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The Experience of Three Decades

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**C. J. Boys, J. Brennan, M. Henkel, J. Kirkland,
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First published in 1988 by
Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd.
13 Brunswick Centre
London WC1N 1AF

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J. Kirkland, M. Kogan and P. J. Youll

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Higher education and the preparation for work.
(Higher Education Policy Series; 4)
1. Great Britain. Higher education
institutions vocational courses
I. Boys, C. J. (Chris J.) II. Series.
378'.013'0941

ISBN 1 85302 505 4

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn

Contents

Foreword	9
1 The Nature and Content of Our Study	11
<i>Maurice Kogan</i>	
The Policy Background	11
The Issues Tested	13
Methods of Study	15
The Institutions Studied	16
<i>Greenfields University. Technological University. Ancient University.</i>	
<i>Redbrick University. Civic Polytechnic. Seaside Polytechnic.</i>	
<i>Provincial Polytechnic. Cathedral College. Coastal College.</i>	
The Basic Units Studied	19
2 History	21
<i>Maurice Kogan</i>	
Changes Resulting From Internal Developments in the Subject	22
Changes to Make the Curriculum More Relevant	27
Responsiveness and Employability	31
Attitudes Towards Modes of Change	32
Changes Noted and Conclusions	35
3 English	39
<i>Chris Boys</i>	
Courses: Institutional Differences	40
Relevance to Employment	41
Changes in Courses	45
<i>Employers and Labour Market Signals. Changes: Types</i>	
<i>of Institution. Student Demand. Teaching Staff</i>	
Conclusions	49
4 Physics	51
<i>Penny Youll</i>	
The Context of Undergraduate Courses	51
<i>Physics as a Discipline of Study. The Physics Community.</i>	
<i>The Place of Physics in Higher Education. The Employment</i>	
<i>of Physicists. Developments in Physics</i>	
The Curriculum: Change and Development	59
<i>Course Characteristics. Curriculum Content. Preparation for Employment.</i>	
<i>Influences Affecting Course Development</i>	
Disciplinary Power and Responsiveness	68
5 Electrical Engineering	72
<i>John Kirkland</i>	
The Subject and Recent Developments	72
Characteristics of Courses	76
<i>Course Content. Sandwich Courses and Work Experience.</i>	
<i>Teaching Methods and Project Work. Sponsorship. Formal Links</i>	
Institutional Considerations	83
Academic and Employment Aims	84

Curriculum Change and Development	85	10 Themes: The Changing Role of Higher Education Institutions	160
<i>Innovation and the Finniston Report. Breadth of the Curriculum.</i>		Maurice Kogan and Penny Youll	
<i>Innovations within Departments. Obstacles to Innovation</i>	91	Changing Perceptions of the Institution's Role	160
Conclusion: The Responsiveness of Engineering Courses		The Institution and its Boundaries	162
6 Economics	93	HELs and Their Environment	163
John Brennan and Mary Henkel		Policy and Decision Making	166
The Discipline and its Recent Development	93	Internal Governance of HELs	167
The Discipline and External Influences	95	<i>The Setting of Objectives. The Role of Governing Bodies. Leadership. Faculties</i>	
The Character of the Courses and their Institutional Contexts	96	<i>and Departments</i>	
Developments	98	Factors Affecting the Role of the Institution in Change	174
<i>A New Degree. A Shift of Emphasis. Economics</i>		Conclusions	175
<i>Collaboration and Autonomy</i>		11 Responsiveness of the Subjects in Our Study: A Theoretical Perspective	177
Student Perceptions	103	Mary Henkel	
Overall Trends	104	Undergraduate Education and the Organisation of Knowledge	177
Pressures for Change and Mechanisms of Change	105	Disciplines and Fields	179
<i>The Discipline and the Institution. Developments at the Boundaries.</i>		Pure and Applied Knowledge	181
<i>The Institution as a Force for Change. Change Agents</i>		Epistemic Characteristics and Criteria	185
Responsiveness	108	<i>Paradigm Centredness. Technique and Language.</i>	
7 Business Studies	111	Epistemic Rules and Criteria	188
Chris Boys		Subject Identities	189
Introduction: Growth and Demand	111	Subjects and their Boundaries	191
Course Objectives	112	Authority, Power and Responsiveness of our Subjects	192
Course Content and Teaching Methods	113	12 Higher Education and Responsiveness: Our Main Conclusions	195
Supervised Work Experience	116	Penny Youll and John Brennan	
Course Changes	117	Curriculum Organisation and Change	195
Responsiveness and Academic Objectives	119	<i>Aims of Curriculum. Curriculum Organisation. Curriculum Content</i>	
Contrasts Between the Sectors	120	Patterns of Curriculum Change	198
Conclusions	120	<i>Negotiation of Subject Boundaries. Course-led Development. The Efficient</i>	
8 Student Perceptions	123	<i>Curriculum. Student Needs and Demands. The Place of Skills Teaching.</i>	
Chris Boys and John Kirkland		<i>Vocational Shift</i>	
The Survey	123	Power and Control Over the Curriculum	205
Student Demand	124	<i>Selection and Assessment</i>	
Student Motivation	124	The Careers Service and Responsiveness	209
Student Experiences in Higher Education	126	The Entry of External Influences	211
<i>Courses and Employment. Work Experience. Teaching Methods</i>		13 Policy Implications	214
Course Content	129	Maurice Kogan	
Value Added	130	Teaching and Responsiveness to the Labour Market	215
Career Aspirations	131	Academic Values and Responsiveness	217
Types of Job Aspired To	134	The Employers' Perspective	217
Conclusions	136	Institutional Arrangements for Responsiveness	219
9 Careers Advisory Service	146	Appendix: Methods of Data Collection	224
John Kirkland		References	229
Role of the Careers Service	146	Index	235
Internal Organisation of the Careers Service	147		
Careers Advisers and Employers	149		
Relations with Students	152		
Careers Advisers and Academics	155		
Careers Advisers and their Institutions	157		
Advisers and Responsiveness	158		

List of Tables

Table 1 - Usefulness of Work Experience to Engineering Undergraduates	79
Table 2 - How Satisfied are you with the Supervision You Received Concerning Your Workplacements from the Following:	80
Table 3 - Level of Knowledge at the Time of Applying for Degree Courses at Current Institution	138
Table 4 - 'I Thought a Degree Would Enhance Employment Prospects'	138
Table 5 - 'Which of the Following Best Describes any Job-Related Reasons for Entering Higher Education?'	139
Table 6 - Importance of Various Factors in Making Option Choices	139
Table 7 - Level of Agreement with Various Statements Regarding Undergraduate Courses and Employment	140
Table 8 - Work Experience or Placement During Courses	140
Table 9 - Level of Agreement with Statements Regarding Course Content	141
Table 10.1 - Improvement in Academic Related Qualities	143
Table 10.2 - Improvement in Skills	143
Table 10.3 - Improvement in Qualities Related to Commitment to Work	143
Table 11.1 - Career Aspirations - Importance of Extrinsic Rewards	144
Table 11.2 - Career Aspirations - People Orientation	144
Table 11.3 - Career Aspirations - Self-Expression	145
Table 12 - How Important is Working in an Academic Environment in Your Choice of Career?	145
Appendix Table 1 - Number of Individuals Interviewed in Institutions Sampled	276
Appendix Table 2 - Student Survey: Percentage Distribution/Subject/Insitution	228

Foreword

In 1984 the Department of Government at Brunel University received grants from the Leverhulme Trust Fund and from the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) enabling it to study how undergraduate teaching in higher education institutions on both sides of the binary divide respond to the labour market.

Our study took us into nine institutions which differed greatly in their history, size and location, and into nearly fifty departments in a range of disciplines.

Because we agreed to treat our material anonymously, we are precluded from naming those in the institutions who so generously gave time and thought to our study. They will know who they are, however, and we express deep gratitude to them. Almost all of our institutions were besieged by other enquiries from outside and some had been recruited for contemporaneous studies made by other researchers (referred to later in this work). They were good enough all the same to accept the additional burden created by our work.

We owe great debts of gratitude to our steering committee, particularly its successive chairmen, Sir Bruce Williams and Professor Gareth Williams, and to all of those members who were active in our support and in commenting on our work. The Leverhulme Trust Fund and the Council for National Academic Awards generously supported us in this study. The styles of the two funding bodies are wholly different inasmuch as the Leverhulme Trust Fund does not seek to maintain an active or controlling interest in the research which it funds, once its decision has been made on the basis of careful evaluation of the worthiness of the research proposal. The Council for National Academic Awards, however, is rightly conscious of its mandate to advance studies that will be useful to the development of higher education in general and public sector institutions in particular. We found the Council's interest, as represented through the steering committee which they established for a group of studies concerned with higher education and the labour market, wholly helpful and supportive. We also wish to note the considerable help given to us by Dr. Rita Austin, Registrar of the Development Services Unit at the time of the inauguration of the project, by her successor, Dr. Alan Crispin, and by Dr. Philip Jones and Dr. Alison Baker who successively acted as Secretary to the Committee. John Brennan was, for most of the period of the project, an assistant registrar at the CNAA and through the happiest of col-

laborative arrangements became a part time associate research fellow in our team.

The team was directed by Maurice Kogan, who edited this book, and convened by Chris Boys. All six, four of whom were part-time members, take collective responsibility for what appears in this book. Each, however, is mainly responsible for different areas of the study. Their individual contributions are noted in the Table of Contents.

We owe much gratitude to Professor Tony Becher for his expert advice on the text and his skilled editorial interventions. Without him, this book would have been twice as long and half as readable as it now emerges. Professor John Burnett, Dr. Oliver Fulton and Dr. Richard Pearson were expert readers who helpfully criticised parts of the text.

Finally, we are under enormous debt to Mrs. Mary Furnell who tirelessly typed successive drafts and held together the administration of the project. Mrs. Sally Harris saw it into its final stages with admirable efficiency.

Chapter 1

The Nature and Content of Our Study

This book discusses the ways in which higher education, and particularly the teaching of undergraduates, responds to the influences of the environment of which the labour market is a major element. It is based on studies made between 1984 and 1987, and field work completed in nine institutions mainly in 1985 and 1986. These were years of massive change in the government of and national policies for higher education. Part of our task was to discover how the intentions of policy makers were already being met by the institutions and how far institutions and their constituent subject groups or departments were changing in response to them.

The Policy Background

The climate within which our institutions were working can be briefly sketched. The concern about manpower needs and education is long-standing but until the early 1970s higher education was thought to be an undisputed good, capable of meeting the needs of individuals for self-development and of the economy for a supply of educated and trainable manpower. It could do so without obtrusive or imperative planning and with the planning bodies responding to the hidden hand of student demand. The 1963 Robbins Report assumed without equivocation that the proportion of each age group capable of benefiting from higher education would grow commensurately with the opportunities provided and that the economy could both succour and find employment for students who graduated in *no matter what discipline*. Until the economic recession affected the employment market almost all graduates secured employment at the level deemed appropriate to their qualifications. Yet two thirds took jobs in *no way related to their degree subjects* (Pearson, 1985). In only a few occupations such as medicine and teaching was there an attempt to fit recruitment to planned predictions of demand.

The comfortable assumption that graduates would find their way to occupations appropriate to both them and the economy seemed borne out in practice. Graduates in history, languages, or mathematics reached

leadership positions in the departments of state, large parts of industry, commerce and the City and led the explosive expansion of such occupations as the media and marketing which formed a formidable part of economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s. Employers, except in the most specialist of occupations, took it for granted that higher education both selected and trained for them the best of the school leavers. The more institutions remained true to their own academic values, the more flexible and literate the graduate work force would be. This employer view had not shifted by the early 1980s in Britain (Roizen and Jepson, 1985) and was also a view sponsored, if in a wholly different education and employment milieu, in Japan (Ushiogi, 1977).

But by the time our study was completed, these liberal policy assumptions had entirely changed. There was already a long tradition of belief that British higher education was inimical towards work in industry and commerce, (e.g., Wiener, 1981). The assumption that higher education would, by serendipity, produce the skills and the attitudes necessary for a new high technology and strong enterprise economy now received short shrift from the Ministers in successive Conservative administrations from 1979. In future, institutions were to be placed within a system in which instrumental rather than liberal educational objectives were to be paramount, and their funding, governance and administration were to reflect a radical change in objectives. These concepts, elaborated explicitly in a series of reports, mostly directed at the universities but applying *a fortiori* to all higher education institutions, (HEIs) (for example, Jarratt, 1985, Croham, 1987, and the DES consultation documents on contractual arrangements for funding, 1987) are most easily exemplified by official statements made in 1987:

'Meeting the needs of the economy is not the sole purpose of higher education, nor can higher education alone achieve what is needed. But this aim...must be vigorously pursued. The achievement of greater commercial and industrial relevance in higher education activity depends on much closer communication between academic staff and people in business at all levels. These connections can lead to more suitable teaching, to research and technology transfer... They also help to foster the positive attitudes to enterprise which are crucial for both institutions and their students.'

'The Government and its central funding agencies will do all they can to encourage and reward approaches by higher education institutions which bring them closer to the world of business.'

(White Paper 1987)

Part of this promise was made good in a subsequent announcement made by the Manpower Services Commission (now the Training Agency) of a new initiative, Enterprise in Higher Education (MSC, 1987). At the cost of £100m this was intended 'to enable higher education institutions to...

embed activities that promote enterprise into the work of the institutions...'

The objectives of the initiative were that 'every person seeking a higher education qualification should be able to develop competencies and attitudes relevant to enterprise'; and that 'these competencies should be acquired at least in part through project based work designed to be undertaken in a real economic setting and they should be jointly assessed by employers and the higher education institutions'.

If, then, the assumption of a serendipitous convergence between what HEIs offered, what students wanted and what the economy needed had given way to a belief that social and economic objectives for higher education could be forged outside the institutions themselves, it was also assumed that these could be insinuated through preferential funding, through systems of contracts rather than those of free grants and through non-academic control by funding and governing bodies.

A further pressure from outside HEIs that had as yet hardly impinged on the institutions covered by our study was the determination of government, with the acquiescence of some funding bodies (ABRC 1987), to fund institutions differentially in terms of their perceived research quality. This again entailed a modification of an earlier assumption: that high class teaching is associated with high class research.

These changes in higher education environment challenged the traditional autonomy of HEIs, individually and collectively, to set their own educational objectives and to become instead service stations for a revitalised market economy.

The Issues Tested

Against this changing policy background, our central concern was the extent to which the undergraduate curriculum responds to external influences and particularly those of employment. Does higher education prepare its graduates for work? If so, how are the influences on it expressed, and how do they make their impact? What part is played in making these changes by higher education teachers, the system as a whole, and by students? Are there 'institutional effects' (Boys and Kirkland, 1988) which account for differences in responsiveness, and are there differences among subjects in the interactions between the curriculum and the outside world? Is there a shift from the induction of undergraduates into knowledge for its own sake towards the acquisition of knowledge and skills instrumental to economic and social objectives?

To anticipate our findings, these issues reflect on changes in higher education at many different levels within the institutions. The balance of courses has changed in some institutions since the beginning of the 1980s. Some have moved from intuitive forms of development towards the set-

ting of objectives. There are certainly changes in balance between managerial and collegial control. Within basic units several areas of possible change are noted. Some explicitly set course objectives. There are changes in the curriculum deriving from internal motivation or from contact with external forces. Changes in educational objectives reflect changing emphases on different types of skills. So, too, we note the influence of student demand and changing perceptions of student needs.

At the basic unit level, there have also been changes in 'transmission', that is to say teaching methods, attitudes towards teaching and responsibility for learning. Finally, we note changes in careers services and their relationships to basic units.

The shifts in environment can be expressed in terms of the movements from the classic autonomous model towards the responsive, dependent model of the institution's relationship with the society which sustains it.

The first, classic, model is that of the self regulating HEI. It sustains its own values and ways of working, but at the same time gives maximum freedom to its basic units to act as members of the 'invisible colleges' within their own disciplines. It is not innocent of connection with the external environment but, by virtue of the unconditional grants on which it survives, is able to determine the academic criteria by which it will admit new activities. It may thus be permeable or responsive to external influences but only on its own intellectual and moral terms. Both its ability to resist outside encroachments and its inability to move decisively in favour of outside influences are enhanced by the distribution of power between the central institution and its largely free standing basic units.

The classic model is consistent with the internalist theory of knowledge (Merton, 1973), which represents the government of knowledge as being conducted through the Republic of Science (Polanyi, 1962) rather than through external sponsors or institutional management.

The second model is that of the responsive and dependent institution. Its starting point is not that of autonomous motivation but that of dependency and sponsorship through which the nature of funding, both basic and adventitious, largely determines the range of activities. In the extreme case, the objectives might be set, or largely conditioned by, external sponsors (e.g. as in the case of the former teacher training colleges or the Royal Military Academy) whilst the institution is left to determine issues of method: in teaching, research and scholarship.

Taking higher education in its historical and international perspectives, both self-regulating and dependent models are evident. In particular, the boundary between a society, the governments representing it and academic freedom has often been subject to negotiation (Neave, 1982). At present in the UK the classic model can be assumed to predominate. There is, however, a rising tide of official rhetoric and behaviour which insists that institutions receive their mandate less from the autonomy granted by their charters than from the priorities and funding patterns

determined by central government, the bodies created to allocate funds, and the consumers.

Even though no institution in the study is directly subordinate to the state, in some cases - for example, those losing teacher training - HEIs have had to establish the right to offer alternative activities and a recognisable dependency pattern has become established. In the public sector in particular, negotiations have had to take place with the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education (NAB), and in some cases the DES, about the range of courses to be offered. Similar dependencies are becoming more observable in the universities as they are required increasingly to negotiate with the University Grants Committee (UGC) about the balance between different subjects, and in recent moves, about the right of individual institutions to offer courses at different levels, or even to undertake research in some areas. These dependencies will become stronger as the NAB and UGC are replaced by funding councils.

Methods of Study

Our study is specific to a limited period of time. We depict trends in undergraduate curricula and then take their pulse at the time we were in the field, in 1985 and 1986. Many of the changes deriving from policy thrusts were only just beginning to take effect. We have, however, indicated their likely development. In focusing on undergraduate courses, we inevitably excluded much that was happening in the institutions - some of it relevant to labour market factors. But the undergraduate focus facilitated comparison between very different types of higher education institution. And, as will be seen, we found everywhere that developments in undergraduate courses could not be divorced from the research activity, consultancies and postgraduate and sub-degree work of the departments we visited.

At this stage we briefly indicate the research basis on which our descriptions and conclusions rest. The reasons for our choice of institutions studied can be found in the Appendix. Given our prime concern to explore the responsiveness of higher education to labour market demands, we analysed undergraduate courses in six subjects, namely, business studies, economics, electrical engineering, English, history and physics, in nine English HEIs. These were a Church of England college of higher education, formerly a teacher education college; a local authority maintained institute of higher education; three polytechnics of varying sizes, styles, and subject emphases; a technological university; a 'greenfields' university; a large civic university, and one of the two ancient collegiate universities. Between them they represented a reasonable mix of urban and greenfield, metropolitan, provincial and regional differences, although the characteristics emerging and deemed to be most important are more those of history, status, modes of control and size than geographi-

cal location. It was agreed with them that they would remain anonymous and that data taken from our encounters would be used mainly for generalisation across the nine HEIs, although significant examples are quoted. Approaches for permission to work in the institutions were made to institutional leaders except in the ancient university where access was first obtained through the good offices of a key role holder in one of the colleges.

The Nine Institutions Studied

The nine HEIs in which we worked varied greatly in history, status, subject range, mode of control and location. We give below brief sketches of each so that the reader can judge the extent to which they represent a reasonable selection of English institutions in the 1980s.

Greenfields University

The university received its Royal Charter in the early 1960s as part of the expansion of higher education. The intention was to create a foundation which would 'redraw the map of learning' where students would pursue contextual and inter-disciplinary studies as part of their degree programmes. The balance between arts and science areas is about 60%:40% but the aim is to achieve a 50:50 balance. The university has a high research reputation and the standards of its undergraduate admissions are well within the general university range. A feature of the university is the matrix organisation of the academic units; schools are the primary units and they offer a spectrum of contextual studies which comprise the minor component of the degree courses and a 'home' base for students; subject areas are taught across the schools, provide the major component of the degree and are formed by the subject groupings of academic staff.

The university has been marked by a strong emphasis on devolution and collegial working although recent efforts to more strongly assist the role of planning and of the controlling authority have been noticeable.

Technological University

The university traces its origins to a technical institute founded in the early part of the century. Through continuous development and diversification, it became a college of advanced technology and later a university.

The university has four schools of study, and offers a wide range of undergraduate courses. The emphasis, however, is on education and training for industry and commerce: the university was a pioneer of the sandwich course.

There is a strong tradition of devolvement of power to the departments: heads of departments relate directly to the Vice Chancellor.

Historically power was devolved to departments with departmental heads relating to the Vice Chancellor. A review and planning exercise at the time of our research, however, aimed to transfer power from departments to faculty level, streamline the committee structure and assert a greater degree of leadership from the centre.

Ancient University

Ancient University is one of the oldest in the country, and eminent internationally both in research and scholarship over virtually the whole range of subjects. Historically the colleges were pre-eminent but over the last century key elements of provision for teaching, examining, and research have become the province of the university. Colleges continue to control undergraduate admissions and play a key role in the appointment of staff. In recent years, however, departments and faculties have become more powerful.

Redbrick University

Redbrick was founded over 100 years ago as a university college and received its charter at the beginning of the century. It is a large university with over 8500 full-time students and 1300 academic staff. There are six faculties, each large enough to be a 'mini-university', and a number of associated centres and institutes for specialised studies and research.

Civic Polytechnic

The polytechnic is one of the largest and was formed from the merger of existing colleges of art and design, commerce and technology. It provides a wide range of courses. It has a high proportion of students following sub-degree and part time courses whilst a full range of subjects are offered. Social science accounts for about 36% of all students. The polytechnic encourages admission by older students and nearly 20% of full-time and sandwich course students are over 25 years. All degree courses are CNAAs validated. The polytechnic is located on several major sites in the centre of the city.

Seaside Polytechnic

The polytechnic was designated in the late 1960s but its origins go back to a local college of arts and science. It became a municipal college early in the century which in the mid-1970s merged with a college of education to become the polytechnic. All non-advanced work has now been shed and the polytechnic is regarded as near university status in the range and

quality of course offerings. The number of full time and sandwich course students is about 6500 of whom nearly 900 are on degree courses. The polytechnic assumes research to be essential to high level teaching and is seeking designation as a university. The faculty level is strong; the deans promote inter-disciplinary work and rationalisation in the face of cuts.

Provincial Polytechnic

The polytechnic was established in the early 70s by the re-designation of a college of technology and later amalgamation with a college of education. It has over 4,000 full time and sandwich students and offers a balance of about 50:50, technical:arts and social sciences courses. All degree courses are CNAA validated.

A major faculty reorganisation followed the appointment of a new Director during the period of research. The new structure reflects vocational as well as academic links and was inaugurated to enhance devolution of responsibility from the centre. A major feature is the modular degree programme which concerns about 50% of the full time student intake and is a strong, cross-departmental organisation within the polytechnic with its own dean.

Cathedral College

An amalgamation of two former teacher training colleges in 1975, the present day Cathedral College is based on two campuses. Both colleges were founded by the Church of England during the mid-nineteenth century, and the present day institution has retained voluntary aided status, whilst not restricting access to those from any particular religious denomination.

The merger came about in response to government policy, requiring colleges concerned solely with teacher training to diversify and to offer flexible courses directly related to students' 'careers in the world of personal and social action'. As a result, the college designed a four year modular BA/BSc degree, with special emphasis on 'careers orientation' - a programme which takes up one morning per week. The degree is validated by a university.

Over the last few years, the balance of courses has changed rapidly; BEd students are now in a minority. Subject balance has also changed although, given constraints on faculties, it seems inevitable that a large majority of students should still be following arts and humanities courses.

Coastal College

The college was established by the local authority in the mid-1970s from two former colleges to provide all AFE work for the region, that of a growing conurbation. It operated on two main sites with some overlap of courses

until consolidation on one main site followed DES withdrawal of BEd work. The college has over 2,000 full-time and over 3,000 part-time students. There are nine departments and degrees are offered in the areas of communication and media studies, business studies, catering and hospitality management, and financial services. There is also a combined studies degree. All courses are now CNAA validated. The college is seeking polytechnic status with the support of the local education authority.

The appointment of a new director has led to the production of a five year plan and a policy that course work, research and consultancy should reflect and link strongly with local economic, industrial and service interests. Radical changes in the portfolio of courses offered have been backed by the local authority and resourced by a comprehensive programme of staff retraining and an entrepreneurial approach.

The Basic Units Studied

As Chapter 10 will show, the nature of the whole institution and its components such as the faculty were the essential context for our study but the main focus was the basic unit. Undergraduate courses leading to a first degree were usually, but not always, created and administered from a department. We also studied the extent to which careers advisory services were changing their role under present pressures and demands for student employability.

Our study is thus based primarily on a range of undergraduate teaching courses in our six subjects and 43 departments, or their equivalents, in very different institutions, in different parts of England between 1984 and 1987. We also conducted interviews in five departments in subjects not included in our range of six.

Full details of the methods used and the samples taken can be found in the Appendix. They were of three kinds. Our main instrument of research was the individual interview, although small group meetings were held too. In all, we conducted 304 interviews with teachers, researchers, institutional leaders, careers advisers and members of governing bodies or councils. They lasted between one and two and a half hours. Detailed notes were written up for collation and analysis by all six members of our research team. We worked on a prestructured common agenda, but one applied broadly in an open fashion. We were concerned with the objectives, content, changing patterns and responsiveness to external influences of the subject areas. Similar discussions were held about careers advice.

In addition, we studied recent printed material, including course catalogues and documents concerning recent changes in institutional policy and practice. We sought comments on much of the material gained from institutions, departments and subject areas. Wherever we felt that materi-

al which we wished to use was sensitive we specifically cleared this with individuals or institutions. Most, but not all, were content to allow our anonymised account to be published.

We also conducted a survey of students' perceptions of their courses and their relevance to employment. Its main conclusions can be found in Chapter 8 but they are also exploited in other chapters.

The book divides between those chapters which report our findings from interviews and documentation in the basic units, the careers services and the institutions (Chapters 2 to 7) and from our survey of final year students (Chapter 8), and Chapters 10 to 12 which mainly treat the same material thematically. In Chapter 13 we venture on policy implications and proposals.

Chapter 2

History

Of the subject areas studied in our project, the undergraduate teaching of history was likely to prove one of the more uncertain in terms of responsiveness to the labour market. History is part of the 'high culture' of British higher education; that is, it is thought to be worthy of study for its own sake; it has always attracted able students and generated respected scholarship. Until now at least, it has been seemingly immune, together with mathematics and physics, from any need to defend itself as an area worthy of study. Yet few students eventually finish up as professional historians. Although its substantive content is not directly related to the tasks performed in industry, commerce or the public sector - except for school teaching - graduates in history and humanities subjects have always secured employment in all of these areas of work. This derives from the fact that employers want people who can demonstrate all round development, general ability to learn and to relate to colleagues and to communicate. However, within most of our nine institutions we noted wide concern among historians about student employment and in some cases a positive responsiveness to the potential futures of students.

It will be seen from this chapter that history undergraduate teaching in seven of our nine institutions has mostly developed in a way which its practitioners feel to be appropriate in the light of the accretion and broadening of knowledge derived from scholarship. The study of history has changed through the attempts over some decades now to break down barriers between its main sub-disciplinary divisions and to incorporate knowledge and perspectives from neighbouring disciplines, particularly the social sciences. Whilst history remains one of the subjects least susceptible to external manipulation, under the pressures of cuts and the concern for relevance to employability, other changes are taking place - if only at the substantial margin - in some of the modes of teaching and learning.

In structuring our data about undergraduate courses in history we noted changes at several levels. There was substantial displacement of provision in most of our nine basic units; its extent was largely related, however, to the status position of the higher education institution. Ancient University, the most prestigious of our institutions had, in fact, gained tenured posts in history in the 1980s. Redbrick University had suffered some losses but had also gained a 'new blood' post. Both Technological Univer-

sity, (which overall had scored well in the UGC 1981 and 1986 exercises) and Coastal College, however, had closed their history courses, one to disappear altogether and the other to appear somewhat remotely in components of degrees in communication studies and decision making.

Some changes in academic content and structure had originated in the 1960s whilst others, deriving from resource constraint or concerns about employability, were of more recent origin. The changes included those resulting from internal developments in the discipline; changes in the curriculum to make it more socially and employment relevant; and changes to induce 'transferable skills' which will meet employment demands.

Teachers of history in the nine institutions all recorded at least some raising of consciousness about students' employability. But there was a spectrum of reaction in the basic units to the proposition that HEIs should respond to the needs of the economy. The traditional belief that a good undergraduate training in any area of study would benefit both the student and the economy was not displaced. Historians argued that training to adjudicate between different versions of events and handling and making sense of a mass of material prepared students well for the world of work where skills training best belongs. The possibility that the inner core of historical studies, its research methods, objectives and criteria, might have been affected by the external pressures of cuts and demands for relevance for employment was not borne out by our observations. The translation into courses for undergraduates did not affect the integrity of the discipline which was, however, eclectic in its subject matter and approaches to the treatment of material.

Changes Resulting from Internal Developments in the Subject

Were changes in the teaching of history made from explicit and declared positions, such as those stated in objectives, or did they occur unsystematically in response to both internal and external movements of thought or demand? Historians are no more accustomed than other higher education teachers to analyse and declare objectives, except inasmuch as the CNAA validation process makes this mandatory for public sector institutions. One university head of department encountered resistance to a proposal that purposes should be defined and was told by colleagues: 'It is done unconsciously and does not need spelling out'. Because changes were determined internally, and on pluralistic assumptions, the historians at Ancient found it impossible to answer UGC enquiries on how they intended to develop their subject area. The departments under most pressure were compelled to think about ways of defending existing balances, but except in the case where history had been wholly converted into elements of non-disciplinary and applied courses, the arguments were about the place of history within joint or combined or modular structures, or the

extent to which there should be a reduction in the number of options offered. The strongest history groups felt that the goals of history teaching spoke for themselves. It was remarked by one historian that whilst those in other subjects engage in other kinds of academic selfconsciousness, historians have tended to focus on questions of course structure.

Much of the change in historical studies derived from the internal dynamics of the subject. Because, for example, the research leading to a tenured staff appointment was dominated by the need to get a PhD, there was a constant search for new documentary, primary materials. So the focus of study moved towards new sources, such as local history, and materials released under the rule restricting access to central government files for a period of 30 years. Individual teachers' academic interests rather than exogenous factors thus accounted for the considerable proliferation in final year specialist options through which teachers expressed their research interests.

The majority shared several traditional assumptions and characteristics. At its most sophisticated levels, history is imbued with a concept of causality and insists on training in the use of evidence, but its conceptual structure and methods are not highly elaborated. Except at Manchester University (not in our sample), professionalism in history was rejected in its formative period in the late nineteenth century in favour of a synthesis between liberal education, specialisation and civic training (Church, 1976).

The traditional structure, still present to different extents in most of our courses, offers students a combination of long periods of history (e.g. European political or British constitutional history from the Tudors onwards) and some periods or topics to be studied in depth, usually in the last year of a three year course. Modern history has always taken pride of place; with the expansion of higher education fewer students read medieval or ancient history. This is attributed in part to the dearth of students now knowing foreign languages, although at Redbrick University a language course is compulsory. In undergraduate teaching, there remain broad divisions into political, constitutional, social, economic and intellectual history.

For a long time, however, thematic treatments cutting across both chronology and traditional subdisciplinary formations (for example, the comparison of revolutions in different ages and cultures) have been pursued - sometimes, however, within the long chronological sequences. Apart from any intellectual justification, themes make extensive rather than intensive study possible for students in broad-based courses. They are particularly useful in joint or combined or modular courses, and to that extent the curriculum, might be affected by stronger external constraints.

For the most part, the study of history has no essential prerequisites, and its boundaries are more than usually capable of redefinition by its teachers and researchers. Thus, a subject area need not be studied in the

broad before it can be studied in depth as a special subject, although it often is. Only economic history, which is often taught in a separate division or by a department of economics, demands some prerequisite knowledge. More than most subjects, history teaching is inherently individualistic. As one non-historian observer put it: 'The way towards status, fulfilment and advancement is by running a special corner for yourself, and making the heart of your third year teaching the PhD you haven't finished'. In recruiting staff, departments obviously looked for coverage of the agreed curriculum offerings, but in two institutions we were told that the undergraduate curriculum, and particularly the specialist areas offered in the latter parts of the course, was in part the product of who happened to have been recruited for its teaching. In departments or subject groups created as the result of mergers, a disparate range of periodic and sub-disciplinary interests might be offered. Whilst some areas of knowledge would be expected, therefore, in any history honours course - and there was a tendency towards more structured and integrated courses - the boundaries were wide and the educational process not systematically progressive, except in expectations of the development of style and an ability to handle complex materials.

History teaching is thus quite malleable, inasmuch as it has no essential core. Undergraduates might, for example, concentrate almost exclusively on ancient or modern history, or as in the case in some public sector institutions, almost wholly on social history.

The concern with methods, based as it is on a strong concern for training in the use of evidence, affected undergraduate curriculum and teachers' attitudes towards the organisation of teaching in relation to other subjects. Thus a traditional history honours course would require students to pursue at least one area through the use of original documents, as well as through the perusal of monographs and learned journals, rather than through set books. Many of our respondents argued that students must have time to develop historical skills and understanding by reflecting deeply on issues over time and by balancing one historical experience against another. As will be noted later this issue became contested when history was subjected to modularisation or other forms of integration with other subjects. Wherever the single honours degree or an independent historical component of a course had been under threat this was usually regretted by historians.

Yet if history teaching was seen as requiring time for deep immersion in the knowledge of the past, it also engaged, if sometimes warily, in acts of colonisation in, or mutual exchange with, other disciplines. In response to long-term movements away from disciplinary exclusivity, some of them associated with the new universities in the 1960s, different forms of modular or multi-disciplinary or domain-based courses were becoming more evident in four of the five public sector institutions, and thematic treatments of historical issues were presented everywhere alongside more

traditional chronological treatments. In at least two of the public sector institutions, some of these changes in structure, towards modularity in particular, were opposed by humanities staff. Historians tended to approach other disciplines with reservations. 'The worst thing to do with historians is to shunt them off to others to make them into sociologists...they would simply get the course that they (i.e., the teachers) want to teach.' Courses, for example, on Social Theory for Historians at Seaside Polytechnic were stated in the prospectus to be 'quite distinctive in their aim and organisation as they reject the view that concepts drawn from economics, sociology, or political science can be introduced into social history in an ahistorical fashion'... 'these disciplines can supply important critical perspectives for the historian, but only if they are located in the relevant historical context'. Highly specialist work in economic history may be seen as outside the style and substantive focus of most historians.

Those changes which recognised the connections with politics, sociology and economics were internally generated in the new cohort of universities as a result of an academic debate, not external pressure. If we take social history as an example, the choice of study areas had been affected by the growing presence of social sciences, with their insistence on the examination of *a priori* propositions against which empirical materials could be ordered. Studies of population or family structures, interpretation of social history, and the history of minority groups, were examples of areas thus incorporated. Social history had been a major growth area in historical research in the past three decades. There had been major advances in many fields, notably in demographic history and the study of the family. In the 1960s social history underwent important changes through the study of class structure. More recently, by borrowing insights from sociology and social anthropology, a more sophisticated critique of class as an analytical concept had emerged. There had also been recent social history writing investigating the relationship between class and community. A new emphasis had also been placed upon 'cultural history' in the broader context of collective consciousness and perceptions of social relationships. There had been, too, developments in the use of oral history; and the adaption of quantitative techniques was thought to have brought major benefits through the analysis of census data and the like: the use of quantification helped to make social history more precise and less descriptive. Social historians also claimed to have deepened the understanding of political history. (UGC Working Party, 1987). Social history was held to have made students more valuable to employers because it provided them with evaluative techniques drawn from a range of disciplines which went beyond simple historical empiricism - a claim also made for economic history (Coleman, 1985).

The movement towards thematic treatments can thus be partly explained by movement over the disciplinary borders. Such themes as the nature of revolutions, or processes of modernisation or of industrialisa-

tion, are common to both history and sociology. Historians work, too, with specialists in area studies such as Russian politics. History has further links with political science: a study of the 1832 Reform Act might lead to appreciation of the present issues surrounding proportional representation. The history of parliamentary reform raises the contemporary question of where power lies. However, the same considerations of relevance led students at Coastal to question the teaching of 18th and 19th century history as being remote from present concerns.

As we shall see later, this kind of questioning might result, at the extreme, in the almost total rejection of the historical discipline.

Sources and techniques of historical study might, as we found, be reinforced by interdisciplinary contact. Several departments had for a long while used films in the teaching of history: the British University History Film Consortium was founded in 1969. In some institutions this approach was enhanced by collaboration with cultural or communication studies.

It is thus claimed that the subdisciplinary categories 'have ceased to be rigid compartments. Nowadays most historians are 'hyphenated' and of these the majority with aspects of social history'. Many of the historians anthologised in recent issues of *History Today*, (1985) whilst defining and advancing the case for their own subdisciplines, also emphasised interconnections. Thus political history included 'analysis of law, constitutions and administration as well as (usually at second hand) a grasp of social and economic phenomena'.

The extent to which the boundaries should be guarded is debated among some historians. Economic history, for example, challenges those historians who 'reject the concept of forces as identifiable agents creating or conditioning historical events' (Elton, quoted by Coleman, 1985). It identifies and measures forces outside the control of individuals. At the same time, however, it deals with individuals and groups in society within particular contexts. Guarding boundaries is not, however, the preserve of the historians alone. When in one institution, the economists were asked to provide economic history as part of social history teaching, they refused to meet the request. The place of economic history within history teaching is affected by the fact that 'it cannot proceed without using the divergent techniques of both the economist and the historian' (Coleman, 1985). In the view of one economic historian, the 'new' economic history, with its use of micro economics, has placed itself outside the reach of students without some formal training in economics; the subject has become 'introverted and narrow, pursuing the increasingly marginal returns of a particular kind of economic theory' (Daunton, 1985). To answer some of the key questions the economic historians have been led into areas of political, social and intellectual history.

Courses in some institutions have shifted from the single honours concentration on history to courses offered as joint or combined with other areas of study. In one of our HEIs historical studies have become part of

a modular structure which we discuss below. Elsewhere modular degrees have been strongly resisted; in one case an attempt was made to preserve a single honours course by bringing to its aid units from honours courses in politics and sociology.

Historians find it difficult to respond to structural changes which prevent students from undertaking a range of courses over a long period during which appropriate experiences and skills can be developed. Single honours courses are thus valued and recent changes in some teaching structures have been stimulated by resource constraints rather than by the imperatives of the discipline itself. One HEI called for the abandonment of the more specialist options because it was no longer possible to justify student groups of two or three.

Changes to Make the Curriculum More Relevant

There is more than one concept of 'relevance' in the study of history. Social history was seen by some as owing its present position in historical studies and teaching to the cultural revolution of the 1960s: it 'derives its vitality from its oppositional character' (Samuel, 1985). For similar reasons, in some HEIs, such courses as women's history, ethnic histories, or the nature of revolutions or third world history were favoured above, say, the British Reformation or the Reform Act of 1832. Elsewhere it was argued, however, that students understand contemporary unemployment or racism best by going back to historical examples of the same phenomena.

There was some interest in the social milieu of history teaching, and its power contexts. Thus the history workshop movement is concerned with 'deprofessionalising' the teaching and learning of history: in this view community studies and community history are seen as having a validity equal to that of the more traditional forms. This might be associated with distrust of the elite roles thought to be occupied by specialists in political and institutional history.

If, however, many of the changes described were mainly 'internalist', although in part responding to external resource pressures, others bear the impress of external pressures of employment and concerns with the economy.

Some history groups attempted to meet what they conceived to be the needs of the market in one or more of three ways. There were courses which might attract funds and students. There were courses whose content reflected concern with the economy as a historical phenomenon directly affecting students' own lives. There were courses embodying employment-related skills.

On the first, history could not attract contracts for 'useful' research or lucrative short courses. But in two of the institutions there were courses

in tourism (a new favourite in the public sector), when historians offered - but in one case their offer was not accepted - modules or courses on the historical aspects of a particular geographical area. Short courses for summer visitors were also being proposed in some institutions where a market for them was expected.

Among courses reflecting concern with the economy, at such centres as the LSE and Glasgow University, business history has been a strong research interest for some years and has become an integral part of economic history teaching. In three of our four universities there were examples within the history courses of a recent interest in market forces. An economic history degree, started in 1981, particularly explored the entrepreneurial spirit; it was said to be taught with reference to 'reasonably free enterprise models'. It was concerned with the theory of economic growth and the problem of the 'British disease'. The university concerned restored a teaching post to help develop the course on the grounds that the subject was 'relevant'. The analysis of Britain's failure to recruit the elite to industry and commerce was a popular final year course in Ancient, and was said to meet students' needs for analysis of where they stood in the world of employment. These might be seen as ways of directing historical teaching towards Britain's economic problems. Some thought, however, that they might have the opposite effect, by discouraging students from being entrepreneurial.

There was, thirdly, the question of the employment skills imparted by the study of history. Several perspectives coexisted. Some historians, from the whole range of our institutions, wholly rejected the inculcation of skills for employment; this was an objective in conflict with that of personal development. Other witnesses asserted the cultural value of the study of history as a self-sufficient objective, arguing that it was possible and desirable to learn communication and other work-related skills on the job. Employers were thought by our interlocutors to share the historian's belief in the development of personal and unique characteristics - a point reinforced by recent research (Roizen and Jepson, 1983). This may have been consistent with the views expressed at Technological where it was thought that students should not spend more than half of their time on course work but should take advantage of the general benefits of life at university. This belief might, however, have to be defended against criticism from students in subjects such as engineering, whose time was fully committed to course work.

A dominant strain of argument was that the skills learned were 'saleable' because transferable; only one respondent strongly dissented and thought students should not be recruited on that assumption. Students learned to deal critically with a great mass of material, to assimilate and reorder it and to arrive at judgements. A further employment justification was that 'students are taught to avoid the 'moral-causal' approach to problems and to concern themselves with thinking about the nature of human

processes in a logical way and concentrating on real problems'. They learn to express complicated issues with logic, clarity and style and with a respect for the evidence. These are abilities needed in administration and marketing, for example.

For economic history it is claimed (Barker, 1985) that it requires particular skills drawn from economics as well as traditional history skills. 'The training is such that its graduates do not go at a disadvantage in a job market'. This viewpoint chimes in with that of some teachers to the effect that specifically disciplinary skills can be taught coincidentally with those concerned with career development.

Students shared the views of their teachers on the qualities enhanced by the study of history. When asked by admissions tutors at one university why they wanted to study history, students said it was because they loved the subject. Over 92% of the history students in our survey declared that they took history because they 'wanted to become better educated generally' and 62% said they felt this 'very much'. Hardly any mentioned employment when seen on admission, although 33% of the third year history students in our survey had experienced full time employment before entering their course. 'But there is this belief handed down from parents to children, predominantly middle class parents, that getting a degree puts you in the way of getting the job that you want.' 'Skills are gained which make students employable.' 'History excludes you from nothing except for the scientific professions.'

67% of the third year history students answering our questionnaire believed that their experiences of higher education, either inside or outside the degree course, resulted in quite an improvement or a great improvement in their objectivity. A further 22% thought there was a marginal improvement. 69.4% thought there was a great improvement or quite an improvement in their original thinking. 63% thought there was a great or quite an improvement in their communication skills and 71.5% thought there was quite or great improvement in their written communication. The vast majority thought there was quite or a great improvement in their critical thinking. By contrast, only 2.5% thought there was an improvement in their numeracy. Students' perceptions of the value gained, and these were judgements made towards the end of their course, were thus consistent with their teachers' impressions.

Producing seminar documents, taking the chair at a seminar, learning how to project oneself orally, were thought by some teachers to induce transferable skills. In one department, three students worked together to make public presentations to students in a lecture. One teacher used simulation exercises for exploration of historical problems, as these were thought to anticipate the kinds of techniques usable in employment. A group might work together for some weeks deciding how to present their work.

The dissertation was thought particularly important for producing employable skills. Students could be taken to the frontiers of knowledge in three years; the dissertation enabled them to develop research skills. They must work on their own, perhaps for as long as six weeks. They must seek out and process information. Dissertations are often referred to in references.

There was some opposition to the teaching of oral and group working skills as part of history courses. 'Allow the stream of consciousness to talk' was one view. 'Many able students, who are getting their thinking together, would be inhibited in their development if forced into public expression.' It would be counter-productive, and productive of neuroses, to worry about the development of personality and presentation. Students were helped best by having rigorous task masters, hard on deadlines, a 'go away and do it' approach; treating an essay as a work of scholarship and marking it accordingly gave a psychological benefit. Some public performance aspects were, however, built into student assessment in some HEIs and this was a source of dissensus.

Computers were increasingly used in historical studies both to enhance the learning of the subject and to add to students' employability. Quantitative methods were also becoming parts of some courses. Whilst in some cases they were 'bolted on' and not integral to the study of history, in others there were computer programmes which enabled students to use information technology in studying and analysing historical issues.

In one course, these transferable skills were seen as separable from study skills which students might be taught in the first year, (although the distinction between them would be seen by some as analytical rather than operational, on the argument that to learn history well is to gain skills transferable to employment). The study skills intrinsic to good historical work included the setting out and listing of sources in bibliographies, taking notes, and the effective use of English. In one polytechnic study skills were allowed one hour a week within each option in the first year.

The issue of skill transferability was dealt with in different ways. We have noted earlier how students might be encouraged to work in groups, to develop their oral and presentational skills through seminars. The promotion of such initiatives was seen as part of the teaching role. Within some history groups, employment profiles were being studied to identify the skills students might want in employment. 'I hear what the careers people tell us and read in *The Times* what employers say they want. I read that they want people who are not just good on paper, but are able to summarise and present arguments.' Students in one university department were encouraged to think about careers from the beginning. In some departments policies for student preparation were worked out by personal tutors in collaboration with the careers service, taking the form of advice and seminars on employment. In others the careers service and counselling were seen as nothing to do with the history teachers or tutors.

Responsiveness and Employability

As we have seen, the acquisition of specific skills for employment was not usually seen by teachers as one of the outcomes of reading for a history degree. But there was seen to be convergence between what students sought in the history course and what employers sought in history graduates. As one Admissions Tutor put it: 'At the level of self-interest if we were to get good students it was necessary to worry about employability'. History departments in many HEIs were beginning to show concern over recruitment. There was already a substantial fall in the numbers taking history O levels, and this was beginning to affect A levels.

The impacts of the labour market on historical studies were perceived variably. The more prestigious institutions were confident of their graduates' employability. The less prestigious were more concerned about students' difficulties in finding employment, or finding employment at the right level in traditional outlets for historians such as the Civil Service. History teachers were therefore more willing than before to consider the importance of helping students gain both presentational and technical skills. These concerns were mainly expressed in the institutions where students could expect no automatic entry to a job which interested them, but they were also present in one of the strongest of our institutions.

For the most part, as the status of the institution or the assumed market value of the degree declined, so the perceived need for demonstrable specific skills increased. At one college the history courses, together with other single disciplinary offerings, became merged in degrees directed towards the employment market through such themes as communication and decision making studies. At Cathedral College, whilst history teaching was sustained on traditional lines, all students devoted part of the week to work-related courses. At Seaside Polytechnic there was a particular concern with the identification of transferable skills. In only one of the non-university institutions did there appear to be an absence of such concerns. At Redbrick there was some emphasis on oral presentation and an ability to work in groups - but there, as in courses offered in other prestigious institutions, the pressure seemed less obvious.

In the 1950s the more able students looked for careers in academic work and the civil service. This later gave way to the media and advertising. Now the most able historians were as likely to seek employment in financial institutions. Their acceptance was related, however, to high ability demonstrated in traditional history courses rather than in the development of particular skills. History graduates were successful in adapting to a rapidly changing labour market. In the 1970s many of them entered teaching and the public sector, but they were also successful in the private sector: commerce, general management, personnel, and accountancy and marketing. Both they and their employers felt that the history degree prepared them well for such employment.