensified competitive pressures, for example from globalisation of markets, changes in strategy, technological innovations, customer expectations and new government legislation. The change research literature indicates that on average organisations undergo major change about once every three years, along with smaller changes that are constantly occurring (CIPD, 2006). Organisational change can be either reactive or proactive, or either incremental or discontinuous. The typology of change itself is problematic since in different dimensions different terms can be used. This research uses the term 'strategic change', which refers to changing the organisational vision, mission, objectives and of course the adopted strategy to achieve those objectives. From the scale of change, strategic change is distinct from incremental change, and is seen as affecting major sub-systems and producing outcomes which impact across many parts of an organisation (Nadler and Tushman, 1995).

Although change is a recurrent feature of organisational life, the pace and specific nature of change in many organisations has accelerated at unprecedented rates in recent years due to a volatile global market and business environment in which organisations now operate (Fay and Luhrmann, 2004; By, 2005). However, although strategic change within the public and private sectors has been extensively considered (see, for example, Iles and Sutherland, 2001; Murphy, 2002) little attention has been given to similar developments in the non-profit sector (for exceptions see Oster, 1995; Courtney, 2002). Furthermore, there is a virtual absence of any scholarship about students' unions, exceptions relating primarily to small parts of university histories (see, for example, Gordon, 1975; Holt, 1977; Cant, 1992; Chesterman, 1996), studies of the Oxford and Cambridge Unions, which are primarily debating societies (see, for example, Graham, 2005; Parkinson, 2009) and a few evaluations of overseas student's unions (see Sharfe, 1995; Hercock, 1994).

Students' unions in the UK have an extensive history. Defined by the 1994 Education Act, they are bodies representing or promoting the general interests of students at university or college. Representation, community and service delivery are three main functions of students' unions. Firstly, students' unions are obliged to represent students' interests and views within the parent organisation (university/college) and provide opinions on 'internal' or student and academic issues, for example tuition fees, and 'external' or wider political issues, for example the Iraq war. Secondly, they are dedicated to the facilitation of social and organisational activities for the student community. Thirdly, they are also responsible for providing a variety of services to students. Most of these services such as bars and nightclubs have a commercial character, although others such as welfare services are non-commercial and could be interpreted in a more communitarian perspective. The focus of these three functions has changed over time.

The strengthening of the commercial focus of students' union towards the end of the twentieth century produced a shift in the character of these organisations, in particular towards service delivery and away from fostering a community activity. In some instances students' unions came to have a corporate feel (Buckley, 2009). In the last few years, however, the commercial model of students' unions has been weakened due to factors such as changing student demographics, expectations and needs and, in particular, in relation to city-centre based students' unions, the emergence of much more intensive commercial competition. The subsequent decline in commercial incomes (AMSU, 2006) has, in many cases, provided the key generator for major strategic change and led many in the student movement to question the role of students' unions and how they could best serve their memberships.

All in all, in light of the pressures from both external and internal environment within which students' unions operate, strategic change is definitely necessary and vital. Students' unions have no choice but to change, but how they can do it successfully is a major challenge. There has been substantially scholarship about strategic

management offering experiences from both the private and public sectors. However, a core question is can perspectives from the private sector apply to membership-led students' unions? Meanwhile, since the 'council-officers-staff' governance model of students' unions is parallel to that of national, regional and local government, can theories from the public sector apply to students' unions? In fact, although there are some clear parallels, the very rapid turnover of leadership and immature officers of students' unions contrasts with standard practice elsewhere in the vast majority of organisations used to derive such theories. Therefore, this research examines the practices of organisational change and strategic management within students' unions and aims to generate some theoretical and empirical implications from the study.

1.3: Justification of the Research

The decision to focus on strategic change within students' unions reflects several factors. Firstly, models of strategic change provide an indication of the common challenges to change but they do not explicitly define variations between organisations. For example, an approach of contingency to change supports a 'one best way for each' organisation approach rather than a 'one best way for all' approach (By, 2005). According to this contingency approach, the performance of change within an organisation is dependent on the situational variables that it faces. Since no two organisations are alike and will not necessarily face the same variables, it is therefore valuable to carry out exploratory studies within students' unions in order to increase the knowledge of organisational change management. In addition, it will benefit the current management practice and the future development of students' unions by providing practical implications drawn from the data. As discussed earlier, achieving successful strategic change is critical for the future of students' unions, and their continuous change raises interesting questions about the nature of effective strategic management processes. As there is no one best way that fits every organisation in every situation, managers and decision-makers in students' unions cannot assume that textbook accounts of strategic management work in all situations

and contexts. Here an opportunity is offered to thoroughly examine issues surrounding strategic change in students' unions with regard to their characteristics, particularly the issues surrounding their governance and strategic change (see chapter six), and to discuss the implications of changes to governance resulting from strategic changes and pressures students' unions are facing (see chapter seven).

Secondly, the thesis reflects deficiencies on scholarship about particular types of organisations. Specifically although there is an extensive academic literature about change and strategic management, very few studies have considered nonprofit organisations (for an exception see Courtne, 2002; Grant, 2003). Similarly, scholars and other writers have neglected UK students' unions (see previous).

Thirdly, the democratic traditions of students' unions and the impact of strategic change on governance generated a multi-disciplinary research project, which draws on scholarship from both management and political science to develop insights about the operation of contemporary students unions in the UK. The advantages of inter-disciplinary research, drawing from a diversity of perspective, have long been advocated by scholars, especially in fields of science (see, for example, Campbell, 2005; Metzger and Zare, 1999; Rhoten and Parker, 2004). It is argued that disciplines are powerful but 'constraining ways of knowing' as they could 'discourage inquiries and explanations that spanned disciplinary boundaries' (Lattuca, 2001, p.2). In contrast, inter-disciplinary research could 'generate more comprehensive understanding about complex phenomena' (Cheng et al., 2009, p.1071). This merit not only works for scientists, but also applies in social science research. For instance, Fiske (2006) argued that sociality is shaped by the interaction of various highly interdependent processes, which cannot be understood in isolation; therefore, different disciplines need to be linked together in order to fully understand social relations. In this research, there is a focus on scholarship about management, specifically organisational change and strategic management. The theoretical perspectives are examined to see how much they can be used within the context of students' unions.

For example, there is a substantial literature discussing the board-management relations in the private sector, but how can they be usefully extended to throw light on non-profit boards? This research also discusses the management of change of students' unions from a political angle. The analysis uses a wide range of political science scholarship grouped around the broad theme of governance. So can, for example, theories developed through evaluating UK government be used to assess students' unions?

1.4: Thesis Structure

In chapter two, the academic literature relevant to the study is discussed. The first part of the chapter is about the nature of organisational change and the process of strategic management. Themes include the causes of change, typologies of changes, models of strategic management and resistance to change inside the organisation. The second part of the chapter explains the crucial concept of governance, both in relation to an expanded notion of government, a theoretical concept that supplies a framework this aspect of the thesis, and in relation to the operation of specific organisations. In addition, the democratic heritage of students' unions necessitates a discussion of several themes from the political science literature, such as direct and indirect democracy, ministerial responsibility, scrutiny, consultation, participation, relations between officials and elected politicians and term limits.

Chapter three outlines the functions of UK students' unions, in particular their contemporary roles and their development over time. This chapter is structured around four time periods: origin and the early days of students' union; post World War II; 1980s and 1990s; and the early twenty-first century. For the first three periods, the background and context of students' union is clearly presented, with discussions about the three key functions – representation, community, and service. This analysis provides a background for the research by explaining how students' unions in the UK have traditionally worked. For the last period 'entering the twenty-first century',

changes within higher education are presented including changes of student profile, student's needs and expectation, and student life styles. This background information of students' unions is very important as it supplies the prism for the subsequent contemporary evaluation. In addition, it provides the context for discussing and evaluating why and how students' unions have been recently subjected to substantive pressures for change.

In chapter four the research approaches and methods used in this study are outlined. The chapter incorporates methodological discussion of a range of issues, including the use of case studies, interview techniques and questionnaire design. Also, the research design is explained and the research processes are detailed. In this chapter, justification for the methods used in this research is provided, as well as a discussion of their limitations.

Chapter five presents findings and discussions about how and why students' unions in the UK have been under pressures to change in the past few years. Based on the substantial pressures for change at the start of the twentieth-first century identified in chapter three, this chapter focuses on examining pressures from the internal environment of students' unions. Two key drivers of the recent strategic change are identified as the intensification of financial pressures and managerial instability. The ways in which students' unions seek to address these challenges are then outlined. The focus is placed on discussing the trends concerning changes to the functions of and service delivery by students' unions during this period and issues concerning their recent governance reforms. The findings draw substantially on the case study analysis, although these findings are enhanced through a wider range of examples, obtained primarily through the questionnaire returns.

Chapter six discusses the management of strategic change within students' unions. By applying strategic management models, the problematic process of strategic change within students' unions is examined. Focus is placed on discussing managerial issues

in the context of previous governance structures before the recent governance reforms. In particular, the relations between elected student officers and the permanent management are discussed. The ways in which such relations have influence on the role of officers during the process of change are examined. The effectiveness of partnership between the officers and the management as implied in the previous governance structure is greatly questioned. The recent governance reforms within students' unions stress a shift from partnering to controlling the management. Therefore, this chapter discusses whether the role of management is an 'agent' or a 'steward' within the context of students' unions.

Chapter seven discusses the consequences of recent governance reforms within students' unions in relation to democracy and accountability issues. The accountability and democracy arrangements of the previous governance structure are first discussed and a substantial range of problems identified. This approach provides a context for discussion of the recent reforms within students' unions. The analysis then focuses on the new structure, firstly through a discussion of strategic management issues and then a comparison of different approaches adopted by CCSU and DDSU and the implications for democratic and accountable governance. The chapter also directly considers the role of boards in the new structure in relation to conformance or performance.

Conclusions about the research are drawn in chapter eight. Principle findings are summarised and discussed, and contributions to knowledge from this research are outlined. In addition, recommendations for further research are also suggested.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1: Introduction

Chapter one has outlined the aims and objectives of the research: analysis of the management of strategic change within students' unions. In this chapter, relevant literature is reviewed; the thesis draws on scholarship in two broad areas. Firstly, there is a focus on scholarship about management, specifically organisational change and strategic management. Secondly, the analysis uses a wide range of political science scholarship grouped around the broad theme of governance. The approach represents the strong inter-disciplinary orientation of this thesis, which draws on scholarship from both management and political science to develop insights about the operation of contemporary students' unions in the UK.

The initial discussion concerns the causes of organisational change, specifically the impact of both the external and internal environments facing contemporary students' unions. Several typologies of changes are summarised, strategic change is defined and models of strategic management are identified and examined. These models provide frameworks for discussing the issues surrounding students' union governance and strategic change. Literature concerning resistance to change is also critically reviewed in order to explore the often problematic process of change management within students' unions.

The chapter explains the crucial concept of governance, which has two distinctive uses. Firstly, the term is deployed generally in terms of an expanded concept of government, a reflection of intellectual and institutional changes during recent decades. There is an extensive evaluative discussion of a wide range of themes incorporating topics such as the traditional concepts of government and public administration, the emergence of the governance paradigm, New Public Management (NPM) and the contrast between direct and representative notions of democracy. This selection of governance literature reflects substantially the democratic tradition of students' union governance and the central role of elected student representatives.

Secondly, the theme of governance also refers to the mechanisms through which specific organisations are governed. This section involves a discussion of a range of literature about governance across the public, private and non-profit sectors. In particular, there is a specific orientation on the role of boards across a range of organisations. Once again, the strong democratic element to students' union governance necessitates a discussion of several themes from the political science literature, which covers issues such as ministerial responsibility, scrutiny, consultation, participation, relations between officials and elected politicians and term limits.

In the last substantive section of this chapter, the contemporary scholarship on the connection between governance and strategic management is discussed and evaluated. The core focus being the identification of themes relevant to students' unions and thus the analysis discussed in subsequent chapters. In the summary, the issues identified in the preceding analysis are summarised and explicit connections are made between this literature and the themes addressed subsequently in the thesis.

2.2: Strategic Change and Change Management

This section summarises the literature on organisational change and change management. The review of literature provides the theoretical frameworks for the later analysis of strategic management within students' unions.

2.21: Causes of Change

There is a wealth of literature (see Ansoff and McDonnell, 1990; Marshak, 2002; Stacey, 2007) within the social and management sciences that suggests that, in the two decades spanning the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the pace of change in the world of work had accelerated. As Marshak (2002, p.279) commented,

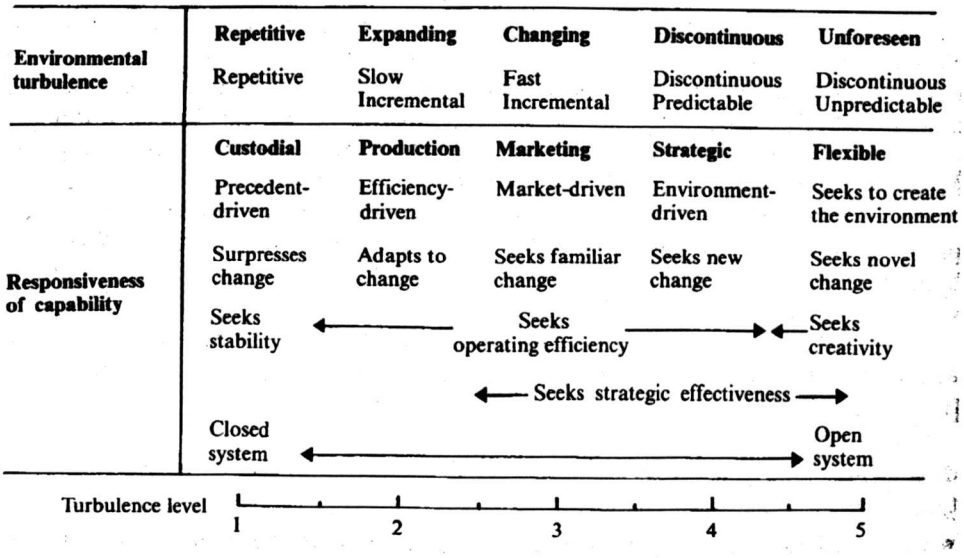
> 'faced with the forces of globalization and information technology, change initiatives such as downsizing, re-engineering, mergers and acquisitions, restructuring and drives to get 'better-faster-cheaper' by 'doing more with less' have all become ubiquitous components of most

executives' jobs as well as consultants' services'.

In order to keep pace with what is happening in the external environment, change has become an integral aspect of organisational dynamics for organisations in the public, private and non-profit sectors alike. Research conducted by Waclawski (2002), which surveyed and analysed financial measures and customer service ratings in twenty-six different business units showed that organisations experiencing large-scale change performed better financially than those that did not undergo large-scale change.

To explain why students' unions in recent years have, and are facing, substantial pressures to change it is necessary to focus on a variety of relevant literature. Scholars, such as Ansoff and McDonnell (1990), Strebel (1996a) and Stacey (2007), use different terms to describe the environmental turbulence, explaining why different levels of change happen in organisations. For example, Ansoff and McDonnell (1990, p.31) identify five levels of environmental turbulence: repetitive (turbulence repeats itself), expanding (turbulence is slow, incremental and forecastable), changing (turbulence is fast, incremental and forecastable), discontinuous (turbulence is non-continuous but predictable), and unforeseen (turbulence is discontinuous and only partially predictable). The responsiveness capacity of companies is then divided into five categories according to the way in which the company responds to change. Companies can be classified in terms of suppressing change; adapting to change; seeking familiar change; seeking related change; or seeking novel change (see figure 2.1 'matching responsiveness to turbulence'). The 'appropriate responsiveness' of Ansoff and McDonnell shows that as the turbulence level rises, strategic effectiveness becomes much more important.

Figure2.1 Matching responsiveness to turbulence



Sources: Ansoff and McDonnell (1990, p.34)

Senior's (2006) three types of environments further develops the turbulence theory. Senior argues that triggers for organisational change arise from three environments which are linked and interact with each other: *temporal*, *external,* and *internal*. The temporal environment consists of long-term historical developments that bring changes over time, through either cycles of industry-based innovation or from the life-cycle of the organisation itself. The external environment includes the political (including legal), economic, social-cultural, and technological environment. Internal triggers encompass changes in people, organisational structure, products/services, and the use of technology, which, to some extent, are the first-line responses to changes in the temporal and external environments.

Senior's approach considers the organisation as a 'system' that comprises elements of formal organisational management and operations, as well as elements of informal aspects of organisational life in multi-dimensional environments. Similarly, Burnes' (2004) 'open systems approach' handles such issues in terms of organisations firstly being open to and interact with their external environment, and secondly, opening internally.

As organisation is in an open system, causes of change are multiple. Interaction of factors from each layer of the environment creates internal forces for change. These are frequently the result of external forces outside the organisation (Senior, 2006). At the same time, internal changes also impact on the external environment (Buckley, 1968). For example, the development of information technology and the changing customer experience forced banks to introduce internet banking. Internet banking reduces labour costs and often increases customer satisfaction, but intensifies competition within the banking industry (Daft, 2010). Moreover, internal changes at any level or in any area will affect all the other levels and areas within the organisation (Leavitt, 1965, Buckley 1968). For example, the introduction of internet banking will undoubtedly increase workload of the IT and helpdesk support staffs; though it might also reduce the time spent waiting in a queue at the local branch or facilitate a reduction in counter-based staffing.

2.22: The Nature of Strategic Change

This research uses the term 'strategic change', which refers to changing the organisational vision, mission, objectives and, of course, the adopted strategy to achieve those objectives. In relation to the scale of change, strategic change is distinct from incremental change, and is seen as affecting major subsystems and producing outcomes which impact across many parts of an organisation (Nadler and Tushman, 1995). To define strategic change in more details, the typology of organisational change is explained, which has a number of categorising frameworks.

From the relationship to external events, organisational change can be *anticipatory* or *reactive* (for example Nadler and Tushman, 1995). Anticipatory change, often referred to as proactive change, concerns expected developments that are relatively predictable. They enable organisations to plan change. Very often proactive change occurs without any specific external pressures or demands for change. For example, it might be initiated to gain competitive advantage rather than in response to a specific customer's requirement. Reactive change on the other hand is a response to unexpected or

unforeseen external developments. Proactive and reactive analyses of change, respectively, show why some organisations plan change in response to internal opportunities or external economic or business market or environmental threats.

From the scope (sometimes called scale) of change, distinction is made between *incremental* and *discontinuous* change (Grundy, 1993). Incremental change refers to changes that are relatively small in scale, producing outcomes that are focused on one function or one unit of an organisation. For example, the health service planned to improve its 24 hour helpline service by providing more staff training and better technical support. It is a type of change associated with periods when an industry is in equilibrium and the focus on change is in introducing new or refining existing practices with the aim of 'doing things better' through a process of continuous adaptation and modification. Discontinuous change, on the other hand, is seen as affecting major subsystems and producing outcomes which impact across many parts of an organisation. It is, therefore, a type of change which involves doing things differently.

Combining the relationship to external events with the scope of change, Nadler and Tushman (1995) produce the typology of change which is shown in figure 2.1.

Figure 2.2: Types of Organisational Change

	Incremental	Discontinuous
Anticipatory	Tuning	Re-orientation
Reactive	Adaptation	Re-creation

Sources: Nadler and Tushman (1995, p.24)

Strategic change in this research refers to discontinuous change as explained in Nadler and Tushman rather than incremental change, and it can be either anticipatory or

reactive. The issue was whether this can occur within the current paradigm of current organisational beliefs and assumptions. If such change does not require a paradigm shift it can be thought of as a realignment of strategy rather than a change that involves a fundamental shift of strategic direction.

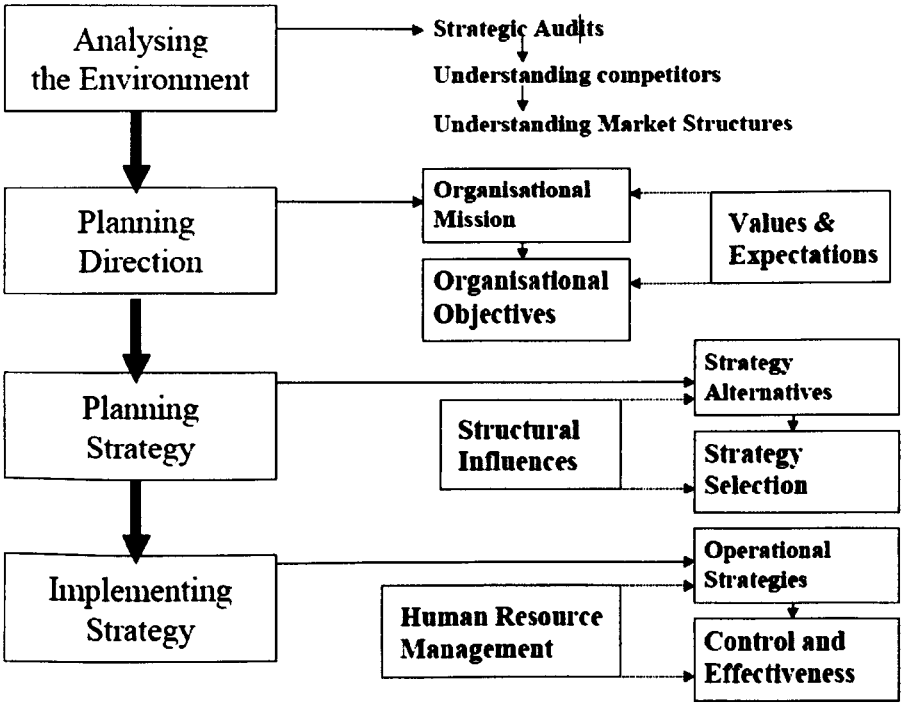
2.23: Modelling the Strategic Management Process

Models of strategic change process in the literature are discussed in this section, which provides theoretical frameworks to examine the strategic management practice within students' unions. Though in practice strategic management and strategy are sometimes used interchangeably, strategic management is a broader term than strategy and refers to a process that includes top management's analysis of the organisation's internal and external environments prior to formulating a strategy, as well as plans for implementation and control (Parnell, 2008). The process of strategic management, therefore, can be seen as a process of strategy formulation. According to Bowman and Asch (1996), strategy-formulation is a decision-making process which is primarily concerned with: the development of the organisation's objectives; the commitment of its resources; and the environmental constraints; so as to achieve its objectives. Based on different views of how the strategy is formulated within organisations, there are two main schools in the literature of strategic management – prescriptive and descriptive approaches. The latter is used to discuss the strategic change within students' unions. The reasons are justified as detailed below.

A traditional view of the strategy process is a linear and rational planning approach, in which strategy emerges as a plan to be explicitly formulated by management before being implemented. This is the prescriptive school as summarised by Mintzberg et al. (1998), which includes the design school (see Andrews, 1971), the planning school (see Ansoff 1965; Ansoff 1991), and the positioning school (see Porter 1985, 1996). The prescriptive school of strategy is more concerned with how strategies should be formulated than with how they actually form (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Taking this approach, the process starts with the search for an agreed objective. Both external and

internal analyses are then processed. Based on this work, various options are identified to achieve the agreed objectives, there usually being more than one way of achieving an objective. One option is then selected which is best able to meet the objective. Finally, the chosen option is implemented by the workforce. This approach thus focuses on deliberate strategy. To illustrate this deliberate strategy process, Greenley's (1989) four-step model is presented as an example in figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3 Greenley's (1989) Model of Strategic Management



Sources: Greenley (1989, p.18).

In this model, the process of strategy management separates into four phases: analysing the environment; planning direction; planning strategy and strategy selection; and implementing strategy. This model is based on a premise that it is possible to analyse the environment, forecast possible outcomes, select strategic alternatives based on an evaluation of the returns each is likely to yield, and devise plans to implement the chosen strategic options in order to ensure that they are delivered. A similar model was devised by Bowman and Asch (1996), which described strategic management as a linear process starting from identifying

objectives, followed by strategy selection, then to change implementation.

The strengths of this deliberate strategy process include: the provision of a complete overview of the organisation and summaries of resource demands; the outlining of the necessary choices if resources are limited; and the capacity to compare with the defined objectives and, therefore, monitor the agreed plan as it is implemented so that progress can be evaluated. However, the planned approach to change has come under increasing criticism since the early 1980s. Critiques include the observation that this model separates thinking from action (see Burnes, 2004), a focus upon the deliberate to the determent of strategic learning (see Johnson, 2000; Williams, 2001; Banerjee, 2001), and concerns about the risk of considering the future through an extrapolation of present trends (see Reger et al., 1994; Corner et al., 1994). Also, it has been argued that the prescriptive schools are too narrow as their focus is largely upon economic factors to the detriment of social and political factors (see Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1995; Kogut and Zander, 1996).

One of the key issues is the extent to which organisations can plan for uncertain outcomes. The planned approach of strategic management tends to be linear in format. They presuppose that organizations operate under constant conditions, and that they can move in a pre-planned manner from one stable state to another (Bamford and Forester, 2003). In that sense, change can be defined in terms of some desired future state and then achieved through a series of interventions and actions. These assumptions are questioned by several authors (see Burnes, 2004, Wilson, 1992, Victor and Franckeiss 2002) who argue that the current fast-changing environment increasingly weakens this theory. The pace and scale of change is so rapid that many organizations find that they are unable to accurately predict or even articulate their 'desired future state' and instead describe it in aspirational overview terms (Victor and Franckeiss, 2002). Given the unforeseen opportunities and difficulties, even carefully planned strategies might lead to different outcomes to those sought, and the whole process may be invalidated. As Beach (1997, p.2) observes:

> 'the need for a decision arises when anomalous events occur. Often, these events stem from internal changes (wants) or external changes (demands), but they can also stem from the realization that an earlier decision was wrong and its implementation is not producing the right results'.

Furthermore, where speed of response is crucial, this deliberate model of strategy cannot work. Many authors (see Burnes, 2004, Senior, 2006) suggested that the emphasis of the prescriptive approach is on small-scale and incremental change, and it is not applicable to situations that require rapid and transformational change. For example, the 'entrepreneurial school', epitomised by authors such as Knight (1967), argues that strategy is rooted in the mysteries of intuition rather than planning. It is claimed that strategy is created and expressed in the head of the leader, not a clearly articulated plan, so this approach leaves scope for flexibility in rapidly changing industries.

The models of planned approaches to strategy can also be criticised in relation to the simplicity of separating the implementation stage from the development of the strategy (Johnson et al., 2005). The linear process proposed by the planned approach to strategy was based on the assumption that after careful analysis, strategy decisions do not require further development or alteration. This would be of limited use to those organizations which wish to seriously address emerging issues from both external and internal environments during the process of change. This weakness is strongly argued by the learning school of strategy, which emphasises that strategies are emergent and can be found throughout the organisation. This learning approach claims that strategy formation, implementation and evaluation are structured as a learning process and formulation and implementation intertwine (see Mintzberg, 1990; Crossan et al., 1996).

There is also the question of whether the changed state will be more problematic than the drivers for change. The deliberate strategy models consider people issues only in the final implementation stage. However, this is seldom the case. For example, the

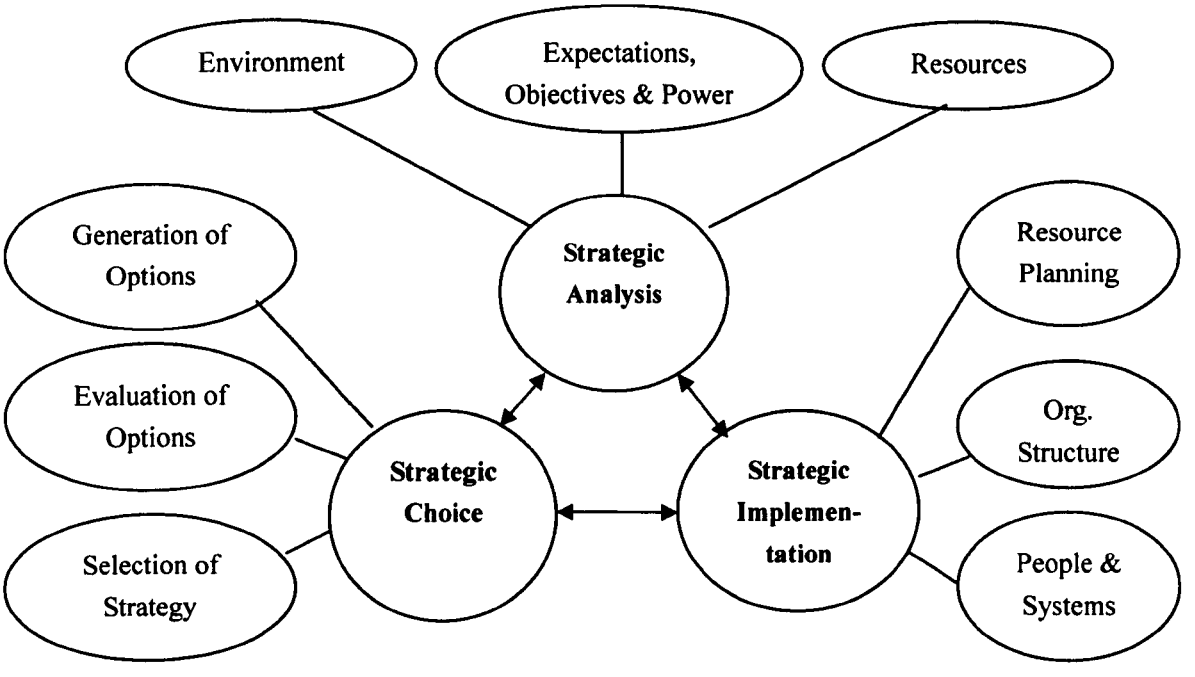
Chief Executive Officer (CEO) may not have the knowledge and power to choose between options and in many organisations discussions on options occurs as a matter of normal practice. For example, the power school views strategy formulation as a process of negotiation. Mintzberg (1983) argued that strategy is a political process of building coalitions, dealing with rivals and conflicting interest group. Stakeholder analysis (see Johnson et al., 2005, Mitchell et al., 1997) is also supported by the power school, where organisations are viewed as a power wielding entity that uses its power over others and among its partners in alliances, joint ventures, and other network relationships to negotiate collective strategies in its interest.

In contrast to the prescriptive school of strategy, the descriptive approach focuses on describing how strategies actually get made. The rationale of this approach is emergent rather than deliberate strategy. It is suggested that the long-term approach is of limited value since uncertainty considerably clouds the ability to predict all the possible influences. Strategy emerges, adapts to human needs and continues to develop over time. It is evolving, incremental and continuous, and therefore cannot be easily or usefully summarised in a plan which then requires to be implemented. Mintzberg et al. (2002), for instance, argued that strategies can emerge from the organisational grassroots and only in retrospect is the strategy of the organisation identified from the pattern of actions taken. This process does not, therefore, clearly distinguish between developing strategy and implementation.

There are many models in the literature used to illustrate this emergent strategy (see Cooke and Slack, 1991, Whellen and Hunger 2000, Johnson et al. 2005). One particularly useful model is that of Johnson et al. (2005). This model emphasises the importance of organizations engaging in developing their own strategic analysis, strategic choice, and strategic implementation policies and practices as a way of addressing the kinds of challenges they face and the changes they need to introduce to enable them to cope, and, indeed, survive, in light of the kinds of internal and external competitive market pressure they face. As the figure 2.4 shows, in this model three

aspects of strategic management – analysis, choices and implementation are interlinked rather than being separated and linear. Strategic analysis concerns analysing the strength of a business's position and understanding the important external factors that influence it. Strategic choice involves understanding the nature of stakeholder expectations, identifying strategic options, and then evaluating and selecting strategic options. Strategic implementation is often the hardest aspect. When a strategy has been analysed and selected, the task is then to translate it into organisational action. Assuming one way of understanding a strategy better is through its implementation, Johnson et al.'s (2005) model contains an overlap between strategic choice and implementation and builds the strategic position up from the experience of strategy implementation. Therefore, in its broadest sense, strategic management, as proposed by Johnson et al., concerns taking 'strategic decisions' – decisions about all the elements in the model, specifically direction, scope, advantage, resources, environment, and stakeholders.

Figure 2.4 Johnson et al.'s (2005) Strategic Management Process



Sources: Johnson et al. (2005, p.16)

The practical strengths of this descriptive approach of strategic management are

obvious. Firstly, it takes account of the people issues at all stages of the strategic management process. It, therefore, provides the opportunity for the culture and politics of an organisation to be included in the process. As discussed in the above section, the focus on the power school and cultural school of strategy has been recognised since, at least, the 1980s through the writing of scholars such as Mintzberg (1983), Mintzberg et al. (1998), Mitchell et al. (1997), Waterman et al. (1980) and Miller (1990). Secondly, it allows the strategy to develop as more is learnt about the strategic situation. The role of implementation is redefined so that it becomes an integral part of the strategy development process. This approach accords with actual practice in many organisations (Mintzberg, 1990; Crossan et al., 1996). Emergent strategy has sufficient feedback during the management process and ensures the continue process of strategy management rather than stopping after a series of steps. It delivers the flexibility to respond to changes, especially in fast-moving markets. It is, therefore, more effective than the prescriptive school of strategy in most situations.

2.24: Controlling the Change Process

Despite the pace of change, there is also evidence to show that many specific change initiatives fail. Recent research by the CIPD (2006) shows that less than 60% of organisations met their stated objectives. In this context, it is important for organisations to recognise and carefully consider how they plan and implement initiatives for achieving change and how the ongoing change process will be managed. Whilst each change situation is unique, there are a number of common issues that will occur in most organisations and settings, and that during the change process act as constraints to success.

Numerous studies have explored success factors of organisational change. These studies (see Kotter and Cohen 2002, Kotter 1996, Stelzer and Mellis 1998, Arvonen and Pettersson 2001) have identified several factors that influence the success of organisational change efforts. These factors include effective leadership; setting and communicating objectives of the change efforts; involving technical staff and

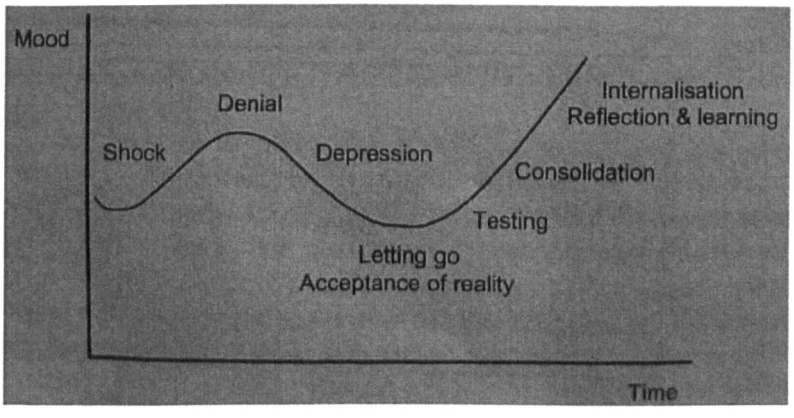
operating managers in the change process; focus on solving concrete business problems; monitoring; adjusting the transition in response to problems in the change process; and anchoring changes in the organisation's culture. Most of these success factors coalesce around the question of how to make people change. The new organisational arrangements may not work as planned until the people involved let go of the way things used to be done and adjust to the new situation (Hayes, 2007). Too often, change management efforts focus solely on the new, desired end results and ignore the shaping of new behaviours that are implicitly required to reach them (Rieley and Clarkson, 2001).

This literature was developed by Strebel (1996b), who explained why employees resist change through a 'personal compact' theory – organisations have personal compacts with their employees. Change efforts will fail unless those compacts are revised. There are three common dimensions of personal compacts, which are formal, psychological, and social. The formal dimension of a personal compact is the most familiar aspect of the relationship between employees and their employers. The psychological dimension addresses aspects of the employment relationship that are mainly implicit. It incorporates the elements of mutual expectation and reciprocal commitment that arise from feelings like trust and dependence between employee and employer.

How employees resist change can be evaluated on an individual basis or the group/organisational level. Based on a psychological analysis, Hayes' (2007) personal transition theory explains how people experience change, irrespective of whether it is considered as an opportunity or threat. As presented in figure 2.5, Hayes examines individuals' response to change as a progression through a series of psychological reactions. Often, people have little warning of change and experience the initial phase of transition as a *shock*. Feelings of anxiety and panic can undermine their ability to take in new information, think constructively and plan. Following the phase of shock is *'denial'*, which is characterised by a retreat from the reality of change. Clinging to the past and refusing to consider the need to change can lead to a reduction in anxiety,

and anything or anyone who challenges this false sense of security is likely to provoke an angry response. The emotional reaction at this stage can also be explained as *nostalgia* (Gabriel, 2000). Resistance to change is at its highest at this point. Eventually the reality of the change becomes apparent and the individual acknowledges that things cannot continue as they are. This provokes a feeling of *depression* which is often associated with a feeling that the situation is beyond one's control. This phase may be characterised by anger, sadness, withdrawal and confusion. It is in this phase that the change really starts to be experienced as stressful. After that, the '*letting go*' phase involves accepting reality for what it is, and it implies a clear letting go of the past. Then a more active and experimental involvement in the new situation stars to take place. The phase of *testing* gradually gives way to a period of *consolidation* that involves reflecting on new experiences and assessing whether they offer a basis for a constructive way forward. The transition is complete when the changed behaviour is normal and unthinking and is the new natural order of things. *Reflection* and *learning* is a cognitive process involving reflecting on what all the activity and emotion has really meant.

Figure 2.5: Hayes' (2007) stages of psychological reaction to change



Sources: Hayes (2005, p.229)

Gabriel (2000) uses an approach of storytelling to explain the pivotal role nostalgia plays in the emotions and perceptions of the many older, longer-serving employees. Elements that act to focus nostalgic feeling include the physical buildings of the

company, the organisation's leaders, departed colleagues, and social functions. Many organisations, like societies, are seen by their members as having had a golden age. Nostalgia for an organisational golden age exercises a considerable influence on the way present-day events are viewed and acts as a rich source of symbolism and meaning. Gabriel concludes that organisational nostalgia is not a marginal phenomenon, but a pervasive one, dominating the outlook of numerous organisational members, and can even define the dominant emotional complexion of some organisations.

Resistance to change can also be viewed through Stewart's (1998) analysis of factors that are common causes of friction between staff which he conceptualised as follows:

- Jobs that require individuals to pursue different aims and look at problems from different perspectives.
- Differences in training and experience that led to the development of different values, ways of looking at the world and language.
- Competition for scarce resources.
- Differences in the power of different groups to influence decisions.
- Personality clashes.

This framework also has, of course, relevance to a wide range of organisational issues, for example the relationship between student officers and their senior management.

The above literature acknowledges the role of individuals in the change process. However, every workplace is a social organisation; and people, who are generally social beings, will form a community within the organisation (Lewin, 1951). Individual behaviour must be seen, modified or changed in the light of groups' prevailing practices and norms (Lewin, 1951). Therefore, people's influence on change can be seen as a network problem, and resistance to change can be at a group or organisational level. This idea is originally from the 'Group Dynamics School' of

change management, which places emphasis on bringing about organisational change through teams of work groups, rather than individuals (Bernstein, 1968). Similarly, the Johnson et al.'s (2005) process of strategy management emphasises the role of the network of people and points out that without taking this dimension of putting people in their cultural and political context into account, the traditional planning process is of limited value. The theory of organisational culture has developed this 'Group Dynamics School' further within the context of change management.

Organisational culture is generally defined in terms of the beliefs and expectations shared by organisation members that shape behaviour (Vasu et al., 1998). Research in both the public and private sector underscores the fact that organisational culture significantly influences what happens in organisations. For example, Martin (2001) suggests that resistance to change can come from strong group norms. Norms are rules or standards that define what people should do, think or feel in a given situation, and they can be either explicit (formal, written, known by all) or implicit (informal, unwritten, and where individuals may not even be consciously aware of them). Implicit norms have been identified as playing a vital role in dictating the actions of group members (Burnes, 2004). Gabriel's (2000) theory of nostalgia is also an example. He claims that

> 'nostalgia is a social phenomenon, and its expressions are often shared with others...people, who have shared a past experience and have a nostalgic disposition towards it, will generally feel close and will tend to reinforce the features noted earlier' (p.137).

Therefore, nostalgia can easily act as a cause of an emotional gulf within organisations between those with first hand experiences of the golden past, and those without.

2.3: From Government to Governance

This section considers the broad concept of governance and the shift from a focus on

government. Firstly, the traditional notion of government is presented; in particular the themes of representative democracy and direct democracy are discussed and evaluated. Problems with the traditional government model are also considered. Secondly, the notion of New Public Management (NPM) is discussed and evaluated. Third, the evolution of a distinctive paradigm of governance is addressed and the features of this concept delineated. This discussion provides the contextual framework for discussion of students' unions later in this thesis.

2.31: Traditional Notion of Government

The traditional model of government can be characterized as: an administration under the formal control of the political leadership, based on a hierarchical model of bureaucracy, staffed by permanent, neutral and anonymous officials, motivated by the public interest, serving any governing party equally and administering those policies decided by the politicians (Hughes, 2003). The theoretical foundations derive from works such as Max Weber's 'bureaucracy' and Woodrow Wilson's 'Politics/administration dichotomy' (1887).

In the 1920s, the German sociologist Weber described an ideal type of public administration and government in his book *Economy and Society* (1978). He recognised bureaucracy as the most efficient form of organisation. His ideal bureaucracy was characterized by hierarchical organization, delineated lines of authority in a fixed area of activity, and action taken on the basis of and recorded in written rules. Bureaucrats need expert training, rules are implemented by neutral officials and career advancement depends on technical qualifications judged by organization, not individuals (Weber, 1978). Governmental organisation has traditionally approximated to this bureaucratic model (Greenwood et al., 2002). Bureaucratically organized bodies exhibit a hierarchical structure (Gerth and Mills, 1991). Within this hierarchical structure, each official has clearly defined duties within specified limits, and operates under supervision of a higher officer within a 'line' command structure. This pattern has traditionally been regarded as particularly

appropriate for public agencies given their typically multi-functional nature and size, and the principles of accountability and equity under which they operate (Greenwood et al., 2002).

Another theory which greatly supported the traditional concept of public administration is the 'politics/administration dichotomy' introduced by Woodrow Wilson – Professor at Princeton for many years before becoming United States President in 1912. According to Wilson (1887), political and administrative matters could be separated, and the administration would be an instrument merely to carry out instructions, while any matters of policy or strategy were the preserve of the political leadership. In other words, the tasks involved in public service were indeed administrative in the sense, of following the instructions provided ultimately by politicians or, at least, high-profile public appointees with direct responsibility for the results. The motivation of the individual public servant was assumed to be that of the public interest and they were thus characterised as having a public service ethos. This motivation has been acknowledged by scholars, Le Grand (2003, p.51) asserted that 'most people, including and perhaps especially those involved with the public sector, are motivated to perform altruistic acts because they wish to help others and because they derive some personal benefits from performing the acts that help others'.

From the 1970s this kind of 'bureaucratic' government encountered increasing criticism in most developed countries. The rigid and hierarchical form of public administration was often criticized. For example, Weir and Beetham (1999) argued that the equality of citizenship has been stifled by hierarchy, and the flexibility required by governmental responsiveness has been restricted by rigidity.

Meanwhile, a consensus emerged to challenge the idea that formal bureaucracy was a particularly efficient form of organization. Horton and Farnham (1999) argued that the characteristics of bureaucratic management are specialization and hierarchy, impersonality and expertise. Those in managerial positions have clearly defined roles

within a specialized, hierarchical and horizontal division of labour. Their responsibilities are narrowly defined and circumscribed by rules, and officials have limited discretion. The implications are that individual managers do not control the resources and are bound by human resources allocations and appropriation budgets determined centrally. All these features result in slow decision-making and delays in response, including to the demands of public consumers and citizens. As Hughes (2003) commented, bureaucracy may be ideal for control but not necessarily for management; it allows for certainty but is usually slow in moving; work may be standardized, but at the cost of innovation.

The traditional model also assumed a role for government as a direct supplier of public services and thus fuelled the substantial expansion of the scale of the bureaucracy following the development of a more social democratic concept of the state. Such developments left government vulnerable to the charge that it was bloated, inefficient and wasteful, charges that became more vocal and widespread after the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s (see Kavanagh, 1987).

Such criticism also reflected academic developments, for example the evolution of public choice theory, which argues for the maximization of choice by individuals for reasons of individual freedom and efficiency and has been applied in a wide variety of contexts (see Cole and Boyne, 1996; Boyne and Cole, 1998). Buchanan and Tollock (1965) are credited with being the primary developers of this theory. With its origins in economics, public choice theory assumes that individuals are rational and self-interested economic men and women. They then analyze how such individuals might be expected to behave in various political settings, for example as voters, politicians or bureaucrats, (Buchanan and Tollison, 1984). Here, the process of political decision making and the decision outcomes are explained in terms of the preferences and bargaining of actors. These bargains take place as a series of games between the participants and where the structure of choices is determined by institutional and socio-economic constraints (John, 1998).

Such intellectual trends and wider concerns about the role of the state precipitated changes in the organisation of government. For example, in the 1980s the Thatcher Government implemented a substantive programme of privatisation in the UK, an agenda that was matched in many other developed countries, for example in New Zealand under Lange and Douglas and in Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism (Ferlie et al., 1996). In particular, these changes led to the evolution of the notion of the enabling state, through which the scope of services directly supplied through government was diminished. This approach was conceptualised by Osborne and Gaebler (1992) in their book *Reinventing Government,* which coined the concept of 'entrepreneurial government'. The core concept was of government as enablers who steered not rowed the state and embraced a market-focused concept of service delivery based on a focus on outcomes rather than inputs and the needs of customers rather than the bureaucracy.

2.32: Direct Democracy and Representative Democracy

Representative democracy is a type of democracy in which the citizens of the state exercise their popular sovereignty through legitimately elected representatives (Bevir, 2009). While citizens play a substantive and active role in the decision-making process in a direct democracy, in a representative democracy citizens vote in elections to choose their representatives, who then congregate in a legislative assembly debating policy and determining legislation, the impact of the citizens usually being quite marginal to decision-making. Representative democracy has been considered as a practical approach to achieve democracy, where it is unrealistic for citizens to directly be involved in decision-making in a large and complex social system.

Representative democracy can be conceptualised through two distinctive characteristics: the elitist approach and indirect democratic participation. The elitist concept challenged any implicit supposition that elected representatives would act in accordance with the will or interests of their constituents. For example, Saward (2003, p.41) encapsulated such ideas through argument that 'most people are ignorant about

issues, irrational in their opinions and preferences, and easily swayed by manipulative appeals from unscrupulous politicians'. Such assumptions have been bolstered, for example, through research findings that have shown how business groups become involved with the political process and even come to dominate areas of it, which brings to a worry that this involvement can lead to political representatives, either intentionally or unintentionally, acting as a voice for these kinds of elite interests rather than their constituents (Bevir, 2009). Wider concerns about elitism have been enhanced through declining and or low rates of voter turnout which undermined the claim that the voice of citizens is adequately represented (Przeworski et al., 1999). Similarly, Stoker (2006, p.102) noted weaknesses in political engagement and suggested that the problem was 'how to construct a political system to cope with the kind of engagement people want and to enable the political system to be both sustainable and effective'. Similarly, Parry et al. (1992) suggested that participation was affected by the level of impact.

In contrast, direct forms of democracy are seldom deployed in our complex contemporary societies, although elements co-exist with the dominant representative model in form of institutions such as parish meetings (UK) and town meetings (US), where any registered elector can attend, speak, deliberate and vote on some small-scale public policy decisions. Direct democracy can also occur through referendums, which in the UK have primarily been restricted to constitutional matters such as the membership of the Common Market (1975); the establishment of devolved government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (1979, 1997 and 1998), the electoral system (2011) and the powers of the National Assembly for Wales (2011). Elsewhere, referendums have been deployed on decide a wide range of public policy decisions, usage in Switzerland and US States such as California being especially prolific (Cronin, 1989; Allswang, 2000).

2.33: New Public Management

The traditional bureaucratic model of public administration, which predominated for

most of the twentieth century, has been challenged in recent decades through the emergence of the New Public Management (NPM) (see, for example Hughes, 2003, Liddle, 2007), which reflects wider changes within the delivery of public services and the transfer of private sector ideas and techniques to governance (Ferlie et al., 1996). The rise of NPM is a response largely to perceived performance issues within the public sector and precipitated, in part at least, through pressure on resources. For example, the OECD (1998) defines this new management paradigm as emphasizing results in terms of 'value for money', to be achieved through management by objectives, the use of markets and market-type mechanisms, competition and choice, and devolution to staff through a better matching of authority, responsibility and accountability. In more concrete terms, the main reforms and ideas associated with NPM include two facets.

Firstly, NPM emphasizes a customer orientation and introduce the concept of consumer into public services. Traditionally, citizens had little opportunity to choose between services offered by public bodies, many of which were monopoly suppliers. Indeed, as many services were funded by taxpayers and were free at the point of delivery, analogies with private 'customers' appeared false (Greenwood et al., 1993). However, a key theme of NPM has been 'an emphasis on the public as customer and on customer choice' (Ranson and Steward, 1994). From the 1980s, the consumerist approach has been increasingly used, which 'offers a way to advance the interests of consumers, whether customer, client or citizen' (Jones and Needham, 1998, p.71). Within the public sector, despite some criticism (for example a new public service approach, see Liddle, 2007) the influence of consumerism is significant in both policies and practices, which emphasises the responsiveness of service providers to public demand (Pollitt, 1993).

Secondly, NPM spreads markets and competition in the public sector. The core argument is that direct delivery through the government bureaucracy is not the only way to provide public goods and services; governments can operate indirectly through

subsidies, regulation or contracts, instead of always being the direct provider (Hughes, 2003). Although mechanisms had been recognised by scholars prior to the development of NPM (see Hague et al., 1975), this paradigm shift recognised the gradual shift from direct to indirect public service provision. Privatisation and establishing internal markets play a central role in NPM reforms. The aim was to promote efficiency, quality and a market version of accountability through competition. For example, in the UK, within many public bodies, internal markets have been established with different elements buying and selling services to each other (Greenwood et al., 1993). In contrast, to traditional public administration, which focuses mainly on inputs, NPM emphasizes the use of output controls, including linking the allocation of resources and rewards to measurements of performance (Bevir, 2009). NPM enables measurement particularly of the 'three Es' – efficiency, effectiveness, and economy (Greenwood et al., 1993). This is achieved by introducing explicit, and preferably quantitative, standards and measures of performance (Flynn, 2002).

Thirdly, NPM brings in private sector management practice and develops entrepreneurial government. As a result, a set of portable private sector management techniques were introduced to the public sector, such as professional management, HRM (human resource management), MBO (management by objective) and performance management.

The main debate about NPM is whether or not it is beneficial to the public sector. Some argue (see, for example, Hughes 2003 and Pollitt 1993) that NPM puts undue emphasis on the principles of being an entrepreneurial government while denying an essential distinction between private and public sector. While pursuing profit is the ultimate goal in the private sector, public sector seeks for maximizing public interest. Hughes (2003) once argued that the public sector might be so different that generic or private sector models of management become irrelevant to its operations. He also points out that it is more difficult to determine objectives or to measure results in the

public sector and this may be one of the key difference between the public and private sectors. Pollitt (1993) also pointed out that the elected representative within the public sector has no direct counterpart in the structure of an ordinary business firm, where directors are usually appointed rather than elected; meanwhile, shareholders seem as even weaker analogy for the elected representative; furthermore, relations between elected representatives and managers are crucial to the running of many public services, yet generic management models offer little advice on how such relationships should be conducted. Others view NPM as having the ability to improve efficiency but only at the expense of other public values, such as those of fairness, accountability, and democracy (Bevir, 2009). Arguments around the differences between private and public sector are covered in more detail later in this chapter.

2.34: Governance as a Wider Notion of Government

Governance refers to 'a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing' (Rhodes, 1997, p.15), from bureaucracy to markets and networks, which owes a significant intellectual and practical debt to the emergence of the NPM. The core focus is the fragmented structure of public service delivery incorporating quangos, agencies, community, voluntary and private bodies.

Developing from NPM, the increasing emphasis on 'governance' attempts to promote networks and to increase the role of civil society in practices of rule (Bevir, 2009). As Rhodes (1997) claims, the notion of governance as governing without government, the rise of governance blurs the distinction between state and civil society. He said, 'the state becomes a collection of inter-organisational networks made up of governmental and societal actors with no sovereign actor able to steer or regulate' (Rhodes, 1997, p57). Taking the practice of UK as the example, in health care NHS trusts were established in the 1990s. In local government, a number of responsibilities were transferred to quangos, such as the Further and Higher Education Funding Councils, Housing Associations, the Funding Agency for Schools and the Urban Development Corporations. Local authorities and their elected members lost direct

control of these service areas.

The wider notion of government also refers to a shift from the unitary state to multi-level governance. This refers to the existence of numerous locations of power and authority – various layers of decision-making from the local to the global (Greenwood et al., 2002). For example, progressive EU integration led scholars to move their conceptual focus away from foreign policy to governance in order to describe, explain and evaluate EU policy-making (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). In the UK, the various layers include not only the EU but also the devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The resultant governance system has been characterised as the replacement of a model based on strong central sovereignty and clear hierarchies by 'a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers' (Marks, 1993, p.382).

2.4: Governance as How Organizations are governed

The term governance is also deployed to encapsulate the ways in which 'organisations are directed, controlled' and held accountable (Cadbury Report, 1992, p.15). This section looks at the governance practice within different sectors and stresses the importance of boards in relation to private, non-profit and elements of the public sector and the pivotal role of elected politicians in relation to a wide range of public sector functions. Two key mechanisms to enhance democracy and accountability with regard to the public sector - consultation and scrutiny - are also discussed.

2.41: Private Sector

In the private sector, many authors describe 'corporate governance' in terms of a system by which organisations are directed and controlled (see Forbes and Milliken, 1999; Daily et al., 2003; Heracleous, 2001; Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003). In detail, it is concerned with the structure and processes of the management of company boards and their relationships with shareholders and other stakeholders (Farrell,

2005).

The models of corporate governance differ around the world, according to the variety of capitalism in which they are embedded (Monks and Minow, 2004). The Anglo-American model tends to emphasize the interests of shareholders, while the coordinated model associated with Continental Europe and Japan recognises a wider range of stakeholder's interests (Mallin, 2011). In the practice of both the US and the UK, there is a single-tiered Board of Directors comprised of a mixture of executives from the company and non-executive directors, all of whom are elected by shareholders (Mallin, 2011). A critical difference between the two countries is that the CEO generally does not also serve as Chairman of the Board in the UK, whereas in the US having the dual role is the norm (Bowen, 2008).

There are many comprehensive guidelines on corporate governance, and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) principles 2004 are often referenced by countries developing local codes of practices. During recent decades corporate ethics has become a focus of interest in the governance practices of modern corporations, particularly due to the high-profile collapses of a number of large corporations, most of which involved accounting fraud (Bevir, 2009). Bevir then summarised some main themes as: openness through disclosure of information, integrity through straightforward dealing, and accountability through clearly identifying individual responsibilities.

Being widely researched in the private sector literature, many studies are directed at improving the governance of companies (Heracleous, 2001; Daily et al. 2003). For example, there is research on the relationship between firm performance and executive compensation (Ferrarini and Moloney, 2010; Jensen et al. 2004). Also, the nature and extent of accountability of particular individuals in the organisation has been another focus of research, in particular the mechanisms that try to reduce or eliminate the principal-agent problem (Bowen, 1994). Moreover, there are plenty of

researches studying the role of board and its relations with management, for example the agency theory (see Jensen and Meckling, 1976; Fama and Jensen, 1983; Denis et al., 1999) and the recent stewardship theory (Donaldson, 1990; Donaldson and Davis, 1991; Davis et al., 1997). These literatures will be discussed in detailed later in this chapter.

2.42: Public Sector

Public sector governance draws on themes relevant to private sector bodies but also encompasses a range of specific themes. In this section two distinctive aspects of public sector governance are addressed. The discussion of good governance reflects attempts by scholars to devise principles or models specifically focused on the public sector, while the discussion about ministerial responsibility highlights the distinctive and continuing role of elected politicians in the governance of a wide range of the state's most important functions.

Principles of Good Governance

Emphasis on models and principles of 'Good governance' has been a recurrent feature of contemporary writings on governance. For the World Bank, 'good governance' involves:

> 'An efficient public service, an independent judicial system and legal framework to enforce contracts; the accountable administration of public funds; an independent public auditor, responsible to a representative legislature; respect for the law and human rights at all levels of government; a pluralistic institutional structure, and a free press' (Leftwich, 1993, p.610).

Scholars and practitioners have formulated various principles and elements of 'good governance', for example, Weir and Beetham (1999) and Weir and Hall (1994) considered governance and democracy. Latterly Democratic Audit, an independent research organisation which audits the quality and effectiveness of UK democracy and human rights, has used two basic principles – popular control and political equality to

define democracy (Democratic Audit, 2011). Agere (2000) suggests the elements of 'good governance' include: accountability, transparency, combating corruption, participatory governance and an enabling legal/judicial framework. The United Nations Development Program (1997) enunciates a set of principles that, with slight variations, appear in much of the literature, which concern participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability and strategic vision. In the UK, the Nolan Report (1998) established seven principles of public life, which include selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. To summarise the literature, the common but key elements of good governance include legitimacy, transparency, accountability, responsiveness and effectiveness.

To define the term of legitimacy, it needs to go back to Max Weber (1964), who identified three sources of political legitimacy. The modern representative democracy is based on Weber's rational-legal authority, derived from the popular perception that the government's power derives from established law and custom. That is why the UNDP (1997) emphasised 'rule of law' as key characteristics of good governance. Transparency is based on the free flow of information, for example the 'openness' used by Nolan (1998). Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them (UNDP, 1997). Accountability means decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organisations are accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders, and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate (UNDP, 1997; Nolan, 1998). This accountability differs depending on the organisations and whether the decision is internal or external. Responsiveness refers to the recommendation that institutions and processes should try to serve all stakeholders (Agere, 2000). Effectiveness refers to the desirability of maximising the use of resources.

Ministerial Responsibility

In the UK, the accountability of politicians with executive authority at national level was based on the concept of individual ministerial responsibility. This doctrine was central to UK governance because effective accountability was a prime component of democratic governance. As Pyper (1996, p.1) commented, accountability was 'often a basic benchmark against which systems of government can be judged'. A workable definition was supplied by Flinders (2001, p.13), who commented that accountability could be defined in terms of 'the condition of having to answer to an individual or body for one's actions'.

Ministerial responsibility rested on the assumption each minister was 'responsible to Parliament for the conduct of his department' (Jennings, 1952, p.189-190). This theory was given practical expression through procedures such as the obligation to answer questions in parliament (see, for example, Franklin and Norton, 1993). Integral to this model was the potential forfeiture of office for serious failure. However, as early as the 1950s, Finer identified a pronounced reluctance to resign and distinguished between being 'answerable to' and 'answerable for' mistakes. The first interpretation, and the workable format of the doctrine, stipulating that usually ministers merely had to 'explain and defend to Parliament the actions carried out on their behalf' (Finer, 1956, p.379) and were seldom obliged to resign. Furthermore, actual resignations were often determined by political expediency and networks rather than seriousness of the errors, for example the resignations of Leon Brittan (1986) and Edwina Currie (1988) can be explained in part through their lack of supporters within the parliamentary Conservative Party (see Cole, 1991).

The lack of resignations also reflected a growing acceptance of the view that the increasing scale of government combining with its fragmentation had undermined such accountability and had rendered ministerial resignations almost inequitable. The point being, that departments were too large and their agents too diverse for any minister to be able to exercise the type of close oversight possible when ministerial responsibility emerged in the nineteenth century (see Sutherland, 1991; Elcock, 1998).

It was no longer credible to base accountability solely on the idea that 'the act of every civil servant is...regarded as the act of his minister (Finer, 1956, p.377). As Flinders (2001, p.367) argued, there was a central 'challenge...to reconcile a complex and fragmented state based around a nexus of inter-organisational contacts with a coherent and workable framework of accountability'. In other words, the shift from government to governance (Newman, 2001) had a key role in weakening the doctrine of ministerial responsibility. Such trends have thus led to a dispersal of accountability, especially in relation to organisations such as executive agencies and quangos where ministers have an attenuated scope of accountability (see Giddings, 1985). This diminution of ministerial responsibility has, of course, meant that officials have acquired responsibility for some policy and or operational matters. This shift in the accountability and responsibility configuration of government has also led to an erosion of the traditional official anonymity, a trend noted as early as the mid-1980s by Regan (1986) with regard to official appearances before select committees.

The Public Sector and Corporate Governance

In the public sector, the relevance of corporate governance can be traced back to the application of NPM during the 1980s and 1990s which brought with it contracting out, the introduction of quasi-markets and the establishment of executive agencies in many areas of the civil service. For example, in the early 1990s Ferlie et al. (1995) studied the NHS as an example of the attempt to reform arrangements for corporate governance in the public sector based on a board of directors model. Based on the positive features suggested by the empirical research, Ferlie et al. (1996, p.10) summarised one of the model of NPM as 'the efficiency drive'. One of the core themes of this model is introducing new forms of corporate governance – the marginalization of elected representatives, moves to a board of directors' model, and a shift of power to the strategic apex of the organization.

This shift also reflected the growth of quangos or unelected public agencies in the UK and the diminution of the governance role of elected politicians at national and

especially local level (see Skelcher, 1998) through the establishment of organisations such as training and enterprise councils, grant-maintained schools, academies and the separation further education colleges from local authority oversight. In addition, the abolition of the metropolitan counties in 1986 led to the transfer of many of their functions to joint-boards run by indirectly elected politicians (Cole, 2008).

One consequence of the increasing use of non-elected bodies has been the growth of governance through boards modelled on the boards of directors of public companies, which are charged with making key strategic decisions. Although the Labour governments (1997-2010) implemented various initiatives to improve the openness of board appointment procedures and the diversity of boards, concerns about the democratic deficit remain (see Weir and Beetham, 1999; Cornforth, 2003; Robinson and Shaw, 2003).

2.43: Non-Profit Sector

The non-profit sector needs to be defined before discussing its governance practice. The terminology to describe the non-profit sector varies from country to country (Courtney, 2002). In the UK, a widely used definition is the five criteria coined by Kendall and Knapp (1993). In this structural and operational definition, the non-profit sector includes all entities which are formal organisations having an institutionalized character, constitutionally independent of the state and self-governing, non-profit distributing, and involving some degree of voluntarism. Very often, organisations in this sector are labelled as 'voluntary' (see, for example, Oster, 1995; Courtney, 2002, Kendall, 2003). Charity is a more narrow definition, which is determined in relation to specify organisation through the Charity Commission (Kendall and Knapp, 1993). Voluntary organisations are either charities or non-charities, but all the charities are within the non-profit sector. There are approximately 400,000 non-profit organisations in the UK, and the total turnover of this sector is estimated at £26 billion (Kendall, 2003). Rapid development of non-profit organisations has been seen in the past decade when voluntary action became integral to contemporary concept of

citizenship and has been encapsulated in David Cameron's (2009) notion of the 'Big Society'. At the same time, the contracting out of public services has increased the significance of the voluntary sector in the delivery of public services. Think tanks of various political persuasions have increasingly reflected on the role of non-profit organisations in their diagnoses of, and prescriptions for, an array of contemporary social problems (Jones and Norton, 2010).

There are various legal structures available for non-profit organisations in the UK, such as companies limited by guarantee, trusts, mutual societies, church ministries, non-registered associations, and Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Regardless of the legal structure, most charities are governed by boards, the individual appointees may be called trustees, directors, board members, governors or committee members, but under trust law they are the people with ultimate responsibility for directing the business of the charity, looking after the money and resources to ensure that it is used to serve the charity's intended beneficiaries. Hence, a key role of these 'trustees' is to see that the staff and management of the organisation carry out the charity's objectives. Most trustees are volunteers, and receive no payment. In small charities and associations the Board may simply be volunteers who help run the organisation. In larger charities the day-to-day management of the charity would normally be delegated by the board of trustees to paid employees who would have to account to the board for their actions. Most charities employ the model of non-executive (non-paid) board members overseeing paid management and staff. Charity law says very little about the structure, composition and duties of a trustee board, but it states clearly that the trustees themselves should not benefit financially from the trust, and so employees of a trust cannot normally be trustees.

Like the private and public sector, issues of accountability have been highlighted in the governance practice within the non-profit sector. For example, 'being open and accountable' is one of the key principles describing how an effective board provides good governance identified by the charity commission (2010). The other five are

understanding their role, ensuring delivery of organisational purpose, working effectively both as individuals and a team, exercising effective control and behaving with integrity.

2.44: Governance in Students' Unions

Governance practice of the students' union has significant parallels with practice in public and non-profit sector and through the prevalent NPM orthodoxies has parallels with private sector structures and behaviours.

According to the structural and operational definition of non-profit organisations given by Kendall and Knapp (1993), students' unions are categorised into the non-profit sector. They are formal organisations and have their own internal decision-making structures. Profits are made only for the purpose of ploughing back into the organisation for investing in other student's services. The voluntarism of students' unions has been confirmed by the 1994 Education Act (Section 22(2)), which enshrines the right of students to opt out of membership of the union, although for most of their existence students' unions have been based on compulsory membership of their institutions' full-time students at least. The nature of students' unions as non-profit organisations is also confirmed by their charitable status.

Many voluntary organisations have been established as membership associations, where it is enshrined in the organisation's constitution that the governing body should be elected by and represent the membership in some way (Cornforth, 2003). However, the governance structure of students' unions differs from other charities, which is traditionally through a single board (NUS, 2008c). For the recent governance review within students' union, the NUS suggests that much of the best practice and advice material available from both the Charity Commission and other sources has been written around traditional charities, which may be inappropriate for the practice in students' unions. For example, many best practice guides would suggest a limited number of beneficiary/elected/paid trustees so that conflicts of interest are avoided

and the skills and knowledge mix are managed effectively. However, the democratic structures of students' unions are typically closer to the political structures of core government, with a much more extensive network of elected positions.

The 'council-officers-staff' governance model of students' union is parallel to that of national, regional and local government. However, the very rapid turnover of leadership and immature officers of students' unions contrast with standard practice elsewhere, although there are some clear parallels. For example, debates about turnover of elected representatives have been reflected in an extensive US literature on term limits (see, for example, Moen et al., 2005; Kousser, 2005). Although term limit advocates (see, for example, Will, 1992), supporters of restricting the maximum number of terms an elected representative can serve, see it as evidence of new members with fresh ideas taking their seats, opponents focus on the obvious loss of experience and policy expertise. For example, Jewell and Whicker (1994) argued that term limits would reduce the effectiveness of leaders, partly because of the high turnover and the resulting inexperience of those ascending to leadership positions. As a result, the political leadership is weakened, while permanent staff gain power. Recent research into the Maine Legislature in the era of term limits in the US indicates the decreased power of committees and committee chairs as a consequence of rapid turnover among the political leadership; meanwhile the term limits have boosted the power of staff because of a lack of experienced members (Moen et al., 2005). Moreover, the lack of expertise on the part of new members resulting from term limits can diminish policy innovation. For example, Kousser (2005) compared the impact of term limits on the operations of state legislatures and suggested that those without term limits were more likely to create innovative policies.

Governance in students' unions also has an important connection with the notion of social capital (see, for example, Putnam, 1993) through the communitarian aspect of their role, and specifically in relation to the support, finance and facilities supplied to a wide range of student clubs and societies.

2.45: Applying Corporate Governance to the Public and Non-profit Sector

Much of the literature discussing governance within organisations is based on practice in the private sector. Cornforth (2003), for example, admitted the fact that the governance of non-profit organisations is relatively under-theorised in comparison with the governance of business corporations. There are plenty of scholars seeking to bring in the general model of corporate governance prevailing in the private sector to public and non-profit organisations (see Farrell, 2005; Ferlie et al., 1996; Clatworthy et al., 2000). For example, Ferlie et al. (1996) identify two defining characteristics of the private sector board. These are responsibility for the governance of the organisation and accountability to shareholders. While the accountability of the majority of public sector boards is to a wider audience than private shareholders and includes customers, citizens and those who have provided the finance and so on, the primary characteristics of the public board are also responsibility and accountability. Further similarities between the two types of boards have resulted from the wider trend since the early 1980s of transferring private sector modes of organisation and governance into the public sector. New modes of operation were introduced where management is carried out by a board of directors (headed by a chief executive), Annual General Meetings are held, and an annual report is published in a similar format to that of a listed company (Clatworthy et al., 2000). These features place public sector boards in similar position to private boards. For example, Otto (2003) compared the roles of chairs to governing boards and managers in different sectors, and the concluded that there were substantial similarities across the different organisational types.

Applying lessons from research of private sector boards to other sectors has, however, to handle methodological problems in relation to variances in characteristics of those with executive power and executive oversight. In particular, variations in democratic cultures and or expectations gave rise to important governance issues. For example, Cornforth (2003) argues that the shift to board control in the public and nonprofit sector raises serious questions about the democratic legitimacy of governing boards

and their effectiveness.

The nature of performance is also different among different sectors. Public sector organisations have responsibility for the delivery of substantive public services and policies, and democratic legitimacy is thus of central importance and a core element of performance (Greer and Hoggett, 1999), although it has arguably been eroded by NPM developments. As for those non-profit organisations, the nature of performance is multi-faceted, and the tasks of boards differ in important respects from those of for-profit boards. Although social responsibility and corporate ethics have been given an increasing emphasis in private bodies such concerns are far more important in relation to both public and non-profit sector to evaluate. Such themes were developed by Clatworthy et al. (2000) who used NHS trusts to examine whether sufficient congruity exists between them to allow governance models created in the private sector to be applied to the public sector. Their study shows that 'the two sectors are too dissimilar for the whole-sale transfer of private sector governance mechanisms to be effective' (p.173). Stemming from 'the contrast between the roles and relative power and expectations of the various stakeholders', tailor-made governance frameworks are therefore suggested for the NHS trusts (p.173).

Moreover, the profiles of board members differ in different sectors. For example, Oster (1995) listed some characteristics that distinguish the non-profit boards from their for-profit counterparts, and there was evidence that non-profits boards are larger, with fewer insiders. The for-profit board generally combines insiders and outsiders, and is typically heavily weighted in favour of people who have professional expertise in areas of business of the firm. However, non-profit boards often consist entirely of outsiders, non-employees of the organisation. Similarly, Courtney (2002) mentioned that shareholders seldom spend more than a fraction of their lives actively pursuing their interests as shareholders whereas many elected representatives are obliged to devote a large part of their waking hours to their public role. In fact, tension exists in the public and nonprofit boards between representatives and professional boards, for

example 'should the boards of public bodies be elected or chosen because of their expertise' (Cornforth, 2003, p. 13).

Furthermore, the level of operating function is different across sectors, which scholars have long recognized. For example, Oster (1995) summarises the five chief tasks of non-profit boards as identified by writers. These are – to select and evaluate the chief executive officer; to define and re-evaluate the mission of the organisation; to develop a plan for the organisation; to approve budgets, and to help obtain resources. Others have illustrated magnitude differences, for example Forbes and Milliken (1999) asserted that non-profit boards typically exerted more influence over operating functions than do for profit boards. Board's involvement of operating function within public and non-profit organisations has been blamed for the challenging and problematic nature of governance. As Middleton (1987) and more recently Harris (1999) noted, staff in non-profit organisations seldom seem to be satisfied with the performance of their boards. Concern has focused in particular on the boundary between the roles of the board and management. Staff accuse boards either of meddling in the affairs of management or conversely of not being involved enough and serving a largely symbolic function (Cornforth and Simpson, 2002).

2.46: Consultation and Participation: Definitions and Applied Research

There is significant academic literature providing definitions of consultation and participation. For example, Arnstein's (1971) 'ladder of participation' distinguishes between consultation and participation based on the extent to which participants affected decisions. Consultation, which comprises Arnstein's (1971) middle three rungs, was termed 'degrees of tokenism' in which citizens possessed a right to be heard but lacked direct involvement in decision making. Participation was used as a generic term describing the top three rungs (partnership, delegated power and citizen control) for a wide range of devices for involving outsiders in decision-making. Similarly, Gyford (1991) suggested that participation involved some degree of 'sharing in the processes of policy-making and service provision' while consultation

exercises acknowledged that the public had the right to be heard even if they did not take part in decision-making. More recently, Burns et al. (1994) identify a 'ladder of citizen empowerment', and Hambleton (1997) discussed the notion of 'community-owned government'.

Consultation and participation are much mentioned in the policy and practice literature in the past two decades, driven by the public managerialism and the notion of governance. Discomfort with the democratic credentials of the new governance lead people to search for new avenues of citizen participation (Bevir, 2009). As discussed earlier, the effectiveness of traditional accountability line involving public officials, elected politicians and the electorate has been challenged within the context of the fragmented approach to government. With the development of new governance, many stages of the policy process are increasingly outside the direct control of elected representatives, and there is therefore a strengthened case for enhancing opportunities for participation. For example, Liddle (2007, p. 404) commented that 'the present crisis in accountability is due to emerging patterns of governance which places an ever increasing burden on a single line of accountability'. Similarly, Cole (2004) discussed the concepts of horizontal accountability to peer groups and downward accountability to clients and service users.

In the UK, there has been a wider focus on participation in the public service reform agenda under the Labour Governments (1997-2010). A range of mechanisms to promote community engagement and participation in public policy decisions were developed to extend 'opportunities for citizens to participate' (PASC, 2001: x). For example, the local government modernisation agenda strengthened the focus on public participation and consultations (DETR, 1998). This modernisation process involved the development of a new political ethos where citizens were expected to contribute to the solution of key policy problems in concert with service providers and policy-makers (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002) by embedding consultation and participation 'into the culture of all councils' (DETR, 1998: 39). Through a survey of

all local authorities, Lowndes et al. (2001a) documented the growth and increasing diversity of activity designed to enhance public participation in local government.

However, the practice of consultation and participation exercises has been the subject of much scholarly criticism. In particular, it has been claimed that participants were often drawn disproportionately from local elites and they might raise unrealistic expectations and generate greater dissatisfaction (Rao, 2000, Rouse and Smith, 2002). As a result, consultation risks 'merely framing questions that reflect the dominant discourse' (Brooks 2000, p. 609), and may not always be representative of the wider community (see, for example, Liddle, 2007; Rowe and Devanney, 2003). Similarly, local authority respondents claimed that the observed growth in participation initiatives might not necessarily represent democratic enhancement (see, for example, Lowndes et al., 2001a; Rowe, 2006), and it has also been argued that 'individual initiatives are often deliberately designed to discriminate in favour of particular groups or areas...they automatically fail the democratic test' (Lowndes et al., 2001a, p.215). Moreover, a review of the Local Agenda 21 implementation at Bath and North-East Somerset Council indicated that any one mechanism for consultation was unlikely to be inclusive and that some groups and individuals will require specific targeting (Rowe, 2000). Such sophistication required public officials with decent research methodology skills in relation to both designing and conducting the consultation, however, in practice, officers conducting consultations often lacked such skills (Liddle, 2007; Cole, 2004).

Overall, researchers have suggested that the effectiveness of consultations can be limited. For example, Lowndes et al.'s (2001a) study of trends in public participation from local government showed that participation initiatives are not always well-supported by the public and often fail to influence final decision making. Similarly, Cole's (2004) study at Devon County Council showed that some consultations were undertaken for cynical purposes to facilitate change rather than give consultees a genuine choice. To better understand participants' motivation of

being consulted and participating, Lowndes et al.'s (2001b) study also examined views and attitudes of citizens on participation initiatives. The results challenged the idea that the public is universally apathetic. Succinctly stated in their own words, citizens' core criteria for public participation initiatives were: has anything happened? Has it been worth the money? And, have they carried on talking to the public?

2.47: Scrutiny

Scrutiny, which involved an intertwined and interconnected almost symbiotic focus on accountability, policy-development and associated aspects of governance has emerged as a central component of UK governance. The term emerged from the linguistic and scholarly shadows as a consequence of the Local Government Act (2000), which obliged local authorities to establish scrutiny and overview committees, which had a range of core roles which included holding the local authority and external bodies, accountability, policy development and performance management (see Wilson and Game, 2011). This development consciously drew on experience of the House of Commons Select Committees, which had a similar range of functions and combined governmental accountability with policy development, recognition of the interconnections between these outcomes. These similarities between parliamentary select committees and local authority scrutiny have been noted by many authors, for example Copus (2004) and Ashworth (2003).

The roots of the current scrutiny focus in the UK can clearly be traced to the mid-1960s when concern about the effectiveness of Parliament in scrutinising central government led to the establishment of temporary select committees shadowing some departments (Crick, 1965), a permanent departmental select committee structure following from 1979. Select committee obligations incorporate scrutiny of core departments and a wide range of associated agencies. Although they operate within the overarching context of party loyalties and obligations, select committee's deliberations usually have a much more bipartisan and evidence-based focus than typical exchanges elsewhere in the Commons.

Scrutiny has been the subject a wide range of scholarly evaluation, in this thesis the relevant themes are explored in relation to three themes: scale, process and impact.

Scale

The 1979 reforms transformed the extent of select committee scrutiny, bequeathed 'a structure for systematic inquiry into the full range of Government activity' (Newton 2001, p.29) and led to an output of reports that has been described by Norton (2005: 120) as 'prolific', for example from May 1997 to November 2000 the Commons departmental select committees published 396 reports (Newton 2001, p.34). Criticism has, however, attached itself to the scope of this activity; in particular there has been a recurrent concern that select committees paid insufficient attention to financial matters (Ryle, 1997).

While the scale of local scrutiny varied notably, some of the smaller districts possessing only one committee; overall scrutiny has become a significant activity for councilors. As early as 2002, Stoker et al. (2002, p.46) found an average of 3.7 scrutiny committees in each local authority with an average of 42 councillor positions (Stoker et al. 2002, p.47). However, it has been also observed that for most local authorities, external scrutiny was considered 'a marginal activity' (Ashworth and Snape 2004, p.550).

Stoker et al. (2002, p.53-54) made a limited attempt to quantify the extent of external scrutiny through a survey asking specific local authorities whether they had staged an external inquiry and found that almost 42% had investigated non-local authority provision. Stoker et al. (2002, p.53) found that London boroughs were 'far more likely to consider non-local authority provision'. In addition, metropolitan boroughs and the counties had a higher than average inclination to investigate non-local authority services. However, Stoker et al. (2002), made no attempt to calculate the overall number of inquiries within any specific timeframe.

Process

Select committees have powers to compel people based in the UK 'to attend, answer questions and deliver up any papers that the committee may wish to see' (Rogers and Walters, 2006, p.324), although there is no overarching 'commitment to provide access to internal files, private correspondence...or working papers' (Weir and Beetham 1999, p.344). In addition, subpoena powers do not cover civil servants or ministers, although there have seldom been problems in securing their attendance (Maer and Sandford, 2004: 9). Overall, assessments about select committees has been constructed on co-operative assumptions about the evidence process and concern about co-operation from and relations with scrutinised bodies has typically been absent from scholarship and practitioner assessments (see Newton, 2001, Norton, 2005, Kelso, 2009).

In relation to local authority scrutiny, the key issue was, with the exception of NHS scrutiny, the absence of subpoena powers in relation to external organisations. External scrutiny was created as 'a voluntary and negotiated affair' (Copus 2004, p.221), in which persuasion was a crucial component of the process and the maintenance of a co-operative atmosphere with scrutinised agencies a core component of success. Developments in the mid-noughties, however, began to shift this framework. Firstly, the *Police and Justice Act* (2006) and the *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act* (2007) gave specified external bodies a duty to co-operate with scrutiny with respect to crime and disorder matters and Local Area Agreements respectively. Secondly, the *Local Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny) Bill,* a Government measure introduced in 2009, 'would have strengthened' such 'obligations on external organisations when carrying out functions relevant to the local authority area' (Wilson and Game, 2011, p.345). However, that bill fell at dissolution in spring 2010 and the current government's *Localism Bill* does not propose strengthening such scrutiny powers.

Both select committees and their local equivalents were normally located at the

bi-partisan and consensual extremity of the political spectrum. Select committees were driven towards bi-partisanship and compromise through factors such as the institutional reliance on basing conclusions on identifiable evidence, assumptions that reports that fall short of unanimity lack authority and socialization amongst political opponents and the emergence of a cross-party commitment to the success of the committee (see Rogers and Walters, 2004, p.335). A similar politico-administrative culture was also prevalent in local authority scrutiny, for example Copus (2004, p.24) observed the development of 'all party support for the scrutiny process' and stress on 'the role of evidence and analysis (rather than party politics) in the proceedings'.

Studies of scrutiny in both tiers of governance have, however, also detected a prevalent culture of party interest. For example, in relation to the House of Commons, Judge (1992) claimed that there had been several cases of direct and covert intervention by the whips in select committee business. Similarly, as regards local authority scrutiny, Johnson and Hatter (2009, p.7) concluded that there was a widespread perception amongst councillors that the potential of overview and scrutiny was inhibited by 'party politics'.

Local authority scrutiny has been assessed through two measures of party influence. Firstly, scholars have monitored party whipping on inquiries. Snape et al. (2002, p.142) concluded that it was 'rarely the case that formal whipping or discipline is applied to overview or scrutiny committees'. Stoker et al. (2002, p.49) found that a party whip was used 'to control decisions' in 9.2% of local authorities, an indication that whilst far from the norm, the use of a party whip to constrain scrutiny was not an exceptional event. Secondly, party influence has also been measured by focusing on whether those groups held party pre-meetings before scrutiny sessions to discuss the forthcoming business. Stoker et al. (2002, p.49) concluded that 39.1% of councils had such party pre-meetings, against 44.5%, which said there were no such gatherings, while 16.4% of respondents didn't know whether such meetings occurred. It was claimed that this data 'indicates that parties take a great deal of interest in the

workings of scrutiny committees, which could indicate that their proceedings follow the priorities of party politics' (Stoker et al. 2002, p.49).

Scholars have also suggested that although select committees have theoretical autonomy to determine their own agenda (Norton 2005, p.117) this discretion operates through a prism of party competition. As Newton (2001, p.32) commented, the requirement to retain 'cross-party support will also have an influence on the choice of subject' and thus the system contains a dynamic to nudge the agenda away from topics of high party-political controversy, although some are occasionally selected, often through fear that avoidance will lead to accusations of irrelevance.

In relation to local government, some writers have also stressed the autonomy of scrutiny and ownership of their agenda, for example Wilson and Game (2006, p.267) observed that as 'far as the council's constitution permits, scrutiny committees set their own agendas'. However, the theoretical autonomy of scrutiny committees to determine their agenda has been challenged through informal channels of political control, for example Chandler (2009, p.87) commented that the power of the political groups probably meant that 'matters which would be highly embarrassing to the local authority are either avoided or not subject to as withering scrutiny as possible'. Similarly, Cole (2001, p.30) observed that scrutiny often concentrated 'on activities that posed a relatively minor threat to the power of the executive'. Stoker et al. (2002, p.49) found that the scrutiny committees determined their agendas in approximately 70% of local authorities, although there was no data on the extent to which local authority executives sought to affect the scrutiny agenda.

Impact

A common viewpoint highlights the achievements of the select committees. For example Norton and Wood (1993, p.17) asserted that 'select committees have carved out a role for themselves as authoritative scrutinizers of government', while Poyser (1991, p.32) highlighted the 'indirect' mechanisms through which the Commons

Foreign Affairs Select Committee exerted influence. Similarly, Norton (2005, p.211) observed, that although select committee activity did not typically 'extend to initiating new policies...it can affect the implementation of existing policies and administrative practice'

Many scholars were, however, skeptics in relation to the impact of select committee recommendations and reports (see Newton 2001; Kelso 2009). Furthermore, select committees have, in general, been reluctant to review the extent to which recommendations were implemented (Newton 2001, p.34), while government departments have shown an inconsistent approach to the quality of their responses to select committee reports.

In general, research has generated sceptical conclusions about the impact of local government scrutiny. For example, Snape et al. (2002, p.42) asserted that the impact on executive accountability has been limited 'even in those authorities which have determinedly attempted to undertake the role', while Baker (2000) expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of scrutiny in relation to education. In addition, evidence from an annual survey undertaken by the *Centre for Public Scrutiny* found substantial scepticism within local authorities about the effectiveness of non-NHS external scrutiny (CfPS 2008, p.10). Similarly, Leach (2006, p.80) concluded that in most local authorities 'overview and scrutiny has stressed the supportive role, undertaking pieces of policy analysis' which 'do not by any stretch of the imagination involve holding the executive to account'.

2.5: Current Research on Governance and Strategic Management

Over the past two decades, there has been much interest in discussing the topic of governance in the field of strategic management of UK and American companies (see, for example, Hendry and Kiel, 2004; Rindova, 1999; Stiles, 2001; McNulty and Pettigrew, 1999). In the public and non-profit sectors, scholars have also recognised

the challenging and often problematic nature of governance (Forbes, 1999; Cornforth and Edwards, 1999; Cornforth and Simpson, 2002; Farrell, 2005; Cornforth, 2001; Mordaunt and Cornforth, 2004). In particular, there are two topics of central significance for this thesis: the role of Board in strategic management and the relationship between the board and management.

2.51: The Role of Board in Strategic Management

Many studies stress the positive role of boards in strategic management, especially for private organisations. For example, Rindova (1999) disagreed with the traditional research on corporate governance, which has viewed the contribution of corporate directors to strategy making as limited by their lack of independence or firm-specific knowledge. She argued that directors contribute to dealing with the complexity and uncertainty associated with strategic decision, and that they make their cognitive contributions to strategic decision making by performing, together with a firm's managers, a set of cognitive tasks: scanning, interpretation and choice. McNulty and Pettigrew (1999) examined the contribution to strategy by chairmen and non-executive directors in large UK companies. Using data gathered from interviews with 108 company directors, they suggested that part-time board members were able to influence processes of strategic choice, change and control by shaping the ideas that form the content of company strategy. Stiles (2001) conducted a study of boards of directors by using a multi-method approach involving an in-depth examination of 51 directors of UK public companies, a survey of 121 company secretaries and four case studies of UK plcs, where multiple board members were interviewed. He examined the impact of boards on strategy and showed that by establishing the business definition, gatekeeping, selecting directors, and confidence building, the board influences the boundaries of strategic action. More recently, Mordaunt and Cornforth (2004) used four case studies to support their view that boards often play an important hands-on role in the turnaround of non-profit organizations.

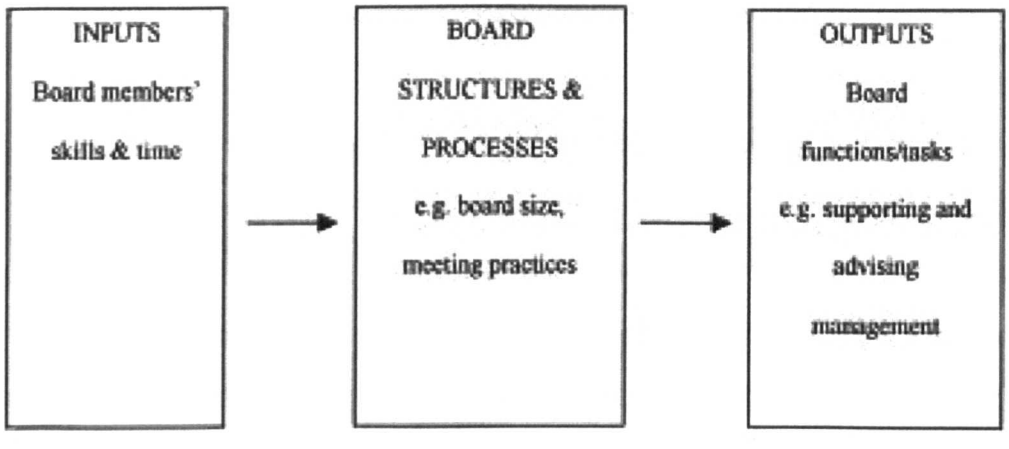
In contrast with the key role of Board in strategic management verified in many

private sector practices, the extent of board involvement in strategic management is doubted in practice within the public and non-profit sector. Evidence has shown the uneven process of bringing private sector governance models into the public and non-profit organisations. For example, Farrell (2005) examined the extent of involvement of one public sector board in the UK, the school governing body, in strategic activity. The change in the nature of school governing bodies was made in the 1986 Education Act when governing bodies were re-constituted to include parental, teacher and community representation. Governing bodies are made up of a combination of appointed, elected and co-opted governors. Membership is determined by formula, based on pupil enrolment. Using empirical evidence from a number of semi-structured interviews conducted in schools, Farrell found that governing bodies were not involved at a high level in strategy within schools. Rather, headteachers were more likely to be undertaking this activity. Reflections were made about the relevance of the 'board of directors' model for both governing bodies and the public sector more generally. Discussions also concerned the tensions between conformance and performance as the key role of board (Cornforth, 2003). The role of conformance focuses on 'monitoring and scrutiny of the organisation's past performance and is risk-averse', while the performance role demands 'forward vision, an understanding of the organisation and its environment' and 'a greater willingness to take risks' (Cornforth, 2003. P.14). For example, Ashburner (2003) reviewed the reforms of governance structure in the NHS, suggesting that the move to a private sector model means that boards are too involved with performance at the expense of their conformance role. On the other hand, some (for example, Liddle, 2007, McGarvey, 2001) argued that political and professional notions of accountability had been undermined by NPM. For example, Liddle (2007, p.407) suggested that the focus on managerialist accountability forced officials to 'put aside their professional training and experience in the interests of the public weal'.

To understand the ways in which boards could contribute to the process of strategic management, studies have been concerned with the relationship between three sets of

variables: various board characteristics; boards' performance/effectiveness; and overall organizational effectiveness (see Bradshaw et al., 1992; Chait et al., 1991; Herman et al., 1997). By summarising a variety of different factors that have been identified as affecting board performance, Cornforth (2001) developed a conceptual framework outlined in figure 2.6. In this simple input-output model, the main outputs of the board are the various functions or tasks supporting the board performance. Five board roles are defined as: strategic direction and policy making, external accountability and relations with stakeholders, supervising and supporting management, stewardship of the organization's resources, and board maintenance. The two main inputs are the board members' skills and experience, and the time they are able to devote to their role. These inputs are transformed into outputs through the board's structures and processes. Broad structures include board size, the existence of sub-committees, the frequency of meetings and the existence of job descriptions for board members. Board processes include how board meetings are conducted, the clarity of board roles, the extent to which a common vision for the organization exists, the ability to manage conflict within the board and between the board and staff, the quality of communication between the board and staff, and whether boards and managers periodically review how they work together.

Figure 2.6 Cornforth's (2001) Influence on board performance

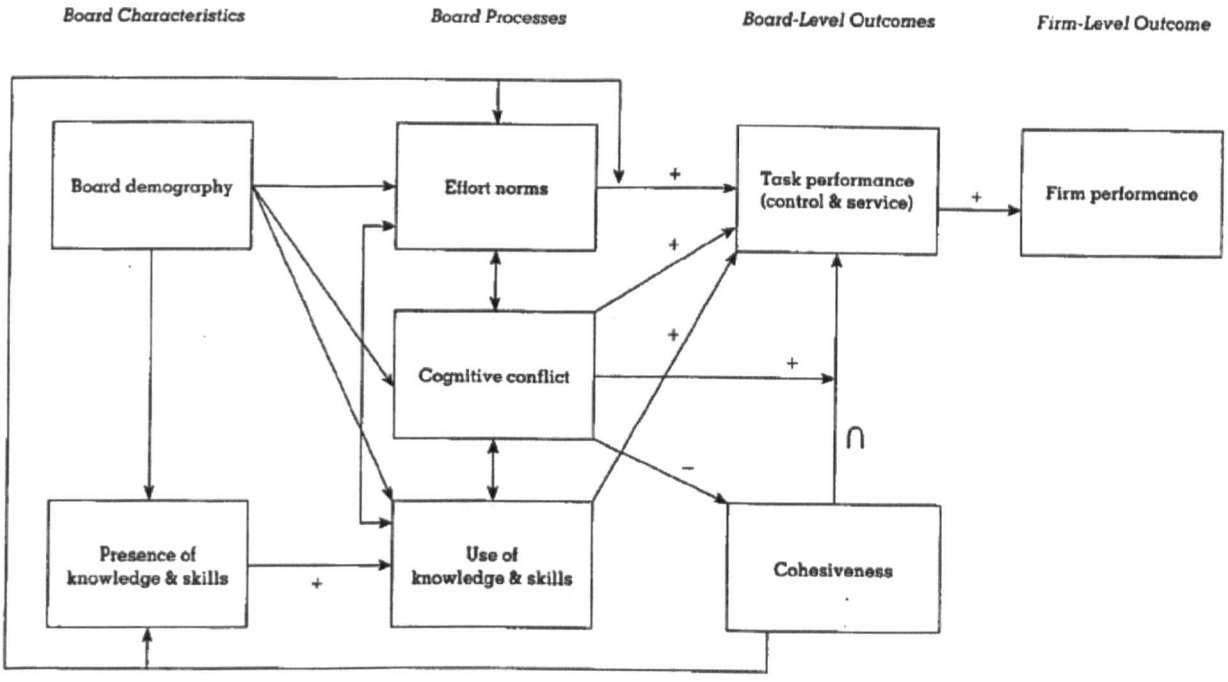


Sources: Cornforth (2001, p.219)

However, the direct demography-performance link of board was challenged (for

example, Forbes and Milliken, 1999). By integrating the literature on boards of directors with the literature on group dynamics and workgroup effectiveness, Forbes and Milliken suggested that the specific processes that mediate between board demography and firm performance depends on factors that are specific to boards as groups and on the specific criteria of effectiveness under consideration (see figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7 a model of board processes and their impacts on board effectiveness

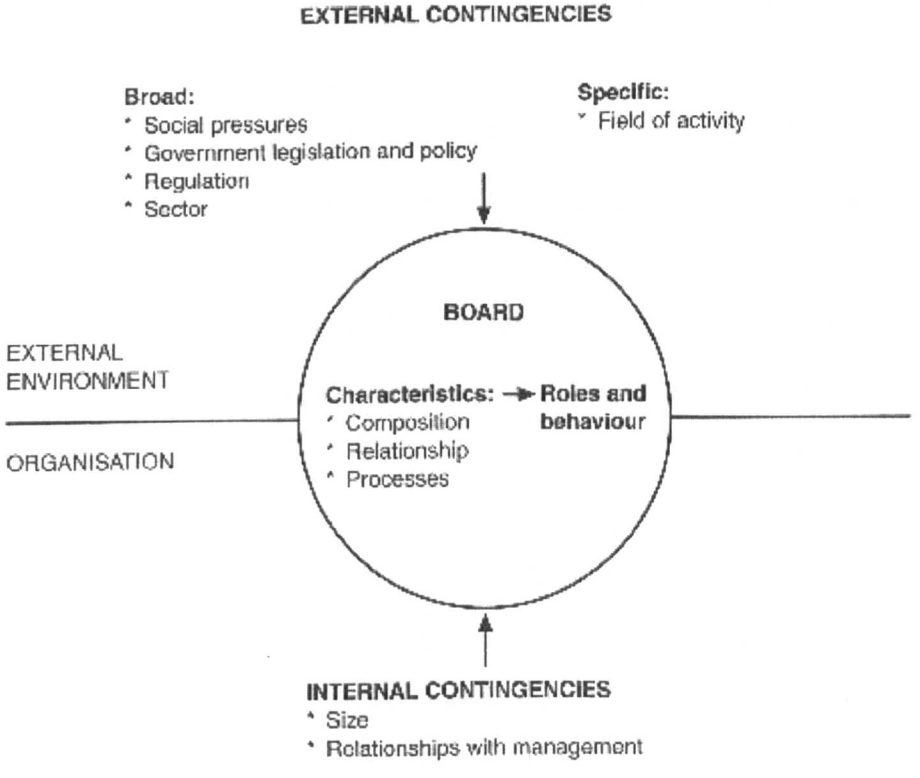


Sources: Forbes and Milliken (1999, p.498)

Much of this literature around the topic of board effectiveness is prescriptive in nature. It has been criticised for giving an idealised view of boards and not being empirically grounded (Cornforth, 2001; Cornforth and Edwards, 1999). Empirical studies of board behaviour have been criticised for their over reliance upon one source of data, usually the perceptions of boards members (Peck, 1995). Research also suggests that developing generic theories or practical prescriptions for boards may be dangerous. For example, Hendry and Kiel (2004) integrated organizational control and agency

theories to explain the board's role in strategy. They categorised a board's approach to strategy according to two constructs: strategic control and financial control. The extent to which either construct is favoured depends on contextual factors such as board power, environmental uncertainty and information asymmetry. A more detailed analysis of contextual influences on boards was summarised by Cornforth (2003) (see figure 2.8) from previous studies. With the focus on public and non-profit boards, Cornforth outlined contextual influences such as government legislation and policy, regulation, social and political pressures, and also the organisational context in which boards operate, for example the size of organisation and relations between boards and management.

Figure 2.8 Contextual influences on public and non-profit boards



Source: Cornforth (2003, p.240)

2.52: Boards, Management and Politicians

The relationship between managers and structures and individuals with responsibility for strategic decision-making is an important theme of this thesis and has been the subject of extensive scholarship. These discussion occur both in relation to the role of boards across public, private and non-profit sectors and politicians with similar responsibilities in the public sector.

In the private sector literature, the main arguments derive from the debate of agency theory and stewardship theory. As developed in the financial economics literature (see Jensen and Meckling, 1976; Fama and Jensen, 1983; Denis et al., 1999), agency theory has attracted the attention of many strategic management researchers leading to a large number of studies over the past two decades. This theory assumes that human beings are rational, self-interested and opportunistic (Eisenhardt, 1989). Therefore, managers will seek to maximize their own interests even at the expense of the shareholders (Hoskisson et al., 1999). Due to the separation of ownership and control in modern corporations, there is often a divergence of interests between shareholders (principals) and managers (agents). Agency theory holds that managers will not act to maximise the returns to shareholders unless appropriate governance structures are implemented in the large corporation to safeguard the interests of shareholders (Jensen and Meckling 1976).

Recently, the agency perspective has been greatly challenged in the private sector governance studies, particularly in the US through stewardship theory, which argues that the executive manager, far from being an opportunistic shirker, essentially wants to do a good job and to be a good steward of the corporate assets (Donaldson, 1990; Donaldson and Davis, 1991; Davis et al., 1997). A steward here refers to one whose interests align with those of his/her principal (Davis et al., 1997). This theory presumes that managers are seeking to maximize organizational performance, and suggests that managers are 'stewards' of the firm's assets and are not motivated by individual goals. This perspective suggests, therefore, a partnership relationship

between the board and management. Given the absence of an inner motivational problem among executives, there is the question of how far executives can achieve the good corporate performance to which they aspire (Donaldson and Davis, 1991). Stewardship theory holds that performance variations arise from whether the structural situation in which the executive is located facilitates effective action by the executive. The issue becomes whether or not the organization structure helps the executive to formulate and implement plans for high corporate performance (Donaldson, 1985). Despite the increasing academic focus on stewardship theory in fields of strategic management, it is not in juxtaposition to agency theory; rather it helps explain some managerial behaviour in addition to agency theory (Davis et al., 1997).

At senior levels in the public sector, the central position of elected politicians means that the relationship between politicians and their senior officials is crucial. This can be seen in all tiers of governance, but in the UK has been most extensively chronicled in relation to national government. The traditional relationship between elected ministers and civil servants can be explained by the 'Whitehall model'. The executive-bureaucratic relations in the Whitehall model are greatly rooted in the notion of traditional public administration, where civil servants have features of permanence, unity, anonymity and neutrality (Weir and Beetham, 1999). The traditional model emphasised the separation between policy making and implementation. However, it is argued that in reality civil servants have advantages over minsters in terms of their numbers, permanence, expertise and cohesion (Jones and Norton, 2010). Civil servants can help to shape, even determine, the minister's agenda. Meanwhile, they are in a position to influence, even control, the flow of information to a minister. As a result, ministers in practice 'rely almost wholly on their departments, senior bureaucrats and private officers, and the resources and advice they can provide' (Weir and Beetham, 1999, p.167). The Whitehall model has therefore rested on a very close partnership between politician and civil servants. This has parallels with the stewardship theory emphasized in the private sector governance

literature.

Since the 1960s, the interaction between politician and civil servants of the Whitehall model has been criticised as not generating good, efficient or effective government (see, for example, Campbell and Wilson 1995, Barberis, 1996, Greenwood et al., 2002). In particular, it has been criticised as an obstacle to radical change (Weir and Beetham, 1999). That was because the difficulty in reality to achieve a close and decent partnership between the two groups. Many former cabinet ministers vented frustrations towards their relations with civil servants. For example, diarist Richard Crossman (Howard, 1979) chronicled difficult relations with his permanent secretary (senior civil servant) as housing minister in the mid-1960s. Also, Barbara (later Baroness) Castle (1996) expressed her grievances in the form of an open letter addressed to the top civil servants, in which she rejected the notion of the civil service as the custodian of the long term and wider public interest.

In recent decades, there is some evidence to suggest that the power of senior civil servants has diminished. In particular, there has been greater use of special advisers to supply ministers with alternative sources of policy and or presentational advice. There has been also a tendency to seek advice from a range of bodies outside government – think tanks, advisory committees and task groups. In some cases, civil servants are not seen as being in the decision-making loop (Greenwood et al., 2002). Permanent Secretaries tend no longer to be the gatekeepers of what advice is or is not sent to a minister (Page and Jenkins, 2005).

In those quangos and voluntary organisations resulting from the fragmented approach to governance, the agency perspective of the relationship between board and management has also been found relevant. In some political science literature, the theory is named as 'principal-agent model', which has become the dominant framework for examining the generic difficulties that arise in any setting from contracting and the contractual relationship (Kassim and Menon, 2002). Many authors

support the applicability of this agency perspective to the public and non-profit organizations, despite the arguments of potential ambiguity over who the principles or owners. For example, Cornforth (2003) argued that the Trust law is even more in line with an agency model of governance than company law as a complete separation of the board members from staff or management is enshrined in trust law. Similarly, in public organisations it can be argued that the public or state's objectives are at risk from managers pursuing their own interests, and so a key role of the board is again to monitor management and ensure their compliance in furthering the organisation's objectives (Cornforth, 2003). However, the 'principal-agent model' causes discussions around the topic of accountability following the introduction of fragmented structure of government. It is argued that the shift towards markets and networks has disrupted the traditional lines of accountability between public servants, elected politicians and the electorate. As Bevir (2009, p.25) argues, policies in the new governance are being implemented and even made by private sector and voluntary sector actors; as a result 'there are often few lines of accountability tying these actors back to elected officials, and those few are too long to be effective'; besides, 'the complex webs of actors involved can make it almost impossible for the principle to hold any one agent responsible for a particular policy'.

This literature indicates, therefore, tensions in the relationship between those, both senior politicians and board members, with responsibility for strategy and managers and thus lays an important theoretical and conceptual framework for the subsequent analysis of students' unions.

2.6: Summary

This chapter has reviewed literature of organisational change, governance and strategic management and, therefore, has supplied a conceptual and theoretical framework through which to discuss strategic change in relation to students' unions.

In relation to the organisation change literature, this chapter has identified the multiple causes arising from both external and internal environments and the existence of a variety of models complete with contrasting both often related categorising frameworks. Amongst the models identified is that devised by Johnson et al. (2005), which consists of strategic analysis, strategic choice, and strategic implementation. Although the process of change management can be presented in various models, they all suggest the process is problematic due to managing people issues. People as a resource available within an organisation are an indispensable lever for change. However, possession of the necessary human resource does not guarantee strategic success. Without strategic deployment and management, people will provide barriers to change. Hayes' (2002) personal transition theory examines an individual's response to change as a progression through a number of stages of psychological reaction. This model has provided a theoretical basis for management to understand how and why individuals react to change. Moreover, as people work in groups within organisations their influence on change can be seen as a network issue. The 'Group Dynamics School' of change management highlights the importance of considering people as the cultural and political context for developing and delivering strategy. To summarise, the literature of change and change management suggests that the process is complex and there is no single solution to guarantee success.

The second part of this chapter has reviewed the topic of governance both in relation to shift away from government and the operation of specific organisations. The initial discussion concerned governance in its wider form as a systemic explanation, which encompassed discussion of traditional notions of government and NPM. This discussion provided a general background to understand the democratic tradition of students' unions. Subsequently, the analysis considered a wide range of issues associated with the governance of specific organisations drawing on literature relevant to public, private and non-profit sectors. Specific consideration was given to a range of issues such as ministerial responsibility, consultation and scrutiny, the objective being to identify themes and literature that can be used to evaluate the governance of

contemporary students' unions. In the final part of the chapter, relations between boards and politicians with responsibility for strategic decisions and their management is discussed through an analysis of a variety of literature and themes for a crucial aspect of the evaluation of students' unions is identified.

Chapter 3

Students' Unions in the UK: Developments, Recurrent Trends and Characteristics

3.1: Introduction

This research examines the management of strategic change within UK students' unions. Last chapter reviewed literature on strategic change, change management, and the topic of governance in field of public administration. This chapter presents a general picture of students' unions in terms of their role and function in Higher Education, their history in the UK, the services they provide, how they are organised, governed and managed internally, how they are funded/financed, and how they have changed and developed over time. Also, the general context within which they operate is outlined to discuss the possible impact and influence of the external environment. Such a context would help to understand the external pressures of and constraints on change in the particular cases in the later stage of research.

The 1994 Education Act defines students' unions in the UK as the bodies that represent or promote the general interests of students. Students can participate in their management through numerous and varied committees, councils and general meetings; and by becoming elected officers. Students' unions are often officially recognised and allocated a yearly budget by the parent institution.

Students' unions in the UK have an extensive history. They have existed for many years catering for a wide variety of student interests and concerns, though at certain times they have been more relevant to the needs and aspirations of some students than of others (Jacks, 1975). Their strength lies in the fact that they are mass, representative organisations providing an opportunity for student self-government, undertaking activities of interest to students and responding to the needs of the diverse sections of the student body. Generally speaking, there are three main functions of students' unions: representation, community, and services. Firstly, the purpose of the organisation is to represent students' interests and views within the parent organisation (university/college) and provide opinions on 'internal' or student and academic issues, for example tuition fees, and 'external' or wider political issues, for

example the Iraq war. Secondly, they are dedicated to the facilitation of social and organisational activities of the student community. Thirdly, they are also responsible for providing a variety of services to students. The focus of these three functions changes over time.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, students' unions were established as the recognised bodies of communication and representation. Representing students' interests and developing a community for students were their main purposes. In this period, the representation function mainly focused on internal student/academic issues. In the 1960s and 1970s students' unions became more politicised, reflecting a widespread spirit of revolt among young people, particularly students, which resulted in some bitter and violent confrontations across the western world. This was manifested by a series of protests against either student/academic issues, for example the lecture system or student accommodation, or external issues such as apartheid, nuclear testing and US policy in Vietnam. The 1980s and 1990s saw a move from the organisation of demonstrations to the expansion of business interests. Massive expansion of commercial service was a key feature of students' unions in this period. Entering the twenty-first century, one of the key features of global organisational life is the continuing experience of change. Students' unions in the UK are no exception. Considering the role and function of students' unions within the Higher Education sector, it is not difficult to understand the change and development that has had to take place within students' unions. Higher education in the UK has changed considerably over time. It has therefore become necessary for students' unions to respond to these environmental pressures to guarantee organisational successful.

This chapter is structured around four time periods: origin and the early days of students' union, post World War II, 1980s and 1990s, and the early twenty-first century. For the first three periods, the background and context of students' union is clearly presented, with the discussions of the three key functions – representation,

community, and service. This analysis provides a background for the research by explaining how students' unions in the UK have traditionally worked. For the last period 'entering the twenty-first century', changes within higher education are presented including change of student profile, student's needs and expectation, and student life style. This analysis gives a context to understand the recent organizational changes within students' unions, which will be explored later in the research.

3.2: Origin and the Early Days

Students' unions, which can also be termed as Guilds (including Exeter, Aston, Liverpool and Birmingham) and Students' Association (used at some institutions particularly in Scotland), have a long history in the UK. Their antecedents are the student societies of Edinburgh University, founded between 1737 and 1787 (Day, 2003). The development of student representation in England and Wales was a markedly slower process. Two key focuses of these early students' unions were student representation, mainly on student/educational issues, and the community role. Their antecedents are either Student Representative Council (SRC) or the student clubs and societies. The service function of students' unions was very limited in this period. This was restricted by limited budget, building issues, and university policy.

3.21: Representation: Student Representative Council

In Scotland, the ancient universities originally had a separate student union for men and women and/or had separate 'unions' for social activities and entertainment, and 'student representative councils' for representational matters, an arrangement that still exists at the University of Glasgow (Brown and Moss, 2001). In the late 1990s, these institutions were amalgamated across Scotland and the term student association was introduced. For example, prior to significant structural changes in the late 1990s there were four bodies with distinct identities and management: the SRC, the Students' Union, the Athletics Association and Debater representing students at the University of Aberdeen. A similar situation can be found at Queen's University Belfast (Walter

and McCreary, 1994). In England, Newcastle was the only University where the SRC and the students' union were separate organisations, a division that persisted until 1968-69 (Bettenson, 1971).

In England, many of the predecessors of students' unions were Student Representative Councils (SRC) formed in the late nineteenth century and early of twentieth century. These SRCs were established to 'represent student interests, to afford a recognised means of communication between students and the University authorities, and to promote intercourse between the Schools' (Harte, 1986, p.181). For example, in 1905 a Students' Representative Council was formed in the University of London (Harte, 1986). In 1906, at the University of Sheffield the first SRC, uniting all sections of the University and elected by the student body, was founded (Mathers, 2005). The term 'Union' was formally adopted in 1923 (Chapman, 1955). A bit later, at the University of Birmingham the Guild of Undergraduates (Vincent and Hinton, 1947) emerged from the SRC.

At that time, men and women had separate SRCs in some universities. For example, the University of Liverpool established the Men's and Women's SRCs in 1890 (Kelly, 1981). In the University of Manchester, the Men's and Women's unions joined in 1967 (Pullan and Abendstern, 2000). It was the custom to have joint presidents, one being male and the other female. In the University of Bristol, the separate Presidents lasted until 1971 (Carleton, 1984). Similarly, at Glasgow the Queen Margaret Union for women was founded in 1906 and did not vote to become 'mixed' until 1980 (Brown and Moss, 2001).

Most of the SRCs were granted legal recognition by the University. For example, at the University College of North Wales, on 24 November 1899, the General Committee agreed that a SRC should be established (Williams, 1985). At the University of Liverpool, a SRC created in 1893 was granted legal recognition in the first University Charter in 1903 (Kelly, 1981). The Council consisted not only of

representatives of affiliated societies but also of representatives elected on a subject basis. The emergence and development of SRCs in the late nineteenth centuries and the early twentieth centuries indicated the political nature of the organisation, which was one of the major functions of the early students' union – representation. During these early days, student representation mainly focused on student/ academic issues.

3.22: A Community of Students

Besides the representation of students, developing a community of students and organising activities, such as sport clubs and societies, was another main function of students' unions back in its early days. 'The original idea of the union, essentially, was to form a university-wide society which cut across separate college lines, aiming to achieve some semblance of unity through the understanding of differences, through debate and the rivalry and fellowship that went with it' (Jacks, 1975, p.73). For example, the start of Liverpool Guild of Students was in 1889, when the University College's Senate agreed to the formation of the Students' Union 'for the provision of magazines and periodicals and the promotion of good fellowship among the students' (Kelly, 1981, p.94).

Many of the antecedents of students' union are the student societies. For example, in Exeter University, sporting, dramatic and literary societies and religious associations flourished before the formation of a students' union (Clapp, 1982). Similarly, at Imperial College, the original idea for the establishment of a students' union was the need for a place for students to congregate and develop a collegiate social life (Imperial College, 2010). At the University of Nottingham, the union's activity started in the 1880s when a cycling club was formed (Tolley, 2003). Also, the University of Leeds has had a students' union since 1886, and at Manchester University the history of the union goes back continuously to 1861, but it appears that these bodies were merely unions of student societies and they did not have the representation function (see Pullan and Abendstern, 2000).

Student Magazines were also an early sign of developing union life among those early students' unions. For example the Gong Magazine was initiated in 1939 at Nottingham (Tolley, 2003), the Clare Market Review Journal was founded by LSE (London School of Economics and Political Science) SU in 1905 (Dahrendorf, 1995), while at Leicester a termly magazine was established a few years after the foundation of the students' union in 1923.

One of the features of student's union activities in their earlier days was again the segregation of men and women. In many students' unions, relations between genders were distant and formal. For example, in Sheffield, in the early twentieth century male and female students had separate common rooms on the ground floor of Western Bank (Mathers, 2005). In the same period, the union of Queen's University Belfast was administered by the students' union society, which included all gentlemen undergraduates of the University, and female students had their own Women's Students' Hall squeezed into a couple of houses in University Square (Walker and McCreary, 1994). In many universities, Men's and Women's Unions had been formed with differentiated subscriptions and regulations, and with elected men and women Presidents. It was after the first world war that the Joint Union came into being, for example in the Goldsmith's College, it was in the year of 1929 that the hitherto separate Men's and Women's Unions were amalgamated (Dymond, 1955).

3.23: Student Service Provider

In the initial phase of students' unions, there was also a need for some, albeit limited services. Strict university restrictions on student activities were one of the key reasons. For example, at Sheffield, the university refused to allow the Union to set up a bar, a full union bar was not permitted until after World War II (Chapman, 1955). Even when the Council permitted dancing in the Firth Hall, it was under strict supervision and regulations (Chapman, 1955). Again, there were no social facilities available for students in the Union until 1949, when a coffee bar opened.

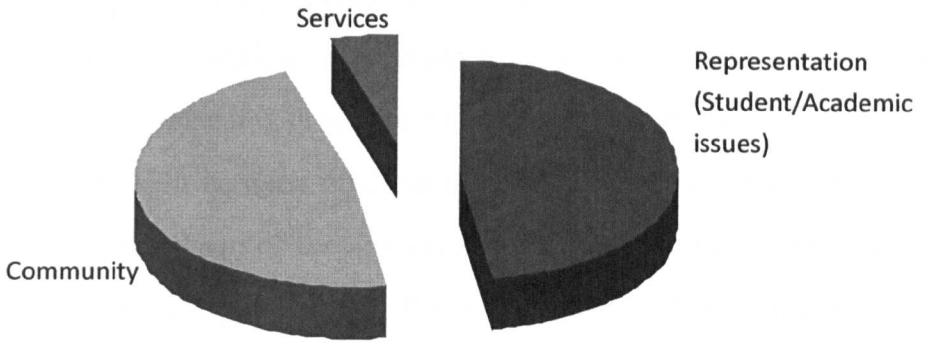
The provision of student services was also restricted by deficiencies in the accommodation provided. Because of funding issues, student activities in this period lacked an adequate home. A union building could meet the needs of individual students and clubs and societies. Most importantly, with a home of its own, students' unions could develop their identity. For example, in relation to Liverpool, there was talk of building a students' union for many years, but the need to find benefactors willing to fund such a project delayed construction (Kelly, 1981). It was not until the mid-twentieth century that students' unions started to have their own building(s), an early example being the construction, during the 1920s, of the old red-brick union building at Southampton.

Most of the students' union buildings operational in this era were funded through donations (Tolley, 2003; Dahrendorf, 1995). For example, the money for the Liverpool Guild building came in relatively small sums from a number of benefactors (Kelly, 1981). The new Union building of Birmingham Guild opened in 1930 was funded through a benefaction (Vincent and Hinton, 1947). Similarly, the new union building of Sheffield University opened in 1936, providing the organisation with a refectory and facilities for student groups, was donated 'as a personal gift to the students of the university, present and future' by the philanthropist J. G.. Graves, who funded many major projects in the city such as the Art Gallery (Chapman, 1955, p.377). In Dundee, the union gained its first accommodation by renting the Ellenbank Building in 1905 with £4,000 raised from the University College Bazaar – a fairly regular event of official speakers, entertainments, live music, comedy and stalls (Southgate, 1982).

In figure 3.1 the approximate balance between student union functions is summarised, this figure and the subsequent figures thus aims to capture in diagrammatic form the nature of students' union activity and changes across the time period. They are not, of course, based on precise statistical assessments but should be viewed as visual aids to the analysis presented in the chapter. Figure 3.1 summarises that representing student

interests and developing a community for students were the main purposes of the origin of students' union in the UK.

Figure 3.1 Students' union: the early years



3.3: Post World War II

Student numbers rose after the war. For example, students numbers at the University of Newcastle increased from 2,975 (1947) to 5,905 in 1970 (Bettenson, 1971). A key driver of change was the implementation of an agenda arising from the Robbins Report (1963), which recommended that higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment and wished to study there (Brown and Moss, 2001). The report advocated a powerful case for a massive expansion of higher education based on the growing demand for it (Harte, 1986). The shift from an elite to an expanded system, which began in the 1960s, brought a dramatic increase in student numbers. For instance, at the University of London student numbers rose from 26,762 in 1960-61 to 53,909 in 1980-81 (Harte, 1986).

The outcome of this expansion of higher education from the 1960s was the creation of a number of new universities, such as East Anglia, Lancaster, York, Warwick, Kent, Stirling and Ulster, as well as the upgrading of former colleges of advanced technology, such as Bath, Bradford, Brunel, City, Loughborough, Salford, Surrey,

Heriot Watt and Strathclyde, to full university status (Scott, 1984). Polytechnics were established in this period as 'the people's universities' replacing the 'concept of the boarding school university by that of the urban community university' (Ainley, 1994). Polytechnics were founded as vocational institutions but gradually mirrored the universities. They increasingly offered courses similar to the universities and with some research strong academics, for example Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, experts of international standing in relation to local elections, at Plymouth Polytechnic. As they were often split between different sites, polytechnic students' unions often faced, therefore, the problem of keeping students in touch with each other and with the union and its activities. Moreover, the polytechnics had very underdeveloped (small) students unions for a long time, compared with those of the universities. For example, research undertaken for this thesis revealed that, as a polytechnic in the 1970s, one student union, from what is now a university, had only three student officers, four staff in the office (union manager, secretary, finance and administrative officer) and no more than three bar staff at any one time.

The population explosion and the changing social situation triggered students' union to achieve greater representation on university bodies and a formal independence from their parent university. This era also saw increasing concerns among students over a range of issues which included both the student/academic and wider political issues. From the mid-1960s, a wave of student protest swept across the campuses of many developed countries, and the majority of UK universities faced a period of disruption (Blackwood, 1968; Sharfe, 1995; Keller and Keller, 2001). As a result, UK students' unions, as happened with students' organisations the world over, became increasingly 'political' in these periods (Ashby and Anderson, 1970; Jacks, 1975). Besides, the politically vibrant period also saw a large range of active and engaged societies and committees, while services expanded to cater for increasing numbers of students. This period was one marked by revolutionary change in philosophy and constitutions.

3.31: Representation on Student/Academic Issues

The population explosion and a changing social and intellectual context inevitably put pressure on the facilities of universities, both academic and physical (Jacks, 1975). As a result students' unions became actively involved in issues of academic standards and teaching at the universities, and of the health and housing of their members. For example, a three day sit-in of the Keele University's Registry Office took place in 1968 in protest against various university rulings of the time mainly concerning accommodation, which included a rule which banned students of the opposite gender from halls after 10pm (Keele University alumni, 2009).

Government's policy towards higher education was a key driver for the student movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1967 the UK government decided to introduce differential fees for overseas students. The issue of overseas student fees erupted again in 1975 when government policy forced an increase of £70. A year later, the Labour government announced that the fees for 1977 would be at least double those of 1975. Students across the country started protests against this change on fees for overseas students. In the University of Sheffield, after Council reluctantly agreed to implement these changes, in February 1977, the protests erupted into an eight-day occupation of Western Bank (Mathers, 2005). A further occupation occurred in November 1979. By then, the new Conservative government had decided to make overseas students pay the full cost of their degree courses (Mathers, 2005).

This era also saw students' unions achieve greater representation on university bodies. Before the 1960s, the right to representation among students was very limited. For example, the University of Reading decided to appoint a full-time medical officer in Reading in 1964 (Holt, 1977), and the President of the students' union asked that the students might be represented on the committee of appointment. The request was rejected. The rejection of that minimal request was a fair reflection of the state of opinion on student representation in the governing bodies of the University.

Entering the late 1960s, it was noted that the social situation was changing rapidly. The national age of voting had been reduced from twenty-one to eighteen in 1969 (Jacks, 1975). Moreover, students had won a democratic concession in 1970 through being able to vote in local government elections – they can vote in local elections where they were at university rather than just at home (Jacks, 1975). Such changes heightened their feeling of exclusion from a say in the running of their own university. Since students were 'expected to bear the full responsibilities of adult life much earlier than would have been thought reasonable a generation ago' (Kelly, 1981, p.340). It was therefore, 'right and proper that the form of the academic community and the role of students within it should be correspondingly modified and modernized' (Kelly, 1981, p.340). Since then, demands of student representation increased. Students were beginning to exert pressure for direct representation on the existing decision-making bodies, in preference to being consulted via bodies created especially for them. The increase in the number of students which followed on from the Robbins Report added to their strength. Pressures for student representation on the Senate and Court were recorded in many university histories, for example at Salford (Gordon, 1975), Keele (Mountford, 1972), Saint David's University College Lampeter (Price, 1990), Exeter (Clapp, 1982), Leicester (Burch, 1996), Brunel (Topping, 1981), and the Lancaster (McClintock, 1974).

After numerous representations between students' union and universities, by the mid-1970s, most universities had given student representatives voting rights on their committee. For example, at Cambridge, the University Council agreed in 1975 with the CSU (Cambridge Students' Union) that student representatives could sit on the Council of the Senate (Pagnamenta, 2008). In Glasgow, students had gained the right to elect representatives on the University's governing bodies during the 1970s (Brown and Moss, 2001). There was an official and statutory recognition of the SRC in the University of Lancaster in the late 1960s (McClintock, 1974). In the University of Manchester (Pullan and Abendstern, 2004), the agreement distinguished between three areas: student welfare; courses, curricula, planning and development; decisions

on such matters as appointments and promotions of members of the staff, the admission of individual students to the University, and their academic assessment. Students were permitted to be directly involved in the first two matters, but were not allowed to discuss individual cases and these were treated as confidential 'reserved business', a notion that remains standard practice on university committees.

3.32: Representation on Wider Political Issues

Beside internal student and educational issues, world affairs were also a key trigger for student's protest and demonstrations from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. Alongside a number of other countries, the Vietnam War, nuclear testing and racial and ethnic discrimination became a focus for student activism. For example, in relation to the Vietnam War, in 1965, a student protest of 250 individuals was held outside the US consulate in Edinburgh (Lipset, 1967). It also saw the first student teach-in at Oxford and protests at the London School of Economics (LSE) against the government of Ian Smith in Rhodesia (Green, 1974).

In 1968, the force of student rebellion began to transform the atmosphere on campuses and challenge the authority of university administrations. The Vietnam War had provoked student opposition on a vast scale in America and this crossed the Atlantic for an anti-war demonstration in London in October 1968 when students occupied the LSE (Dahrendorf, 1995). There was strong reaction to the LSE's decision to dismiss two lecturers who had supported the occupation. During the 1960s and 1970s, student protests included a 80,000 strong rally in Grosvenor Square outside the US embassy, anti-racist protests and occupations in Newcastle and unrest at Hull sparked by events in France during spring 1968 (Bamford, 1978). This atmosphere was reflected through National Union of Students politics, for example in 1969 Jack Straw became NUS President with the support of the Revolutionary Socialism Association (RSA) (Bettenson, 1971; Dahrendorf, 1995).

'We were all political in those days', recalled one 1970s' student, but 'the majority

limited their activity, at most, to attending the emergency general meetings, especially when lectures were cancelled' (Mathers, 2005 p.253). However, the degree of student protest and demonstrations varied among universities. Some universities, for instance the University of Salford, remained remarkably quiet during this period. A possible explanation may be that students attending the university on integrated courses were less radical than their full-time peers (Gordon, 1975). Also, a Union survey of Manchester in the 1960s found a strong link between subjects studied and political attitudes and activity (Pullan and Abendstern, 2000). For example, engineers, as the natural servants rather than critics of industrial society, seemed inclined to concentrate on making things work rather than on questioning what they were working for. In contrast, some universities in the country have a history of particularly left-wing activism, much of which occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, the universities of Keele (Mountford, 1972), Sussex (Daiches, 1964), and LSE were regarded as those most politically active in the country (Blackstone, 1970). North London Polytechnic (NPL) was very left-wing and confrontational (Jacka et al., 1975; Floud and Glynn, 1998). The issue was that this radical activism declined in most places after mid-1970s but remained strong in a few areas. The University of Sussex, for example, remained a focus of radical student activism during the 1980s, as a student from a nearby university in the 1980s commented 'by the early 1980s students at Sussex still operated in a radical time warp, while the culture at neighbouring institutions had been transformed'.

3.33: Student Community and Service Provision

During World War II, military service was responsible for limiting the number of full-time students and it became difficult for student societies to undertake their normal range of functions. The regular social activities of the students' unions were revived as soon as the war ended. After the war, traditional student activities continued and some new ones were introduced. For example, in Sheffield, RAG (Raise and Give) did not take place for four years during the war and was inspired by an energetic need to make up for lost time when it resumed in 1946 (Mathers, 2005).

Similarly, to celebrate the vast new spaces of University House and the Library, the Sheffield Students' Union decided to stage an Arts Festival after the final examinations in 1963 (Mathers, 2005). Following the dramatic increase of student number in the 1960s, students' union societies flourished. For example, the 1975-76 Students' Handbook of the Liverpool Guild of Students lists over thirty such societies affiliated to the Union using its buildings as their meeting-place, besides a great array of departmental societies, athletic clubs, and other organisations meeting elsewhere (Kelly, 1981). Throughout this period the importance of fostering a sense of community and funding student groups continued to be recognised.

The period witnessed significant developments in the services provided by students' unions. It was recognised in most students' union across the country that it was impossible to impose the restrictions of pre-war social life on those students returning from the conflict. For example, in the University of Sheffield, women in the late 1940s were allowed to visit men's halls of residence much more freely (Chapman, 1955). By 1949 the students had voted to have a bar in the Union (Mathers, 2005). During the 1960s and 1970s, hardly any students needed to take a job during term-time and drinking was a daily event for many students, therefore, social life centred on the Union or hall bars or pubs (Mathers, 2005).

Various new services were also introduced by students' unions in the decades following World War II. For example, at Queen's University Belfast, a number of improvements affecting the well being of students were made by their students' union. A permanent health centre was established in 1947 and a full time medical officer was appointed in the following year (Walker and McCreary, 1994). Nightline was also created in the 1970s by many students' unions across the country. This is a confidential listening service provided by students in a structure similar to the Samaritans. For example, Sheffield Students Union created its Nightline in 1971 (Mathers, 2005), and Leicester Students Union established the Nightline service in 1973 (Burch, 1996). Moreover, the dramatic increase of student numbers changed the

scales of services provided by students' union. For instance, in the University of Salford whereas in 1965 some 2,000 full-time students used the union facilities, whereas five years later some 3,400 have had to be catered for (Gordon, 1975).

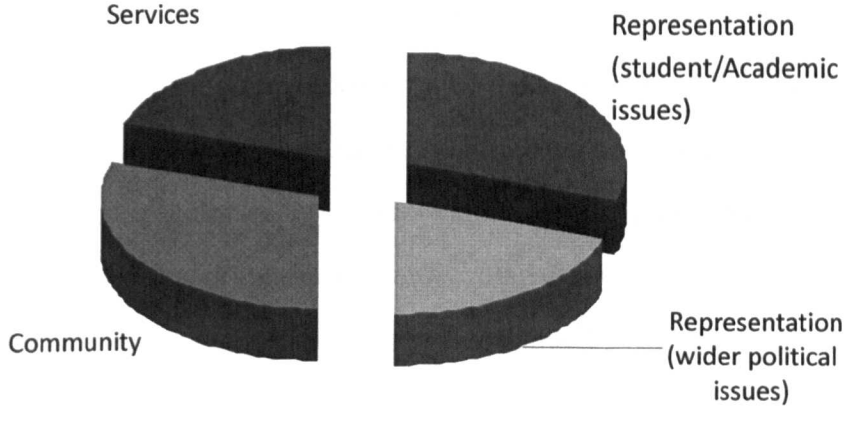
Calls for the establishment of paid student officer posts were early signs of changing attitudes amongst students towards duties undertaken on behalf of the union (Mathers, 2005). It was substantially a reflection of the view that the provision of quality services required paid student officers. The most important objection to such a payment system centred on the philosophical question of whether students' fees should be used for the purpose of paying other students. There was concern that once payment was introduced for one job in an organisation composed of unpaid jobs it would creep into other things and the concept of students undertaking tasks as a service to other students would be lost (Mathers, 2005). A significant break with the philosophy of voluntary service came in the late 1960s when students' union presidential positions started to become a full-time paid job, in recognition of the increasing workload and changing nature of the position.

It was well recognised that the management of such an enterprise was a considerable responsibility. The core issue was that the substantial expansion in the scale of commercial services, those which members had to pay to use, meant that the scale and also quality (in relation to the managers) of the administrative, managerial and elected support had also to be increased substantially. During the 1960s, many students' unions, therefore, introduced sabbatical officers and appointed full-time permanent secretaries and bursars to take responsibility for the day-to-day administration. For example, considering the heavy burden of work involved, the principal officers of Liverpool Guild were allowed to take a sabbatical year during their term of office, the cost being met from Guild funds (Kelly, 1981). Similarly, at Salford University the student president in 1965 was a full-time appointment, the university granting a sabbatical leave from course work during the academic session. Later, a full-time union manager was appointed to manage the proliferation of commercial services

being offered (Gordon, 1975). Similarly, by 1979 Southampton possessed four sabbaticals - President; Treasurer; Education and Welfare Officer; and Athletic Union President (Southampton SU Handbook, 1982/83), a fifth (Events Officer) being added in 1985 (Southampton SU Handbook 1985/86).

Similar trends occurred across all university students' unions, developments that have been widely documented, see for example at Imperial College (Imperial College, 2010), Leicester (Burch, 1996), Greenwich (Hinde, 1996), Brunel (Topping, 1981), Exeter (Clapp, 1982) and Saint David's University College Lampeter (Price, 1990). The features and balance of student union activities during the 1960s and 1970s are illustrated in figure 3.2. Student representation was still the main function of student's unions. Protests and demonstrations in this period had a strong focus on both student/educational and external issues and there were widespread demands for student representation in university governance. The period also witnessed a strong focus on service provision, especially commercial services, which grew in relative importance. However this politically and socially vibrant era also saw a large range of active and engaged societies and committees. The core theme is, therefore, one of substantial expansion across the range of activities but a disproportionate rise in the service focus and engagement with wider political issue.

Figure 3.2 Students' union: 1960s & 1970s



3.4: 1980s and 1990s

The expansion of UK higher education accelerated during this period, especially after 1992. The polytechnics were given university status by the Conservative Government in 1992 through the Education Act 1992, a reflection, in part at least, of their convergence, with regard to courses and functions, with the traditional universities. In terms of the overall student population, there was an increase of more than 100% in the timeframe 1989-99 (Eurydice, 1999). This massive increase of student population has placed spiraling demands on public finances. The Student Loans Company was founded for the 1990/91 academic year to provide students with additional help towards living costs in the form of low-interest loans to replace the student grant, giving loans to 180,200 students in its first year representing a take up rate of 28% of eligible students (SLC, 2010). Furthermore, the Labour Government passed the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 which introduced tuition fees for full-time UK and EU undergraduate students of £1,000 to start in the 1998/99 academic year (BBC, 1998). In addition, maintenance grants were replaced with repayable student loans for all but the poorest students. In consequence, the financial pressures facing students intensified, which was one of the features which made the 1990s different from any previous decades. Increases in the cost of studying and the growing importance of consumerist perspectives in wider society (Bateson & Taylor, 2004) have affected the way students view their university life, for example in relation to expectations about course quality.

Within this context, students' unions across the UK have changed significantly during this period. This era saw a decline in enthusiasm for the organisation of demonstrations and an acceleration of the service focus noted previously. For example, as early as 1988 the students' union at Cardiff University had reinvented itself as primarily a supplier of services to students, as a contemporary activist at another Russell Group institution in that era recalled, the students' union at Cardiff 'was different in kind to ours.....and not about political or community activism but

supplying the obvious and day-to-day or perhaps month-to-month needs of their members'. The union thus had a themed pub and spacious shops but lacked a strong community focus and serious intellectual and political student pursuits typically took place in university venues.

Across the country, while there was recognition of students' unions' ability to conduct their own affairs, they now had to establish new management and organisational structures to meet both the burgeoning commercial aspects of their operations and the educational and welfare needs of their members. In some places, at least, the political left had to operate within the context of tighter limits on what the students would accept. Such trends were pronounced in some southern universities, for example at Southampton in the mid-1980s, as one student activist of the era recalled, 'the left was defeated on a string of issues in the Union Meeting[1] from a vote on the miners' strike to no-platform and an attempt to refuse to accept Barclays cheques....they even failed to name the Coffee Bar after Nelson Mandela'. While there was still a strong focus on wider issues such as Section 28 and the Poll Tax, the focus of student protests during the 1980s and 1990s shifted towards student/academic issues. Despite an intensification of pressures on students' time, clubs and societies continued to be an important part of the community life.

3.41: Representation on Student/Academic Issues

Gradually, student/academic issues grew in relative importance. There were more student protests, which were directed towards government actions and policies affecting the education and welfare of students. For example, at the University of Sheffield, 2,000 students and staff marched up Cambridge Street on 20th May 1982 to attend a rally protesting against Government cuts. It was estimated to be the largest demonstration by a single university (Mathers, 2005). Even at politically moderate Southampton, in November of 1982 the SDP President of the Students' Union organised an overnight library work-in to protest against higher education cuts

[1] The forum for direct democracy, where any union member could attend and vote.

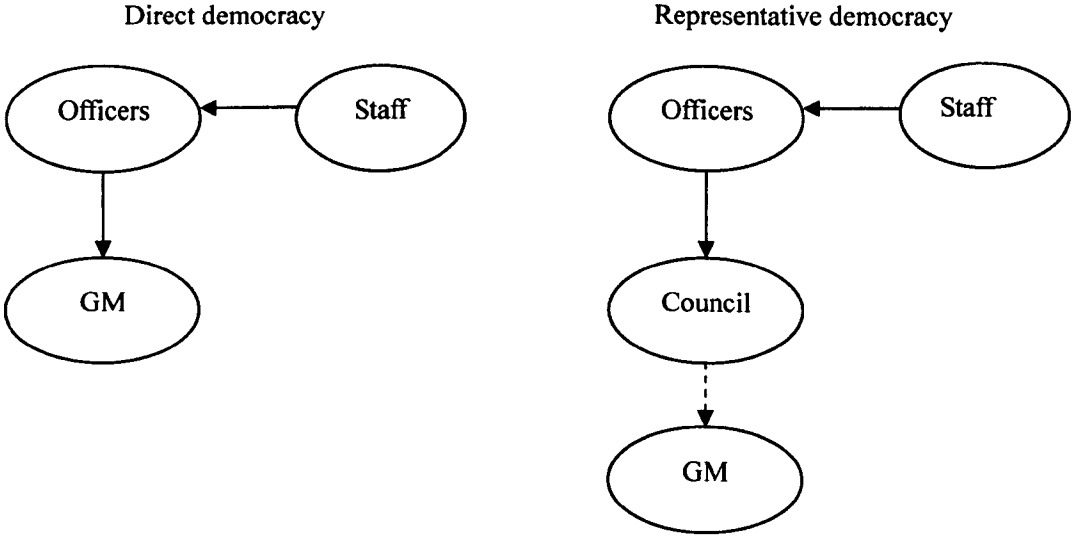
(interview with SU activist). In the late 1990s, when tuition fees for undergraduates were first introduced, there were extensive protests against it around the country. In 1998, there were protests at 150 universities (BBC, 2009). In Scotland, thousands of students converged on Edinburgh in a protest against student fees on 16 October 1999 (BBC, 1999). In England, there were occupations at Oxford, Sussex, Goldsmiths and University College London in 1999 (BBC, 2009). However, education campaigns can be short and have little effect as issues move on which each new intake. Once such things are introduced they are accepted by new students. For example, while student loans were the subject of intensive protest in the late-1980s, opposition drained once the scheme was implemented and was accepted as a fact-of-life by most new students. Similarly, Hasan and MacIntyre (2011) recorded how a rent protest organised by Ed Milliband while at Oxford, only achieved some short-term success but did not instigate longer-term change, the college leadership being easily able to reassert their agenda once the protestors graduated.

The increasing commitment of time, money and energy to challenging government actions in areas affecting the academic opportunities available to present and future students has been the hallmark of student activities during the last twenty years. One of the key reasons was the development of consumerism among students. Consumerism has and continues to push representation in relation to the university as high tuition fees have made students more focused on the quality of their course. For example, many students' unions now have a large number of course representatives on their councils; this is a relatively new development. For example, twenty years ago course representatives typically had no direct role in the students' union governance, as one 1980s student activist recalled 'often student rep positions went unfilled or unopposed and most student reps had at best a marginal or tangential interest in the students' unions but an almost exclusive focus on their department and their course'.

Another feature of student representation in this period was the shift from direct democracy to representative democracy (Figure 3.3). The dramatic increase in student

numbers was one of the key triggers. The sheer number of students on campus made such meetings impractical through the absence of rooms spacious enough to hold the required percentage of students on a regular basis, where General Meetings survived in diminished form quorums were often reduced, as one ex-student observed 'this was justified as much power had drained to other forums'. Reducing the frequency of meetings sometimes allowed very infrequent general meetings to be held in unsuitable venues that could not be used on a regular basis, for example sports halls were sometimes booked to accommodate annual meetings. Meaningful and powerful direct democracy had therefore become impracticable. At Southampton, for example, Union Meetings were held in the Debating Chamber which had a fire limit below the quorum level even in 1980s when the Union had only 6,000 members, the expansion of students in the 1990s thus meant that the only possible regular venue was too small. As a result, student's councils have emerged as a kind of representative democracy. These Councils are for the most part either residential or subject-based. For example, Imperial College introduced a Union Council in 1996 as the supreme governing body (Imperial College Web, 2010).

Figure 3.3 Students' Union: from direct democracy to representative democracy



The dotted-line arrow in figure 3.3 indicates that under the representative democracy

structure within students' unions the GM (General Meeting) has is held only occasionally and thus has little effective influence. For instance, in the University of Keele the governing bodies are the Student Council and the Union General Meetings. Although the Union General Meeting is the sovereign body of the students' union it only sits four times per academic year. The normal day-to-day governing is done, therefore, through the Council (Williams, 2009). In Sheffield, entering the 1990s the General Meetings were discontinued, and referenda took their place (Mathers, 2005).

In fact, problems of getting quorums at General Meetings were quite common entering the 1990s. In some unions, General Meetings were constantly in danger of being inquorate. For example, at the University of East Anglia, the minimum number of General Meetings was cut from three to one per term, since they were seldom well attended (Sanderson, 2002). In many other unions, the number of General Meetings gradually declined, and were eventually abolished, for example the Sheffield Students' Union (Mathers, 2005).

Another key reason of the rise of representative democracy was because of a problem which the officers frankly acknowledged that General Meetings of the Union, with some exceptions such at as at Southampton, could easily be manipulated by a small but determined body of often quite left-wing members. Even at Southampton, the centre 'of political gravity' (interview) was left-of-centre while the student body was a whole was thought to vote overwhelmingly Conservative and SDP/Liberal Alliance[2]. For many years, these criticisms of students' unions had circulated among more moderate and or conservative members (Pullan and Abendstern, 2004). According to this perspective, unions purported to represent all students, but in fact spoke only for a vocal, left-wing minority addicted to slogans; constitutions permitted, indeed

[2] As an activist of the period recalled, this impression was drawn from the perspectives of student politicians from all parties and results from a suppressed poll organized but not published by the students' union just before the 1987 General Election, which allegedly showed strong and roughly equal support for the Conservatives and the Alliance and negligible Labour support.

encouraged, the manipulation of General Meetings by small bodies of politicos and endowed such meetings with undue importance.

3.42: Representation on Wider Political Issues

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was still a strong focus of student representations on wider matters such as nuclear weapons and Section 28, although overall the scale and intensity of campaigning was diminished (Bateson & Taylor, 2004). Despite a few exceptions such as the 1984 protests by students at the Polytechnic of North London against Patrick Harrington's status as a philosophy student (Solomon and Palmieri, 2011), which focused around wider matters about racism and fascism, students during this period were generally less radical. Students had come to distrust the 'gesture politics' and rituals of left-wing protest, partly, perhaps, because they offered no solution to the practical and material problems of student life (Pullan and Abendstern, 2004). Symptomatic of this new mood was the failure of the Socialist Workers' Students Society, in February 1990, at Manchester Students' Union to win support for their proposals to occupy the University offices in protest against the introduction of student loans the following autumn. To authorize such action, an Emergency General Meeting needed to attract 500 students. However, this meeting mustered only 108 (Pullan and Abendstern, 2004).

In the University of Keele, although it initially had a historical reputation for left-wing activism amongst students, from the 1980s it began to acquire a reputation of apoliticism, with political groups struggling to recruit on campus (Williams, 2009). Similarly, Allan Barnes, the Sheffield Union President (1982-83), was deeply disappointed that only 1,000 people on the campus signed a well-advertised Union petition against the general public expenditure cuts implemented by the Conservative government, whereas 14,000 signatures were collected locally from the general public. He concluded that 'the social pressures on young people to gain a place at university, and then obtain a good degree in order to secure a job, were now so great that inward-looking and selfish attitudes were inevitable' (Mathers, 2005). The University

of East Anglia in the late 1980s also saw a shift in the attitude of students away from 1960s and 1970s radicalism. For example, in 1987 union president Karin Smyth, noted that her role was less 'swashbuckling radical and political' than it used to be (Sanderson, 2002). This shift was matched by Southampton at that time (Nash & Sherwood, 2002), with the decline in the election of Presidents on a party political ticket, for example in 1986 the apolitical Ian Geddes was elected on an Athletic Union ticket (Southampton SU Handbook 1986/87), while in 1988 Richard Chevase won an a Medical Society ticket (Southampton SU Handbook, 1988/89). Even when politicos such as the Conservative Edward Grant (1989) were elected President it was on the basis of broad-based and cross-party campaigns (Sherwood, 1989).

During this timeframe amongst the student community there was 'a shift to the Right in perceptions' and more co-operation with the university authorities. A Gallup Poll of students nationally at this time discovered that among self-perceptions 'ambitions', 'responsible', 'self-reliant' and 'realist' ranked very high, whereas very few admitted to be a 'rebel' or 'radical'. The Daily Telegraph was delighted to characterise students as 'happy new realists' preparing for the 'real world' (Sanderson, 2002).

By the early 1990s students' unions were very different places compared with two decades earlier. The fear of unemployment led students to focus on their studies changing the culture of the students' unions. Jo Abra, the University of East Anglia Students' Union welfare officer, suggested that in the sixties the main aim of going to university was to experience life, but now people want to get a good degree to get a good job (Sanderson, 2002). There has been an allied decline in student participation. For example, at the University of Nottingham, student numbers involved in representation declined dramatically in the 1990s (Tolley, 2003).

The new mood was also reflected in a revised students' union constitution at the University of East Anglia. In its preamble, the document noted the change in union and student activity from political activism to social and commercial activity and

commented that:

> "We have reluctantly had to accept that the days of 'mass student activism' have gone. Involvement in the Union has moved away from political decision making and towards the social side of student life. Although we are attracting more people than ever to our discos, shops, bars, clubs and societies, we have recently found it more and more difficult to encourage people to stand for elected posts and to attend General Meetings." (Sanderson, 2002, 377)

3.43: Student Community and the Development of Commercial Services

Overall, during this period the larger student unions, at least, continued to sustain and develop a rich community focus. For example, at Southampton the 1983/84 handbook listed 57 affiliated non-sporting societies which included ballroom dancing, real ale, theatre group, debating, all the main political parties and a comedy group called the Pig Fondler's Guild which staged pantomimes, rag reviews and hoaxes. There was also an expansion of non-commercial services. For example, many students' unions introduced welfare services to provide personal advice to students. Sheffield Students' Union, for example, was the first to establish a 'welfare rights and advice' service to deal with students' many queries (Mathers, 2005). At the beginning it was run by trained student volunteers during lunchtimes, and in 1985 a full-time worker was appointed to offer training and support to the volunteers and take over the more complex problems. Since then, professional welfare services were copied by many other universities, such as Imperial College and Southampton.

However, pressure on such community engagement, whether through clubs and societies or as volunteers in non-commercial services, intensified through growing financial pressures on students and substantial graduate unemployment during the mid-1980s thus making students more inclined to focus on employability rather than community activities for their own sake. During the 1990s, as a result of the introduction of student loans, abolition of the maintenance grant and the introduction of tuition fees, financial pressures facing students intensified (CVCP, 1999). Most of

the financial cushions on which students had previously relied were taken away. Part-time jobs during term-time became essential for many. A survey of Sheffield graduates found very few examples of term-time employment before 1990. Things were changed entering the 1990s. One student interviewed by The Star said that that he had a grant of £1,500 and a £1,000 student loan, but needed to work three nights a week in a pub to supplement this. Another said he was 'wary of loans' due to the unemployment rate (Mathers, 2005). Similarly, in Northern Ireland, Queen's Belfast Students' Union carried out a random survey in 1993 of 650 students and found that 49 per cent had to take part-time jobs in order to make ends meet and they were taking employment ranging from five hours to 35 hours a week (Walker and McCreary, 1994). Its Student President for two terms from 1993-95 reflected:

> 'The students of the nineties are walking a very thin tight-rope and trying to keep a balance between their academic work, their social life and their financial commitments. Students have to adopt a more structured approach than in the past. The pressure is such in a three-year degree that students really have to keep in touch with their studies. They can no longer miss several lectures and tutorials and expect to catch up' (Walker and McCreary, 1994).

Consumerism was another key driver for the changing profile of student community life. The impact of consumerism is not only on internal university representations, which has been discussed above, but also on services provided by students' union. A report from the Manchester Students' Union states in the 1990s 'few students were interested in the Union as a political machine or as a debating society' (Pullan and Abendstern, 2004, p290). Most students concerned themselves chiefly with the quality of the goods and services which the Union provided, and asked only that their elected officers be competent administrators and give proper directions to their permanent staff of managers, secretaries and other supporters.

Such trends encouraged a focus on the provision of commercial services by students' unions, the scale of which expanded markedly during the 1980s and 1990s, building

on trends originating in earlier decades. For example, the Imperial College Students' Union opened a bar and catering operation in 1984. In Sheffield, the students' union expanded acquiring the Fox and Duck pub in 1987 which is still part of the organisation to this day, and the Octagon was constructed allowing the union to put on large gigs and performances (Mathers, 2005). In Heriot-Watt University, the programme of students' social events in the 1990s was dominated by promotional evenings for various beer, cider and wine manufacturers (O'Farrell, 2004). Although, in the larger unions, at least, such social and entertainment facilities had existed in recognisable form since, at minimum, the 1960s (see various Southampton SU handbooks) the argument here is that in the 1980s consumerist pressures and changing expectations led to new developments, upgrades and modernisations, for example in the late 1980s at Southampton the Union's bars and live music facilities were modernised (Southampton SU handbooks 1986-87; 1988-89).

The pace of commercial development accelerated in the 1990s. Students' unions were more 'commercial' than any previous decades. For example, table 3.1 shows the major investment within Liverpool Students' Unions.

Table 3.1: Major Investment within LSU

Year	Bars	Shops	Membership services	Other
1988		50K on H building		
1991	230K Site B bar			
1992	250K The Venue (Bar C)			
1995				50K Finance
1996				200K Catering
1997	500K Bar C			
1998	360K Bar C	7K Site I		
1999			227K Gym (Paid by the University)	
2000	36K Bars EPOS	40K H building, 27K Site A, 2K Site T, 27K Shops EPOS		
2001	440K Bar S	65K Site B Shop		
2002	650K Bar C	20K Shop		

Year	Bars	Shops	Membership services	Other
2003	20K Bar S		10K Gym (Paid by the University)	
2004	105K I (£40K by the University), 40K B	55K SIAC	6K Training Suite	14K Finance
2005			110K Student Activities Centre	
Total	**£2.631M (£40K by the University)**	**£283K**	**£354K (£237K by the University)**	**£264K**

Source: adapted from LSU financial reports1988-2005

The expansion of student numbers led to many extensions to student union buildings, the employment of more staff and the election of more sabbatical officers. Budgets and turnovers also increased, For example, the income of Nottingham Students' Union rose from £250,000 in 1982 to £1,480,000 in 2006. Membership rose by 23,000 in the same period, whilst staff numbers more than trebled (Tolley, 2003). In Oxford, its Students' Union in 1980 employed a second sabbatical, the Vice-President (Finance), whose job was to oversee the rapidly expanding services sector and coordinate the yearly negotiations with the JCRs. In 1987, a third sabbatical was added, the vice President (Welfare). In 1990 the Women's Officer became a sabbatical position. The Student President for two terms of Queen's Belfast from 1993-95 reflected:

> 'The work-load has increased considerably in recent years with the larger numbers of students, a greater turnover, more staff in the students' union and more services provided. It is now becoming a much bigger business' (Walker and McCreary, 1994, p169).

Building restructuring included the reconfiguration of the Liverpool Guild building in 1994 to accommodate the growing population and to house student services (LGoS, 2006). Union buildings were also refurbished in the late 1990s at, for example, both Sheffield and Kent (Mathers, 2005). Changes at Southampton at few years later at the start of the new century were symbolic of this era. Much social and communal space favoured by generations of union activists was lost to accommodate increased

numbers. In addition, the distinctive debating chamber was replaced by a cinema in a clear reflection of the priorities of the time, interestingly this result had been an objective of Union Films since, at least, the 1980s, but in the earlier period, as one ex-student activist recalled:

> 'they dared not even mutter such a heresy because the wrath of every politico from the socialist workers to the Conservatives, and led by the Union President and the Deb Soc (Debating Society) President, would have descended upon them.....they would have been crushed'.

Undoubtedly, this commercial focus, and revenue raised, meant that students' unions have had the opportunity to gain more independence from the university and operate ever more autonomously. For example, the organisational plan (1995) of Liverpool Students' Union stated that:

> '...it is the Union's intention to expand its commercial operations during the next year. It is important that we can find new sources of revenue to reduce the dependency on the University grant...'

Similarly, at Manchester it was believed that a new entrepreneurial spirit made its Students' Union less dependent on public funding and able to finance its own building, (Pullan and Abendstern, 2004). However, the downside of this development has been weaker links with parent institutions and increasing emphasis on commercial operations. For instance, in Sheffield, during the 1990s University subventions to the Union were reduced, with the result that it had to rely on its commercial performance to maintain services (Mathers, 2005).

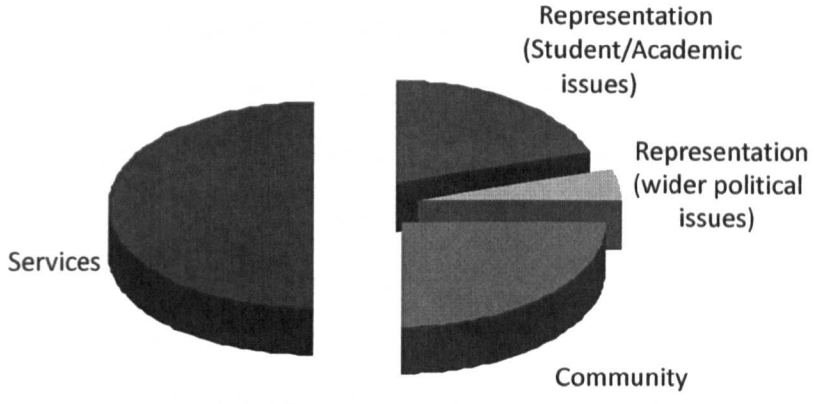
Another result of the intensification of the commercial focus within students' unions was that its management became increasingly professional from the 1980s onwards, a reflection of also of the increasingly managerialist emphasis in the public sector (Ferlie et al., 1996). Student leaders of the 1960s and early 1970s sought control through direct involvement in the provision of services and facilities. Those of the 1980s and 1990s, however, recognised that student control could be exercised through

employing some professionals to provide particular facilities or services. This expectation resulted in the growth of the 'professional' manager and the corresponding development of a more commercial orientation. For example, in Sheffield, in 1989 the Union voted in favour of having a professional entertainments manager, instead of the sabbatical Social Secretary (Mathers, 2005). Many unions increased the number of permanent managers during this period. In the late 1990s 'General Manager' was found to be the most popular title within students' unions, representing 65% overall, while 'Permanent Secretary', once historically the most popular, was in sharp decline with only 6% holding that title (AMSU, 2006). The change in title was indicative of the changing nature of management in students' unions. This introduction of 'General Manager' within students' unions was analogous to the change within public sector under the NPM (Ferlie et al., 1996), and the shift from an administrative public service ethos towards a more generic focus on managerial skills.

Figure 3.4 shows the features of UK students' unions during the 1980s and 1990s. Campaigning was the main focus of students' unions dating back to the 1960s and 1970s. Things were changed entering the 1980s as providing students services, especially commercial service, became the prime function of students' union. Much had been made for many years of the contest for money and attention within the Union between campaigns and services: left-wing students emphasised the first, Conservatives the second. When Conservative ministers eventually commissioned a survey of seventy-one students' unions in 1989, they found that none spent more than two per cent of its income on supporting political groups and that about two-thirds spent less than 0.5 per cent (Pullan and Abendstern, 2004). Meanwhile, this era saw the student representations on wider political issues diminished while student/educational issues became more important. Changing cultures amongst students combined with sometimes acute pressures also meant that fewer were able to engage in voluntary and communitarian activity within students' unions. As a 1980s' student activist, with some knowledge of subsequent developments recalled:

'in the mid-1980s we used to moan that most people were apathy about the union and its clubs and societies, but in retrospect we were living through the end of a golden age of such community activity, the students' unions of ten or fifteen years later had far fewer members willing to engage in voluntary activity.....even allowing for the overall increase in numbers'.

Figure 3.4 Students' Union: 1980s & 1990s



3.5: The Twentieth-First Century: Pressures to Change

The student profile has altered dramatically. These changes have seen increases in home-based, part-time, mature and ethnic-minority students. The Government's policy toward higher education, for example student fees and financial support systems, has had a great impact on student life. This policy shifts have strengthened broader consumerist trends amongst students. In addition, the Charities Act 2006 has changed the status of students' unions. Within this context, it has therefore become necessary for students' unions to change. This section summarises external pressures to change in the new century. The changing functions of students' unions during this period are addressed in chapter five.

3.51: Students' Demographic Change

There has been a substantial shift in the student demographic over the last 15 years. The student body has changed considerably with mass expansion resulting in 2.38 million students studying in higher education and approximately 5 million studying in

further education in the year of 2006/07 (HESA, 2006/07). However, a 12 per cent drop in the number of 18-20 years-olds from 2010/11 to 2020/21 is likely to have a negative impact on growth in student numbers (Bekhradnia, 2007).

Widening participation levels in higher education has been a key government objective in recent times. It has brought with it a change in the student profile. For a long time the student population was largely comprised of school leavers studying full-time. However this has changed and the student population now includes large numbers of mature and part-time students. According to the 2001 Census there were nearly 2.3 million students in higher education in the UK in 2001/02, 41% of whom were part-time students. The increase in part-time students in higher education has been dramatic. There were six times as many part-time students in higher education in 2001/02 as in 1970/71 (See Appendix A: 'Students in higher education in the UK'). Between 1994/95 and 2004/05 the percentage of part-time students rose by 8 % (from 31.3% in 1994/95 to 39.1% in 2004/05). There is a clear drive by the government to meet the targets established by the Leitch Review (2006) which sought to dramatically raise skill levels in the UK by making learning more flexible. It is likely to see an increase in the number of part-time students (NUS, 2008b). This agenda poses a challenge for students' unions because traditionally few part-time students had much involvement in students' union, some unions such as Southampton even excluded part-timers from membership.

Meanwhile, there has been a steady growth in the number of postgraduates students over the past 10 years and one could assume this trend will continue. Postgraduates constituted 21% of the total student population compared with 9.8% in 1970/71, 12.9% in 1980/81 and 14.9% in 1990/91. Between 1996/97 and 2005/06 total postgraduates numbers increased by 66 per cent (NUS, 2008b). Again, traditionally postgraduate involvement was mainly restricted to postgraduate affairs and some clubs and societies, for example, as one 1980s student activist from Southampton recalled: 'apart from a few people such as myself, and outside of the small

postgraduate affairs department, union activism was almost exclusively an undergraduate preserve'.

Over half the students currently in higher education can be defined as 'mature' on entry (Cadogan, 2002). The increase in the numbers of part-time and mature students provides a challenge to students' union services that have traditionally been geared to the needs of full-time undergraduates aged between 18 and 23. Most of those mature students have acquired experience in the labour market or in a vocational education system. They have different needs and aspirations than those 18-year-olds who proceed straight from secondary school to university. For example, an NUS report showed how mature students were less likely to use student commercial facilities such as bars and nightclubs (NUS, 2008a). This loss of student loyalty poses a challenge to students' unions to develop so as to meet their needs more effectively and sustain income.

Furthermore, students are now more diverse. Both international and UK domiciled[3] ethnic minorities students have increased in number during the past 10 years. The number of UK domiciled students coming from ethnic minorities increased from 12% in 1994/95 to 16% in 2004/05 (See Appendix A 'First Year UK Domiciled Students by Ethnicity'). They represent a wide range of heterogeneous communities, the majority of them from recent immigrant groups from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Over the next five years it is anticipated an increase in international students with demand for approximately 325,000 places in 2010 growing to 511,000 in 2020 (Bohm et al., 2004). This trend thus increased pressures on students' unions to supply services for a diverse membership.

3.52: Change of Student Needs, Expectation and Life Style

Pressures from the changing fees structure and financial support system have

[3] UK domiciled students are those whose normal residence is in the UK, including the Channel Islands and Isle of Man.

triggered a shift in student needs and expectation of their university experience. Debt remains a major issue for students. In 1992 the average student debt amounted to £3,484 at graduation, but by 2003 it was over £8,000 (NUS, 2008b). Meanwhile, the proportion of students taking out student loans has increased rapidly since 1990/91. Nearly 30% of eligible students in the UK had student loans in 1990/91. In 2004-05, 80% of eligible students in the UK took out a loan to support them through higher education, the average amount being £3,390 (See Appendix a 'UK Students Taking out Student Loans statistics'). It is interesting to know that in a National Student Statistics, just over a third (34 per cent) of students were 'more than somewhat concerned' about their current levels of debt (NUS, 2008a). It seems that some students do not have a great deal of concern regarding the debt they are in when leaving their studies as it is so large they tend not to see it.

On the other hand, the number of students taking term-time employment has increased in recent years despite widespread concern that such work affects the ability to study (NUS, 2008a). Back to the 1970s and 1980s, most students could survive on their grant (especially if topped-up by their parents) and it was most unusual to take a job during term-time (Mathers, 2005). The change from the mid-1990s is the number working in term time, although this practice has been banned at Oxbridge. According to NUS (2008a) Student Experience Report, almost half (46 per cent) of working students are reliant on paid employment to fund their basic living expenses. Three-quarters of students undertake paid employment while at university, either during term time (35 per cent) or during the holidays (51 per cent). The effect of undertaking part-time work needed in order to fund today's university education has had a big impact on the student experience. Put simply, students today do not have as much "free" time as they used to. This presents real challenges for students' unions to drive up participation levels and ensure student involvement in activities, representation, democracy and governance.

Along with the increased costs of studying, the growing number of graduates has

intensified competition for graduate-calibre jobs, competition that has been compounded in the last few years by the economic recession. Many students see university as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. For example, only 29 per cent of students say that one of the main reasons for them wanting to go to university is 'for the experience'. There were similar responses when school leavers were asked for their main reasons for wanting to go university; the most popular responses were again: 'to gain qualifications' (68 per cent), 'to improve my chances of getting a job' (44 per cent), and 'to improve my earning potential' (45 per cent) (NUS, 2008a). Such student experience is an international trend, as many countries have conceptualised graduate 'employability' as a key factor in their reforms towards higher education (Bienefeld and Almqvist, 2004).

It is believed that the new models of higher education financing have begun to change the traditional relationship between the university and students. Under the new system, it was estimated that students would spend an average of £28,600 on fees, rent and maintenance over the three years of study and anticipate a final debt of around £13,000 (The Guardian, 2005). Students have during this time become sophisticated consumers. They became consumers once they were expected to contribute towards their own education by paying tuition fees (Bienefeld and Almqvist, 2004). Meanwhile, they have much higher expectations about the quality of service provided by higher education institutions. In this context, the quality and quantity of student involvement facilitated with regard to both academic and non-academic activities became important (Bateson and Taylor, 2004). Consumerism thus meant that provision for students became an important aspect of recruitment. Although student engagement in wider political activities and in university governance structures is an important aspect of institutional life, the number of students who become involved in such activities represents only a small percentage. The socialisation of the remaining majority was, therefore, dependent on other programmes such as student clubs and societies, athletic involvement and part-time jobs on campus. Such facilities affect the choice of where to study for many students.

This trend of consumerism has also changed the way students look at their unions. The range of commercial services students' unions provide just makes it another service provider, which is just more cost effective for students. The tendency is for students to regard themselves more as consumers and less as members of a self-governing organisation (Mathers, 2005). This was reflected in the reducing participation in General Meetings by the late nineties as analyzed earlier in this chapter. The growth of a consumerist orientation amongst students, which has been seen as driving the initial growth of commercial services, was thus subsequently expressed through the emergence of discerning consumers without binding loyalties towards using commercial services supplied their students' union. It was such circumstances that helped to diminish commercial income in the twenty-first century and push strategic changes.

Living close to home and more community-based social life were other key features of student's life style in the new century. Regarding the choice of university, a NUS report shows that 31 per cent of students choose their university because it is close to home (NUS, 2008a). Local students tend to have their own social circles and are familiar with other service providers. Largely as a consequence of a high density of students within a particular community and 'town and gown' relationships there is a blurring between the facilities offered by universities/students' unions and the local community (NUS, 2008b). Statistics also show that with the increase of 'in house' entertainment and rise in alcohol sales in supermarkets more students are staying at home for leisure time (NUS, 2008b).

The tradition of student protest goes on. Protests are still strong on some issues such as the Iraq War, and tuition fees and in recent times some have interpreted events as a resurgence (see Solomon and Palmieri, 2011), although overall such protests have not come to affect the atmosphere of campus in a style reminiscent of the 1960s and for most students remain an often distant spectacle. In reality, a diverse student body faces significant time pressures and major barriers to participation.

3.53: Charities Act 2006

Students' unions in the UK were formerly 'exempt' charities but were regulated by their parent institutions and the 1994 Education Act. However, the Charities Act 2006 stated that all charities, aside from those that remain exempt, must prove its public benefit. Consequently, students' unions whose income exceeds £100,000 have lost their exempt status. They are required to register with the Charity Commission and subject to the following regulations and powers (NUS, 2008c):

- Student Unions need to demonstrate their public benefit to the Charity Commission.
- Student Unions are required to file an annual report and audited accounts to the Charity Commission.
- Student Unions are advised to conform to the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice (SoRP).
- Student Unions that own land are subject to regulations on dispositions and mortgaging charity land.
- The Charity Commission has the power to initiate an inquiry into a registered Student Union.
- The Charity Commission has the power to act for the protection of a registered Student Union (for example, by suspending or removing trustees, making certain orders or appointing a receiver or manager).
- The trustees of the Charity needs to be clearly defined and would be required to attend structured training sessions in trustee law and the roles and responsibilities of trustees.

The Charities Act 2006 came into force in 2009 and gave students' unions until June 2011 to register with the Charities Commission (Pook, 2010). Registration began on 1 June 2010 (Charity Commission, 2010). The University of Portsmouth Students' Union became the first student union in the England and Wales to register with the Charity Commission (registered on the 1st June 2010) (NUS, 2010).

Discussion around governance and the new charity law have prompted many students' unions to review their governance arrangements as a matter of best practice. In this sense, the change of law prompts a review of governance arrangements within students' unions.

3. 6: Summary

This chapter has summarised how students' unions in the UK were traditionally organised, from their origins through to the commercial expansion during the 1980s and 1990s. From a group of students who joined together to organise the social life and better represent themselves in the eighteenth century, students' unions have grown into large and complex contemporary organisations. The analysis has showed a recurrence of focus on the three functions of the students' union - representation, student community and services provision – and shifts in the emphasis given to various aspects of their role over time. This analysis also identifies substantial pressures for change at the start of the twentieth-first century, which have been grouped around the themes of changes to the student demographic; changes in student needs, expectations and lifestyle; and alterations to the legislative framework through which students' unions operate following the enactment of the 2006 Charities Act.

This chapter, therefore, makes a significant twofold contribution to this research. Firstly, it establishes the benchmark and framework for this thesis by specifying clearly the functions of students' unions, which is later used as the prism for the subsequent contemporary evaluation. Secondly, it sketches substantive pressures for change driving the functional and organisations changes identified, discussed and evaluated later in this thesis.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1: Introduction

As established in chapter one, this research examines strategic change within students' unions in the UK. The discussion covers how and why students' unions have recently changed, the consequences and implications of these changes and the barriers, obstacles and constraints to such changes.

This chapter outlines and justifies the methodology used in this research. Firstly, the selection of the specific case studies is described and justified and brief background material about each students' union is supplied. Secondly, the research design is explained and the research processes are detailed. Explanations are also given for the selection of specific approaches in particular contexts. Thirdly, there is an evaluation of the value of qualitative research and its prime role in the methodology used for this thesis is justified. Fourthly, the value of case study research is discussed and the appropriateness for this research is confirmed. Fifthly, the core methods used, interviews; participant observation; questionnaires; and documentary analysis, are discussed. Finally, the chapter considers problems and core issues concerning the chosen research methods and specific issues regarding their application in this study.

4.2: Research Methods and Design

This section addresses the selection of the specific case studies and discusses some key elements of research design.

4.21: The Selection of Case Studies

This research conducts a primarily qualitative study and has been based substantially on five case studies of UK students' unions. In this section, the specific selections are discussed and justified.

Firstly, this research focused on city-centre based students' unions in reflection of the intensive commercial competition that contemporary students' unions often encounter

and the significance of such competition for the organisational change process (see later). The focus on students' unions in similar geographic contexts reflects the requirement to compare similar institutions so as to be able to apply the conclusions to others in similar settings (see Denscombe, 2007). This approach enabled the compilation of a substantive amount of data about how students' unions facing such intensive pressures handle change and enabled contrasts to be drawn between the different responses of students' unions facing similar pressures. This had the potential to reveal more of significance than findings about contrasting responses from students' unions in different geographical contexts facing different commercial challenges. This city-centre focus also had a wide resonance because many UK students' unions have a substantial presence close to the centres of cities or large towns. This approach was however, not based on an assumption that such commercial pressures were only experienced by city-centre students' unions. In contrast, the selections were based on assumptions that the intensity of commercial pressures in such institutions might generate strategic changes that would produce findings more valuable than through studying students' unions situated in geographic locations where commercial pressures were likely to be less intensive.

Secondly, the selection of multiple cases follows a replication design approach as suggested by Yin (1989). The replication logic, not sampling logic, is analogous to that used in multiple experiments. For example, upon uncovering a significant finding from a single experiment, the pressing priority would be to replicate this finding by conducting a second, third, and even more experiments. Some of the replications might attempt to duplicate the exact conditions of the original experiment. Other replications might alter one or two experimental conditions considered unimportant to the original finding, to see whether the finding could still be duplicated. Only with such replications would the original finding be considered robust. The logic underlying the use of multiple-case studies in this research is the same. Each case in this research is carefully selected to ensure it either predicts similar results or predicts contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons. Therefore, the selection process is a

dynamic and ongoing recursive process. The choices of whom to study next result from what has been found in a previous (preliminary) examination. In particular, the governance focus of case studies four and five flowed from earlier findings. The analysis is also enhanced through selecting specific cases with contrasting characteristics in relation to factors such as old/new universities, finance and governance status issues. This approach enabled strategic change to also be considered within settings that contrast to a significant extent.

Table 4.1 (see overleaf) summaries the main features of the five students' unions selected as case studies. For each institution a range of basic data is supplied, this information covers, the type of university, the size of the student population, location, income, number of staff and the number of clubs and societies and brief details about their commercial activities. These figures aim to indicate the brief differences between cases, and they are based on the statistics obtained when interview occurred. Because of the length of research, each individual case study was conducted in different time period and the figures across the time period from 2007 to 2010. To preserve anonymity the case study organisations will be given simple identifiers 'AA', 'BB', 'CC', 'DD' and 'EE'. Details of how each case was chosen are explained below the table.

The first case selected was a urban students' union (with the main building located in the city centre and also operating over five sites on three campuses) had an annual turnover of approximately £1.5 million, with a mixture of income encompassing a grant from the parent institution and commercial income derived from bars, retail and franchise operations. Its parent institution was a new university, established in 1992. Based primarily on three campuses, the university served over 24,000 students.

The second students' union chosen was very similar to the first one. They were both based in city-centres and operated over different sites, with a similar commercial income per year. Their parent institutions both became universities in 1992. The

reason for choosing a similar case for study is to compare the change process and management practice within similar organisational settings. In each of the following cases, the same research methods are employed (except participant observation, which was used in the first case only).

Table 4.1: The case study students' unions (2007-2010)

	AA	BB	CC	DD	EE
Parent Institution					
Type of University	New Uni. in 1992	New Uni. in 1992	Long-Established civic university	Long-Established civic university	Long-Established civic university
Student population	24,000	34,000	27,000	25,000	18,000
Students' Union					
Location	Main building in city centre, also operates over 5 sites on three campuses	Main building in city centre, also operates over 2 sites on one of the campuses	City centre	City centre	City centre
Income	£1.5 million	£2 million	£5 million	£10 million	£3 million
Permanent staff numbers	70	50	40	185	56
Student staff numbers during term time	220	100	150	815	64
Clubs and societies numbers	42	95	132	300	187
Commercial operation	Shops, bars, cafe	Shops, bars, cafes.	Shops, bars, cafes. Also hosts live music, theatre and comedy.	Shops, bars, cafes. Also hosts live music, theatre and comedy.	Shops, bars, cafes.

The third case study concerned a city-centre students' union from a traditional university and had a higher turnover than the previous two cases. As discussed earlier in chapter three, the new universities (ex-polytechnics) normally had very underdeveloped (small) students' unions, compared with those of the traditional universities. Comparison was, therefore, made between students' unions which have a long history and tradition and those new ones to see whether they are facing the same pressures to change and whether there exist similar obstacles to and constraints on change. The finding (see later) that financial problems were a key trigger for governance reform at the third case study students' union also helped to shape subsequent research and the direction of the thesis. The fourth and fifth case study interviews, therefore, focused more on questions about governance while discussed broader strategic change matters.

The fourth case study was selected, in part, because it had a more traditional governance structure than the third case and because, in contrast, other similarities to the third case study. The aim being to research different governance arrangements in somewhat large unions located in old universities. The student union was, of course, based in a city centre. The fifth students' union selected as a case study also had a traditional governance structure similar to the fourth case study and was also located in a city-centre. It had a long history, as part of an old university, and a substantial annual turnover. Its recent governance reform proposal also stated clearly that the financial situation was the key driver for the change of governance.

4.22: Research Design

The empirical data presented in this thesis was collected through interviews, questionnaires, participant observation and documentary analysis. This section details each stage of the research in terms of what data was collected, how they were obtained and analysed, and when and where specific methods were used.

The researcher had been employed by one of the case organisations – AA Students'

Union (AASU). In this case participant observation and fieldwork had been conducted. During the participant observation process, the researcher observed staff perceptions of, and reaction to, change, talked to those concerned about their experiences of change informally, experienced the management and leadership issues occurring during change and also attended various meetings (for example sabbatical and staff meetings) to gain first-hand information. Such ethnographic approaches stress the advantages in terms of witnessing, observing, experiencing and describing the behavioural processes during strategic change within an organisation (Patton, 2002). During this process of observation, notes were taken. These notes were similar to a diary and included the researcher's reactions, feelings, self-reflection, memories, and impressions. This allowed the researcher to assess her own affect on data collection and analysis as suggested by Patton (2002).

Documentation studies were undertaken in the initial stages of each of the case studies. Data was obtained from a range of sources including managerial memorandums, promotional literature, community newsletters, financial statistics and reports into specific issues or projects. All this information was useful to quickly establish an understanding of the organisations being studied. Also, in a later stage of the research this data helped to either verify or supplement findings acquired through other methods.

Interviews were used to obtain detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions and opinions towards change pressures and the management of change in students' unions. Interviews also focused on governance issues which had emerged as an important issue from the earlier analysis (see previous). As well as the case study specific interviews, another additional interview was undertaken with a 1980s' student activist to deepen understanding of the development of students' unions. In total, 51 interviews were undertaken. Face-to-face individual interviews were conducted rather than focus groups discussions. Even though individual interviews were much more time-consuming, they were considered to be more effective than focus groups for this research. The core issue was that some of the questions concerned quite sensitive and personal-related matters. For example, student officers were asked about their

experience of being a member of the Executive Committee within the organisation. Also, managers and staff were asked to comment on their relationships with elected student officers. A focus group approach would have both compromised confidentiality with regard to sensitive issues and risked responses designed not to offend fellow participants and or damage working relationships (see Fern, 2001; Krueger and Casey, 2000).

To allow consideration of many different points of view a diverse group of interviewees was assembled (see table 4.2). Both elected sabbatical student officers, who were sitting on the Executive Committee and senior members of staff were the core interviewees. In addition, staff from a variety of departments and with varying positions and lengths of service were also interviewed.

Table 4.2: The Interviewees

Type		**Number**
Student officers		10
Ex-student activists		1
Senior managers		15
Staff members	Membership services	10
	Commercial services	10
	Other services	5
Total		**51**

Each interview took between 30 to 90 minutes. In most cases, the duration was approximately 60 minutes. The interviews were all semi-structured because semi-structure interviews permit greater flexibility and 'a more valid response from the informant's perception of reality' (Burns, 2000, p.424). In addition, as Burns (2000) suggested, semi-structure interviews mean a greater length of time spent with the informants, an approach which increases rapport. Consequently, the informant's perspective is provided rather than the perspective of the research being imposed. Also, the informant uses language natural to them rather than trying to understand and fit into the concepts of the study. Interview questions focused on investigating attitudes and perceptions of the challenges students' unions were facing; their understanding of the organisation's aims; their experience of organisational change;

their perceptions of the management of change; and their view and opinion towards recent governance reform. Questions for student officers and staff members were slightly different. A sample of interview questions is provided in an appendix to this thesis. Interviews undertaken for DDSU and EESU focused more on governance questions (see previous) and those with the former union activist concerned a diverse range of issues about students' unions in the 1980s.

The interviews were recorded using a small digital voice recorder. At the beginning of interviews, interviewees were informed that the purpose of the recording was to provide an accurate factual record and that the data would be treated confidentially and securely stored. Interviewees were assured that they (and the organisation they represented) would remain anonymous. Also it was specified that anything they said was 'in confidence' and if used in the thesis that full anonymity would be preserved. It would not be possible for comments to be attributed to either the interviewee or their students' union. After the interviews, all the voice records were transcribed for analysis.

In the latter stages of this research, 80 questionnaires were dispatched to a range of students' unions via email. These questions focused around the possibility of financial difficulties and the impact on organisational restructuring in the past ten years. The sample was not restricted to city-centre students' unions because the objective was primarily to enrich understanding about the overall development of UK students' unions, especially in relation to the general discussions outlined in chapters three and five. The questionnaires were sent to the senior managers of students' unions. A sample of the questionnaire is provided in an appendix to this thesis. Overall, 19 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 24%.

After the data collection, all the materials were gathered to be analysed. Unlike quantitative analysis, there are no clearly agreed rules or procedures for analysing qualitative data (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). This research used narrative analysis,

content analysis and grounded theory. Narrative analysis identifies the basic account which is being told, and focuses on the way an account or narrative is constructed, the intention of the teller and the nature of the audience as well as the meaning of the story or plot (Riessman, 1993). This research uses narrative analysis to draw out from the accounts within the different cases in terms of the changes that have occurred, pressures for change and strategies proposed to meet the challenges they face.

In the content analysis, both the content and context of data are analysed: themes are identified, with the researcher focusing on the way the theme is treated or presented and the frequency of its occurrence (Robson, 2002). Content analysis was used in this research to explore the problematic process of change management, for example to identify the key obstacles of and constraints on change. The analysis is then linked to variables such as the role of the contributor and the existing organisational arrangements.

Grounded theory involves the generation of analytical categories and their dimensions, and the identification of relationships between them (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The process of data collection and conceptualisation continues until 'theoretical saturation is reached', which is necessary 'to ensure that the theory is conceptually complete' (Punch, 2005, p. 214-5). In this research, during the analysis of the interview data a few themes emerged such as the relationship between elected officers and management, accountability issues around consultation and scrutiny and term limits. Relevant data from interviews was drawn out and categorised under these themes for further analysis.

4.3: Justification of the Research Methodology and Methods

This section explains the value of qualitative as opposed to quantitative research as the prime means of exploring the nature of the research questions that inform the thesis. The justification for choosing to use case studies is also explained by reference to relevant literature. Advantages of the chosen research methods are discussed.

4.31: The Value of Qualitative Research

This research examines the management of strategic change within students' unions in

the UK. To explain the value of the qualitative methods used in this research, it is useful to firstly outline some of the distinguishing features between qualitative and quantitative research.

Although recent innovations have highlighted the complementarities of qualitative and quantitative methods, qualitative and quantitative methods in social science research have long been separate spheres with little overlap (Silverman, 2001). Cook and Reichardt (1979) argue that qualitative research is subjective and insider-centred while quantitative research is objective and outsider-centred. A summary of the distinction between these two research approaches is shown in tables 4.3 and 4.4 as below.

Table 4.3: Qualitative Research and Quantitative Research 1

Qualitative Research	**Quantitative Research**
Discovery oriented	Verification oriented
Process oriented	Outcome oriented
Explanatory	Confirmatory
Goal: understand actor's view	Goal: find facts and causes

Source: adapted from Cook and Reichardt (1979, p.10)

More recently, Greenhalgh and Taylor (1997) have summarised the distinguishing features between qualitative and quantitative research as follows:

Table 4.4 Qualitative Research and Quantitative Research 2

	Qualitative	**Quantitative**
Social theory	Action	Structure
Methods	Observation, interview	Experiment, survey
Question	What is X? (classification)	How many Xs? (enumeration)
Reasoning	Inductive	Deductive
Sampling method	Theoretical	Statistical
Strength	Validity	Reliability

Source: adapted from Greenhalgh and Taylor (1997, p.741)

From the literature it is clear that qualitative and quantitative approaches present two different perspectives and look at different things. Quantitative research uses numbers

and statistics, drawn from, for example experiments and correlation studies using surveys and standardised observational protocols. Samples used in qualitative research study tend to be smaller compared with quantitative focused-projects, which require quite large samples to generate results with statistical significance. Qualitative research includes for example, open-ended interviews, naturalistic observation, document analysis, case studies and life histories (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). It is concerned with collecting in-depth information and asking questions such as 'why do you say that?'

This research explores the problematic process of the management of strategic change within students' unions. Questions such as 'why have the changes recently taken place?', 'how have students' unions changed over time?', 'what are the key obstacles to, and constraints on, strategic change within an organisation?', or 'what are the implications of change?' clearly need answering primarily through qualitative methods. These questions do not readily lend themselves to a quantitative approach. In particular, qualitative approaches are appropriate given the importance of listening to practitioners and exploring ideas and concerns generated by the interviewees. The core issue is that qualitative methods allow interviewees to describe answers in their own terms and, at the same time, rephrase questions in their own terms.

Quantitative methods typically gather information by asking the same set of questions to a specific sample of a reference population and recording the answers in numeric format (Punch, 2005). This numeric information is usually machine-readable and can be analysed using conventional statistical modelling techniques and test procedures (Davies, 2007). Phenomenologists state that quantitative research is simply an artificial creation by the researcher, as it is asking for only a limited amount of information without explanation (Wilson and McClean, 1994). Gilbert (1993) argues that a methodology relying on standardization forces the researcher to develop questions general enough to be minimally appropriate for all respondents, possibly missing what is most appropriate to many respondents. As a result, quantitative

methods would be good at testing hypotheses within an organisational setting, but have only limited use-value for gaining information about the type of issues considered in this thesis. As explained before, this research looks at issues of how organisations change over time, what the perceptions of, and reaction to, change management are, why they feel the way they do and how the change is affected by existing organisational arrangements and governance structures.

Qualitative research is suitable in the context of this research as it provides textual or narrative information that is either descriptive or unable to be gathered using quantitative methods of research and analysed using statistical analysis (Silverman, 2001). The goal of using qualitative methods in this research is to try to capture the whole picture of what is happening, to present an account of what people say and do in their own terms, and to represent how they understand issues, that the researcher seeks to understand, from their own perspectives (Punch, 2005).

The strength of the qualitative research used here is that it can provide depth and detail. Researchers who use qualitative methods seek a deeper understanding of what and how questions. They aim to study features in their natural setting, 'attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denkin and Lincoln, 1994, p.2), and they use a 'holistic perspective which preserves the complexities of human behaviour' (Black, 1994. P.425). In this research, qualitative methods were employed to make sense of, and interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them during the process of change. Moreover, qualitative research is all about exploring issues, understanding phenomena and answering questions by seeking out the 'why' and the 'how' topics through the analysis of unstructured information such as interview transcripts, recordings, emails, notes, feedback forms, photos and videos (Punch, 2005). As the literature claims, individual change is a complex psychological event that occurs during the process of organisational change. This qualitative research is valuable as it helps to gain insights into people's attitudes, behaviours, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations,

cultures and lifestyles.

Qualitative research can also generate new theories and recognise phenomena ignored by previous researchers because of its 'openness'. Quantitative research begins with an idea (usually articulated as a hypothesis), which then, through measurement, generates data and, by deduction, allows a conclusion to be drawn. There is a level of researcher imposition (Wilson and McClean, 1994), meaning that when developing the research, the researcher is making their own decisions and assumptions about what is and is not important. They may, therefore, be missing findings of importance. Qualitative research, in contrast, begins with an intention to explore a particular area, collects data (observations and interviews), and generates ideas and hypotheses from the data largely through a process of inductive reasoning (Mays and Pope, 1996). This approach is appropriate providing the focus offering a critique of the commonly held views and ideas within the literature about change, managing change and its limits and possibilities. The research questions focus on the extent to which the theories originally developed in relation to the private public and other non-profit organisations apply to students' unions, whether they work, make sense and what does change in students' unions add to or how does it challenge the perceived wisdom? In this sense, a qualitative study is more appropriate than quantitative research.

The nature of this research project meant, therefore, an overwhelming reliance on qualitative methodologies. Quantitative approaches were confined primarily to the questionnaire, which generated some background information to contextualise the wider study. There are also some numeric tables in the thesis, for example table 3.1 in chapter three, which applied quantitative approaches to a very limited extent.

4.32: The Value of Using Case Studies

The case study was chosen as the most appropriate approach to generate most of the findings for this project. The term case study has multiple meanings. It can be used to describe a unit of analysis, for example a particular organisation, or a research method.

The discussion here concerns the use of case studies as a research method. The case study is a common research approach used in the social sciences. Although there are numerous definitions, Yin (1989, p.23) defines succinctly the scope of a case study as a research method as follows:

> 'A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.'

This research explores the reasons for and the ways in which students' unions have changed in recent years. Being able to conduct an in-depth study and determine the complete organisational context means that a case study is a useful tool in explaining why or how certain outcomes happen rather than providing a listing of what the outcomes are (Denscombe, 2007). Burns (2000) also suggests that the case study is the preferred strategy when 'how', 'who', 'why', or 'what' questions are being asked. In brief, the case study allows an investigation to retain the 'meaningful characteristics of real-life events' (Yin 1989, p.14). Case studies were, therefore, conducted in this research to gain in-depth understandings replete with meaning and with a pronounced focus on processes.

The use of case studies also reflects the complicated nature and multi-layered characteristics of change processes and the need to focus on the subtleties and complexities of the whole organisation. As Denscombe (2007, p.36) claimed, the case study provides a holistic view in a natural setting, and it offers a greater chance of discovering 'how the many parts affect one another'. Yin (1989) also suggested that the case study can be used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individuals, groups, organisational, social, political, and related phenomena. That is why Stake (2003, p.436) argued that to qualify as a case study it must be a 'bounded system' – an entity in itself'. In this research, the study of organisational change is based primarily on particular cases as different settings have different stories.

This research discusses the consequences and implications of change that students' unions have recently undertaken. The use of case studies ensures that theory can be grounded in practice and that practice challenges theory, for example Tellis (1997)

claimed that multiple cases strengthen the results by replicating the pattern-matching, thus increasing confidence in the robustness of the theory. Also, as a case study provides many perspectives on events, interactions, relationships and processes, it is useful to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear single set of outcomes (Saunders et al., 2000). Thus, case studies are valuable in this research.

Another important reason for using case studies is the fact that they allow the use of a variety of research methods which help to capture the complex reality of the subject (Yin, 1989). Qualitative research typically involves the collection of very extensive data to produce understanding of the entity being studied (Saunders et al., 2000). Every research method has its own advantages and disadvantages, which will be discussed in detail in the following section. Therefore, using a blend of methods helps to give a balanced perspective and offset the disadvantages of some specific methods. When doing case studies, multiple sources of data and multiple data collection methods are likely to be used. Many case studies will use sociological and anthropological field methods, such as observations in natural settings, interviews, and narrative reports (Denscombe, 2007). But they may also use questionnaires and numerical data. Though most case studies are predominantly qualitative, it is not necessarily a qualitative technique (Punch, 2005). Considering the complex reality of change that this research aims to explore, it requires case studies which can employ multiple methods to obtain high-quality findings.

This research employs a multiple-case approach. Multiple-case design has distinct advantages in comparison to single-case designs. A single case study has been proved by researchers to be of limited use for external validity (Yin, 1989) because there was a significant risk that it might produce atypical findings. In contrast, multiple-case design can be considered advantageous in that the evidence can be more compelling (Burns, 2000). The overall study is, therefore, regarded as being more robust (Yin, 1989).

4.33: Discussion of Methods

Interviews are probably the most widely used method in qualitative research (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Classic ethnographers such as Malinowski stressed the importance of talking to people to grasp their point of view, to discover not only how individuals think and feel about a topic but also why they hold certain opinions (Burgess, 1982). In other words, the interviewer can probe deeper into a response given by interviewees. In this research, the main advantage of interviews is that they provide the researcher with opportunities to conduct detailed investigations of an individual's personal perspectives, and to understand the personal context within which the research is located. Meanwhile, the interviewer can adapt the questions as necessary, clarify doubt and ensure that the responses are properly understood, by repeating or rephrasing the questions (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

Observation has a long tradition in the social sciences, for example it has been extensively employed by psychologists and by educational researchers (Punch, 2005). Participant observation is different from direct observation as the role of the researcher changes from detached observer of the situation, to both participant in and observer of the situation (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). In this research, participant observation is conducted for one of the case studies. As the central ethnographic data collection technique (Punch, 2005), participant observation has a main strength of directness – it provides direct access to the social phenomena. Because the researcher is there for an extended period of time, s/he sees what people are doing as well as what they say they are doing. Over time, the researcher has the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the people, the organization, and the broader context within which they work. This personal contact was important for sharing interviewees' experience and minimising the barriers implicit in acting as an objective outsider.

The advantages of using questionnaires are obvious as being fast and flexible (Punch 2005; Gilbert 1993). By using questionnaires, many questions can be asked about a given topic. Large amounts of information can then be collected from a large number

of people in a short period of time. They can be administered from remote locations using mail, email or telephone (Wilson and McClean, 1994). Another value of questionnaires is their anonymity, which may encourage honesty. This study uses questionnaires to develop an understanding of the broader context within which the case study students' unions operated and specifically to address the issue of the impact of financial pressures on strategic change (see previous).

Documents, both historical and contemporary, are a rich source of data for social research (Punch, 2005). Being fast is an advantage of collecting data from documents (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). In conjunction with other data, documents can also be important in triangulation, where an intersecting set of different methods and data types is used in a single project (Denzin, 1989). Documentary study is used for conducting case studies in this research to ensure that everything is checked from more than one angle. It would be difficult and nearly impossible to build up a wider picture of change and change management through sole reliance on interview data. There is a recognised source of bias in self-reporting techniques referred to as a social desirability set, which means that in many spheres of social life there are socially desirable ways of behaving and, consciously or unconsciously, individuals will tend to respond in that way, although in the real world they might behave differently (Saunders et al., 2000).

4.4: Research: Problems and Issues

Problems and core issues of the research in terms of data collection and data analysis are addressed below including the ways in which difficulties were overcome are explained.

4.41: Data Collection

The skills of the researcher are crucial to qualitative research. As Patton (2002) argues, the qualitative researcher is an instrument and not a mechanical or test device used in a quantitative research experiment. As a result, the biases of the researcher during the

process of data collection can be a potential weakness. Sources for bias include case selection, interviewee selection and the selection of reports and documentation (Denscombe, 2007). This prompts the question of how well the case study findings match reality. Burns (2000) argues that many case study investigators fail to develop a sufficiently operational set of measures and employ subjective judgment to collect the data. Endeavour was made to mitigate personal bias in this research by deliberately designing the ways in which case studies were undertaken. Whilst all data collection methods can be contaminated by unrecognised bias, this research uses a blend of methods to give a balanced perspective and offset the disadvantages of some methods. The previous discussion in this chapter has also explained when and where specific methods were used.

Participant observation was used in this research. As argued by Golafshani (2003), participation can change the social situation being studied. The traditional role for a researcher is to be non-existent (Mays and Pope, 1996), so that participants act exactly as they would if the researcher was not present. In one of the case studies in this research, the researcher worked in the organisation herself. There was a risk that the quality of interviews conducted were not guaranteed as some participants might not have been prepared to tell the truth in front of an interviewer they knew and who was their work colleague, whatever assurances were given about anonymity and confidentiality. To overcome this problem, the selection of participants for interviews has been carefully considered. Interviewees were chosen from different areas within the organisation comprising the student officers, senior managers and staff members from different service departments (commercial services, and membership services). This approach ensured that different views from a diversity of groups were supplied, similarly a mix of new and long-standing staff members were interviewed. There was also the risk that personal involvement increases the possibility that the recorded observations highlight particular incidents while ignoring equally important others. Attempts were made to avoid this difficulty by using multiple sources to obtain data.

One of the weaknesses of qualitative research, as summarised by Ratcliff (2002), is its dependence on the researcher's personal attributes and skills. Although this is also true with quantitative research, it is not as easy to evaluate the researcher's skills in conducting qualitative research. For this research, the skills of the case study

investigator were crucial in the processes of data collection and particularly in interviewing. Interview skills cannot be developed overnight and may take considerable time to acquire, although individuals with certain personality types can adapt quickly. In the case of this research, the novice researcher had to and managed to learn effective interview skills quickly, a learning process assisted by the fact that her main supervisor participated in some of the early interviews. A particular problem was encouraging reticent interviewees and those with poor verbal communication skills to talk. Early on, the researcher realised that some of the interviewees were not experts about all the topics discussed at the interviews. As a result, it was difficult for them to give sufficient details in a short time. To overcome this problem, emails were sent to participants two days before the interview, reminding them of the interviews and attaching a copy of questions to explain topics that would be discussed. It was noticed by the researcher that most of participants would print those interview questions out and bring them to the session. This arrangement produced better prepared subjects and more effective interviews.

The most important time in each interview was often the first few minutes and it was, in the majority of cases, crucial to create a climate that put the interviewee at their ease. The researcher, therefore, opened with basic personal questions, such as 'how long you have been working for the Students' Union?' and what their job entailed. Smiling, maintaining eye contact and the occasional nod to express interest always helped. These were the signals to the participant to continue giving full answers and that what they are saying was relevant and valuable. During the conversations, if there were any questions participants found difficult to answer, it would be better to leave them and come back later if necessary.

To encourage participants to talk, the investigator needed to be a good listener, observing and sensing skills. In addition, answers often needed to be explored. As explained before, this research used 'semi-structured' interviews. Though precise questions were formulated before the interviews, many of the follow-up questions could not be prepared in advance. So, insight and intuition had to be used to identify what line of questioning to follow and how to respond after a tentative or unexpected response was provided. Experience from this research also suggested that good preparation before the interview is important. For example, before, at least, each batch

of interviews, the researcher looked at the Union's website. In addition, when interviewing in unfamiliar organisations, she arrived early for each interview, walked around the union building, sat in the union's cafe and talked to some of the staff working there to try to absorb something of the culture of the organisation.

4.42: Data Analysis

Qualitative research is less easily generalised and as a result it is difficult to aggregate data and make systematic comparisons (Golafshani, 2003). This is one of the weaknesses of qualitative research. Again, much depends upon the researcher's research skills. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, much attention was focused on design, specifically what questions were asked and with what purpose.

In a case study what is being observed is a participant's notion or construction of reality, their understanding of the world. The shortcoming of hearing voices but not exploiting them in the stage of data analysis can be also caused by personal bias (Yin, 1989). The role of human subjectivity should not be ignored, as it is very easy for the case study investigator to allow equivocal evidence or personal views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions drawn. In one of the case studies used in this research, personal involvement as an employee implied a danger in being selective and overconfident with some of the data. Having recognised the potential personal bias in the process of data analysis, multiple sources were used to reduce bias. The use of multiple sources is one of the principles of case study research and also the major strength of the case study approach (Burns, 2000). This research incorporated a range of data collection methods – interviewing, observation, analyzing records and documentation, and survey questionnaires. Analyzing data from multiple sources helps to diminish the effects of personal bias to a great extent.

4.5: Summary

The methods deployed in this research have been outlined in this chapter and the justification for the methodology has been explained. This study conducted primarily qualitative research. Empirical studies were undertaken to obtain first-hand data to develop important findings about strategic change in students' unions. Detailed

qualitative evidence was collected to discuss the challenges involved in the management of change. Five students' unions were chosen for study. Methods for collecting data in this research incorporated questionnaires, interviews, participant observation and documentation. The choice of case studies was based around a city-centre theme and contrasts in terms of factors such as old and new universities, finance and governance status issues. The ways in which the research was undertaken have been explained in detail in this chapter. When and where methods were used has also been clarified. Although the research itself has its limitations, the chosen methodologies were justified in this chapter. The findings and analysis of the research are reported in the following chapters.

Chapter 5

Recent Strategic Changes within Students' Unions

5.1: Introduction

In this chapter findings are discussed in relation to strategic change within students' unions during approximately the last decade. The analysis draws both on chapter two, which introduced a wide variety of relevant literature, and chapter three, which outlined the core issues in the long-term evolution of students' unions. Firstly, the chapter considers the key drivers of this strategic change, which are identified in relation to two core factors: the intensification of financial pressures and managerial instability. Secondly, an overall picture of organisational changes during this period is outlined. These include the minor organisational improvement in regard to the functions of and service delivery by students' unions, a large scale organisational restructure during this timeframe, and the change of strategic focus – a shift away from commercial services to other aspects of students' unions roles. Thirdly, the chapter addresses the issue of governance reform in students' unions, traditional and new models are chronicled alongside a discussion of the drivers of these strategic changes. The findings draw substantially on the case study analysis, although these findings are enhanced through a wider range of examples, obtained primarily through the questionnaire returns.

5.2: Pressures to Change

This section considers pressures for change arising from financial factors and managerial instability.

5.21: Increasing Finance Pressures

Entering the new century, finance within students' unions remained rather precarious (AMSU, 2006). Empirical data in the research showed that commercial services provided by students' unions, and which have been greatly developed during the 1980s and 1990s, were now suffering. The significant downturn in commercial profits was due to increased business competition coupled with the changing student experience, demographics and life style. As the Chief Executive of DDSU commented

students' unions, which 'have an over reliance on bars and on late night entertainment' were 'facing increasing and often severe financial pressures'.

Many students' unions have seen their trade income fall in recent years by more than 15% year on year (AMSU, 2006). There was a continued and significant reduction in bar sales over the past ten years. A survey by the AMSU (2006) showed that over half of students' unions' saw a fall in bar sales in 2002-03, and in 2003-04 there was a fall in sales in nearly 60% of them. The following year continued this downward trend – 2004-05 saw a fall, nationally, in bar sales. Research by the NUS also showed that bar sales halved nationally from £120m in 1998 to £60m in 2008 (NUS, 2008b). For example, the annual reports (2006-2009) of EESU showed that there was a continuous decline in commercial income (from £2,749,000 in 2005, to £2,563,000 in 2006 and to £2,020,000 in 2009).

For those students' unions which are city-based[4], where students have a substantial range of alternative social and leisure providers, the reduction in commercial income was intensified and driven substantially by often intensive private sector competition. As the case study analysis showed, in the last decade, city-centre students' unions have begun to face much more aggressive competition from commercial rivals. In consequence, some of those students' unions were struggling to maintain net incomes from trading in areas such as retail, catering, bars and night club entertainment events. For example, the commercial services managers at AASU pointed out that:

> 'The development of commerce in the vicinity of our main building, the city centre and other student areas that were directly targeted at students began to have an adverse impact on sales...Tesco is now open just at the corner...bars in the city centre offer even more cheaper and better quality services....This situation has continued and over the last three years activity and contribution levels from commercial activities have declined by 35-40%. The decline has been double-digit for almost every year.'

[4] Most universities in the UK are either campus-based on a greenfield site away from urban life, or city-based with buildings in different areas.

This comment was confirmed by the financial figures from AASU's annual reports. For example, for the year ending June 2005, whilst the block grant remained at an average level for the sector, trading income fell by almost 12% on the previous year. This decline of commercial income continued during the following years from 2006-08. The situation was similar in BBSU emanating from the interviews.

The threat from intense commercial competition was even more significant for CCSU, DDSU, and EESU. Because their parental institutions are traditional red-brick universities, the size of these students' unions is much bigger than AASU or BBSU in terms of annual turnover, physical space of union building, and scale of service provision. A tradition of these students' unions was their high reputation for being one of the best venues for entertainment and social events in their city. Their union buildings were amongst the largest and most successful music venues in their city, where many popular bands have played. As well as boasting the substantial nightclubs and a number of bars within their union buildings. For instance, there were ten bars within the CCSU building prior to 2006. However, this commercial success has been greatly challenged in recent years by competition from national pub chains. On a national level this, combined with the urban club scene, took business from students' unions. For example, the former commercial services manager at DDSU said:

> 'we saw a knock on effect in that our entertainment budget has gone down quite a lot since we lost a lot of gigs and events to the O2 Academy, which took the business for live music events. With the O2 Academy, that is essentially where the bands have gone so it has taken the business attraction. As there is an O2 Academy in every major city, bands will play there as they have developed a relationship with them.'

As a result, the decline of commercial income caused financial difficulties within students' unions to different extents. The CCSU, for instance, made a loss of over £200,000 for the financial year 2005/06, and for the previous two years (2003/04 and 2004/05) it made a loss in each year of £400,000.

Whilst the business competition became more acute, many of the facilities and services offered by students' unions began to look tired and dated compared with the burgeoning pub and club scene. The initial response, in an attempt to compete with commercial rivals, was to increase investment in their venues, although as will be shown later, this approach was not prioritised by many students' unions subsequently when many institutions embarked on a strategic shift (see chapter six and below). Furthermore, many students' unions had accumulated successive years of deficits, which negatively impacted on their reserves, liquidity and, therefore, ability to invest. Financial support from the parent institutions thus started to become crucial. In fact, many of them did provide more funding to support students' union services, as well as investing in major improvements to facilities. For example, 90 percent of UK universities awarded their students' unions a real-terms increase in the academic year 2009-2010 (Taylor, 2010). For example, at DDSU, new services, ideas to maintain high-quality services and a major redecoration of the Union building received substantial financial support from the University. Again, the General Manager from Northampton Students' Union said: 'we have not made a profit from our operations for over ten years now, and we are constantly loss-making and need to be bailed out by our University every year'.

The above findings suggested that the significant decline of commercial income has greatly changed the funding models of students' unions. In contrast to the 1990s, when students' unions were more independent in finance, their continuous development nowadays required a close relationship with their parent institutions. As the General Manager at EESU observed:

> 'Students' Union's struggle more financially, so now it's more important that we engage more with the University and we are seen more as a part of it rather than some kind of revolutionary counterpart'.

In some cases, university support included direct intervention in terms of taking over business operation and managerial assistance. For example, after the CCSU suffered a

few years in financial deficit, the University intervened by firing the former General Manager of the union and recruiting a replacement. At Coventry, cuts to block grant and loss of external income streams following university decisions to take over areas of commercial activity. At the University of Portsmouth Students' Union, the Union's trading company went into administration and was purchased by the parent university in 2005. Similarly, when the University of Abertay Dundee Students Association (UADSA) experienced financial difficulties from 2000 to 2004, due to the decline in commercial income, the University spent £6 million on a new student centre on basis that commercial services were removed from UADSA control.

Outside of the city-centres business competition was often less intensive, although this effect was lessened to some extent because in some of those places such as Southampton or Exeter, many students lived quite close to the city centre. However, the close proximity or proactive businesses was not the sole driver of this threat to the income of students' unions. As observed in chapter three, changes to student lifestyles and expectations also played a key part. For example, the Heriot-Watt student union, which is situated on the western fringes of Edinburgh, recorded substantial losses in trading income since 2004, with loses blamed on changes in student lifestyle, including such as the changed drinking habit and more demands on service quality (Taylor, 2010). According to Taylor's report, after costly measures to save the association, which included the appointment of a financial controller by the university, 2006-07 saw a deficit of £80,000, followed by a surplus of £30,000 in 2007-08. The students' union made a loss again in 2008-09.

Meanwhile, costs have risen due to increases in salary and wage rates. In 1999 the UK introduced a legally-binding minimum rate of pay (BBC, 1 April 1999), which had a significant impact on wage bills in the service sector. Rising spending also included pension costs. For example, the Chief Executive of Salford Students' Union pointed out that:

> 'the Union has not experienced financial difficulties due to taking the proactive reorganisation steps which have reduced overheads or closed failing/unprofitable services. However, the key financial challenge facing the Union is the deficit in its closed pension scheme which places a significant draw on reserves.'

In fact, the substantial commercial expansion of students' union activity in the 1990s (see chapter two), was, in some places, poorly planned thus although the services were, at least, initially popular with members, in the medium-term this expansion left students' unions under significant financial pressures (Sanderson, 2002). In the case of DDSU, prior to its recent staffing restructure, there were seven members in the senior management team in 2008, thus imposing a wage bill for the senior management that was difficult to justify. One of the sabbatical officers commented on the financial problems that DDSU were facing, and said, 'looking at it as an organisation we were paying too much for management'. For BBSU, although trading increased and the revenue grant income from the University remained largely unchanged the trading surplus had to be used to support growing increases in expenditure. The significantly increased costs and static trading income led to an overall deficit in 2008 of £156,372.

5.22: The Unstable Period of Management

Findings in the research suggest that over the period covering the last five years or an even greater timespan, the changeover of senior management was frequent within students' unions. Results from the returned questionnaires show that around 84 per cent (16 out of 19) of students' unions had new Chief Executives during that timeframe. In the case studies, four out of five students' unions have changed their Chief Executive once or twice during this period. This frequent staff turnover can be the result of negative impacts of organisational change on individuals, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. It also indicated the tension between management and elected student officers, which has greatly de-motivated many top-level managers. Again, this issue will be examined in chapter six.

The situation was acute within BBSU and CCSU. In CCSU, during the period of severe financial deficit in 2004-05 its General Manager at that time took a sick leave for nearly a year and nothing was done to address the financial problems for over a year. Eventually, in early 2006, the students' union approached the University for assistance with their deficit. The General Manager was fired and a successor was appointed in April 2006. A number of strategic changes were quickly added onto the short term agenda to improve the financial performance.

A similar situation was occurred in the BBSU. The period of instability of management was caused by the illness of senior management from early 2006 until a new General Manager was appointed in mid-2007. The previous General Manager had been absent through ill health for a prolonged period of time since early 2006. For that reason, one of the Assistant General Managers had taken the position of Deputy General Manager since then. However, two months later this newly appointed Deputy General Manager also took a long-term sick leave. As it has a limited budget BBSU had not found someone from outside to fill the gap but simply promoted another Assistant General Manager to be the Deputy General Manager. As a result, since the early 2006 and until mid-2007 there had been only one person working in the senior management team which has three positions. That person had to cover the workload of three senior positions. This problem stopped the five-year plan (2003-2008) in its tracks and in early 2007 only the first stage had been completed. The unstable period of management ended in mid-2007 when the two senior managers who had been off sick since early 2006 left the BBSU and the new General Manager was appointed. In common with the other case studies, the appointment of the new General Manager brought in with it new direction and leadership. Due to instability within the senior management team, the BBSU had been static and staff had experienced difficulties due to a lack of direction. Implications of and lessons from these accounts will be discussed in the following chapters related in a wider theme of officer-management relations and issues of accountability.

The above examples are indicative of wider trends and they are not isolated examples. In fact, over the past five years NUS has experienced a marked increase in number of students' unions contacting national officers or staff to support a students' unions in what is probably best termed as 'crisis' situations, normally brought about by a financial crisis, attempted university takeover, departure of one or more senior managers or wider organisational failings (NUS, 2008b). This instability in senior management was another internal pressures students' unions faced.

5.23: The Pressures for Change

Findings of this research show that the driving force for change within students' unions was a combination of many different factors. Factors include pressures from the external environment within which students' unions operate. The analysis in chapter three shows that students nowadays are more demanding and that there is more of a consumerist mindset among students; they are paying a significant amount of money for their education and there is that sense of wanting value for money in all aspects of their lives. There are changes such as university entry becoming more competitive, the governance and widening-participation agenda and the emergence of a much more diverse student body. Such fundamental changes mean that students' unions also have to change, to adapt to the requirements of their membership. In addition, legislative changes have driven governance reforms.

Meanwhile, pressures from external environment have triggered internal pressures. As the above analysis in this chapter, the increasing market competitions and the fact of changing student needs and expectations have caused the drop down of commercial income within students' unions in recent years, in particularly for those located near or within the city centre. The financial difficulties as indicated in this research have made students' unions becoming increasingly dependent on funding from their parent institution.

Overall, organisational change and development has been greatly influenced by the multi-dimensional environments within which organisations operate (Senior, 2006). As the literature claims, an organisation can be seen as a 'system', comprising elements of formal organisational management and operations, as well as elements of informal aspects of organisational life in multidimensional environments (Senior, 2006). In the case of students' union, drivers for change come from three types of environments as Senior suggested: temporal, external and internal environment. Causes of changes of students' union support what Senior (2006) claims as the interaction of factors from each layer of the environment. For example, pressures from external environments created internal forces for change. This research focused on city-centre based students' unions in reflection of the intensive commercial competition such contemporary students' unions often face and the significance of such competition for the organisational change process. Empirical data from the research suggests that the pressures to change are no difference on size of organisations as there are similar results from both new and old university's students' unions. The following sections outline and discuss, in detail, how these students' unions responded to the pressures they faced.

5.3: Recent Changes

This section presents an overall picture of organisational change: minor organisational improvement in terms of functions and service delivery, wider issues of organisational restructuring and strategic change.

5.31: Minor Organisational Improvement: Functions and Service Delivery

As discussed in the above section, a dominant theme for students' unions across the country in recent years has been the need to respond to the changing environment, and the need to react to the significant decline of commercial income. The substantial shift in the student demographic has forced students' unions to reposition their services to

meet the needs of the new student profile. Meanwhile, the recent financial difficulties required operational improvements, as a result some changes have occurred.

Firstly, there was evidence of the modernisation of services and facilities through physical improvements as an initial response to, and attempt to compete against, commercial rivals (see elsewhere in this chapter and chapter six). These included renovating commercial venues, for example at Sheffield SU, Worcester SU, Leicester SU and Imperial College SU. In some unions, this change was a reaction to the intense commercial completion. For example, two main bars of AASU were refurbished in 2004 and the commercial services manager explained why they did that as:

> 'This [recent decoration] is required by the nature of the industry...Being a bar or a night club if you don't provide a much needed lift to the décor you will find it difficult to attract customers. That is why there are less students coming to us in the recent years – there are more brand-new bars and clubs opened in the town providing better services'.

Similarly, BBSU set out a five year development plan in early 2003, seeking to implement a more substantial improvement programme. Physical building work was included in this plan and a key impetus for the need to change was 'the pressures from increased competition from commercial operators on the High Street providing social and leisure activities' (BBSU, 2003, p.ii). The plan also explained that changing student demography and expectations have required the review of the facilities and the layout of the building. It summarised the University Estate Strategy which identified future growth in student numbers in the main campus, and concluded that physical improvement would greatly expand the number of facilities which the Union can provide. Moreover, feedback from students suggested that the facilities currently operated by BBSU were unpopular. The BBSU building was built in 1982 at a time when students' unions had a distinctive different concept of their role and catered for a much smaller number of students (see chapter two). Over the intervening years there had been periodic alterations and refurbishment carried out in certain areas, but the

basic layout and structure remained unaltered. Its marketing research with students showed that 'a modern and vibrant environment that students would find easy to access and navigate their way around' was much welcomed (BBSU, 2003, p.xii). The implementation of this four stage project was anticipated to take three to five years starting in the summer of 2004. Unfortunately, the change was stalled as a result of the period of unstable management and still has not been completed in 2009 when the research was conducted.[5]

Secondly, commercial objectives have been shifted away from providing cheap services. For example, a new marketing strategy was recently proposed by EESU, in which 'cheap drinks' was no longer set as the criteria used to compete against other high-street bars and clubs. The plan claimed that there is a widespread belief that students' unions being charitable organisations should espouse such values live by those values. As the new General Manager said in the interview:

> 'whilst we say we are here to provide students with social opportunities, for us to get them as drunk as possible for 50p per shot of vodka is irresponsible and we should not be doing it'.

Thirdly, there were some changes were made by tweaking the commercial services, for example changing opening hours and looking for other trading opportunities. For example, aiming to compete with high-street retailers, the EESU's new marketing strategy focused on providing different products and services to those that Tesco or Asda could provide. One of the sabbatical officers explained it more succinctly as:

> "They [high-street retailers] are more about 'what are you going to eat tonight?' and we are about 'what are you going to eat for lunch?' because we know that that is what students really want and we are not open till 11 o'clock at night".

This new marketing strategy also tried to represent the moral values held by students by using ethical suppliers and by adopting ethical practices wherever possible.

[5] This plan was not just focused on commercial services but on the wider suitability of the union.

Similar changes also focused on co-operating with the plurality of interests from a wider range of stakeholders – not only members but also parent institutions, staff and other students' unions. Building up partnerships with the university has been regarded as crucial as discussed earlier in the chapter in relation to finance and commercial services. In addition, management development tactics were another key element of improvement plans. For example, the AASU put great effort into developing a professional management by providing more management training for its line managers. In 2005/06, over 20 managers and staff members undertook an accredited management development course that was developed and delivered by an external partner. The aim of the course was to develop managers' skills and knowledge to enable them to manage staff performance, in line with the Union's business objectives. Similarly, in the same year, 23 managers of DDSU attended modules on a Management Development Programme accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management. Moreover, collaboration with other unions operating in the same area was also highlighted. For example, the General Manager at CCSU said:

> 'In this city, we have two students' unions located in the city centre less than a mile's distance. Since we all serve the same purpose, there is no point in them undertaking a job twice when resources can be pooled...We are looking at sharing out our marketing and finance service with other students' unions in the future. We believe that this can save a lot of cost, both in labour and operation'.

5.32: Organisational Restructuring

Students' unions have also undertaken substantive organisational restructurings during this timeframe. For example, the major programmes of strategic scale restructuring have been implemented at CCSU in 2006, AASU, BBSU and EESU in 2007, and DDSU in 2009.

A key driver of these recent organisational restructures within students' unions was to address the financial problems. For example, within the University of Strathclyde Students' Association, the academic year 2006-07 saw a staffing restructure to enable

continuing financial viability (USSA, 2010). Similarly, the Chief Executive of Exeter SU explained that the primary reason for their restructure in 2008 was for 'financial stability' and 'sustainability'. A more recent organisational restructure (March to June 2010) at Warwick SU was driven as a result of 'financial issues following a building development'. Similarly, In Essex, the union has claimed that it had no choice but to make staff redundancies due to a financial crisis which would see the organisation bankrupt if they did not make savings (Essex SU, 2010). The organisational restructure plan (2010) made by Heriot-Watt Students' Association was also due to the continuing funding cuts from university's grant from 2008-2009 and the financial crisis facing the Association (Taylor, 2010).

The restructurings cited the above examples included cutting services, in particular commercial services, departmental amalgamations, staff redundancies and changing staff roles. The cost-cutting exercise started typically with removing some service provision, which mainly focused on commercial operations in recognition that competition with commercial rivals was often not feasible. According to a NUS report, a number of students unions across the UK have 'divested their commercial services in the last five years for a number of different reasons' (NUS, 2008b, p.3). The downsizing activities involved reducing the scale of commercial operations within the unions – in some cases the commercial services were taken over by the parent institution. For example, at Heriot-Watt Students' Association, restructuring plan meant that the 'Watts On' magazine has been forced to cease publication and the campus bar 'Liberty's' was closed most evenings (Taylor, 2010). In Bristol Students' Unions, the main retail operation ceased trading. In the University of Salford Students' Union, the recent restructuring exercises undertaken over the last five years included the closure of Travel Shop and the Union's nightclub, and ceasing responsibility for the management of the University's leisure centre, which was returned to the University. In the 2007 restructure of AASU, the leisure centre was closed together with two bars and two shops. Things were even more acute in BBSU,

where the number of bars and night clubs were reduced from nine to four after the 2006 restructure.

Changes also occurred in the administrative structure of these organisations, in particular there were many departmental amalgamations. For example, following a personnel review of Heriot-Watt Students' Association in 2009 six departments were amalgamated and the number of senior managers was reduced to three (Taylor, 2010). At the University of Salford Students' Union, the print shop and financial management function have been outsourced. Similar approaches were also undertaken by the DDSU, where many of the finance services for example the payroll was outsourced to an external provider and the department of Finance and HR was merged to form a Business Services Department. In the 2006 restructure of CCSU, two new departments were created – the venues department and membership services. Great change also took place within the existing commercial services department, in which the previously separated functions of catering, events and bars were merged into the venues department. As a result, 'the wage bill looks much better' commented the General Manager. In addition, this restructuring was claimed to have increased the organisation's efficiency, as one interviewee observed 'all the student services, which used to work in isolation and without proper management, were brought together into the membership services department'.

Changes to staff, including changing roles and reducing numbers, were the unavoidable consequences of the above restructure programmes. For example, the cost-cutting exercise of CCSU culminated with staff redundancies. Its General Manager acknowledged past problems in relation 'having staff doing the wrong jobs in the wrong areas with the wrong skills'. Following the restructuring, a quarter of the staff members, most of them were from the commercial services, were made redundant over the summer of 2006; meanwhile ten new staff joined the organisation working in the newly created departments. In Salford Students' Union, the senior management team was re-organised to reflect the changed operational responsibilities

of the Union. Similarly, in Aberdeen Students' Association, over the past few years new members of staff have joined the team to take up positions in Student Activities, Finance and Marketing, whilst a number of longer serving staff members have moved on (AUSA, 2008). In Aberystwyth University SU, following 18 months of under-budget trading, the SU underwent a full organisational restructuring in January 2008, voluntary redundancies and shifting some staff to part-time roles. An additional recent restructure within DDSU in 2009 saw seven posts in the senior management team reduced to four, and twelve staff were made redundant. These changes produced a saving of £300,000 on the wages bill.

Changes were also made in relation to the roles of elected officers. For example, in Heriot-Watt Students' Association, the 'vice-president service and communications' role was changed from a sabbatical position to a part-time officer position (Taylor, 2010). Similar findings were also obtained from the case studies, where either some employee posts have been removed or the number of sabbatical officer has been reduced. For example, in the governance reform (2009) at BBSU, all the part-term positions for student officers were removed. Also, in CCSU, specific roles for elected student officers for example VP (Vice President) Welfare, VP Education, VP Activities and VP Societies have been taken away in 2008 and at present there is a group of student representative officers under the general titles of President, Deputy President and Vice President.

5.33: Strategic Change

According to Ansoff and McDonnell's (1990) analysis of the appropriate response to environmental turbulence, strategic effectiveness becomes much more important as the turbulence level rises. This was the case of students' unions in the past decade. The recent organisational restructuring programmes within students' unions have been outlined and discussed in the above sections, and these reflected the shift in the strategic focus, in most institutions, away from commercial services such as bars, shops and night clubs. For example, the restructuring of Portsmouth Students' Union

in the summer of 2010 was justified in terms of having a main objective of saving salary costs and reorganizing the union's priorities away from the provision of extensive commercial services (from a comment of the Chief Executive in questionnaire). The choice about the balance between different students' union roles (representation, service provisions, or student community) is not new. As the analysis of chapter three indicated, the focus of these three functions of students' unions has shifted over time. Much had been made for many years of the contest for money and attention within the unions between campaigns and services: left-wing students emphasised the first, Conservatives the second (see chapter three).

Entering the new century, the widespread decline in commercial income, consequent financial pressures and the changing student profile helped to generate a re-orientation of the role of students' unions and in the last few years, in many students' unions that has been a reduction in the provision of commercial services (see previous). This change also reflected unease that the substantive commercial service roles had weakened the student community and the affinity of the membership with the students' unions. As one officer at a case study union observed

> 'we supplied some quite extensive services and so many of our members viewed us as they viewed Tesco, demanding commercial-style quality while having virtually no loyalty towards us. The danger was that when we struggled to supply that level of service, they went elsewhere and there was nothing but a vacuum left'.

Furthermore, as Cadogan (2002) noted, the fewer students who define their relationship to the union as that of a member, the less they involve themselves in the union as an organisation.

The shift away from commercial activity towards the student community function has been assisted through restructuring, particularly in relation to supporting clubs and societies. For example, in the organisational restructuring of Derby Students' Union completed in 2008, its marketing function was changed to carry out marketing for the

whole of the organization, in particular for promoting clubs and societies, and not simply to be a club night's promotion tool as in the past. In a series of change at CCSU in 2006, the union, for the first time, began to precisely monitor of the number of students involved in its sports clubs and societies. Meanwhile, all of the ten new staff worked for the membership services department, and the position of 'Membership Services Manager' was created as a member of senior management team. Similarly, in the case of BBSU, its newly appointed General Manager mentioned the new vision for the future and a set of values for the organisation during the interview. He acknowledged that the union had over-focused on commercial activities in the past and paid insufficient attention to what students really wanted during their time at university; therefore in the future BBSU 'needs to shift from a service-based organisation into an experience-based organisation that would enhance the quality of the student experience at the university'.

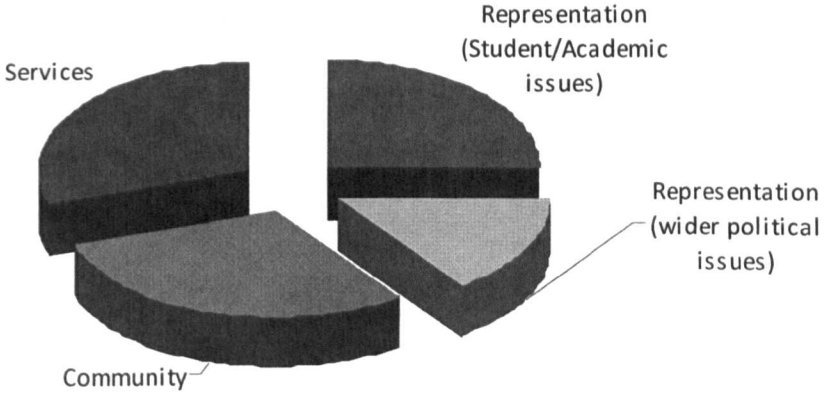
The role of students' union has also been reoriented from emphasising on commercial operation back to student representation. For example, in the organisational restructure of Derby Students' Unions completed in 2008, a democracy and activities manager was created, and new roles were also created for democracy and campaigns. In the CCSU, its new General Manager appointed in 2006 proposed a 'Mission, Purpose, Principles and Priorities' document for the Union and claimed the emergence to shift the focus of core values to representing students, as a new direction for the whole organisation. Similarly, since the appointment of a new General Manager in 2002 much of the work of AASU has involved shifting the direction of strategy from an emphasis on commercial services back to what are called 'core' students representation. As its General Manger explained:

> 'We have realised the imbalance in development between commercial services and membership services over the past decade. We now refocus on developing membership services by expanding the existing welfare services and training/development departments, and by providing more sports facilities to its students.

The representational aspect was assisted through the development of digital media, which opened up more opportunities to engage students in representation. In particular, electronic voting has increased turnout in students' union's elections. In Southampton the students' union elections in 2010 had a record of 7,156 votes, approximately 36% of the total union membership. In contrast, even sabbatical elections at Southampton in the 1980s often struggled to get turnouts of 1,000 voters, approximately a sixth of the then electorate. For example, in 1985 the election of the Treasurer, the second most important sabbatical post, was won by a candidate with only 488 votes on a turnout of 745 (interview). In DDSU, in 2011 all the elections were conducted fully online and they broke records with voter turnout records - 7,216 students voting in the officer elections.

The above features of the shifting strategic focus within student unions in the past decade are illustrated in figure 5.1 (see below). Student representation has re-emerged with a strong focus on student/academic focus, for example the protests over the tuition fee proposals, but also some stress on wider matters such as the Iraq war (2003) and the contemporary public expenditure cuts, although without the intensive left-wing radicalism of previous eras. The role of students' unions as a community has been re-emphasised and there was much less focus on students' unions as a supplier of commercial services.

Figure 5.1 Students' union: in the new century



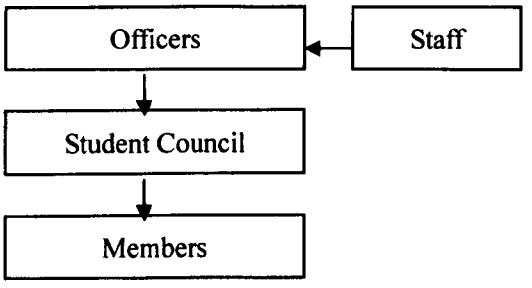
5.4: Governance Reform

This section addresses recent changes to the governance of students' unions.

5.41: Governance Structure before Change

As analysed in chapter three, the traditional model of the students' union's governance had a large component of direct democracy through union or general meetings where any union member could vote on policy. However, apathy and the increase in student numbers led to this structure being replaced, particularly in the 1990s. Students' councils have emerged as a form of representative democracy, with the direct democracy element being, at most, marginalised to very occasional, often one per year, meetings. This model could be broadly described as a 'members-council-officers' governance model, which had a widespread application in students' unions (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 Democratic Control Structure of the Students' Union



Within this governance structure, the makeup of union council is complex and varies among different students' unions. A common feature was that members were not involved in directly electing most of council. Many of the 'councillors' were indirectly selected from other committees. Elected student sabbatical and non-sabbatical officers had executive authority and often were formally constituted as an Executive Committee (precise terms vary, for example Southampton SU had an Administration Committee). They were elected annually for a period of one and occasionally up to three or four years (no more than two years paid office – Education Act 1994 S22(2)(f)). These elected officers constituted are the Board of Governors

with overall direction, leadership and management of Union affairs, and were accountable to the student population primarily through the Student Council and a direct-democratic element in the form of general meetings, which were still occasionally held.

In theory, the ultimate decision-power usually rested with Student Councils, however, there were practical governance issues facing a group of students, often of a hundred or more individuals, who are untrained and unsupported and who typically come in once every few weeks to act as the prime decision making body. For example, the president (2006/07) of AASU commented on the council by saying that:

> 'many of them [the councillors] do not really understand the role of elected student officers and do not even question written reports put forward by the executive committee'.

Similarly, the president (2007/08) of BBSU agreed with this, and she said:

> 'we [Executive Committee] have to report business to the council. But very often they [the councillors] do not even question written reports put forward by us'.

In practice, in the vast majority of students' unions, the Executive Committee became the key decision-maker. Furthermore, the student officers had a vast array of formal roles which included executing decisions, 'employer' responsibilities, constitutional responsibilities, operational duties (for example trading performance, funding, licensing and staffing), and a crucial representational role. Much of the officers' work is directed at representing student issues within the university and providing information and support to the student body on a whole range of issues including academic procedures, health, welfare and finance. Executing decisions means student officers are charged with the executive management responsibility for the organisation, and are responsible for setting policy and strategy for the organisation in conjunction with the senior management team. 'Employer' responsibilities incorporated health and

safety, finance and liaison with trade unions roles. In practice, each officer has a portfolio of responsibilities, which require working closely with individual managers within the students' union. For example, elected student officers usually include the following positions:

- President
- Vice-President (Services) or Services Officer
- Vice-President (Welfare) or Welfare Officer, Treasurer (or Finance Officer)
- Press and Publicity or Communications Officer
- Entertainments, commonly known as Ents Officer
- Education Officer (or Academic Affairs Officer, Educational Campaigns Officer)
- Athletic Union Officer (or Sports Officer)
- LGB (Lesbian, gay and bisexual) Officer,
- Secretary (sometimes Vice-President General Secretary)
- Equal Opportunities or Liberation Officer
- Clubs and Societies Officer
- Campaigns Officer, and
- Accommodation Officer.

To assist in the day to day running of the students' union permanent staff were also employed by the Executive Committee in a two-fold capacity: to be directly responsible for providing a particular service or facility, and to provide professional advice and support to student officers when required.

Under the Executive Committee comprising elected student officers, there was a management team that was responsible for the union's daily operation. The size and layers of the management team varied among different students' unions, depending on the number of staff employed and the service provision required. It usually consisted of senior managers and service managers. It was the responsibility of the General Manager to report to officers on the union's operations and management.

5.42: Drivers for Change

Governance reform has been a 'hot topic' within students' unions across the country

in recent years. The reasons for the recent discussion around governance were multiple. Firstly, this reform was in line with the students' union's new status as a registered charity. As discussed in Chapter three, the Charities Act 2006 required students' unions whose income exceeds £100,000 to become a registered charity and be regulated by the Charity Commission.

Secondly, as also discussed in chapter three, governance changes were driven by shifting student demographics, expectations and lifestyles. In many students' unions a review of governance was, therefore, seen as a method to ensure continuing relevance to the membership. As the DDSU President commented:

> 'The Union is nothing if it is not democratic. Regular democratic reviews are needed to improve our governance by consulting our members to see how we can work better for them'.

Thirdly, in many cases, governance reform arose as a consequence of financial problems because declining commercial income led to criticism of existing governance structures. For example, the Chief Executive at Cumbria Students' Union acknowledged that:

> 'the poor financial situation was a symptom of the poor governance structures and processes; bad decision making and the ability to manipulate/by-pass decision making authorities without appropriate accountability was largely the reason we were in financial difficulty'.

Similarly, in the case of CCSU, its General Manager commented that its governance structure was 'fundamentally flawed'. He said:

> 'Whilst the full-time officers received a reasonable amount of training and continuous staff support to gain knowledge, skills and experience, the part-time officers did not and realistically could not obtain them...Due to the poor quality of the executive, there was a clear lack of the specific skills that were needed to achieve the long-term strategic plans...All of the these resulted in poor performance and a lack of strategic development within the Union over recent years.'.

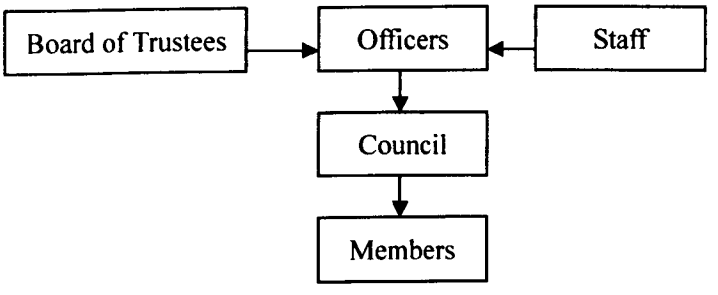
Furthermore, there was no framework to hold staff, in particular the senior managers, to account for activities for which they had delegated responsibility. Perhaps more importantly, in reality the managerial decision making structure and the student decision making structure often operated as distinct entities despite that, in theory, they comprised a unified framework with the student officers having ultimate responsibility. For example, the General Manager of EESU commented on their recent financial difficulties, and it was said that:

> 'We have had a pretty traumatic decade and are in the process of recovering from a financial slump of epic proportions...The recent governance change is designed to stop things like this happening...the governance structure at present meant that many people had a say on issues like Union finances, despite having no financial expertise or experience. However many of these people were not accountable when things went wrong...'

5.43: The new Governance Structure

During the recent governance review of students' unions, a common and key change was the establishment of a Trustee Board as required by the Charities Commission (see chapter three) and the appointment of non-student trustees from outside the organisation. The precise composition of Trustee Board varies, for example while many students' unions have elected students as the majority in the board there are a few exceptions such as in Birmingham, Coventry and Kings' College. However, the overall governance structure within students' unions after recent change is similar, which is presented in figure 5.3 as a comparison to the previous arrangement (see figure 5.2 in the earlier section).

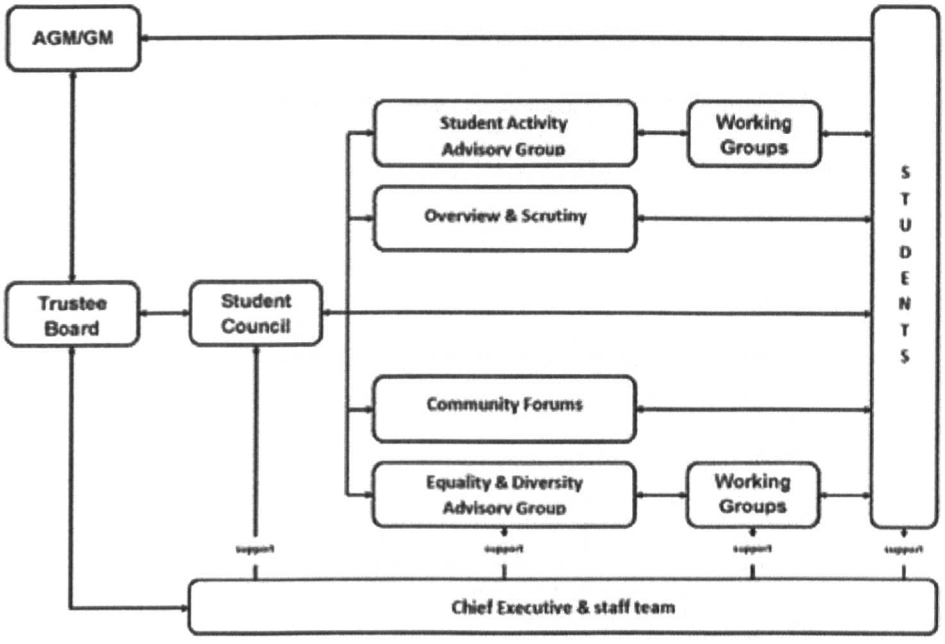
Figure 5.3 The New Governance Structure



Regulated by legislation, the usual body of trustees in a charity is called the board. The key issues were that those trustees were clearly identifiable and that it is empowered, in the governing document or constitution, to be able to control the management and administration of the charity. In the five case study of students' unions, the trustee boards comprised both elected students and appointed non-student members. Bringing in external members to sit on the boards was believed to be best practice as suggested by the NUS (NUS, 2008c). It is argued that under the legal requirements, trustees of students' union should have to understand the legal and financial aspects of the union. The potential benefit of having a hybrid model of student and non-student trustees was to provide a mixture of experience and expertise. Results of the case studies indicated that compliance with the charities legislation has been interpreted very differently by different unions, and the findings suggest two kinds of governance structure within students' unions after their recent change. One is a more democratic structure (for example DDSU), and another change more radical (for example CCSU).

In August 2008 CCSU formally endorsed a new set of constitutional arrangements. According to its Constitution, the CCSU at present is led by a Trustee Board, which consists of four elected sabbatical student officers, four other students, and four non-student experts, who each serve a four year term (see Figure 5.4). The four sabbatical officers (President, Deputy President, and two Vice Presidents) are all called 'Student Representative Officers' instead of having specific roles for example welfare or education. The four externals are appointed for their expertise in various and relevant areas, for example finance.

Figure 5.4 CCSU's New Governance Structure

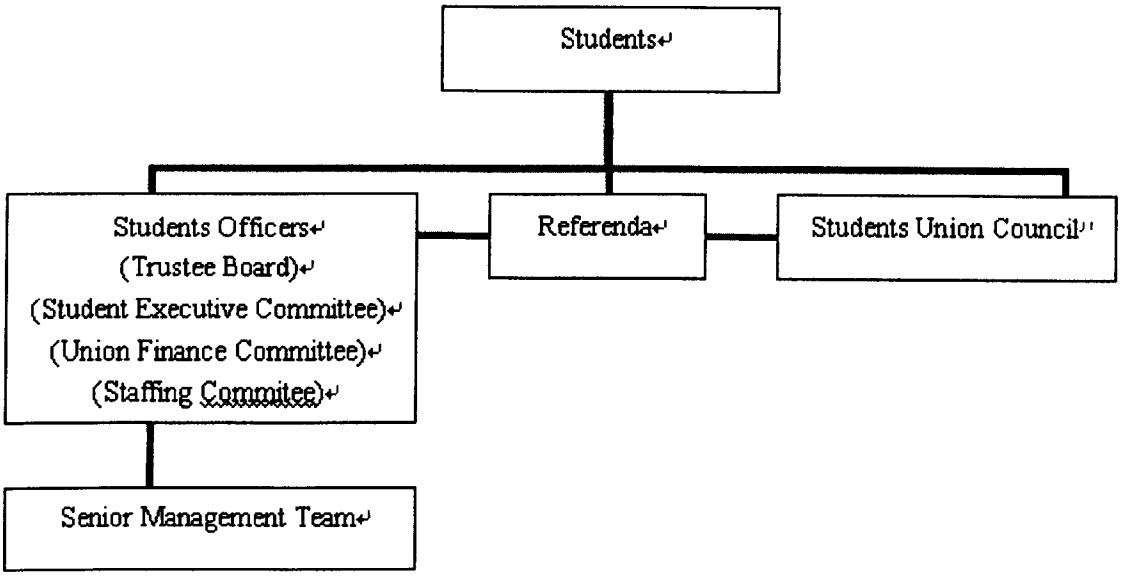


Source from: http://www.lgos.org/content/index.php?page=6878

On a day-to-day basis the union is run by the Chief Executive and staff team. The Trustee Board sets the strategic direction - what to do - and the Chief Executive and staff team implement processes and procedures to meet it - how to do it. The governance model in place at CCSU is an executive (decision making) Trustee Board, advised by a Student Council. The Student Council is in turn advised by other groups. The stated objective of the system is to ensure that the Trustee Board has as much information about the student experience and student opinion as possible to help it set the strategic direction of the organisation, and to offer students a variety of ways to engage with its governance. Its '2007 Governance Structure Change Proposal' states the aim of creating a coherent and clear decision-making structure. Using a wide range of scrutinised information, the Broad of Trustees made the strategic decisions relating to long-term planning of the CCSU. Those decisions were then relayed to senior management, who were responsible for implementation. Another reason for the introduction of Trustee Board, as explained by its General Manager, was to transfer day-to-day executive leadership to permanent professionals because it was believed that 'a lot of officers had become too focused on running the organisation but not behaving as student representatives'.

In the case of DDSU, the last major governance review took place during 2006-07 and was implemented in 2007. This reform changed the structure and powers of Union Council and Standing and Representative Committees, abolished General Meetings and established the Trustee Board. The new governance structure is showed in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5 DDSU's New Governance Structure



At the heart of the changes was the establishment of a new students' union council of 56 members, consisting of 40 councillors elected from each academic department, eight councillors from groups such as mature, international and postgraduate students, together with the eight full-time student officers. It was the first directly elected students' union council in the UK, replacing the previous model of a council appointed by student groups within the Union. One hundred and seventeen students contested the 48 places on the new Council over two sets of elections held at the beginning of 2007/08. According to its '2007 Constitutional Review', recommendations to Union Council from the working group on the Charities Bill and Democratic Review, this change in the make-up of Student Council was driven by concerns about the level to which bodies are accountable. For example, in a recent consultation members described their council as being hidden, which was perhaps

unsurprising as members are not involved in directly electing most of council. Alongside the changes to the Student Council, a Trustee Board had been established with responsibility for overseeing the strategic and financial management of the Union. The eight students' officers, whose position as trustees has been formalised, have been joined by three independent external trustees bringing legal, financial and business experience. A student Nominations Committee recruited the external trustees and the first meeting was held in November 2007.

The key changes of the recent governance reform within students' unions was summarised in this section by comparing different approaches between CCSU and DDSU. During the research, different voices were heard and there was some doubt in terms of the real benefits of the governance reform to student representation and democracy. For example, a senior manager at Warwick SU pointed out that:

> 'The additional bureaucracy around additional boards and committees has increased the administrative burden on already stretched staff and sabbatical officers. There is a cost to the restructure which is difficult to absorb. The changes have also not really increased student engagement. We welcome additional (non-sabbatical) student involvement in the Trustee Board however the wider benefits of increasing student engagement/involvement in democracy and representation issues has not materialised.'

In fact, while the recent governance review of students' unions aimed to improve the management performance and to better representation for the members, it is useful to ask such a question as: to what extent has the strategic change within students' unions been improved by the change? What are the democratic implications of the recent governance reform? To what extent does the student body still have the final say after introducing appointed trustees? These questions will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

5.5: Summary

Empirical data from the research shows that students' unions in the UK had been through, or were in the process of going through, a process of change. The driving force is a combination of many different factors, from both external and internal environments. Some of the changes have been incremental with focuses on improvement of service provision, whilst some have been discontinuous involving organisational restructuring and reform of governance structures. Facing the acute pressures from both external and internal environment, strategic effectiveness became extremely crucial for students' unions, especially for those located in the city centre. For example, to save cost, many students' unions have undertaken organisational restructurings including such as staff redundancy, cutting commercial services and merging service departments. During these change, most students' unions have reoriented their focus towards representation and membership services, away from commercial services. Putting the change drivers into consideration, it is the fact that strategic changes within students' unions are still on-going and will continue into the foreseeable future.

This research focuses on studying the recent strategic changes implemented by students' unions. These include the large-scale organisational restructuring, shifting the focus of functions and the review of governance. The following chapters will present findings on the management of strategic change within the context of students' unions.

Chapter 6

Strategic Management of Students' Unions in the Previous Governance Structure: Obstacles and Tensions

6.1: Introduction

This chapter discusses the management of strategic change within students' unions, especially in relation to changes to the provision of commercial services. Firstly, strategic management models are applied to examine the obstacles of and constraints on change. Focus will be placed on discussing managerial issues in the context of previous governance structures before the recent governance reforms. Secondly, based on the analysis of change obstacles, the key characteristics of strategic management of the students' union are summarized, with a particular interest on discussing the relations between student officers and management. Thirdly, the effectiveness of a partnership between the officers and the senior management, as implied in the previous governance structure, is questioned. The recent governance reforms within students' unions stressed a shift from partnering to controlling. This chapter, therefore, discusses whether management should have an 'agent' or 'steward' role.

6.2: Obstacles to Change: Strategic Analysis and Choice

According to Johnson et al. (2005), the process of strategic management starts from strategic analysis, which concerns analysis of a business's position and understanding the important external factors that influence it. Strategic choice then is needed, which involves understanding the nature of stakeholder expectations, identifying strategic options, and then evaluating and selecting strategic options. In its broadest sense strategic management, as proposed by Johnson et al. (2005), is about taking 'strategic decisions' – decisions about all the elements in the model; direction, scope, advantage, resources, environment, and stakeholders. In this section, the application of such theories to students' unions is considered by identifying obstacles to strategic change and, therefore, the implementation of effective strategic management.

6.21: A Sense Missing of Direction and a High Level of Uncertainty

Case studies in this research found that the most common complaint staff had on strategic management was 'uncertainty'. Most staff interviewees reported a sense of

uncertainty about the future of the organisation. For example one of the service managers at AASU said:

> 'The problem of working at a students' union is that it never has a clear direction for the future. In terms of individuals, a number of people (probably no more than four or five of us) have their own future plans but many don't.'

This high level of uncertainty among staff was mainly due to the lack of vision and long-term direction for the organisation. At the times when interviews were conducted at both BBSU and CCSU, their new General Managers were to be newly recruited. Interviewees were asked to use some words to describe the recent strategic management within the organisation. The most common responses included 'chaos', 'mess', 'confusion', and 'stuck'. In recent years, when the commercial income declined and students' unions faced financial difficulties, it was the fact that the organisation was also suffering from a missing sense of direction:

> 'I started at a very funny time. When I started there was no management structure. There was only one assistant General Manager who acted as General Manager in the senior management team. We were in a situation that we were not sure what was happening. We had just been concentrating on keeping things going without really thinking about the future of the organisation. It had been a very difficult time and very frustrating time. We were waiting for that person coming to give us a direction and leadership, and work out where the Students' Union was going.' (from BBSU)

> 'We do need more direction and more truth. Students are changing and so are Students' Unions. Commercial competition is there. Based on that, we do need someone to lead the organisation forward, coming with new ideas, to give everybody direction...In the past, the worst thing was people didn't know anything about the future and just guessed.' (from BBSU)

> 'A clear idea of long term plans for the union was lacking. I did not even know what the organisational objectives were...after such a long period of uncertainty and stagnation we do need someone coming in to enable us to move forward.' (from CCSU)

> 'It has been changing so much in the last couple of years. I hear all sorts of rumours from different people about what is going to happen and about what is the plan, either way will have a big impact on the ways we actually operate,

> on the amount of money we take...however, I never have been informed of any long-term plan for our department.' (from CCSU)

Partly due to the absence of a clear direction and long-term plans, the awareness of the pressure for change was limited among staff. From the interviews at BBSU, only one out of five of interviewees were able to point out some of the challenges that students' unions were facing and the implications for the union as an organisation. As the General Manager from EESU stressed:

> 'People working in a students' union need to keep up to date with student trends as students have changed a lot from ten or twenty years ago and it is essential that the organisation provides training and networking events for staff development'.

In the case of BBSU, however, formal and informal training schemes were very limited in the past five years. When the new General Manager was appointed in 2007, he realised that 'there was a lack of awareness and recognition of the need for change within the whole organisation, and there was no real understating by a lot of people of where the students' union was and what it should be doing'. So his first task was to give staff an appraisal of where they were and why the union was not providing what its members wanted. Then, a new mission statement was issued clearly stating the vision, values, and mission of the organisation. Meetings were also held to consider how the organisation could get from where they were to where they wanted to be, and what that process and outcome would mean for everyone involved.

In order to find out why the absence of long-term strategic direction is normal within students' unions as this case studies indicated, it was necessary to first examine the composition of Executive Committee, which was responsible for making strategic direction for the organisation.

6.22: A Lack of a Balance of Skills and Experience of Officers

The change management literature suggests that the role of leadership is extremely important in the context of strategy change within an organisation (see, for example,

Kotter, 1996; Stelzer and Mellis, 1998). During the process of change, effective leaders should illuminate the route to change, whilst, in the meantime, making sure that the ideals are shared with others. However, the absence of a clear vision, goals and long-term planning in BBSU indicated the failure of student officers in providing leadership and potentially problems generic across all students' unions. The fact is (on the whole) elected student officers, who sit on the Executive Committee, do not bring with them the significant experience of analysing problems in a work-setting and thus have not developed robust skills in this area. Coming out of interviews with the student officers, most of them commented that they did not have confidence on their managerial skills. A President from the case studies accepted the point that it was not an easy job to be a sabbatical officer, especially during such a difficult time in finance for the Union (BBSU). He said:

> 'In the first couple of months of my Executive life, I was full of ambition. I wanted to do this, and wanted to do that. But soon I realised that all those plans were not feasible because of the budgets...To be honest, I don't really understand the figures and tables of those financial reports. The only thing I know is we are losing money and we need to do something to improve the situation. '

Similarly, another student officer complained that:

> 'I became frustrated...People (staff members) started to question the ideas we wanted to put forward. I just don't know how to work with them. The only management experience I have was my part-time job in a bar...I tried to learn from my past experience and took training at the same time, but you know it takes time to improve your personal skill'.

In practice, whilst full-time officers were generally provided with a reasonable amount of training as well as continuous staff support to gain knowledge, skills and experience, the part-time officers did not have these and realistically could not be expected to acquire them.

As the literature argued, strategic analysis is a crucial aspect of strategic management (see, for example, Greenley, 1989; Bowman and Ash, 1996; Parnell, 2008). It

requires an analysis of a businesses' position and understanding of the important (external) factors that influence it. In addition, there is a requirement to make decisions based on examining the environment, the organisation's expectations, objectives, power, and resources. Given the typically limited skill set of union officers, who are usually in their late teens or early twenties, it can be argued that it is inappropriate for them to shoulder such an important responsibility for the organisation. For example, in the case of the CCSU, when it started losing money the need for change was not quickly recognised and a solution was not implemented until the financial situation got so strained that the university intervened (see chapter five). As findings from Chapter five showed, it was after the new General Manager had been appointed that the organisation started its plan of remedy. A similar situation occurred at BBSU, where there was no clear direction given from the top of the organisation by the Executive Committee when the management's support was not in place (see chapter five).

6.23: Rapid Turnover of Leadership

Difficulties in relation to a frequent turnover of political leadership, which have been recognised through the political science literature (see, for example, Moen et al., 2005; Kousser, 2005), were also evident in relation to students' unions. There was clear evidence that many of the student officers had difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities due to the annual turnover and substantial annual changes in the membership of the Executive Committee. For example, the President of AASU said:

> 'This is my second year in the Executive. I think it is much better than my first year as I have a clearer picture of the Union. But for the other sabbaticals I am not sure whether they are the same as me. This is only their first year, they came in the summer and spent a couple of months to take all sorts of training and to get to understand how the Union works. Then from September they started doing things, but as you know things do not always go as planned. Coming back from the New Year, they started to consider whether to stay in the Union for another year or not. Then for those who decided to go they need to get ready for job hunting...You see one-year

> Executive life is not long...I do strongly recommend other sabbaticals to stay for two years. '

Obviously, the rapid turnover of leadership has made it difficult for the executive committee to gather enough expertise. Newly elected officers are typically faced with the task of becoming familiar with a host of new issues. For example, the President of EESU commented that:

> 'the problem with the students unions is that unless you [students' unions] have officers back for a second year it takes a long time to actually get into your [student officers] role and really know what you [student officers] are meant to be doing'.

The President of DDSU agreed with the above. He said:

> '...the real problem with the officers is their transient nature, by the time you get really used to your role it's the last month of the year and the undergrads have already gone and it's really frustrating because you wish you knew what you know now six months earlier'.

This transient model of student representation has been a feature of students' unions since they were first established. For example, the Education Act (1994, 22(2)f) stipulated that no student could serve more than two years in a paid post at their students' union and typically most such sabbatical leave after a one-year term. As a consequence, the system does not allow a balance between continuity and renewal to be achieved; or for the opportunity for knowledge that has been built up to mature and for decisions to be made in the light of that maturity. This was what the experience of the CCSU showed. During the union's recent problems it was observed that because of the limited skills of the student sabbatical officers 'it would take them a while – maybe a month, maybe three months....to figure out what is going on'. Then it 'would take them another couple of months to conclude where the problems are'. When they finally understood the problems, their one-year term was almost completed. Although in theory they could pass on their conclusions to the next set of sabbaticals, in practice those

elected representatives would have their own set of assumptions, prejudices, agendas and skills and might, initially at least, view the issues differently.

6.3: Obstacles to Change: Strategic Implementation

In Johnson et al.'s (2005) strategic management model, when a strategy has been analysed and selected, the task is then to translate it into organisational action. This process is believed to be the hardest part. During the strategic implementation within students' unions, common obstacles and constraints occur from staff, on both an individual basis and a collective sense.

6.31: Personal Resistance

Organisation is a social system, and to change anything requires the cooperation and consent of the people who are part of it (Lewin, 1951). During the process of organisational change, every individual has their own (different) personal transition process (Hayes, 2007). At the time the research was conducted within the CCSU, it had been over twelve months since the strategic change had taken place. When those survivors who remained in the organisation after the change were asked about their initial feelings towards the change, a clear picture was shown of each person's personal transition process from initial 'shock', 'denial', 'depression', to 'acceptance of reality', 'testing', and 'consolidation' as suggested by Hayes (2007).

As explained in Chapter five, during the organisational restructure in summer 2006, a quarter of the CCSU workforce was made redundant. This caused a great deal of concern and worry to those who remained after it. Obviously everyone was concerned about job security. That is why most staff felt 'shock' and 'denial' at the initial stage of change. As one of the senior managers who witnessed the events unfold commented:

> 'People at the beginning felt very much under pressure. Everybody was given new contracts [people's working hours have been changed]. Everything was

changed...We were very reluctant to change...There were a lot of negativities. I still think as the declining commercial services, people were still concerned about their job. People were wondering was this the first step or do we need more redundancy.'

Here are some examples from those whose role was changed within the organisation:

'I was not entirely surprised but it was a bit of shock... People were made redundant...I wasn't sure what was going to happen to the organisation.'

'At the beginning I was scared for my job. I have a wife and family to look after...It was hard, and I had very little sleep during the first few months...At that time, we just wanted to get as much information as we could...Unfortunately, all our line managers were gone and we were left in a position of no direction and communication...'

Staff concerns covered their own job security and also how the organisation would treat those made redundant, a reflection of Lewin's (1951) focus on the communitarian aspects of such organisations. Here are two examples of comments from staff:

'The majority of staff who left had an average ten years service. Unfortunately we have offered very, very little personal development to these people while they were here. Most of them came in straight after leaving school and prior to the change they thought this would be the only job they have for their life. They came in without going through the recruitment process. They don't know how to fill an application form and any interview techniques. All they know was just the job they were working here. Sadly, for those we still kept in touch, most of them still haven't found any employment.'

'People working around you just lost their jobs. We have been working together for ten or twenty years, and I have a bound relationship with those people...We all like this place otherwise we would not be here for ten or twenty years. Sadly, we had to go for competitive interviews for staying in this organisation.'

After a certain time, the change reality was accepted by most staff being interviewed. As one of the staff working in the retail services at CCSU acknowledged:

'Everyone needs to be adaptable to change. Now it has been twelve months on, and I can see it was a right decision, and I do think the change works. At this time last year I didn't think so'.

At the 'testing' stage of change, most interviewees expressed an appreciation of the then current management practices as they felt involved and empowered. For example,

'We are lucky to get a new Chief Executive now. He seems involved more with us. He doesn't sit in the office all day. He always comes in with t-shirt and if he is in a suit we know he has a meeting. He comes around and talks to people. You can always talk to him. For example, sometimes you found something wrong you can easily speak to him that thing doesn't work while in the past we didn't have any chance to speak to senior managers...'

'The appearance of senior managers is very different now. They are now always walking around while those previous used to stay upstairs in their office. It is very different because it seems they are more hands-on and know how things are working around here.'

'We now have lots more empowerment and trust. The managers used to go to weekly management meetings where the general manager sat there and gave instruction. We just did what he told us without having any empowerment at all.'

Findings from the other case studies also suggested that there was less resistance for change when staff received sufficient information of what was happening. It is obvious that staff always like to be involved and consulted during the change process. Here are some examples:

'I think as long as the change makes sense and can provide better services to students, I am happy to change. If it doesn't make sense to me, I would like to have an opportunity to raise my opinion and my opinion has been seriously considered'. (from DDSU)

'The current management has certainly made more and better efforts to communicate with staff...In my point of views, the previous management was making personal, career-related decisions rather than for the benefit of the union'. (from EESU)

> 'If it [change] is done for the right reasons and those reasons are clear to me then I am not going to challenge that really...I may not even agree with those reasons, but I accept that is what managers have to do, make decisions like that'. (from AASU)

For the case of BBSU, where there was a unstable period of senior management, staff expressed a strong wish to receive a clear explanation from the top, of what had happened to the senior managers who had been absent for a long time, when and whether they would be coming back, and what should be done in their absence. Unfortunately, the main channel of obtaining such information was rumour and gossip in the tea room. As one of the interviewees said, 'we need to feel secure and included...more information is required to bring us together and prevent assumptions being made...we need fact not fiction'.

6.32: Cultural Resistance

Many of staff in students' unions had worked in the sector for a long period of time. When conducting the case studies, it was always easy to find staff with more than ten years working experience in a students' union. To some of them, the Union they are currently working for was the only employer they have had since they left school. For example, the staff statistics of AASU showed that in 2007 a fifth of the workforce had worked there for more than ten years and another 15% of staff had worked within the organisation for between six and ten years. Such a high loyalty was also found in the other four case study students' unions. A member of staff who had worked for the BBSU for seven years said 'we have had a very difficult time over the last couple of years. A lot of people have gone. I stayed here because I like working for students and I did enjoy it'. It was true that for those who left the organisation, many of them continued to work for students, for example for other Students' Unions, in the University, or for other Student organisations.

Long-term service of staff members can be beneficial for an organisation. It reflects strong organisational commitment to some extent and it also helps to improve

efficiency as cultural harmony can only be achieved over time. On the other hand, a large number of staff with long-term service within an organisation would impact negatively on the process of change due to their strong cultural resistance, arising, in part at least, from challenges to long-established personal compacts of their employee (see Strebel, 1996b) and a strong element of nostalgia (Gabriel, 2000). Such resistance from staff with substantial service arose, in part at least, from the fact that they had witnessed and experienced the growth and development of an organisation over time. As a result, they had developed their own values and beliefs of what was right or wrong. For example, in the past decade the focus on commercial rather than membership services meant that many staff acquired a view of students' union functions as having a key requirement to make money and a perception of students' unions as a place providing cheap food and drink. These shared values and beliefs were very important in determining and changing patterns of behaviour and also connect with Martin's (2001) location of resistance to change within strong group norms. When the organisation introduced a change that contradicted its existing culture, for example the shift in organisational focus away from a commercial to a student based service; it was strongly resisted by staff. For instance, the commercial services manager at AASU argued against the recent decline of investment in bars by the Union and he said:

> 'Decorating the bars is necessary to attract students. That is the only way to raise income...I would like to see the future Union in a modern building as it was very difficult to serve different needs in a compact building.'

A manager from the commercial services within BBSU also stressed that:

> 'The Union needs to get income which could then be used to pay staff and put back into developing student services such as sports events, societies etc...We cannot only rely on the University's money [block grant]...That's what we did [commercial service] in the past and we did succeed'.

The above opinion suggests, therefore, a reluctance to embrace a shifting culture and at implicit tendency to marginalise or ignore changing external conditions, for

example changing lifestyles amongst their members and the intensification of commercial competition which students' unions struggled to compete against.

The literature argues that this phenomenon of 'nostalgia' can easily create an emotional gulf within organisations between those with first hand experiences of the "golden" past and those without (Gabriel, 2000). The research findings at the CCSU support this claim. After large-scale redundancy, the organisation recruited new staff to fill newly created positions. One of the initiatives was to reinforce and stabilise the new values and beliefs by bringing new blood to the organisation. However, the organisation soon encountered the problems in achieving cultural integration between existing staff and the newcomers. For example, one member of staff who had been working in the CCSU for twenty years complained:

> 'With new people coming in, it is hard for them to fit in if they come in with the wrong attitude...Those new people haven't built up their reputation with staff yet, and they were coming as manager and told staff doing this and doing that...'

6.33: Tensions between Officers and Staff Members

Tensions between elected politicians and their permanent officials (see, for example, Campbell and Wilson, 1995; Barberis, 1996) are reflected in relationships between staff members and student officers. Table 6.1 (see overleaf) gives a summary of the common frustrations identified through the case studies and thus explanations for severe tensions in that relationship.

Empirical data from the research showed that there was a great deal of mistrust between staff and officers within students' unions. The General Manager at CCSU acknowledged the fact that 'something that we still don't do very well is communication – we still don't have mechanisms for staff-officer communication'.

Table 6.1: Common Frustrations within Students' Unions

STAFF FRUSTRATIONS	OFFICER FRUSTRATIONS
• Low priority given to welfare and representation. • Sabbatical burnout - things grind to a halt. • Battles over boundaries. • Unreliability and absenteeism. • Lack of long term planning - starting projects and not finishing them. • Using personal political influence with staff. • Being forced to take policy decisions. • Lack of appreciation for the professional environment.	• Staff thinking that their area is priority. • Persistent comparisons with predecessors. • Staff's insistence on a 9-5 working day, which does not fit with a student's fluid lifestyle. • Projects that go ahead, whether I'm there or not. • Staff who lobby elected officers. • Staff who pass the buck on difficult operational issues. • Staff who don't think that what we do is 'work'.

Furthermore, many staff members were critical of the contributions of student officers because they were mostly young and had little or usually no managerial experience. This mindset was encapsulated by one quite junior officer who commented that:

> 'I felt like that I had to pander to the sabbatical officers and probably gave them too much power and they kind of went ahead and did things without telling permanent members what they were doing which led to quite a number of problems.'

Often there were greater tensions in relations between student officers and the senior staff; in particular difficulties arose when staff felt that officers had made the wrong decision. Furthermore, it was implied that such tensions could be generational and almost ingrained. For example, a middle-aged manager who had been in this field for thirty years and has worked in this organisation for more than fifteen years, commented that "a twenty years old elected officer coming in saying 'I think this' and 'I think that'... there was always going to be that tension".

Not only did officers participate in strategic management, they got involved in operational day-to-day issues, much to the annoyance of some staff. For example, one

of the interviewees said that:

> 'They [student officers] always stick their nose in operational issues, sort of 'we shouldn't have this DJ at this nightclub' or 'we should be doing it this way', kind of putting the backs up of the commercial managers...People who have had years of experience within a sector and then someone – an elected officer – comes in and tells them 'no you shouldn't be doing it like that. You can image how frustrated it is.'

These tensions resulted in a lack of cohesion during the process of strategic management within students' unions. Certainly what you see in all of the case studies is that the officers, as one interviewee observed, 'are left to do their little bit and the staff get on with their bit'. So, as commercial services departments grew, they became detached from the rest of the students' unions and acquired a distinctive sectional viewpoint and agendas. As one interviewee commented 'as it grew into something much bigger, it became separate'. Such contrasting agendas were mentioned by an officer, who complained that 'it is about how often you [Commercial Services] can put on a club night when we are trying to engage more with international and postgraduate students' [the officers believed that the Club night programme of the Union was basically for white, middle class undergraduates].

The General Manager at BBSU also observed that there was little working between officers and staff within the organisation, even the physical space of the staff - the majority of staff were working behind a locked door, and the officers were out in their own space and there was a physical separation. Furthermore, this separation led to an array of bureaucratic procedures governing communication between the two groups. For the staff to operate with the officers; there was a staff-student protocol so the officers were afraid to speak to the staff about issues, the only person that they would ever speak through was the General Manager.

Officer-management tension caused problems for the process of change. As Coram and Burner (2001) observed for successful organisational change it is necessary to

adopt an approach that appreciates and responds to staff fears and concerns. A passion for understanding human intervention and behaviour is needed to encourage, cajole and drive teams and individuals to own and commit to change (Hackett and Spurgeon, 1998). However, often the tensions between staff and officers undermined such attempts and often fostered a divisive them and us approach, the divide bolstered by differences in factors such as age, experience and roles.

6.4: Strategic Management in the Previous Governance Structure

Based on the above analysis of change obstacles and constraints within the context of students' unions, this section summarises the key characteristics of strategic management under its previous governance structure.

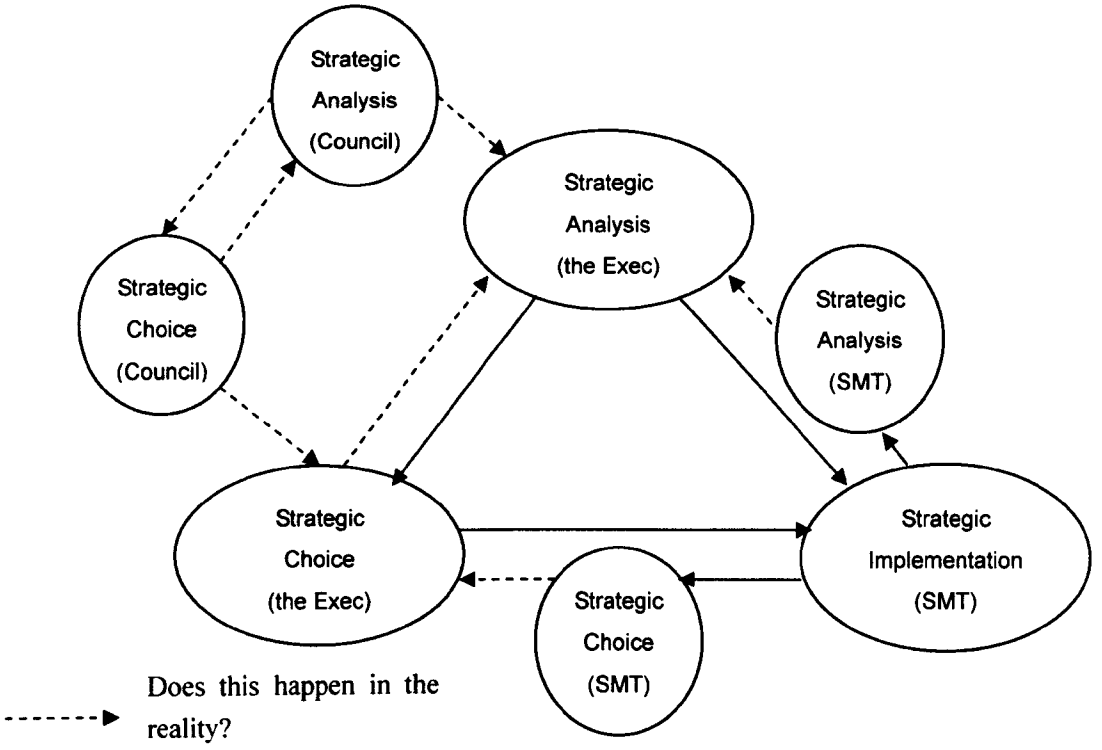
6.41: The Process of Strategic Change

As discussed in Chapter two, the descriptive school of strategic management (see, for example, Cooke and Slack 1991; Whellen and Hunger 2000; Johnson et al. (2005) claims that a planned approach to strategy is of limited value since the uncertainty considerably clouds the ability to predict all the possible influence. Strategy emerges, adapting to human needs and continuing to develop over time. Emergent strategy has sufficient feedback during the management process, and ensures the continue process of strategy management rather than stopping after a series of steps. It delivers the flexibility to respond to changes, especially in fast-moving markets. A popular model as discussed in Chapter Two is from Johnson et al. (2005), which emphasises to interlink rather than to separate the three aspects of strategic management – analysis, choices and implementation. Assuming one way of understanding a strategy better is through its implementation, Johnson et al.'s model builds the strategic position up from the experience of strategy implementation. It allows the strategy to develop as more as learnt about the strategic situation. Such flexibility helps the organisation to address the kinds of challenges they face and the changes they need to introduce to enable them to cope, and, indeed, survive, in the light of the kinds of pressures

internal and external competitive market pressure they face.

Applying Johnson et al.'s (2005) model to illustrate the strategic management process within students' unions in its previous governance structure, Figure 6.1 is presented in the below.

Figure 6.1: Strategic Management of Students' Union in the Previous Governance Structure



As explained in Chapter five, the Student Council, or equivalent, was the ultimate decision making body in theory, although the Executive Committee had become the actual decision maker in practice. This structure raised an important problem, the difficulty of a body primarily or totally comprised of young people in their late teens or early twenties taking decisions about the strategic direction of the organisation (see above). There is a clear lack of the specific skills that are needed to formulate and execute long-term strategic plans. Moreover, the annual turnover of elected officers results in a lack of continuity and a vacuum for strategic planning of the organisation. As a result, the Executive Committee requires in the support from the senior

management team on making such strategic decisions. Strategies for change were, therefore, dependent substantially on strong working relationships between officers and managers. Tensions in those relationships can, therefore, cause significant discontinuities in strategic change and encourage organisational inflexibility.

6.42: Discontinuous Nature of Strategy for change

By its nature the students union is an organisation whose leadership is constantly changing, and for an organisation this can bring difficulties (see, for example, Moen et al., 2005; Kousser, 2005). The annual turnover of elected committee members does not allow an adequate balance between continuity and renewal to be achieved; or for the opportunity for knowledge that has been built up.

Also, solutions which are acceptable to one year's executive do not always find favour with the next. The analysis-choice-implementation in students' unions is not a continuous process and it is stopped in the middle due to turnover in the membership of the Executive Committee. In the context of students' unions, it is impossible for the elected committee members who only sit on it for a short period (often of one year and rarely more than two or three years)[6] to go through the process of performing strategy analysis, making choices, implementing strategy, and return back to making further analysis or choices. When the next executive comes, it is also impossible for them to follow straight away their predecessor's strategic analysis. There is always a gap between the turnovers of the Executive Committee, which has caused the discontinuity of the strategic management process within the organisation.

In this case, when long timeframes were involved in decision making, decisions were either not made, or if they were, not adhered to. A senior manager from EESU confirmed the difficulties of developing a continuous strategy within a students' union. He said:

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[6] Individuals can serve as paid sabbaticals for a maximum of two years.

'It [the Executive's performance] varies every year. Very often it depends on who are sitting on the Board. For example, you find out that the coming sabbaticals this year are easier to work with than the previous, for example they are more mature, and have a clearer picture of the Union. You know that will make everything smooth. But things will be different next year when the new sabbaticals come.'

A staff member at BBSU told how the three-year plan of the Union has been stopped in the middle. She said:

'We had a three-year plan five years ago involving some physical improvement of the building. The work started in the first year from rebuilding the main entrance. The project stopped in the middle after three months. It was said because of lacking of money. When the new officers came in the year after, they said these work were not worthy. That is why our three-year plan has not been achieved till present.'

6.43: Inflexibility to Change

Given the context of the lack of a balance of skills and the rapid turnover of student officers, as discussed earlier, in the strategic management practice of the students' unions the three aspects of strategic management – analysis, choices and implementation were hardly interlinked as suggested in Johnson et al.'s (2005) model, and it was unlikely that change strategy would be developed over time. This reality of a slow decision-making process within students' unions has made them very inflexible to change in the past, a reflection of the problems organisations face in dealing with rapid changes (see, for example, Victor and Franckeiss, 2002). The General Manager at AASU admitted that 'we have grown up from a very small number of people, very limited services and facilities, up to a bigger organisation, while the organisation is totally inflexible to change'. Similar comments were also from both the BBSU and CCSU as:

'This organisation is very inflexible as there is a need for change and a drive for change but very little is happening.' (from the BBSU's General Manager)

'Over the last two or three years, revenue declined and nobody actually took any steps to holt the decline. Things just carried on in the same way. Probably the fact we had a clean sweep and we need some fresh ideas from outside.'

(from the CCSU's General Manager)

The CCSU's General Manager explained one of the reasons for the recent governance reform was to improve the flexibility to change. He said that:

> 'Like most students' unions across the sector, we have had to face fresh challenges in recent years in communicating and engaging with student members. However, the Union has failed to be flexible enough to influence and adapt to changes in its environment. These resulted in the financial deficit seen in recent years.'

There was also much evidence showing how CCSU failed to adapt to the pressures they faced in the past. For example, CCSU continued to employ the same number of staff after suffering the severe financial deficit in 2004-05. When entertainment turnover was cut in half it continued to employ the same number of staff even though its wage bill was rising. The organisational structure did not work! As a service manager commented:

> 'Although there were six members in the senior management team, the daily management practice did not follow the agreed line management structure, and staff needing an answer spoke to the General Manager directly in most cases.'

A member of staff also confirmed that:

> 'I think we need to modernise as things seem stuck in the Union of when I was a student here. We need to be able to change quicker and respond faster to students and university marketplace. Unfortunately, I don't think the previous management team has realised this and obviously we cannot change as a single part of the organisation without any support from the top'.

Being greatly influenced by the inflexibility of strategic management, the established working practices within students' unions were also very inflexible to change. Case studies in this research show that within students' unions there were many staff, who were very reluctant to changes. The annual turnover of the Executive Committee enabled some staff to resist especially if there was too much change or change

occurred too often. A service manager at AASU said:

> 'We knew that they [sabbatical officers] would only be in post for only a year. We had no reason to change!'

All of these shaped reactions to what they saw as the implications of change. For example, a member of staff at BBSU admitted the fact that:

> 'A feature of the students' union is that things are always changing...if you don't want to change it is simple – just to stay at where you are and to wait for the next executive team when changes might be not necessary at all'.

A similar comment was from the EESU:

> 'The management team before were quite reluctant to change. The team came in twelve, fourteen years earlier and they did very well in the first four or five years but did not change anything after that.'

These findings suggested, therefore, the presence of an ingrained bureaucratic agenda that was capable of surviving interventions by transient student officers, a characteristic that had clear parallels in Whitehall (see Howard 1979; Castle, 1996).

6.5: Relations between Board and Management: Agent or Steward?

The above sections examined the key obstacles of, and constraints on, strategic change within students' unions under its previous governance structure. As a result, the characteristics of strategic management of students' unions are summarised as being discontinuous in nature and inflexible to change. This section discusses the relations between elected student officers and senior management as a key factor to achieve successful strategic change given the context of the previous governance structure within students' unions. To understand the officers-management relations, one needs to understand the world of elected student officers, the world of management within students' unions, and the interaction between the two. In this section, the roles of student officers are first examined, followed by investigating

perspectives from senior managers. Secondly, the ways in which relations between the two groups have impacted on change within the context of students' unions will be discussed in details. At the end of this section, relations between the Board and management are discussed through a comparison to theories and practices in other sectors.

6.51: Impractical and Confusing Role of Student Officers

As explained in Chapter five, under the previous students' union governance model, student officers were both political leaders and managers, despite the theoretical sovereign position of Union Council, weak lines of accountability meant that actual power resided with the Executive Council. In particular, their duties covered responsibility for the strategic direction of the organisation. Officers were assumed to be capable of establishing long-term direction for the organisation, ensuring that the management team followed their policies and ensuring that their staff did not commit errors in their work. Evidence in this research shows, however, that this individual responsibility of student officers was impractical owing to factors such as their limited skills, knowledge and experience and also their annual election.

In addition, it was also evident that the officers' roles were often quite confusing. In particular, instead of providing leadership of the organisation, student officers were often involved in much of the day-to-day operations of their union, a factor in tensions with the staff. Furthermore, the case studies indicated that many staff perceived an increase in the extent to which student officers had become managerial participants in day-to-day operations. For example, a senior manager commented that:

> 'There is a huge change in the management of the Union, especially the role of sabbatical officers. The way in which the Union is structured and managed has changed. It hasn't had impact on us too much in the past, but it is beginning to have a great impact on us in the last three years.....a shift away from possibly the staff manage their own department, it is more emphasis on the sabbaticals, get them involved in staff management. In the past, they are normally just policy makers, and their role is making policy

but not to get involved in any departments. But more and more they come to do that.'

Similarly, the General Manager at EESU also pointed out that:

'They [student officers] were more like fire fighters than leaders leading the organisation to change proactively

These arguments were supported by another EESU staff member, who suggested that:

'They [student officers] are supposed to be looking after students, but very often now they get involved in many things like staffing (sacking) which I think they shouldn't be involved'.

The fact that student officers were more like elected managers rather than elected representatives was made explicit by other interviewees. A General Manager who has been working in the Union for 13 years pointed out that:

'The role of the elected student officers is now very different from that in the past. In the past, they were political officers who debated major policy issues and organised campaigns and demonstrations. To become a sabbatical officer you had to serve an apprenticeship on the Union Council as a non sabbatical officer. Nowadays, the substantial growth in the employment of students in bars, catering outlets and other retail areas has resulted in this becoming a recruiting ground for sabbatical officers'.

The implication of such changes was that student officers had a primarily managerialist concept of their role, which incorporated both strategic and non-strategic aspects, and which could be linked to the widespread managerialist approach to public services (see, for example, Ferlie et al., 1996; Hughes, 2003). In particular the role of a sabbatical had become to be seen as substantially that of a manager and less that of a student activist, a trend that was reflected in steady increase in the salary paid and the fact that it was no longer tied to the student grant (Ramsbottom, 2002).

Part of the reasons for the lack of clarity over the responsibilities of the elected student officers within students' unions was due to the nature of the organisation itself. While strategy, policy matters and monitoring of efficiency and effectiveness are often quoted as the function of the Board in Voluntary Sector Organisations (The VolResource, 2007), it is believed that operational details should be left to staff and volunteers. However, particularly in smaller organisations, it is not easy to be so precise, as discussed in the literature review in chapter two (Oster, 1995, Forbes and Milliken 1999). Board members may be closely involved in the work and will often comment on their experience at the 'front line'. This is the case in students' unions.

It is also argued that under the previous governance structure, the unclear and confusing role of student officers was due to the fact they have acquired some trustee responsibilities. According to charity law, trustee's responsibilities are to act in the best interests of the charity, to ensure that all activities and expenditure further the charity's aims, and to exercise the same degree of care in dealing with the administration of their charity as a prudent business person would exercise in the conduct of their own affairs. Given that students' unions are democratic and membership originations, there are significant variations from the traditional charities with a single board. Where a students' union has a policy making council or general meetings, and a smaller body of elected officers, it has often been the case that it was unclear who served as the charity trustees of the organisation. This identifies a potential clash between charity law and a political structure focused on accountability to the students, for example the obligation of a trustee to act in the best interests of the charity as opposed to the democratic will of the Union.

6.52: Management's Frustration

If student officers were short of managerial skills, knowledge and experience, important responsibilities must fall on the permanent senior managers within the students' unions. However, evidence in the research shows that the interaction between the two are often troublesome.

Of particular significance were the differences between the two groups in training and experience and the consequential emergence of distinctive values and approaches (Stewart, 1998), which posed notable problems for the relations between student officers and senior managers within students' unions. As suggested in the public governance literature in chapter two, British bureaucrats and politicians followed separate and distinctive career paths and had an understanding of their roles that was more clearly distinguished from each other's than in other democracies (Campbell and Wilson, 1995). In the case of the students' unions, putting the immaturity and rapid turnover of student officers into consideration, the frictions are often felt to be more acute than in many other organisations. Ample evidence from the case studies show that tension grew when officers had to manage staff as they had very little management skill and experience. Management complained that elected officers use personal political influence over them and of being forced to take policy decisions, while elected officers said management lobby them to get their own way. As a result, the two very often have regarded each other with suspicion and mistrust. For example, the General Manager at DDSU acknowledged that:

> 'it is always not good at the beginning as the officers are more suspicious of the senior management, and it is easy for the staff to be frustrated with the new officers as they have less knowledge...'

Another senior manager at DDSU also said that:

> 'it is a bit ridiculous really that sabbaticals would manage staff as they have no management skills'.

Complaints were made from the senior managers that they lacked a certain degree of autonomy and authority which has been granted by the Executive Committee. This has triggered confusion and frustration among managers. For example, the EESU's General Manager commented that:

'...as managers, we recognise the importance of delegation, and more importantly, the need to be judged by results... However that fact is that very few elected officers have the ability or the maturity to evaluate outcomes'.

The reality of 'judged by person' but not 'judged by result' would undoubtedly frustrate those senior managers, as the General Manager at BBSU said:

'...In any good employment relationship, your manager will point out your failings, and even if he or she doesn't, you'll soon find out on the grapevine. As a general manager [in a Students' Union] however, you'll probably be the last to know. Elected officers tend to be reticent with their criticisms, so you have to rely upon intuition and 'nose'. This often leads people to believe that only political hacks who have climbed the greasy pole of student politics can be effective general managers'.

A core challenge for those senior managers was, therefore, that they were expected to work with enthusiasm in the same posts for successive Executive Committees and build up trust and respect with them, in a short time, every year after the elections.

Meanwhile, Stewart's (1998) fourth reason, difference in the power to influence decisions, can occur in any organisation. But, in students' unions it is more acute between elected officers and senior management. One of the senior managers at AASU said:

'I don't have any power although I have influence which is mostly based on my personal abilities; and a group of students who have the authority and power but no knowledge and skills on the Executive'.

The fact that the support received was largely based on personal influence of senior managers rather than from any power-based force has caused management's frustration. For example, a senior manager at CCSU expressed the view:

'You have to be able to build up trust and respect with the new group of people (the Sabbaticals)... that is a strange one as personal and individual traits rather than professional knowledge and skills are important for my role in this organisation'.

6.53: The Impact of Relations with Management on Strategic Change

The above sections discussed in detail that the previous governance structure of the students' union has rested on a very close partnership between elected student officers and senior management. For example, the AASU's governance document (2007) stated clearly that 'the Executive Committee was responsible for setting policy and strategy for the organisation in conjunction with the General Manager'. Similarly, CCSU's governance statement (2007) also stated that:

> 'In the existing governance structure, student officers obtain information from students and pass it to the senior management team who provide support in developing, planning and implementing strategy'.

To draw an analogy with the system, a useful model is the working relationship between senior personnel in the civil service and elected ministers.

Evidence in the case studies suggested that in the reality, senior managers within students' unions have a greater influence on the decision making during the process of strategic management. As discussed in Chapter two, the literature regarding the relationship between civil servant and ministers (see, for example, Weir and Beetham, 1999), it has been observed that Permanent Secretaries tend to be the gatekeepers of what advice is or is not sent to a Minister. Similar complains were raised within the case of students' unions. One of the employees at AASU said that the General Manager had control over the officers as 'they [the sabbaticals] were drawn into his [the General Manager's] camp'. She went to stress that:

> 'Years ago, the sabbaticals were there, they do their jobs and the manager does his job. But now, the sabbaticals are on the manager's side. No matter the manager wants to do it, they just get it done.'

Evidence also suggests that very often leadership within the students' union is provided by senior managers rather than elected student officers. A common theme from the different stories in the case studies of students' unions was that the problem

of a 'lacking long-term direction for the organisation' has been improved somewhat after the appointment of new General Managers, who placed plans for change on the agenda. This then raises an interesting question – do those senior managers rather than the student officers become leaders within the organisation to address the purpose and objectives of the organisation, to provide a vision for the future and to develop staff awareness and recognition of the need for change and improvement?

The fact that while, in theory, leadership was held by the elected student officers the most senior managers also provided leadership and that this confused dynamic led to conflict and tension. The problem can be more acute than between ministers and civil servants because the position of the elected representatives was much weaker, arising from factors such as age, experience and short term limits.

The above analysis shows that the process of strategic management within students' unions is complex. Strategy tends to have a discontinuous nature, and the whole process can be very inflexible to change. The relations between officers and senior management have a direct, and often negative, effect on the possibility of achieving an inter-linkage between the key stages of strategic management – analysis, choice and implementation as suggested.

Firstly, the willingness of senior managers in terms of providing full support to the elected student officers on decision making is the key. This really depends on the working relationship between the two groups. However, the above analysis shows that it is not easy to build up such a positive partnership as very often they regard each other with suspicion and mistrust.

Secondly, advice needs to be heeded as well as offered. In the case of the students' unions, when the senior management team does put their efforts on supporting the student officers, there will be another challenge – how likely are decent suggestions made by the senior managers to be accepted by the officers? A wide variety of work

of political science offers reasons why good advice may be discarded. As summarized by Campbell and Wilson (1995: p4), 'the psychology of the individual decision maker, conflict between the advice offered and the standard operating procedures of the agency, and ideological blindness of decision makers may explain the rejection of policies that would work'. As for the students' unions, this challenge comes back to the capacity of the elected student officers in terms of judging management's performance, the issue of annual election, and again the working relationship between two groups.

Empirical data from the case studies has shown the ways in which officers' relations with management have effects on strategic management and the role officers play during the process of change. There were two possible situation developed. In the first, there is a poor working relationship between the officers and senior manager, where the level of trust between the two is low. In such cases officers are unlikely to gain support on making strategic decisions. If the working relationship between the two groups fails, lack of management and control can cause unpredictable problems which cannot be recovered from until external intervention – often by the parent institution – occurs. As explained in Chapter five, in the CCSU the management team had underperformed for a considerable time, and problems with the financial deficit had not been effectively handled. Similarly, in the BBSU the inefficiency of senior managers had not been dealt with until the University intervened. In both cases, the working relationship between the officers and senior managers was poor. As a result they both suffered the consequences.

In contrast, where a good partnership has been developed between the two groups the strategic processes benefit. In this situation, the gap of strategic analysis between turnovers of the student officers can be bridged, the processes of strategic management and change are more likely to be continuous. As a result, strategy can be developed over time. Case studies of both the AASU and DDSU supplied evidence for this conclusion. In the case of AASU, the General Manager forged a very close

working relationship with the Executive Committee. Things looked much better here as the union has promptly responded to the problem of declining commercial income. The shift of organisational strategy focus from commercial services to membership services was following the changing student expectations and perceived value of the role and function of the students' union. Strategic changes had been set clearly and adhered to in the organisation's strategic plans. The process of change looked quite smooth and less problematic, compared with both BBSU and CCSU.

At DDSU, a 'pretty good' relationship between the student officers and management was mentioned by most manager and officers during interviews. This students' union had strategic plans in placed every three years since 2002. Though it faced financial pressures from declining commercial income and intense business competition as other students' unions located in city centre, proactive approaches were implemented, as reflected in their three-year strategic plans. As a result, the Union was strikingly successful not only in its consistent level of service but also in its ability to adapt quickly to the needs and desires of students. The General Manager explained the ways in which they gained trust from the officers and the contribution to the continuity of strategic plan. He said:

> 'It is difficult to make them [officers] trust you in a short time, but every time we [the senior management team] make sure that plan is well researched with students, well published, there has been lots of consultation and it has been agreed with lots of students. So long as we have done all that, when the next set of officers come in they respect the plan that has been put in place. They respect it for two reasons: we did all the research so it is relevant to the students and well publicised for awareness. Therefore there is no need to immediately change it or be negative.'

Empirical findings in this research on students' unions indicate that the success of strategic management depends on whether there is an effective partnership between student officers and the management. The relationship between the two groups has a great influence on the role officers play in the process of leading change. These

findings support what the literature claims to some extent. Firstly, it supports the literature about the indirect link between board inputs (board members' skills and time) and outputs, for example Forbes and Milliken's (1999) study challenged the direct demography-performance link of board. They suggested that the specific processes that mediator between board demography and firm performance depends on factors that are specific to boards as groups. In this research, case studies on students' unions show the similar findings, where the relations between student officer and senior managers is a key mediator between board input and its contribution to successful strategic change.

Secondly, findings in this research also support the contextual influences on public and non-profit boards as suggested in the literature. For example, Cornforth (2003) summarised the various contextual influencing factors. These include some distant contextual influences (including such as government legislation and policy, regulation, social and political pressures) and the organisational context in which boards operate (for example the size of organisation and relations of boards with management). Discussion of the relations of officers and management in this chapter supports this claim.

6.54: Discussion: Agent or Steward?

The above discussion suggests that in the students' union an effective partnership between elected student officers and senior management is the key to achieve successful strategic change. However, under the previous governance structure of students' unions, the relationship was often strained, difficulties driven by factors such as frequent turnover of student officers, contrasting perceptions of the roles of student officers and, by implication, that of managers and the almost systematic tensions that seem generic to relationships between elected politicians, of whatever form, and the senior permanent officers they work closely with and rely on. As the case study analysis showed, such tensions often led to frustrations amongst the senior managers about the quality and direction of strategic leadership, concerns that were reflected

through comments made by some student officers about the challenges of the managerial aspects of their role. Frustration at what they perceived as dysfunctional managerial structures could be seen as evidence of managers having a stewardship and partnership approach consistent with Le Grand's (2003) perspective that public sector employees can often have altruistic motivations and focused on the overall effectiveness of the organization. However, such tensions could also lend itself to an agency interpretation or a confirmation of some political science findings about the operation of senior civil servants which stresses clear sectional agendas and perspectives which often combine with self-interest and have been expressed in writers of scholars such as Le Grand (2003), who argued that public servants can also operate to further their self-interest even at the expense of a wider public good.

Given the questions in regard to the effectiveness of a partnership between the officers and the senior management as implied in the previous governance structure, the NUS (2007) suggested that the elected student officers should take more control of the organisation, genuinely understand what is happening within it, and regularly satisfy themselves that the structures and processes within the organisation are sound and are being adhered to. As a result, most students' unions undertook governance reform following the registration with the Charities Law 2006, which highlights the functions of Trustee Board in controlling within the organisation (see chapter five). As a consequence of the change, titles of the most senior manager in a students' union have changed from 'General Manager' to the 'Chief Executive'. The change of title indicates a shifting understanding of the relationship between management and Board, from the partnership in the past to now a kind of controlling. Interesting questions are, therefore, worthy to ask in terms of should the management within the students' union be an agent or a steward; what the best practices are in other sectors; whether the theories in regard to the relationship between board and management in the literature are applicable to students' unions.

As discussed in Chapter two, there are argument in the private sector literature

between the agency and stewardship theory. The agency perspective stresses the importance of the board monitoring and controlling the work of managers. In contrast, stewardship theory stresses the role of the board as a partner to management, improving top management decision-making. Even though it is argued that stewardship theory is not in juxtaposition to agency perspective (Davis et al., 1997), there are increasing focuses on viewing management as the steward to the board in fields of strategic management in both academic research and managerial practice, particularly in America. However, Chapter two also discussed the different nature of nonprofit organisation compared with Private Corporation.

The application of private-sector models, such as the agent and stewardship concepts, to students' unions can be challenged through a consideration of core differences between students' unions and private companies. Firstly, there are core variations in relation to accountability and democracy, students' unions operating as membership organizations with authority based on democratic arrangements, which traditionally had strong roots in a direct variant. Secondly, the nature of performance varies; particularly in relation to the generation of profits by private companies. Therefore, in the private sector organisations, mutual interest and goals could be relatively easily aligned between shareholders and managers, which is the basic assumption of stewardship theory. However, performance within the non-profit sector is more complicated, although financial considerations are still important, for example in relation to declining commercial income. Performance models relevant to both public and non-profit organisations have a much stronger multi-faceted orientation. In particular, there is typically a strong focus on process, especially the emergence and sustainability of a democratic legitimacy. Thirdly, democratic structures also raise issues of competition amongst interest groups which, without the often unifying private sector emphasis on profits, pose strong challenges for a concept of a general good for the whole organisation. In particular, such pressures have been made explicit in relation to political perspectives and the power-base of some officers, which inclines them to push often a quite distinctive agenda that might conflict with a more

manageralist concept entrenched in a performance-driven perspective. Nevertheless, a basic template in relation to selfish or altruistic inclinations and partnership or more conflict-based cultures have a rough applications to organisations in public, private and non-profit, although significant different in characteristics and objectives will affect factors such as the magnitude of importance and specific findings. In any case, in recent decades, the emergence of NPM has arguably diminished the contrasts between the sectors.

Furthermore, the discussion regarding the relations between elected officers and management in the students' union is parallel to the practice of the UK's government. In the UK, 'politicians are dependent to a quite extraordinary degree on permanent bureaucrats, not only for policy advice and administrative support, but for staff and political assistance' (Campbell and Wilson, 1995, p19). According to the literature, this Whitehall model is highly distinctive, contrasting not only with the American practice of having numerous political appointees at the top of each agency but with the German and Swedish systems of moving bureaucrats in politically sensitive posts after the party in power changes. The literature also suggests that the Whitehall model has been increasingly challenged since the late 1970s. Although nowadays civil servants are still featured as permanence, unity, anonymity and neutrality (Weir and Beetham, 1999), the old hierarchical decision-making structure has given way to a more flexible arrangement. This is particular true in those quangos and voluntary organisations resulting from the fragmented approach to governance, where the agency perspective of the relationship between board and management has been found relevant. For example, Cornforth (2003) argued that trust law is even more in line with an agency model of governance than company law.

All in all, considering the distinct features of non-profit organisations contrasting with for-profit companies, it is unrealistic to simply adopt either steward or agency theory to the context of students' unions. In fact, the need to both control senior management and be their partner in decision-making can be a source of role conflict and tension for

board members in non-profit organisations (Cornforth, 2003). Referring to the changing practice in British executive-bureaucratic politics, both controlling and partnering are necessary for the reality of students' unions. A balance needs to be achieved between the two rather than a complete division. As Le Grand (2003) suggested, management serving the public has both self-interest and public interest, and their motivation will differ according to the policy.

6.6: Summary

This chapter considered strategic management under the previous governance structures of students' unions. Empirical findings from the case studies showed that the strategic changes that have recently taken place in students' unions have encountered many obstacles and constraints. A core problem was frequently a lack of vision from the top of the organisation. As a result, staff awareness of the need for change was poor and many of them felt uncertain about the future. These issues were, in part at least, the result of an imbalance of the skills and experience of elected student officers, who sat on the Executive Committee and were responsible for making strategic decisions. The fact of the rapid turnover of student officers, tensions between officers and managers and weaknesses in the governance structures have also diminished the capacity of students' unions to change. In addition, changes were strongly resisted by those people who had built up their own beliefs and understandings towards the organisation and who had formed their existing working patterns over time. Without proper staff involvement and consultation, personal resistance would hinder the process of change.

As a result, the processes of strategic management within students' unions were characterized as being discontinuous in nature and very inflexible to change. This was a key determinant of the prolonged financial difficulties that many students' unions have experienced recently. The core issue was an inability to respond to changing external circumstances.

Empirical findings in this research indicate that senior managers within students' unions have a great influence on the decision making during the process of strategic management. As a result, the success of strategic management depends on whether there is an effective partnership between student officers and the management. However, the effectiveness of the partnership between the officers and the senior management, as implied in the previous governance structure, is questioned. Under the previous governance structure of students' unions, the relationship was often strained, difficulties driven by factors such as frequent turnover of student officers, contrasting perceptions of the roles of student officers and, by implication, that of managers and the almost systematic tensions that seem generic to relationships between elected politicians, of whatever form, and the senior permanent officers they work closely with and rely on.

The recent governance reform within students' unions stressed a shift of the role of senior managers from being partners with student officers to being controlled by the Board of Trustees. This chapter therefore discussed the argument between whether the management should be an agent or a steward. It argued that it is impractical to apply governance theories developed in the private sector to students' unions. Referring to the literature of both public and nonprofit organisations, it is suggested that the relations between elected politician and management can be subtle. Both controlling and partnering with management are necessary for officers within students' unions. A balance needs to be achieved between the two rather than a completely division.

Chapter 7

Strategic Management, Accountability and Democracy: An Undemocratic Future?

7.1: Introduction

Chapter six examined the management of strategic change within students' unions before the recent governance reforms. The evidence suggested that relations between elected officers and management have a great influence on achieving successful strategic changes. The role of management within students' unions has changed over time. The abandonment of the term 'secretary' for 'general manager' in the 1980s reflected the managerialist trends of the era. Recently, there has been a shift from employing 'general managers' to having 'chief executives', a reflection of a more significant policy role. Chapter six then went on to argue that instead of defining managers as simply either an agent or a steward the relationship should be conceptualized through both a controlling and partnering perspective.

This chapter considers strategic management under old and new governance structures through a focus on democracy and accountability considerations. Democratic theory was discussed in chapter two and the democratic inheritance of students' unions described and evaluated throughout this thesis. Similarly, the concept of accountability was also addressed in chapter two with particular emphasis on its importance to notions of good governance.

The chapter starts with discussing the accountability and democracy issues of the previous governance structure of students' unions. This analysis helps to place recent changes into context and to compare the difference governance models. Next, the recent changes are considered and evaluated and contrasting approaches to democracy and accountability identified and considered. In the final section, the role of the board is considered within the context of conformance and performance.

7.2: Accountability and Democracy of the Previous Governance Structure

As explained earlier in Chapter five, the governance structure in students' unions

before the recent reforms applied a 'members-council-officers-staff' model. This model emphasised the vertical accountability, which had significant parallels with classic ministerial responsibility because the managers were held to account through elected officers; that had ultimate responsibility for the actions of their department, functions or, in the case of presidents, the union as a whole. To explain this accountability model in more detail, the political leadership was usually through an Executive Committee, comprised of both full-time and part-time officers, accountable to a Union Council, which had a similar policy and accountability role to a legislature or parliament. This was primarily a representative democracy; remnants of the former direct democracy were usually restricted to very occasional meetings in which any union member could attend and vote, or occasional referendums. The most senior staff member, the General Manager, was accountable to the Executive Committee for the successful management of the organisation.

This model provided a theoretical legitimacy to the actions and policies of students' unions both because theoretical responsibility was located in officers elected by the union membership and because those officers were theoretically accountable to a forum of individuals who were also elected by the wider membership. Although this model was not an exact replication of Westminster, because the election of officers and council members were separate processes, it operated on a similar principle of representative democracy – the accountability of elected politicians with executive power to another group of elected politicians without executive power. These arrangements, therefore, gave students' union governance a democratic legitimacy, although the practice was often open to the criticism that an unrepresentative minority participated, even as voters, in these processes and that, therefore, most students' unions failed to reflect adequately the opinions and values of their members (see chapter three).

However, the agenda and policies of students' unions were defensible in terms of being student driven and reflecting a clear student perspective rather than the interests

of other groups such as the university as a whole or the senior administration of the university. Furthermore, democratic structures could be defended as giving the students a sense of ownership of the institution and thus perhaps fostering social capital (see Putnam, 1993) through communitarian activity such as involvement in clubs and societies. In effect, it could be argued that rather than social capital leading to good governance, as scholars such as Putnam (1993) argued, it could be claimed that, in relation to students' unions at least, good governance encouraged social capital

This vertical model of democratic accountability has, however, been subjected to substantial criticism from scholars (see, for example, Finer, 1956; Elcock, 1998; Flinders, 2001). In addition, analysis of the specific characteristics of students' unions (see chapter six) suggested a wider range of problems with the application of representative democracy, a core difficulty being the relative weakness, in their respective settings, of students' union officers when compared to ministers. In the next section, these issues are considered in substantive detail.

7.21: Accountability of Officers and Managers

Discussion in chapter six highlighted the significant contribution of senior managers to strategic management within students' unions and parallels were made with the relationship between ministers and their senior civil servants at national level. However, despite the administrative power of managers, the traditional governance arrangements concentrated, in parallel with national government conventions, on the accountability of officers. This focus meant that weaknesses in the approach identified in relation to practice in Whitehall were transferred to students' unions governance and augmented through the specific characteristics of students' unions.

Firstly, this approach meant that there were very few effective mechanisms in place to hold the senior management to account. As the literature in chapter two indicates, this is a weakness of ministerial responsibility thus accountability has shifted towards making officials accountable. In UK's ministerial responsibility system, ministers

were the only legitimate representatives of their departments in public. It meant that only ministers could answer to Parliament for their departments' policies and performance, and that civil servants were anonymous and not heard in the days before the St John Stevas reforms in the late 1960s and late 1970s respectively made select committees parliamentary feature (Campbell and Wilson, 1995, p10) and the traditional civil service anonymity started to erode (see, for example, Regan, 1986). Similarly, the managerialist agendas of the 1980s and 1990s produced a further shift when certain functions of the core departments were 'hived-off' into agencies headed by officials, which acquired a degree of direct and public accountability for their operation (see, for example, Cole, 1998, Skelcher, 1998; Weir and Beetham, 1999). Similarly, boards and chief executives of a wide range of non-departmental public bodies, nationalized industries and a variety of other elements of quasi-government already had a significant public profile and a wider extent of responsibility and accountability'[7]. In contrast, students' union governance models contained no agencies, NDPB (Non Departmental Public Bodies) or quango equivalents, where officials had been given clear responsibility for functions.

Secondly, the students' union lacked the matrix of accountability mechanisms to hold elected politicians accountable. A core issue being the absence of a system of committee scrutiny similar to the select committee processes at Westminster, local authorities and the devolved legislatures (see, for example, Giddings, 1995). Similarly, opportunities to ask elected student officers questions were limited and the typical volume of questioning slender and almost non-existent in comparison with regular and extensive procedures at Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the National Assembly for Wales (see, for example, Franklin and Norton, 1993).

Thirdly, despite constitutional frameworks stating that other forums such as student

[7] NDPBs and quangos had wider responsibilities than executive agencies because, in theory, they had a significant policy role, whereas agencies operated within a ministerial policy framework, although in practice such distinctions were often difficult to justify (see Cole, 1998)

councils or infrequent general meetings were the sovereign body, effective political and administrative power was often concentrated in the leadership, with the union establishments seldom being defeated on core issues. As a President from one of the case study students' unions observed:

> 'The Executive Committee has to report their business to the council. But very often they [the councilors] do not even question written reports put forward by us.'

This culture suggests parallels with Westminster where the core agenda policy agenda is usually controlled by the leading ministers (see, for example, Rogers and Walters, 2006) and might suggest that in the contemporary culture in which the political polarization of previous decades has declined the risk of the union's political leadership being effectively challenged by the membership has diminished. Furthermore, it could be argued that it might be easier to crystallize opposition around a high-profile political issue rather than narrower agendas focused primarily on the management of the union. In addition, the switch from direct to representative democracy might have made it more difficult for a radical leftist opposition to mobilize.

Fourthly, although the switch from direct to representative forums arguably diminished the influence of the radical left, in students' unions the practice of representative democracy, as in relation to Westminster and almost all legislatures (see, for example McKay and Johnson, 2010) was still criticized for causing the over-representation of certain groups (see chapter two). For example, DDSU '2007 constitutional review' written by the working group on the Charities Bill argued that the 'current governance structure does not encourage participation and it excludes people who do not belong to any special groups' (p.2).

Fifthly, practice in students' unions also reflected and typically magnified experience at Westminster with regard to sanctions in relation to the 'answerable for' version of

ministerial responsibility (Finer, 1956) because resignations of students' officers as a consequence of clear failures linked to their office were rare. For example, at Southampton only one President resigned due to administrative/political failure in the 65 years from 1923 when the post was established (Southampton SU Handbook 1987-88). As an activist from the 1980s recalled, 'even the most incompetent sabbaticals should survive given inertia, precedent, inevitable problems in mobilizing against them and their short term of office'. This politico-administrative culture could be seen with regard to the case study students' unions. For example, although the CCSU suffered severe financial deficits for a couple of years prior to 2006 none of the student officers were recalled or resigned voluntarily over performance during that period. Similarly, in the case of BBSU, no officers resigned or were recalled during the period of managerial instability and the stalling of the five year strategic plan. Often students' unions had a culture in which incompetence of some sabbaticals was expected and of waiting until students elected more competent individuals. Such attitudes can be identified from some comments made by senior managers and quoted in chapter six.

Sixthly, although accountability in students' unions has not been undermined by a governance fragmentation in the same manner as political accountability at the national level (see, for example, Newman, 2001; Liddle, 2007), it could be argued that scale effects similar to those referred to in chapter two applied. The argument that contemporary ministerial departments were too large and too diverse for effective ministerial oversight (see Sutherland, 1991; Elcock, 1998) could be applied to students' unions. The argument being that the massive commercial development and organisational expansion during the 1980s and 1990s, strained the relatively limited management knowledge, skills and experience of elected officers and meant that it became difficult for those elected politicians to assert effective oversight over their managers, who often now were required to have quite specialist skills and knowledge. Furthermore, such arguments also connect with findings that generalist ministers often struggled to control the activities of permanent civil servants who, although generalist

on appointment, had the time and aptitudes to acquire a deep understanding of the subject matter. As Campbell and Wilson (1995) claimed, politicians with little technical training nor expertise often had difficulty in controlling the bureaucracy.

Seventhly, as was indicated in chapter six, the frequent turnover of students' union officers challenged their capacity to exert effective oversight over the management and thus the operation of the chain of accountability, an analysis supported through the substantial literature on term limits (see Moen et al., 2005). Eighthly, it could be argued that the youth and inexperience of student officers strains and challenges this accountability model because of the difficulty in exerting effective accountability and control over much older and experienced managers (see chapter six).

This democratic or accountability deficit often affected the administrative and managerial culture of students' unions, which could operate often in a vacuum of immunity from popular pressures and affected the attitudes of some staff towards their jobs. For example, a senior manager at a case study students' union commented that:

> 'If you just want to have the salary.....that would be very easy...You just need to be back to work at nine and leave at five...No one would care about what you have done in a day.'

This malaise could also directly affect strategic management, for example a service manager at one of the case study institutions suggested that a lack of accountability pressures on officers and senior management meant that:

> 'This organisation did not have any vision or plans for next five years' time. In terms of individuals, a number of people (probably no more than four or five of us) have their own future plans for what they are doing but many don't. That is simply because we don't need it.'

Weaknesses in this accountability model were shown more directly through the case studies in the research. Experience of the CCSU has shown when it started losing money five years ago, while the organisation faced substantial financial pressures to

act, the structure lacked the robust governance and accountability mechanisms to force the political and managerial leadership to act and ultimately the University had to intervene in a crisis situation. One of the staff members pointed out where the problems were in his opinion. He said:

> '...the previous senior managers just didn't care we are a students' union. It seems to me it was just a job to them. For those people like me who do appreciate a students' union environment are very easy to be frustrated. For example, previously, the commercial services manager wants to run a bar as a business rather than a students' union and the General Manager didn't care about it...'

The core issue was that this was not how a representative democracy was supposed to operate. In theory representative institutions should be strong enough to prevent a crisis and push the leadership to deal with such systemic and ingrained difficulties.

The experience of BBSU also showed the consequence of this flawed accountability model and how the organisation had been marooned in the middle of change. A staff member comment on that as:

> 'The previous general manger was a nice man but he did not deal with issues and the issues built up. Because he tried to maintain the chaos rather than making change, we have a large catch up to make.'

During its unstable period of management (see chapter five) there was nothing in place that was effective and able to prevent the situation from becoming worse. When the senior manager was absent, the staff was not given assurances from the top of the organisation that the situation was under control. Again, under a representative democracy with robust accountability mechanisms such organisational chaos should be, at least, identified and remedied. For example, there are diverse examples of parliamentary questions and select committee inquiries identifying such managerial and administrative problems and ministers subsequently acting (see, for example, Norton, 1993; Giddings, 1995; Rogers and Walters, 2006).

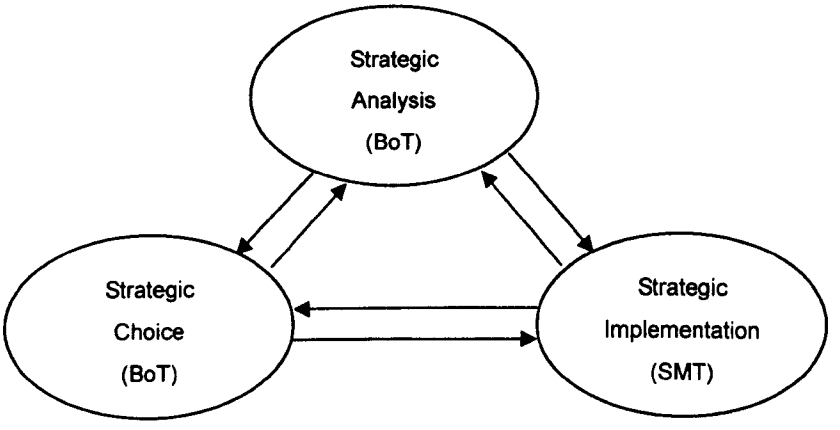
7.3: The New Governance Structure

The above section analyzed the problems of accountability and democracy of the previous governance structure within students' unions. The analysis also provided explanations of the recent changes to governance arrangements. This section considers the changes through comparisons with the process of strategic management before these changes and discusses the consequences of those changes. This discussion focuses around factors such as the well-documented and inherent weaknesses of consultation and scrutiny and the hypothesis that the implementation of this agenda in one case study students' union has diminished the already weak accountability mechanisms to such an extent that the institution has a weak claim to be termed a democratic organization.

7.31: Strategic Management in the New Governance Structure

The impact of these governance reforms for strategic management is outlined in figure 7.1 (see below), which can be compared with figure 6.1 shown in chapter six.

Figure 7.1 Strategic Management of Students' Union after Governance Reforms



The first change is a separation between 'strategic implementation' and 'strategic analysis'. In the past (see figure 6.1 in chapter six), administrative and political structures similar to that at national level involving ministers and civil servants, meant

there was not a clear distinction between these two processes. That was largely because the senior managers played a key role in supporting and advising student officers on decision-making, and the officers were involved in much of the day-to-day operations within the organisation. As a result of this structure and the aggravating factors identified above, accountability mechanisms were weak and unclear. Furthermore, as was suggested in chapter six, such managerial, administrative and accountability weaknesses affected the process of strategic management and encouraged inflexibility even in response to substantial stimulus such as the recent financial problems. What has been changed significantly, as Figure 7.1 showed, is that senior management is now only responsible for strategic implementation, and strategic analysis and choice are the job of the Board of Trustees (BoT), which in the meantime provides full support and advice to senior managers.

According to their governance documents, all the five students' unions in the case studies stressed that the Trustee Board had the responsibility for determining the union's strategy and vision. In contrast, strategy implementation was delegated to the management. For example, the Bye-Law of DDSU stated clearly that:

> 'The Trustee Board shall ensure that strategic plans are in place, and regularly reviewed, to provide long-term direction for all Union services and activities'.

Also, the Chief Executive (title has been changed from General Manager as a result of the governance reforms) at CCSU confirmed that he was 'ultimately responsible for the implementation of their [BoT] strategic plans'. The implications of this change for relations between board and management have been discussed in detail in chapter six. Discussion in this chapter will concern implications for democracy and accountability, which will be assessed in the following analysis.

The second key change is the introduction of external members into students' union governance; Trustee Boards each have several external members often serving terms a

longer than the student trustees (usually three years). The aim was to provide a mixture of experience and expertise for the Board. In theory, this model should improve strategic management and the capacity to undertake strategic change because processes were now much clearer (see figure 6.1). An inter-linkage between three stages of strategic management as suggested in Johnson et al.'s (2005) model can be achieved as the board is supposed to have the necessary managerial capability and the continuity of certain members. For example, the president of DDSU commented on the introduction of external trustees into the board as 'hugely positive' provided students remained a majority of the voting strength, He acknowledged that the external trustees provide the 'balance' as there can be 'the greater variety of view especially from people with experience', and

> 'if the external trustees agree with me on something, it makes my case to SMT [senior management team] really good'.

Similarly, the president of EESU also appreciated the external members sitting on the board as:

> 'we can draw on the expertise these individuals have in areas such as the management of finance, marketing and legal..... They have skills that they can bring to the table that we otherwise wouldn't have'.

External board members were also welcomed by those senior managers within students' unions. For example, the Chief Executive at CCSU said:

> 'The external trustees are good because of the support they can give us [senior management team], but they are also really useful in assisting the trustees to challenge themselves...The trustees have provided a level of scrutiny that the organisation has lacked for some time...The benefit of skills and experience that the Trustees offer is essential for the organisation's development and sustainability'.

Also, the Chief Executive at DDSU commented that:

> 'I thought it was a positive thing to have more external trustees as it would tend to a more long term view, bring in people with more experience, learn

from their experience'.

Despite the above positive comments about having external trustees involved in running the students' union, discussion around the issues of accountability and democracy is unavoidable in view of the democratic inheritance of students' unions. In particular, there are issues in relation to conformance and performance with regard to boards (see chapter two), which raises questions about whether students' unions now face similar issues following the introduction of Trustee Boards. As discussed in chapter two, the case of students' unions has been neglected in the literature of the non-profit sector. The following section, therefore, discusses the issues of accountability and democracy under the new governance arrangements of students' unions and the potential challenges to the democratic inheritance of students' unions. The issues are who has the executive power to run the union – student officers or the Trustee Board, are the trustees confined to compliance and regulation rather than day-to-day policy and management, and do students still have the power of ultimate decision-making through a representative body under this governance structure? Findings in this research indicate that compliance with the charities legislation has been interpreted very differently by different unions, with contrasting implications for democracy.

7.32: Students' Unions and Democracy

Chapter five has briefly summarized the findings in terms of two different kinds of governance structures within students' unions resulting from the recent strategic changes. This section discusses in detail the implications for democracy of these governance arrangements through an analysis of how the approaches of CCSU and DDSU contrast, with a particular focus on the allocation of power between trustees and the council and the extent to which power resides with the student membership.

Experience from DDSU

In some students' unions, the current governance structure has a strong democratic

element. Taking DDSU as an example, its constitution states that the student officers (eight positions) and external trustees (three positions) form the Trustee Board. External trustees were appointed through a Nominations Committee consisting of two student officers, two non-officer members of the Student Council and one external trustees, so four students to one non-student. Furthermore, nominations were subject to the approval of the Student Council. Overall, the Trustee Board had responsibility for the Union's financial and strategic management.

As a key element of DDSU's governance, the Student Council is a wholly directly-elected body, consisting of one representative for students in each academic department or school, one representative for each representative constituency and the Union officers. Furthermore, the Student Council has important roles such as representing the views of the membership, establishing union policy, considering budget proposals from the Finance Committee, overseeing the work of the student officers and making recommendations to the Trustee Board. The democratic elements are quite obvious in this governance model. The first democratic feature is that members vote to choose their representatives, who sit in the Student Council debating and setting policy. As discussed in chapter two, this kind of representative democracy has been considered as a practical approach to achieve democracy, where it is unrealistic for members to directly be involved in decision-making in a large and complex organizational system. In particular, the link with each academic school ensures a broad spread of representation across the university and gives each student an obvious focal channel through which to transmit their views and agenda into the Union's democratic process as well as making it difficult for small and politically unrepresentative groups to obtain disproportionate influence.

In addition, the Student Council has a classic scrutiny role that combines holding the officers to account with an effective role in policy-making. For example, the '2007 constitutional review' of DDSU proposed that:

> 'Council should keep its officer scrutiny role, but it should have more teeth to do it with...It should have some policy making powers...Council would also have the power to challenge officer decision...'

Direct democracy also occurs in the governance of DDSU through referendums. According to its Constitution, the referenda may determine the policy of the Union, changes to the Union's constitution and Bye-laws and the removal of officers, and may resolve disputes between the officers and Union Council. For example, the Council has the power by a two thirds majority to block decisions of the officers and send them back for reconsideration, and in the case of any dispute between the two the officers have the power to send an issue to referendum. Put simply, where agreement between the council and officers could not be reached, the decision would be referred to the membership to arbitrate.

This quite traditional model can, of course, be subjected to most of the extensive criticisms of students' union governance outlined above; nevertheless the maintenance of such democratic mechanisms does ensure structures able to provide a basic degree of responsiveness. In essence, this governance model both ensures that students wield, in theory at least, most of the executive power through their majority status on the Trustee Board and that theoretical sovereignty and, to some extent, a clear line of accountability rests with a substantial representative forum of students. Although, as has already been indicated, practice is likely to divert substantially from the pure democratic theory, DDSU was still constituted approximately as a representative democracy and with some elements of direct democracy.

Experience from CCSU

In contrast to the governance practice of DDSU, some students' unions have massively diminished democracy with negative impacts on student ownership of their union and responsiveness of the union to student views. Taking the case of CCSU as an example, according to the Constitution, CCSU is currently governed by a Board of Trustees, comprising four student trustees, four student representative officers and

four lay trustees appointed for their skills and expertise. The Trustee Board has overall responsibility for the management and administration of the Union, fulfilling this by setting the overall strategic direction and directly managing the Chief Executive.

The power balance between the Trustee Board and Council is very different to the governance model in DDSU. As the governance documents of CCSU explain, the governance model in place at CCSU is an executive (decision making) Trustee Board, advised by a Student Council, which is in turn advised by other groups. Although 30 councilors are directly elected from across the campus to make up of the Council, the actual power of these councilors is limited to an advisory role. For example, in explaining the role of student Council in CCSU, the governance document mentions that:

> 'Students wishing to participate in debating and influencing the lobbying agenda at the University can do this by standing for election to Student Council. Student Council offers a platform for members to debate issues pertinent to students and scrutinise the performance of the Union'.

Under the current governance arrangements, the capacity of students to shape the strategic direction of their union is primarily limited to the election of the four representative officers and four student trustees. Furthermore, although students have an eight to four majority on the Board of Trustees, in reality the decision-making process is influenced substantially by the views of the external trustees, who are, of course, typically much older, much more experienced and with a much more extensive set of skills than the student representatives. In essence, the concentration of powers in the Board of Trustees replicates some of the governance issues identified in relation to the former arrangements outlined earlier in this thesis. At CCSU this governance structure has, arguably, helped to shift the focus of the student officers away from managerialism and service delivery onto wider political agendas. For example, in 2011 the CCSU sabbatical elections were won by four candidates who campaigned strongly against tuition fees and those with an emphasis on student

services were defeated. Although such results could be interpreted as a product of student opposition to government policy, it could also be seen through the prism of a growing recognition that CCSU students appeared to have little effective control over the delivery of the union's services. This position can be contrasted with previous generations, for example a 1980s' student activist recalled that:

> 'although we had many intensive political debates, in my era winning sabbatical candidates always felt obliged to focus primarily on student services and that candidates running campaigns solely in opposition to government policy would have obtained derisory support'.

Compared with the roles and power of Student Council, and the opportunities for direct involvement of students in decision-making through referendums, in the case of DDSU, there was a clear democracy deficit at CCSU. The issue was that at CCSU consultation and scrutiny structures have replaced much clearer and stronger representative notions of democracy. However, as wider scholarship has shown such scrutiny mechanisms and broader forms of consultation often struggle to achieve a notable impact on the decision-making process (see, for example Snape, et al., 2002; Leach, 2006), while consultation exercises can easily be dismissed as tokenistic (see Arnstein, 1971; Cole, 2004). Furthermore, analysis of scrutiny at national and local levels has also shown that such structures are often reluctant to even address certain important issues (see, for example, Ryle, 1997). Such scholarship poses wider medium and long-term challenges for CCSU, the core issue being whether a marginal impact in the effectiveness of such mechanisms will weaken participation in the union in a manner suggested by Parry, Moyser and Day (1992) and perhaps affect wider activity in the union and thus undermine its social capital (see Putnam, 1993). Another significant factor could be the pronounced career-focus of many students and the realization that while employers might be impressed by candidates who had taken clear executive and leadership roles at university, service on scrutiny and or consultation mechanisms might be less valued. In particular, CVs laden with such scrutiny experience might invite probing about what such activity actually achieved!

7.4: The Role of the Board: Conformance or Performance?

The above section discussed the consequences of recent strategic change within students' unions, and identified a significant diminution of democracy in one case study students' union. Such trends also reflect the tensions of board roles between conformance and performance, as indicated by recent studies within the public and non-profit organisations (Cornforth, 2003). In the case of the students' union, the role of conformance means ensuring the organisation acts in the interests of its members – students. The performance role emphasises adding value to the organisation's strategy and top decision – in other words, a key aspect is the involvement in strategy- making.

The pattern of governance structure of the students' union has seen a move from earlier forms of the 'members-council-officers' model, which could be seen as focusing on conformance, to now the 'members-council-board' model, where the emphasis is more clearly on performance, although there appear to be wide variations in the extent. That is particularly the case with the attenuated CCSU model of democratic governance, where conformance appears to have a very low priority. Such arguments are not new. There is already plenty of literature discussing such tensions within the public and non-profit sector. For example, Ashburner (2003) reviewed the reforms of governance structure in the NHS, suggesting that the move to a private sector model means that boards are too involved with performance at the expense of their conformance role.

A key challenge for the boards of students' unions is to make a balance between the different demands on them. Cornforth and Edwards (1999) suggested a number of important factors that enabled some of the boards they studied to have greater involvement in strategy making without compromising their conformance role. They suggested two important factors. One is the attitudes and experience of board members, which could be shaped by board selection processes, board training and by the attitudes of managers to their boards. The other is the board processes, which

emphasises giving priority to longer-term issues.

In relation to students' unions a core issue is to ensure that there was a majority of elected student members sitting on the board, so they can represent students' interests during the process of strategic decision-making. For example, the president of EESU acknowledged that to make sure the current governance structure is kept led by students their guidance is to:

> 'keep the ratio 2:1 of students to non-students...Decisions that need to go to a vote will allow the student decision to win over the trustees'.

Although, as indicated above, such arrangements are not sufficient to ensure conformance they must surely be regarded as a basic required, yet wider findings from this research showed that students' unions such those at as Birmingham, Coventry and Kings' College had boards where the external trustees formed the majority.

Meanwhile, the key role of non-student board members should focus on giving expert guidance and providing forward vision based on the understanding of the organisation and its environment. However, as Cornforth (2003) pointed out, this professional role of board members demands a close involvement with the organisation, which may conflict with their unpaid status as required by the charities legislation. This is a dilemma for those appointed non-student board members, which needs to be dealt with.

Some students' unions have responded to democratic concerns by separating the boards from a policy-making role. For example, in the EESU, the trustee board was constituted as an entity distinct from the wider representative and policy-making process, following recommendations by the President 2007/08, which commented that:

> 'What changes is that the responsibility for the governance of the organisation is transferred to the new trustee board. Union Council will be responsible for representing students, setting policy and campaigning, but not the running of the Union's services...The trustee board would not get involved in the policy making of the Union, running campaigns or representing students, unless those things affected the future of the organisation...Union Council can still mandate officers to run certain campaigns, uphold certain policies and hold them to account for their political behavior, but they can no longer scrutinize the budget or wield other trustee duties.'

However, such a separation risks reducing board conformance, in particular it would cause dilemmas for student officers to decide whether their main role was to serve the students or to have a prime focus on broader performance issues. Boards might also tend to adopt a more managerialist agenda at the expense of a more thorough responsiveness to agendas arising from the wider union membership.

7.5: Summary

This chapter discussed the weaknesses of accountability mechanisms in the governance structure before their recent change within students' unions. Despite the value of democracy in terms of legitimacy in the previous governance structure, it was argued that the capacity of the 'members-council-officers' model to provide for democratic control and or responsiveness of the executive was limited, constrained and beset by many problems similar to those experienced at the highest levels of national government. The chapter has also, however, suggested that one response to the recent governance changes and these associated democratic deficiencies has been to substantially diminish democratic governance through the replacement of arrangements in which, at least, theoretical power resides with a representative forum of students by scrutiny and consultative structures.

To link with the previous analysis, there was also a sense that a response to the problems of strategic management, change and policy-making under the old governance structure can be to effectively diminish democracy to such an extent that

the political structures almost cease to be democratic. On another level it could be argued that one response to strategic pressures resulting from declining incomes might have been to blame democratic governance and abolish it, a reaction that has also been seen in the responses of many political systems to acute financial crises (see, for example, Wintrobe, 1998). The chapter has also considered the issue of board conformance and performance and linked these themes with the wider findings on governance.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1: Introduction

Change is the one thing that we must all face. Organisations are no exception. Nowadays, to survive in the dramatically changing environment, flexibility and a capacity for change is crucial for organisations. Such pressures are illustrated by the experience of contemporary UK students' unions, which have been subjected to a range of pressures such as the changing needs and nature of their memberships, alterations in their legislative framework and declining commercial income. As the change management literature suggested, organisations need to respond through the development of a clear strategy for action. Effective strategic management is, therefore, crucial for any organisation, including students' unions.

This research examined the management of strategic change within UK students' unions and the associated governance issues. It undertook a scholarly assessment of the roles and development of UK students' unions. Meanwhile, it evaluated the pressures for and responses to change within contemporary students' unions, explored and discussed the process of strategic management within these organisations, and also assessed the democratic impact of such changes in UK students' unions.

This study conducted primarily qualitative research. Empirical studies were undertaken to obtain first-hand data to develop important findings about strategic changes and the management of such changes in students' unions. Five students' unions were chosen for the case studies. The choice of case studies was based around a city-centre theme and contrasts in terms of factors such as old and new universities, finance and governance status issues. Methods for collecting data in this research incorporated questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis. This study also used a diverse collection of scholarly literature from both management and political science.

This chapter gives a conclusion to the thesis. An overall picture of how and why

students' unions have changed in the past few years is summarised in the first part of the chapter. Then, empirical findings are outlined with regard to the problematic process of strategic management within the students' unions under the previous governance structure. Next, the findings and discussion of chapter seven in respect of the democratic implications of recent strategic change in students' unions is addressed. In the final section, the overall contribution of this thesis to scholarship is considered.

8.2: How and why did Students' Unions Change?

Chapter three summarised how students' unions in the UK were traditionally organised, from their origins through to the commercial expansion during the 1980s and 1990s. From a group of students who joined together to organise the social life and better represent themselves in the eighteenth century, students' unions have grown into large and complex contemporary organisations. The analysis has shown a recurrence of focus on the three functions - representation, student community and services provision – and shifts in the emphasis given to various aspects of their role over time. During the late nineteenth and first two-thirds of the twentieth century, students' unions focused substantially on representing student interests and developing the student community. In this long period, the representation function mainly focused on internal student/academic issues. In the 1960s and 1970s students' unions became more politicised; reflecting a widespread spirit of revolt among young people, particularly students, which resulted in some bitter and violent confrontations across the western world. This was manifested by a series of protests against either student/academic issues, for example the lecture system or student accommodation, or external issues such as apartheid, nuclear testing and US policy in Vietnam. The 1980s and 1990s saw a move from the organisation of demonstrations to the expansion of commercial services.

Entering the twenty-first century, one of the key features of global organisational life is the continuing experience of change. Students' unions in the UK are no exception.

The analysis in chapter three identified substantial pressures for change at the start of the twentieth-first century, which have been grouped around the themes of changes to the student demographic; changes in student needs, expectations and lifestyles; and alterations to the legislative framework through which students' unions operate following the enactment of the 2006 Charities Act.

Chapter five continued to focus on outlining the overall picture of change within contemporary students' unions and discussing in detail how and why they have changed during approximately the last decade. The findings drew substantially on the case study analysis, and were enhanced through a wider range of examples, obtained primarily through the questionnaire returns. Empirical data indicated that the driving force of recent change within students' unions was a combination of many different factors. These included the external pressures as discussed in chapter three, for example the fact that students are more demanding and that there is more of a consumerist mindset among students. Students are paying a significant amount of money for an education and there is a sense of wanting value for money.

Pressures from the external environment have meanwhile triggered internal pressures. For example, the increasing market competition and changing student needs and expectations have caused the decline in commercial income within students' unions in recent years. The case studies in this research focused on city-centre based students' unions in reflection of the intensive commercial competition such contemporary students' unions often face and the significance of such competition for the organisational change process. In particular, empirical data showed that due to the aggressive competition from commercial rivals, these students' unions were struggling to maintain net incomes from trading in areas such as retail, catering, bars and night clubs. Findings from the research also suggested that the significant downturn in commercial profits was triggered through changing student experiences, demographics and life styles.

The analysis of change pressures on students' unions in chapter three and five supported scholarship about the causes of organisational change. For example, Senior (2002) suggested that organisational change and development were greatly influenced by the multi-dimensional environments within which organisations operate, where an organisation can be seen as a 'system' comprising elements of formal organisational management and operations, as well as elements of informal aspects of organisational life in multi-dimensional environments. Senior (2002) also commented that drivers for change come from three types of environments (temporal, external and internal environment), which inter-link. This was the case in relation to change within students' unions.

By presenting a picture of UK students' unions under pressure to change, this research also focused on a necessity for change, in particular a key factor was the need to change in response to their membership and also obligations to represent them and supply appropriate services. In fact, change and development has always been a feature of organisational life. As the literature suggested, its pace is believed to have been accelerating recently due to the increasingly volatile global business environment in which most organisations now operate (Marshak, 2002). According to Ansoff and McDonnell's (1990) analysis of the appropriate response to environmental turbulence, strategic effectiveness becomes much more important as the turbulence level rises.

The responses of students' unions to the pressures they faced were outlined in chapter five. Some of the changes were minor and incremental focusing on the improvement of functions and service delivery, whilst some have been discontinuous involving change to the overall strategy of the organisation, for example the organisational restructuring and reform of governance. This research focused on the study of strategic change rather than those minor and incremental organisational improvements. This empirical data, when combined with the theories outlined in chapter two, indicated the complexities of change management. This problematic process of

change management thus emerged as a core concern and was, therefore, examined next.

8.3: The Problematic Process of Strategic Management

Chapter six applied strategic management models to examine the obstacles to change within students' unions, there was a focus on discussing managerial issues in the context of previous governance structures. A highly problematic change process was shown through five case studies. Although each change situation was unique, there were common issues occurring during the process of change.

A core problem was frequently a lack of vision from the top of the organisation. As a result, staff awareness of the need for change was poor and many of them felt uncertain about the future. These issues were, in part at least, the result of an imbalance of the skills and experience of elected student officers, who sat on the Executive Committee and were responsible for making strategic decisions. The fact of rapid turnover of student officers, tensions between officers and managers and weaknesses in the governance structures have also diminished the capacity of students' unions to change. Meanwhile, changes were strongly resisted by those people who had built up their own beliefs and understandings towards the organisation and who had formed their existing working patterns over time. Without proper staff involvement and consultation, personal resistance would unavoidably hinder the process of change.

Based on the analysis of change obstacles and constraints, the key characteristics of strategic management of students' unions were summarized as being discontinuous in nature and very inflexible to change. This was a key determinant of the prolonged financial difficulties that many students' unions have experienced recently. The core issue was an inability to respond to changing external circumstances. Empirical findings in this research indicated that the relations between student officers and

senior managers have a direct, and often negative, effect on the possibility of achieving an inter-linage between the key stages of strategic management – analysis, choice and implementation - as suggested in the literature (see Johnson et al., 2005).

These findings supported scholarship to some extent. Firstly, it supported scholarly conclusions about the indirect link between board inputs (board members' skills and time) and outputs, for example Forbes and Milliken's (1999) study challenged the direct demography-performance link of boards. They suggested that the specific processes that mediator between board demography and firm performance depends on factors that are specific to boards as groups. In this research, case studies on students' unions show similar findings; where the relations between student officers and senior managers was a key mediator between board input and its contribution to successful strategic change. Secondly, findings also supported the contextual influences on public and non-profit boards as suggested in the literature. For example, Cornforth (2003) summarised the various contextual influencing factors. These included some distant contextual influences, such as government legislation and policy, regulation, social and political pressures, and the organisational context in which boards operate, for example the size of organisation and relations of boards with management.

The analysis in chapter six also questioned the effectiveness of the partnership between management and officers, as implied in the previous governance structure. Empirical data in this research showed that under the previous governance structure of students' unions the relationship was often strained, difficulties driven by factors such as frequent turnover of student officers, contrasting perceptions of the roles of student officers and, by implication, that of managers and the almost systematic tensions that seem generic to relationships between elected politicians, of whatever form, and the senior permanent officers they work closely with and rely on.

As indicated in the case studies, the recent governance reforms within students' unions stressed a shift of the role of senior managers from being partners with student

officers to being controlled by the Board of Trustees. Chapter six discussed the issue of whether the management was an agent or a steward. Overall, it was suggested that the relations between elected politicians and management can be subtle. Both controlling and partnering with management were necessary for officers within students' unions.

8.4: Democratic Implications of Recent Strategic Change

The value of democracy in terms of legitimacy should be acknowledged, which builds on a student-driven agenda and perhaps generates a sense, amongst students, of ownership/loyalty towards their union. However, the operation of democratic accountability was flawed under this the traditional governance model and there was evidence that governance and wider representative practices and procedures created an attenuated version of accountability. A core issue was the relative weakness of union officers when compared with UK ministers. For example, there were obvious challenges for elected officers, who have short terms of office and little real-world experience, in exerting democratic control over senior management.

Recently, students' unions across the country have gone through a process of governance reform, a core driver being changes to charity legislation, which has involved the introduction of external trustees and trustee boards. However, these reforms have been implemented in contrasting manners, in particular chapter seven showed how different students' unions have developed governance models with wide variations in terms of democratic accountability and democracy. For example, this research showed that at CCSU the governance system could hardly be classified as 'democratic'. Responsiveness to the membership was expressed solely through consultative and scrutiny structures with only persuasive influence rather than clear authority.

The critique of a decline of democracy also reflected tensions between board roles in

relation to conformance and performance, as indicated by recent studies within the public and non-profit organisations (Cornforth, 2003). In the case of the students' unions, the role of conformance means ensuring the organisation acts in the interests of its members – students. The performance role emphasises adding value to the organisation's strategy and major decision – in other words, a key aspect is the involvement in strategic making.

8.5: Contribution to Knowledge

As explained in chapter one, although there is an extensive academic literature about change and strategic management very few studies have considered non-profit organisations (for exceptions see Oster, 1995; Courtney, 2002). In particular, there is a virtual absence of any scholarship about students' unions, exceptions relating primarily to small parts of university histories (see, for example, Gordon, 1975; Hinde, 1996; Holt, 1977; Barker, 1996), studies of the Oxford and Cambridge Unions, which are primarily debating societies (see, for example, Graham, 2005; Parkinson, 2009) and a few evaluations of overseas student's unions (see Sharfe, 1995; Hercock, 1994). This research, therefore, makes a significant threefold contribution to the body of knowledge.

Firstly, this research outlined an overall picture of UK students' unions in terms of their role and function in higher education and their history. This study discussed how students' unions had grown and developed from a group of students who joined together to organise the social life and better represent themselves in the eighteenth century to the complex contemporary organisations. It also discussed the recurrent trends and characteristics of three main functions of students' unions: representation, community, and services. Apparently, none of this research on students' unions had been done before, as indicated in the literature.

Secondly, this research conducted an inter-disciplinary study, which drew on

scholarship from both management and political science, to develop insights about the operation of contemporary students' unions in the UK. Of crucial importance was the fact that the characteristics of students' unions meant that this analysis could and should draw on a wide range of inter-disciplinary scholarship because narrower approaches were not sufficient. The non-profit focus meant that it was unrealistic to simply adopt the corporate governance approach and change theory from the private sector to the context of students' unions. However, the pronounced democratic traditions also meant that this analysis could not just adopt templates from existing studies of the non-profit sector but had to draw heavily from political science scholarship on governance. However, the application of mainstream political science theories had to proceed with caution given certain features of students' unions such as the rapid leadership turnover, although US literature on term limits assisted here, the immaturity of elected officers and the new distinctive legislative framework. It was, therefore, decided to adopt an approach that blended a range of literature to evaluate these organisations. In summary, an inter-disciplinary approach was selected to 'generate more comprehensive understanding about complex phenomena' (Cheng et al., 2009, p.1071).

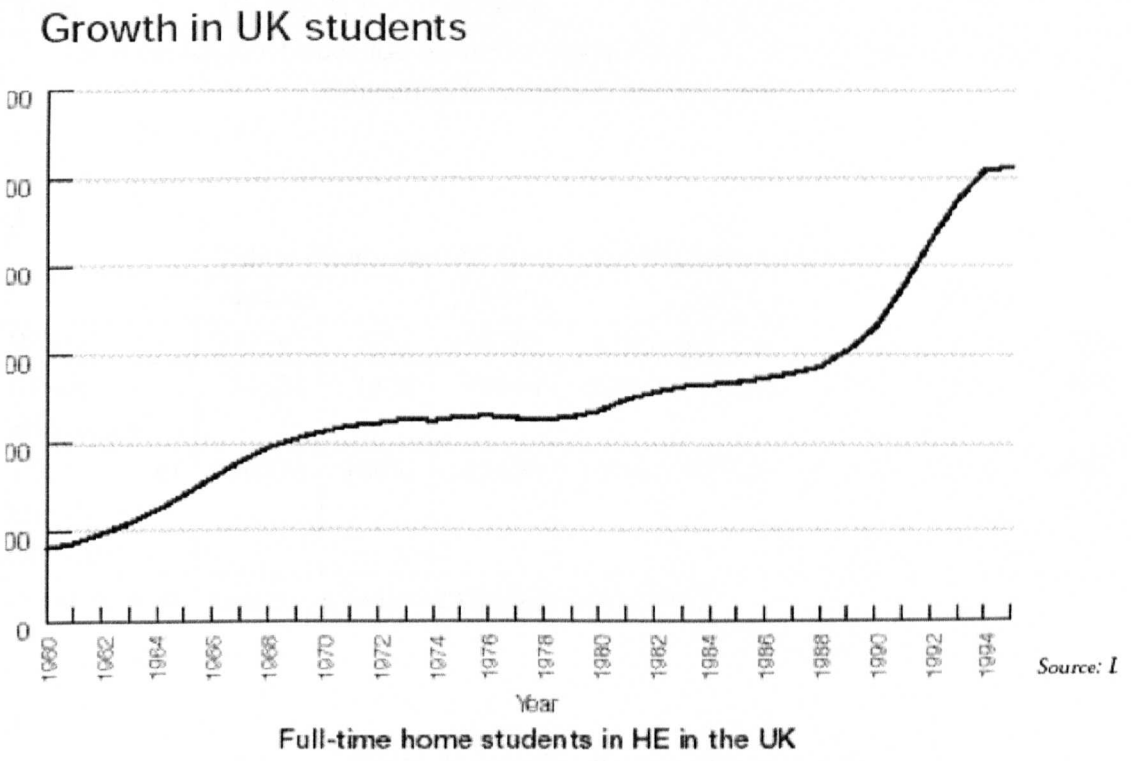
Thirdly, this research generated some specific insights in relation to the application of strategic change in organizations with a strong democratic inheritance and in which elected politicians traditionally had a significant influence on strategic management issues. The thorough examination of issues surrounding strategic change in students' unions (see chapter six) and the discussion of the democratic implications of change (see chapter seven) were, therefore, invaluable. For example, the discussion in chapter six suggested that both controlling and partnering with management were necessary for those elected officers within students' unions, and that a balance needed to be achieved between the two rather than a complete division. Similarly, discussion in chapter seven generated interesting findings about potential impacts on democracy and accountability arising from new governance arrangements that has been driven, in part at least, through the requirement for effective strategic change.

In relation, to recommendations for future research, perhaps the core issue was that of the emerging democratic deficit in some students' unions, which in one appeared to have become so large as to suggest that the democratic inheritance of the organization had been abandoned. There was also obvious scope for complementing the case studies used in this analysis with detailed comparisons located in different settings. But overall, this research has focused on a type of organisation that has previously been neglected by scholars and has, therefore, signposted the route to a diverse range of scholarly activity in that academic rarity; a largely un-researched field.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: UK Higher Education Student Demographic Changes

1.



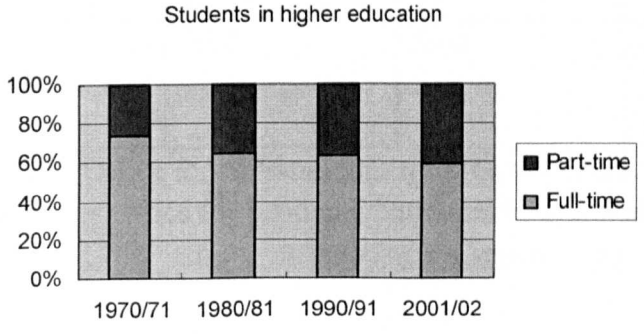
Source: I

(Source: DfES, http://www.dfes.gov.uk)

2.

Table: Students (home and overseas students) in higher education in the UK (thousands) 1970/71 – 2001/02

	1970/71		1980/81		1990/91		2001/02	
Full-time	457	74%	535	65%	748	64%	1326	59%
Part-time	164	**26%**	293	**35%**	427	**36%**	921	**41%**
Total	621	100%	828	100%	1175	100%	2247	100%



(Source: www.statistics.gov.uk)

Students (home and overseas students) in higher education in the UK (thousands)
1994/95 – 2004/05

	1994/95		2004/05	
Full-Time	1,076,630	68.7%	1,391,505	60.8%
Part-Time	490,683	**31.3%**	896,035	**39.1%**
Total	1,567,313	100%	2,287,540	100%

(Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency HESA, 2006, Students in Higher Education Institutions, various years.)

2.

Table: First Year UK Domiciled Students by Ethnicity

	1994/95		1997/98		2001/02		2004/05	
White[8]	395593	88%	464386	87%	607255	86%	651580	84%
Ethnic minorities[9]	54681	**12%**	71064	**13%**	99960	**14%**	121265	**16%**
Total of known ethnicity	450274	100%	535450	100%	707220	100%	772845	100%

(Source: www.hesa.ac.uk/holisdocs/pubinfo/stud.htm)

3.

Table: Population by Age Group

United Kingdom Percentages

Age group	2001	2002	2011	2021
Under 16	40	40	36	36
16-24	22	23	23	21
25-34	29	28	26	26
35-44	30	30	28	24
45-54	26	26	28	26
55-64	22	22	24	26
65-74	17	17	18	21
75 and over	15	15	16	18
All ages (=100%) (millions)	59.0	59.2	60.5	62.4

(Source: Office for National Statistics; Government Actuary's Department; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

[8] The ethnic category 'White' includes the entries: White, White-British, White-Irish, White-Scottish, Irish Traveller, and other White background.

[9] The ethnic category 'Ethnic Minorities' includes the entries: Black Caribbean, Black African, Black other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Asian other, and Other.

4. UK Students Taking out Student Loans statistics

	Percentage		Average amount £	
1990/91	28		390	
1998/99	68	+142.86%	1870	+379.79%
2004/05	81	+19.12%	3390	+81.28%

(Source: www.statistics.gov.uk, www. Defs.gov.uk)

Appendix B: Interview Questions

SEMI-STRUCTURE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (for staff members)

1. Can you start by introduce yourself as how long have you been working in this organisation, what is your role here, and etc.?

2. What do you think are the purpose of Students' Unions?

3. What would you describe to be the major changes within the organisation during the past few years?

4. What do you think are the driving force behind the changes you just mentioned?

5. Has the changes affected you? If so, in which ways?

6. In you opinion, are these changes positive or negative? And, why?

7. How has change effected governance/daily running of the Union?

8. How change is affecting the traditional role and purpose of the Students' Union in universities?

9. In general, are the changes well received or are they a cause for concern? And, why?

10. Are there different implications/consequences of change for staff as opposed to elected officers?

11. How are the changes being managed?

12. Are you generally happy about the ways in which changes are managed? And, why?

13. What are the implications of the changes for the future of the organisation?

14. Are there any questions that you think are important that I have not asked?

SEMI-STRUCTURE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (for student officers)

1. Can you start by introducing yourself as how long have you worked at the Union, what is your role here, and etc?

2. Can you give me a quick summary of what Student Unions are and how they operate/what their traditional role within the University is?

3. Has the Union experienced financial difficulties in the past 10 years? If so, when was that, what was it about, and what was the reason?

4. Has the Union gone through a process of organisational restructure? If so, when was the that, what was it about, and why?

5. Has the Union gone through a Governance reform process recently? If so, when was that? Were you involved the change process? Did you join the Union before, during or after the change?

6. What were the reasons for change to the governance structure? Were the financial difficulties one of the key drivers for the change of governance?

7. In your opinion, are these changes positive or negative? (why?) -- the composition of the board/executive committee and whether sovereignty (ie political power) lies with students in the form of a general meeting/large representative council.

8. What are the implications of the changes for the future of the Student Union?

9. Are there any questions that you think are important that I haven't asked?

Appendix C: Research Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How long have you been working in this Students' Union?

2. What is your role?

3. Has the Students' Union you are working with gone through a Governance reform process recently? If so, when was that?

4. Were you involved the change process?

5. Did you join the Students' Union before, during or after the change?

6. Has the Students' Union you are working with gone through a process of organisational restructure? If so, when was that and what was it about?

7. Has the Students' Union you are working with experienced financial difficulties in the past 10 years? If so, when were that and what were the difficulties?

8. Were the financial difficulties one of the key drivers for the governance reform?

9. Do you have any additional comments regarding the recent governance reform?

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