

**An investigation of the University Heads of the Valleys Institute
(UHOVI) 2009-2016, as a strategic partnership to deliver Welsh
Government policy**

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate a higher education-led strategic partnership introduced to deliver Welsh Government (WG) policy. Its focus is on the responses to research questions provided by a variety of staff working for and with the University of the Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) between 2009 and 2016. UHOVI was tasked with delivering level 4+ qualifications and skills to support the physical, economic and social aspects of regeneration in the Heads of the Valleys, South East Wales. The initial UHOVI partners were the University of Glamorgan (UoG), the University of Wales, Newport (UWN) and four further education colleges from the heads of the valleys region. Following the merger of UoG and UWN in 2013, the University of South Wales (USW) was formed and became the lead higher education (HE) institution in the strategic partnership.

The contextual background to the study includes exploring the history of UK and Welsh education policy. This provides examples of legislation and national reviews that recommended the use of partnerships to meet government policy directives.

Qualitative data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with identified UHOVI senior leaders, curriculum managers and administrators. This data is used to explore a broad understanding of the UHOVI partnership as a strategy to deliver Welsh Government policies. To help place this qualitative data into a theoretical context, use is made of Huxham and Vangen's (2000a) conceptual framework for examining collaborative advantage (where a result is achieved by a partnership that an individual organisation could not achieve on its own) and collaborative inertia (where strategic partnerships do not progress). Combining the qualitative data collected for this thesis and Huxham and Vangen's conceptual framework shows a picture emerging in which there appears to be uncertainty among a proportion of the participants about the purpose and core aim of UHOVI. In addition, what also emerges is an apparent lack of shared understanding of partnerships as the preferred strategy to deliver Welsh Government policy.

Conclusions from this study will indicate that the critical success factors required to achieve collaborative advantage are present in the early phase of UHOVI (2009-2013), but largely absent from its latter phase (2013-2016). These factors are both internal to the partnership and external in terms of wider societal and economic influences. Continued research of partnerships as a preferred strategy to deliver national policies is needed to further understand how collaborative advantage can be more easily achieved and how collaborative inertia avoided.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction

The University Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) was officially launched in November, 2010 at the Llanhilleth Institute, by the Welsh Government Minister for Education, Leighton Andrews. He announced that UHOVI was a ‘ground breaking higher education initiative for the Heads of the Valleys (HOV) region’ situated in South East Wales, UK. He informed the audience that UHOVI was a key part of the Welsh Government’s (WG) strategy to improve skills and opportunities in the region (Evans, 2010). UHOVI was founded on an innovative partnership, backed by £10 million of Welsh Assembly funding over four years. The partnership was between the University of Glamorgan (UoG), the University of Wales, Newport (UWN), local further education colleges and regional unitary authorities (Evans, 2010).

At the same event, the Director of UHOVI and Pro Vice Chancellor of the University of Glamorgan (UoG) Helen Marshall, indicated to the audience that ‘the aim is to embed UHOVI as a credible force for employers, learners and communities and it is not a short term initiative...in ten years’ time we want to be outstripping other parts of Wales in terms of participation in higher education’ (Evans, 2010). This bold statement was reinforced by partnership colleague, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Wales, Newport (UWN) who stated ‘We are in this for the long haul. We want to make a difference in the valley’ (Evans, 2010).

The core aim of this study is to investigate UHOVI as a strategic partnership to deliver Welsh Government policy which aimed to up-skill and regenerate the Heads of the Valleys (HOV) region in South East Wales. This involves an examination of the key challenges a strategic partnership faces in its bid to deliver its specified, core objectives. In the UHOVI example the challenges were identified as a need to increase:

1. the participation of learners studying higher education (HE) in further education (FE);
2. the number of HE in FE courses and qualifications;
3. the types of HE in FE courses and qualifications offered.

*The University of Glamorgan (UoG) and the University of Wales, Newport (UWN) are referred to as the two university partners of UHOVI up to 2013. In 2013 they merged to form the University of South Wales (USW).

Helen Marshall had indicated that the intention of UHOVI was to contribute to transforming lives and in doing so helping to regenerate the region by creating a highly skilled work force for the 21st century (Evans, 2010). It was apparent that single providers acting independently, could not achieve the challenges identified. UHOVI was introduced as a strategic partnership that could maximise the skills of regional HE and FE institutions. This would also indicate to the WG that their strongly-held views on collaborations between local FE, HE and work-based providers had been adhered to. The thesis does not intend to provide a comprehensive account or evaluation of the performance of UHOVI. Its primary focus is on the relationships between the partner organisations and the way in which the staff involved went about their work.

This introductory chapter begins by setting the context for this study, briefly outlining the economic and social context for the introduction of UHOVI, and the commitment of the WG to provide the funding that enabled the partnership to design and develop Curriculum Qualifications Framework Wales (CQFW) level 4+ courses and qualifications. It goes on to explain what UHOVI was, which institutions it involved, and what it did, this is important to better understand the context in which UHOVI as a higher education led partnership operated. This is then followed by a section which highlights the reasons for my interest in this topic and introduces the study's research objectives. The chapter concludes with a section that provides an overview of the study with summaries of the contents of each chapter.

1.2 The economic and social context for the introduction of UHOVI

The UHOVI model embraced both the individual and regional dimension to connect effectively the physical, economic and social aspects of the communities of South East Wales to underpin and support the regeneration of the region. This innovative contribution to the resolution of some of the issues and challenges faced within the region was to be delivered through educational engagement which goes beyond traditional widening access approaches, in order to engage directly with specific population groups and achieve outcomes which support their personal skills development as well as improving qualification attainment (Saunders et al, 2013). In supporting the rationale for UHOVI, marketing literature focused on the strengths of the past in order to support progression to the future.

A retrospective view of the comments by the Rt. Hon. John Morris MP, Secretary of State for Wales in his foreword to *'The Valleys Call'*, (1974) is interesting. His comments significantly predate UHOVI but demonstrate its importance over 30 years later

For over 200 years, the valleys have played a unique role in the life of Wales. Their

contribution to our economic development, our social attitudes and our religious, cultural and sporting heritage is immeasurable ... the problems of the valleys are therefore the problems of all of us in the Principality (Ballard, 1974).

A more up to date rationale has been provided by Steve Fothergill, *Futures for the Heads of the Valleys* (2008), Institute of Welsh Affairs, who argued that:

The Heads of Valleys have the most intractable development problems of any older industrial area in the whole of Britain... They not only lag furthest behind the rest of the UK in terms of prosperity, but also show the least signs of catching up (Fothergill, 2008, p 3).

Further to Fothergill's (2008) analysis, Bates (2009) indicates that university was not an aspiration for young people who were white, male and from lower socio economic backgrounds. It was also apparent that these young people had attended under performing schools and had not enjoyed their experience. Information from the *Turning Heads* (2006) report indicates that £140 million of special funding was committed over the lifetime of the programme to help 'transform the opportunities and prospects for young people, local residents and businesses in the HOV region' (WG, 2006). The Report portrays the HOV as an 'area of social and economic deprivation with a declining population and a lack of quality employment opportunities. It also points out that Heads of the Valleys' residents who are in work are less likely to be in skilled or professional jobs (only 50% compared with 62% for Wales as a whole) and many of the more skilled jobs within the area are likely to be filled by individuals who live outside of the Heads of the Valleys' (WG, 2006, p 11).

1.3 The Heads of the Valleys Region and the case for UHOVI

The borough of Merthyr Tydfil is typical of the HOV communities in a post-industrial era and is featured heavily in the *Turning Heads* (2006) report. The following statistics clearly indicate the social, economic and cultural challenges that people in the HOV region faced, along with the scale of the challenge facing the UHOVI partnership.

- 56% of the working age population were in gainful employment, compared with the overall Welsh average of 70%.
- 32% of people of working age were in full time employment.
- In Merthyr, 33% of people of working age had no formal qualifications.
- Whilst 46% of people of working age in Wales had not engaged in any form of training or learning in the 12-month period prior to 1998, that figure rose to 69% for Merthyr.

- 15.4% of people over 16 were participating in any form of learning in the area (2001).
- Average earnings for residents in Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent were 20% below those in the rest of SE Wales.

The WG *Turning Heads* report (2006) suggests that ‘it is difficult to predict what the Heads of the Valleys might look like in 2020 ... because of the complex array of global, national and local factors that are likely to influence change in the area’ (WG, 2006, p14). The document also suggests that ‘at least £500m less public and private funding would be invested in the area’ (2006, p 14) if there had not been the report. Also ‘less emphasis would be placed on joined up strategic development, with a reduced focus on obtaining best value from the estimated £1bn annual public expenditure in the Heads of the Valleys area’(2006, p 14).

In addition to this stark data, it is also worth noting that many residents within Merthyr Tydfil commuted to low skilled and low paid jobs elsewhere. Those who lived and worked in Merthyr Tydfil on average earned 35% less than those who worked within the area but lived outside. The WG report (2005) acknowledged that ‘this environment impacts on educational aspirations and attainment’ (2005, p8). The WG produced evidence a year later which indicated that:

In 2006, 25% of the population had no qualifications (compared with 17% for Wales as a whole) and there were 50% less graduates living in the area as in the rest of SE Wales. Only 41% of 16 year olds were achieving 5 GCSEs at A*- C grades, 11% less than the Welsh average. Participation in education post 16 (including HE) was lower than anywhere else in Wales.

This statistical evidence provided the WG with the information it required to challenge educators. The WG needed explanations for the reasons why so many of the HOV population did not engage with further and higher education and they requested solutions in the form of educational strategies that had not been tried in such deprived communities. Mainstream education served the needs of a minority of learners, but the challenge of alienated communities required a collective vision and response from educational partners, appropriately informed by the HE sector. The challenges within the Heads of the Valleys revealed that inaction was not an option (WG, 2006b, p 14).

It was in this challenging economic and social context that UHOVI was established in 2009 to react positively to the UK-wide *Leitch 'Prosperity for all in the Global Economy: World Class Skills'* (2006) and *Skills that Work for Wales* (WG, 2008a) reports. Both policy documents pointed out that the UK generally and Wales specifically fell behind international competition

with the skills gap (financial and professional services, advanced materials and manufacturing, construction and ICT) being exaggerated for the valleys regions. The creation of an overarching and all-sector Heads of the Valleys Education Programme, (HOVEP), showed a commitment to bringing about a major transformation of the social and economic fortunes of the valleys area. By using expertise from HE and leading industry employers, HOVEP provided a genuine opportunity to develop a leading-edge curriculum portfolio for all education providers which included health and social care, business, management and financial services. HOVEP also had a remit for delivering higher education provision which it channelled through the newly-formed UHOVI. In order for the economic and social transformation of the Heads of the Valleys to be realised, the UHOVI partnership was tasked with engaging all ages of learners, with a remit to ensure that younger learners remained in post-16 education and training and that older learners (employed or unemployed) were able to access a range of awards and learning experiences that were relevant and appropriate to their individual, family, community and workplace interests (Marshall, cited in Evans, 2010).

1.4 UHOVI's aim and objectives

The Universities' Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) is a strategic partnership between the Universities of Glamorgan and University of Wales, Newport. Working closely with further education colleges and training providers, local communities and businesses operating in the Heads of the Valleys, UHOVI will develop industry-specific skills tailored to the needs of the region to support economic and social regeneration (Saunders et al, 2013, p76).

The social and economic conditions already described had an influence on the strategic decisions made by the UHOVI planning team who decided that UHOVI's core aim would be

To effectively connect the physical, economic and social aspects of regeneration in the Heads of the Valleys to underpin and support the transformation of the region, by commissioning a coherent programme of informed curriculum within a single planning framework, on a more visible and enduring basis (UHOVI, 2010).

UHOVI aimed to expand higher education in the heads of the valleys through new engagement by providers with individuals, employers and communities. It had the task of designing and implementing foundation degree or equivalent qualifications, work-based learning for paid

employees, and bite-sized accredited adult education programmes within community centres. Higher education provision was to be distributed in numerous locations – including businesses, social enterprises, and further education colleges. When devising the overall business plan there was also a more distinctive UHOVI vision for a substantial physical presence through new-build plans for a lifelong learning campus in each of the two towns of Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale (ibid).

UHOVI involved key stakeholders within an over-arching governance process for the commissioning of provision by colleges, universities and work based learning providers in the heads of the valleys. It is however emphasised that UHOVI goes beyond any simple brokerage function. It posited a longer-term vision for the region through developing local ambition as well as attracting local people and organisations into the heads of the valleys as a desirable place to work and live. The intention is that at long last the net outflow of skills and enterprise from the sub-region will finally be reversed. The following six core objectives were defined for the UHOVI programme:

- To improve level 4 and above qualifications and skills to meet Leitch targets in the heads of the valleys region
- To contribute to the regeneration of the region
- To provide an escalator approach to skills acquisition through the use of further education colleges
- To provide a work-related/based learning network for students to develop industry-specific skills
- To raise awareness and participation to bring participants to the ‘door’ of UHOVI
- To relocate appropriate research units to the region.

(Saunders et al, 2013, p85)

Within the preparatory stage of UHOVI, three research and consultancy exercises gathered crucial information from a variety of heads of the valley stakeholders in order to guide higher education curriculum planning and delivery. First, a learning innovation expert group drawn from UHOVI partner organisations identified good pedagogic practice associated with outreach and widening access methods and activities (Jones, 2010). This project highlighted the importance of learning support through mentoring and coaching (Saunders, 2008), informal learning, all-age advice and guidance, family and intergenerational learning, and developing learner voices for advocacy.

Second, a labour market intelligence consultancy project (Gaunt, 2011) profiled employers and workforces in the heads of the valleys through reviewing previous studies (including David and Blewitt's 2004 research for the Institute of Welsh Affairs). The study also recognised the growing redundancy agenda within public and private sector organisations, based on the 2008–2010 recession. A general need was identified for the provision of clear case studies and strategies that would change heads of the valleys employers' attitudes and assumptions about the need for only developing intermediate skills in workforces (Saunders et al, 2013, p84).

Third, Adamson et al (2010) completed interview and focus group analysis with representatives from organisations associated with incapacity claimants, support and employment agencies, employers and healthcare professionals – as well as a small number of incapacity benefit recipients. This research concluded that tailored interventions deploying mentoring in particular are more likely to succeed, targeting seven sets of individual circumstances: mental health (including depression), physical incapacity, family (including caring responsibilities), alcohol and substance misuse, basic skills, job-readiness, and lack of transport (Saunders et al, 2013, p84).

The Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute therefore emerged as a constructive and ambitious response to these baseline profiles through proposing a new skills and employability agenda shared by a variety of education providers. Significant features marked out a new level of regional higher education engagement through proposing a plan for making a measurable difference to identified sectors of the society and economy of the region (Saunders et al, 2013, p.80). It offered access to higher education expertise, including centres of research and teaching excellence, in a way that would be coherent and targeted. The proposed Institute was to build on a powerful educational legacy within South Wales, established by numerous workers cooperatives, trade unions, and heavy industry managers (see Beddoe, 2000; Burge, 2000; Coombes, 1944; Davies, 1999, 2003; Evans 1993; Lewis, 1993). And there was to be progression for learners through collaborative provision involving universities, local authorities, further education colleges, private training providers and community/voluntary organisations (Saunders et al, 2013, p80).

In order to achieve the six UHOVI objectives and apply the research recommendations, UHOVI began the task of embedding higher education in the heads of the valleys through a partnership model which included the following projects, institutions and networks:

- The universities of Glamorgan and Newport

- The further education colleges of Coleg Gwent, Merthyr, Morgannwg, and Ystrad Mynach
- The local authorities of RCT, Merthyr, Caerphilly, Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent – and their associated Learning Networks
- Projects sponsored by the Welsh Government’s Communities First Programme
- Voluntary sector networks within the local authorities
- The Reaching Wider First Campus consortium of universities for South East Wales
- Information advice and guidance specialists including Careers Wales
- Work-based learning providers.

1.5 Rationale for the Study

I have worked in the Welsh education sector since graduating in 2001. Over the past nineteen years there have been significant legislative and policy changes that have had a significant impact on the way in which education is structured and consequently delivered to learners. I will show how these changes were initially driven by the New Labour Government’s vision (1997) to create a UK-wide higher education system that addressed the imbalances of social inequality by developing policies that promoted social justice (Beckmann and Cooper, 2004; Mulderrig, 2003). A fundamental strategy for achieving New Labour’s vision was to organise education providers into larger partnership structures. Skills policies, broadly defined, were an essential component of both economic and social strategies (Keep and Mayhew, 2010). However, what New Labour’s policy drive did not anticipate was that the years 2000 to 2008 may well have been the high point for post-compulsory funding (Keep, 2008). To sustain new initiatives would have meant a reallocation of existing funding rather than an allocation of new funding (Lupton and Obolenskaya, 2013). As a consequence, Burchill (2001) indicates that responsibility for the implementation of government policy rests with the partnership and failure to achieve government targets lies with the specific organisation, rather than with the government itself. This latter interpretation places responsibility on the local providers to deliver on the objectives of the partnership and removes culpability from central government (ibid). It will be argued in this study that the role of a strategic partnership such as UHOVI would have been to deliver on both of these dual objectives of wider social justice and economic purpose.

This position, which sees partnerships responsible for the implementation of government policy, is central to an understanding of whether or not UHOVI was effective. One of the

components of this thesis is the use of research conducted as a series of semi-structured interviews with twelve staff who all worked for UHOVI or partner FE colleges. This qualitative research provides original observations of the strategic partnership from the point of view of staff who were part of the UHOVI journey. Secondly, the thesis utilises the empirical research findings of Chris Huxham and Siv Vangen who jointly conducted numerous studies into governing, leading and managing collaborations. These were published between 1996 and 2017. Their research provides a theoretical framework against which the UHOVI can be assessed as a strategic partnership. Vangen explains that

Throughout the world, public organisations collaborate across organisational, professional, sectoral, and sometimes national boundaries to deal more effectively with complex, multifaceted issues and problems that are beyond individual organisations' capabilities to tackle effectively on their own (Vangen, 2017, p 264).

Their research suggests that the general premise underpinning these collaborative arrangements is that the differences between organisations, including their areas of expertise, assets, know how, priorities, cultures and values constitute unique resources that when brought together create the potential for effective synergies and collaborative advantage (Huxham and Vangen, 2005).

Huxham and Vangen's (2005) research provides the framework against which to analyse the complex relationships which underpin partnership work and to reach an analytical position which helps consider whether UHOVI, as an innovative higher education-led partnership, achieved collaborative advantage through the synthesis of the differences identified above. Huxham (2003, p 401) states that

Collaborative advantage is a practice-orientated theory concerned with enhancing practical understanding of the management issues involved in joint working across organisations. Two contrasting concepts are central to it: collaborative advantage which is concerned with the potential for synergy from working collaboratively, and collaborative inertia which relates to the often disappointing output in reality.

Based on my research aim 'to investigate UHOVI as a strategic partnership to deliver Welsh Government policy', my research objectives are:

- To examine the experiences of participants involved in collaborative working and relationships across the UHOVI partnership

- To identify perceptions of the strengths and limitations of UHOVI and partnership arrangements for the management and delivery of level 4+ qualifications and courses
- To understand what lessons can be learned from applying Huxham and Vangen's concept of collaborative advantage to the strategic partnership of UHOVI

I have chosen a qualitative approach for this study because I wanted to investigate the personal experiences of the people that were tasked with delivering the core aim and objectives of UHOVI as a strategic partnership. This is further explained by the research methodology described in Chapter five. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve participants who held differing roles within UHOVI. This enabled me to address the breadth of my research aim and objectives. The participant sample was divided into three groups: senior leaders, academic staff and administrative staff.

1.6 Overview of the analysis

This investigation of UHOVI begins with a literature review that contextualises the background to the introduction of this strategic higher education-led partnership. Firstly, Chapter two outlines the purpose of higher education across the UK by exploring various examples of higher education policy. It includes a section on higher technical education and how this contributes to the development of HE in the UK. The intention is to summarise the historical policy story of higher education and set the scene for describing the purpose of universities, firstly in the UK and latterly in South East Wales. It also provides an insight into the purpose of the University of South Wales (USW) and is key to an understanding of UHOVI as a strategic HE-led partnership. Chapter two is concluded with a timeline of landmark higher and further education policies and legislation, firstly in the UK as a whole and latterly in Wales, after the establishment of the Welsh Assembly Government in 1998. The role of the devolved government is highlighted as the momentum towards establishing strategic partnerships to deliver policy becomes stronger. This is reflected in the eventual introduction of the UHOVI strategic partnership in 2009.

The second part of the literature review, Chapter three, provides a critical link with the previous chapter by exploring the policy context in which UHOVI was introduced as a strategic partnership in the HOV region of South East Wales. This policy context identifies the Welsh Government's *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales. Delivering Skills that Work for Wales (2008b)* and the core aim and objectives of UHOVI which helped justify the funding it received from the Welsh Assembly Government. In addition, the Leitch Report

(2006) is considered in terms of its national importance and influence on and adoption by the higher education sector across the UK.

The final part of the literature review, Chapter four, begins by focusing on the UK-wide use of partnerships and their strategic importance in delivering higher and further education policy. The chapter summarises the purpose and aims of partnerships and also considers the debate concerning merger versus partnership. Whilst merger is not a focus of the research aim of this study, it is nevertheless useful to provide an understanding of UHOVI as a strategic partnership in a Welsh policy context. Having explained the strategic role of partnerships from a UK context, the chapter further describes the era of transformation in Wales and the WG drive for collaboration and institutional mergers. Chapter four also refers to various reviews and legislation that support the strategy of partnership between HE and other providers, including FE. This includes additional references to the Leitch Report (2006) and *Skills That Work for Wales Action Plan* (WAG, 2008c). These reports both indicated that larger learning providers are more cost effective and have greater critical mass to provide a broad, high-quality curriculum, student services, and the latest technology. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the structure of partnerships.

Chapter five, describes the research methodology used by returning to the core aim and objectives of the study as well as its organisational context and theoretical basis. It includes sense making, an ongoing process in which individuals make retrospective sense of events (Weick 1995). Also, in my former role as an employee of UHOVI, I had an 'insider status' and history within USW and UHOVI and the potential bias this might produce. The chapter considers the sampling approach and strategy used for data collection. Finally, the research design is discussed and explains the choice of method before concluding with sections on data collection, analysis and ethical considerations. A further element of the research methodology is the inclusion of Huxham and Vangen's (2005, 2009) research on collaborative activity. This is used to support the findings presented in chapters six and seven.

Chapters six and seven focus on the findings, based on the qualitative evidence collected from the interviews with the senior leaders, academic and administrative staff. The two chapters are organised into four sections which relate to the research objectives. Where appropriate they utilise Huxham and Vangen's (2009) framework of collaborative advantage and collaborative inertia presented as a set of seven overlapping perspectives 'which are predominantly issues

that practitioners see as causing pain and reward in collaborative situations (Huxham, 2003, p 401).

Finally chapter eight focuses on findings and implications for further research, policy and practice. The findings are based on participants' answers to the research questions and the examples of practice and research identified in the literature review in chapters two, three and four. The final part of the chapter focuses on the critical success factors, for further consideration by planners of strategic partnerships and policy makers.

*The University of Glamorgan (UoG) and the University of Wales, Newport (UWN) are referred to as the two university partners of UHOVI up to 2013. In 2013 they merged to form the University of South Wales (USW).

*Up to May 2011 the Welsh Government was known as the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). For the purposes of this study, only the term Welsh Government (WG) will be used

Chapter 2: Higher Education in the UK: Policies and Purpose

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the purpose of higher education from the early twentieth century to today with a view to understanding how policies have developed and priorities have changed. The chapter outlines: the development of higher education from the very first universities at Oxford and Cambridge where their purpose was to protect the interests of the church and elite social classes; through strategic partnerships introduced specifically to deliver HE policy; to the early twenty first century with a consideration of the role played by higher education in meeting the needs of the economy.

The chapter also focuses on the evolution of the University of South Wales (USW). It includes historic landmarks as part of the narrative, including the opening of Wales's first School of Mines at Treforest (1913) an institution based on a strategic partnership that a century later evolved into USW, the parent institution of UHOVI. This historical background is included as part of the investigation as it reflects the evolving context of higher education and indicates how the USW is an integral part of this narrative. Finally, the introduction of UHOVI in 2009, initially through the dual approach of UoG and UWN supported by several FE colleges and latterly through USW, is an example of an HE-led partnership initiative that responded to a national HE policy directive: a strategic response intended to meet the social and economic needs of the communities and economy of the HOV region of South East Wales.

2.2 The historical context of the HE system in the UK: Its original purpose

Universities across the world experienced spectacular expansion in the twentieth century (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). In Britain in 1900 there were approximately 91,000 students enrolled on higher education courses. This figure can be compared with the 2.2 million students enrolled in 2015/16 (Universities UK, 2017). This incremental growth or 'massification' of higher education has been actively promoted through successive governments since the start of the 1960s, initiated by the *Report of the Committee on Higher Education*, (Robbins, 1963). The broad aim of the Report was to 'increase the number of students into higher education to positively impact on the economy and society within the UK'. Speaking at a Universities UK conference in 2017, Professor Paul O'Prey Vice Chancellor of the University of Roehampton and Chair of Universities UK, succinctly stated that:

Our universities are a tremendous national asset, transforming lives through the teaching they undertake, driving social mobility and equipping the UK's workforce with higher-level skills that the economy needs. Institutions in all parts of the country carry out world-class research that helps to tackle global challenges, and generate the ideas and expertise that encourages innovation and improves our health and wellbeing (O'Prey 2017, p 1).

As O'Prey observes, two of the four functions for British universities are to 'drive social mobility and contribute to the economy'. It is very likely that of the one hundred and sixty two higher education institutions (excluding further education colleges) in the UK in receipt of public funding via one of the UK funding councils (Universities UK, 2017) the majority would agree with O'Prey (2017, p 1). The functions he has identified are fundamental in influencing the more recent UK higher education policy agenda regardless of which political party is in power. When Prime Minister Blair proclaimed 'education, education, education' in 1997 as a key priority for his government, this policy commitment and in particular the emphasis placed on lifelong learning, can be seen as part of a developing trend rather than a new direction (Tight, 2006, p 473). It is very likely that each UK university would plan and prioritise its institutional strategy around the function which was most relevant to it. This would depend in part on the type of higher education institution, mission and strategic direction determined by the senior management and governing board. These functions contrast starkly with the rationale for the establishment of Oxford and Cambridge universities in the 12th century whose main function was to train clerics and administrators who worked for the royal and papal interests (Preston, 2001).

For this elite community of students, their learning and teaching was delivered in Latin, which helped to preserve their own existence defined by their own customs and privileges (ibid). Those select students followed a curriculum that consisted of the seven liberal arts, alongside the three philosophies: Grammar, Rhetoric, Dialectic (which included the study of Latin and logic), Music, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, Natural Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Metaphysical Philosophy (Mallett, 1968, p 8).

This inaugural curriculum and the strong connection with the Church is the first example of a university relying upon a strategic partnership with another organisation in delivering curriculum and qualifications. The relationship between Oxbridge and the Church retained its influence until the theocracy of the medieval period was replaced by the growing power of the state and the Humanistic philosophy of the Renaissance (Halford, 2009). 'The accompanying

religious reformation and drive for scientific discovery was the beginning of a new era where the role of the individual with a personal conscience and the expectation of the pursuit of wealth through commerce changed the complexion of the universities' (Halford, 2009, p22). Further changes occurred with the rationalism and empiricism of the enlightenment creating a more secular establishment (ibid). The original purpose of higher education delivered by Oxford and Cambridge Universities was defined by the narrow, specific curriculum for a selected group of learners, supported through the strategic partnership with the Church of England to protect their own values, customs and higher position in society.

This situation existed in England until the establishment of the University of London in 1836 and the University of Durham in 1837. Revolutions in France and America promoted a progressive democratic ideology, highlighting the importance of science and political economy in the curriculum, together with the notion of educating the population to fulfil the role of citizens and actively contribute to civil and commercial life (Porter, 2000). The importance of science to the higher education curriculum and the necessity for more citizens to contribute to the economy meant that the Oxbridge offer alone was not sustainable for the UK needs (ibid). It becomes clear that the purpose of higher education was evolving.

To emphasise this evolving purpose Preston (2001) describes a gradual shift from a primary economic system, based upon agriculture, to a secondary one, based upon manufacturing. This was followed by a tertiary system, based upon the provision of services (Petty's law, cited in Preston, 2001) and created the need for an expanded system of university and technical education. The Universities of London and Durham were both founded in the 1830s, but for very different purposes. Durham was intended to be a northern replica of Oxbridge, whereas London was established to provide higher education for students outside of the established Church of England (ibid). This breakaway from what was a protected elite community, was ground-breaking in terms of the curriculum and pedagogy, especially in relation to emerging scientific knowledge (ibid). It is also the first example of higher education being offered to a different type of learner, one not bound by a religious leaning (ibid). At the same time the development of technical education and its benefits to the economy was also starting to be recognised across the emerging industries in the UK. The higher education sector was starting to realise its impact on the growth of UK society and the economy (Mcfarlane, 2005).

From the outset, the founding College of the University of London did not discriminate on religious, social or gender grounds. University College was founded in 1826, followed by Kings

College in 1829 (Briggs 1991). From the start, students and graduates of the London Colleges were not required to sign the thirty nine Articles of Faith, which bound Oxbridge scholars to the established Church (ibid). In addition, the different type of curriculum at London University attracted many ex - Oxbridge scholars, who could not maintain their faith in the light of scientific knowledge published in the late 19th Century (Halford 2009, p 23).

The more specialised and mechanistic system of the German Enlightenment universities, founded by Humboldt, was to be seen at London, where the medical school, and associated research became paramount and in the founding of the Victorian civic universities in England, where the curriculum frequently reflected local industrial sponsorship (Macfarlane, 2005). This is a key point in the evolution of higher education policy and for the story of UHOVI. The UK Government recognised that national policy could not dictate to the elite institutions of Oxbridge in delivering a wider curriculum beyond that of the seven liberal arts and three philosophies (Mallett, 1968). However it could create the opportunity for the expansion of the higher education sector, through the creation of more universities, the missions of which would reflect the needs of local industries, through new innovative curriculum and qualifications (Mcfarlane 2005). This was about expanding knowledge and skills across the growing industries that could add value to both society and to the economy, alongside the traditional elite institutions such as Oxbridge (Porter, 2000).

The expansion of the university system in the UK between 1900 and 1939 occurred because of what Lowe (2002) referred to as accretion, by the upgrading of the university colleges, creating the 'red brick' universities, and resulting in 50,000 full-time students by 1939. The government funding of higher education in the United Kingdom began in 1889 with an annual Treasury grant to the universities and University Colleges, as a precursor to the University Grants Committee (UGC), which was created in 1918, the Haldane Report, a landmark study which set out the principles to underpin the Government's use of evidence and formation of policy. In 1946 the UGC acquired a planning role, in addition to its funding remit, financing the building of the campus universities in the 1960s, which, with their halls of residence and pastoral function, aspired to the collegiate Oxbridge model and its high associated costs. The UK higher education sector was evolving and adapting in an attempt to meet the social and economic purposes of their time and were simultaneously striving to retain the prestige and elitism of the Oxbridge model.

This post war expansion, whilst facilitating the move from a system of higher education functioning principally to support and reproduce a social and professional elite, to one enlarged by the application of meritocratic principles still had a participation level with less than 15 to 20 per cent. This was regarded by Trow (1974) as denoting the need for a transition to a mass system of higher education. This system was admired internationally as a golden age of free access, high standards and low drop-out rates (ibid).

Halford (2009) indicates that following the Second World War, there was a need across the UK for highly-skilled technicians and professionals, which led the demand for more higher education qualifications (ibid). This demand resulted in an expansion and upgrading of existing institutions and the building of new institutions (ibid). This period was also the start of technical colleges offering qualifications through the external examination systems of universities, but funded by the local education authorities (LEAs). This expansion of skills and higher education qualifications was largely unplanned and helped create the original binary system of higher education.

2.3 The Coal Mines Regulation Act of 1903 and The Coal Mines Act of 1911 and their impact in South Wales

A key landmark in higher education policy occurred when a specific industry, coal mining, required highly trained colliery managers with high proficiency in science and the practical application of skills. To respond to this economic need, the 1903 *Coal Mines Regulation Act* specified the introduction of ‘a course of study of at least two years at any university, university college, mining school...’ (*Coal Mines Regulation Act*, 1903). The effect of this was to shift the balance between the comparative importance of experience and academic knowledge and made the role of the universities in technical mining education essential. The background to the discussion about the importance of the ‘school of experience’ and the supporters of university and college education lay in the relevant sections of the Coal Mines Regulation Act of 1887 sub section 1 section 23 and the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1903 sub section 2, section 24. A key influence on policy decisions occurred in 1902 when a committee of the Home Office under the chairmanship of HHS Gunynghame looked into ‘...the use of electricity in Coal and Metalliferous Mines and the Dangers Attendant upon its use’ (Public Enquiry, 1902).

This led to more informed debates about the extent to which colliery managers should be educated in scientific principles. The report of the 1902 committee had far reaching implications in that it was widely recognised that the manager’s position could be undermined by his lack of knowledge (ibid). It was becoming obvious to all interested parties that the

partnership between scientific knowledge and practical understanding would have to be made (ibid).

At this time (1902), the University College, Cardiff Collegiate Committee* ¹was dominated by members with pure academic and ecclesiastical backgrounds. It contained ten churchmen and seven academics out of a membership of eighteen (Trow & Brown, 1933). The only industrialist appointed was Lord Aberdare (formerly HAS Bruce, Joint Trustee of the Dowlais Iron Company) (ibid). It was his strength of character that forced through a commitment to technical education to be included in the College Charter (ibid). As early as 1881, the Aberdare Report's main conclusions were 'to give prominence to all branches of natural science and in particular to those whose practical application could be readily applied to commerce and manufacture' (Aberdare Report, 1881, chp 5).

The industrialists and coal owners had influence over policy decisions that would lead to progress in the choice of appropriate qualifications for managers in dangerous industries such as coal, iron and steel (Trow & Brown, 1933). Professor Galloway who was the then Head of the University College, Cardiff's Mining Education Department, acknowledged that industrialists wanted men with both practical and theoretical knowledge, capable of managing all aspects of pit life (ibid). Practical coal owners despised the out-moded and to them useless study of the dead languages still encouraged by the grammar schools prior to World War 1 (ibid). The new University College, Cardiff emphasised and insisted upon Latin and Greek as two essential subjects for matriculation (ibid). However, Galloway tried hard to modify these requirements on behalf of students entering the BSc Mining course (ibid). The Senate, however, the real power of the University, overruled him (ibid).

Debates on this crucial subject continued throughout South Wales with several interested parties involved. Apart from University College, Cardiff and the coal owners, the South Wales Institute of Mining Engineers, the South Wales Federation of Miners and Labour MPs were all interested in the future of this new more practical higher and technical education (Trow & Brown 1933). Whilst some progress was being made on what should be taught through the curriculum, who should own the scheme, polarised views (Trow & Brown, 1933). Trade unions

¹ *The original name of the University College, Cardiff was The University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire. This title stood from 1883 until 1972. In 1893 it became one of the founding institutions of the University of Wales and began awarding their degrees. In 1972 it had taken the name University College, Cardiff. In 1999 the public name of the University changed to Cardiff University.

and Labour MPs including Rhondda Miners' leader, Noah Ablett and Labour MP Tom Richards didn't want the proposed scheme to be seen as a finishing school for the owners' sons (ibid).

2.4 The Opening of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Schools of Mines at Treforest, 1913 and Crumlin, 1914

In addressing a meeting of the South Wales Institute of Mining Engineers, Sir Thomas Holland stated

‘Training therefore for industrial functions and training for academic proficiency were totally different in nature; both were necessary, but could not be worked together in the same institution’ (Holland 1914, p 254).

Holland (1914) goes on to crystallise his argument, adding even more pointedly that ‘colliery owners were more likely to devise a useful scheme of education than could be formulated by the official Education Department, which was bound by rules that might be of general use, but were often inconvenient in local application’ (Holland 1914, p 254). Consciously or unconsciously, Holland was advocating the scheme to be introduced by the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coal Owners' Association in the opening of the first ever mining school at Treforest in 1913 (ibid).

Professor George Knox, the first Principal of the South Wales and Monmouthshire School of Mines, gave evidence to the Haldane Commission (1916) thus: ‘the academic man was generally considered to be too much aloof from the industry itself, and disinclined, as some owners put it, to take off his coat and get to work’ (Haldane Report, 1916, q.6065) Knox went on to highlight Galloway's fears about an over-emphasised classical education: ‘In South Wales, at the present time, the whole tendency of secondary education is classical. We find a great defect in the boys who come from secondary schools without doing the most elementary chemical work and they get no physics as a rule and no general science’ (Haldane 1916, q. 6065). Williams (1998) draws attention to the role of Lloyd George in supporting the recommendations of the Haldane Commission which he believed to be one of the most important documents in the history of Wales. Williams recognises a relationship that is developed between the University of Wales and the nation in what he refers to as a ‘cultural awakening’.

By 1911 the South Wales Coal Owners' Association had become sufficiently disillusioned with the overly academic approach of both the secondary schools and the University College, Cardiff that they recommended the formation of the two Schools of Mines at Treforest and Crumlin.

An important element of the owners' approach was that the two schools should be open on equal terms to all and the majority of the men enrolled were the sons of colliers or subordinate officials in the mines (*Western Mail article 23rd Sept 1913*). This approach was an early indication that egalitarianism could influence education policy decisions (ibid). Industrialists such as colliery owners of the South Wales valleys felt that at the University College, Cardiff, only the sons of well to do mining agents had been enrolled (ibid). Allied to this, of course, was the commitment to provide a course of instruction in practical mining rather than academic instruction (ibid). It was this egalitarian approach that would eventually convince all parties including the unions and Labour MPs that their scheme should be supported.

Whilst the coal owners had won the argument with regard to the importance of practical higher education meeting the needs of industry, it was still important for the two schools of mines to retain a positive working partnership with the University, College in Cardiff. Principal Griffiths outlined the need for this partnership and the possibility of setting up a joint mining education scheme for South Wales (Holland, 1914, p 75). The conflict over the purpose of higher level technical education had taken place since the Aberdare Report (1881) (ibid). The resulting strategic partnership between the University College, Cardiff and the coal owners represented a coming together of two distinct aspects of higher learning. What these developments in partnership working allowed, was a clearer understanding of the purpose of the new curriculum and new qualifications.

This strategic partnership introduced a new Joint Working Diploma between the School of Mines at Treforest and the Mining Department at the University College, Cardiff which had received approval from the Home Office under the regulations of the Coal Mines Act of 1911. The detail of the joint diploma emphasised the importance of a strategic partnership in which both institutions could complement each other in delivering excellent higher technical education to prospective students. The first year of the course was to be spent at University College, Cardiff for pre science, years two and three at the School of Mines. A fourth year course (post diploma) was arranged for University College, Cardiff. This Joint Diploma Scheme was to work successfully for fourteen years when the local authorities of Monmouthshire and Glamorgan took full responsibility for the Schools in 1928 (Regulations for Further Education, Article 13, p 88). This period in the history of higher technical education within South Wales provides an interesting background to the evolution of higher education policy and the way in which different partners can combine to deliver results for individual learners and the economy.

The partnership between the University College, Cardiff and the coal owners' schools in Crumlin and Treforest was unique and represented a collaborative response to the expedient needs of a strategically vital industry for Wales and the world - coal mining. It also focuses on the objective of making higher education more accessible to non-traditional sections of the community, in this case the working-class sons of coal miners. Recruitment in the first years of the Schools of Mines indicates the egalitarian approach of the coal owners as students were predominantly from under-represented working-class families (Trow & Brown, 1933).

The partnership between the University College, Cardiff and the two schools of mines in Treforest and Crumlin has parallels with the partnership arrangements of UHOVI. The key parallels are summarised as:

1. Strategic partnerships introduced to achieve objectives that could not be achieved by individual providers alone
2. Higher technical education being accessible to all, including those from non-traditional educational backgrounds
3. Higher technical education focusing on a balance between the requirements of the economy and social justice

The chapter will now focus on another major change in UK higher education policy initiated through the Robbins review between 1961 and 1963.

2.5 The Robbins Report on Higher Education, 1963

Only about four in every hundred young people entered full-time courses at university. Only 1% of working-class girls and 3% of working-class boys went on to full-time degree level courses. Another 4.5% of young people went on to teacher training and other full-time courses in further education. Just over 5% more were in part-time further education (Robbins 1963, Cmnd 2154, table 5).

This was the situation in the UK in 1961 when Lord Robbins was asked to chair an enquiry into the future of higher education. When he published his findings in October, 1963 his research completely changed the higher education landscape and focused on three features of a national system of mass higher education (Barr & Glennerster, 2014).

These were:

1. A national student support system,
2. The beginnings of a national university application system

3. The foundation of wholly new universities.

The Robbins Report (1963) provides the policy directive for a new, innovative purpose for the new universities in the UK. Some of the key findings highlighted that only a small proportion of society was capable of benefitting from higher education. Too many young people were leaving school for employment without considering HE as an option. There was essentially a large pool of untapped talent that wasn't being afforded the opportunity to fulfil their capability (Robbins, 1963, table 19).

What Robbins made clear was that 'restricting the entry into higher education for large swathes of potential learners was and would continue to have major implications for the British economy' (Robbins, 1963, p 8). One recommendation was the need for a co-ordinated expansion of higher education within a new system in the UK. The report did not simply recommend current expansion (i.e. a greater supply of university places) but that the number of places available in higher education should be expanded to ensure that all who were qualified and wished to enter should be able to do so (Barr & Glennerster, 2014). This was an important message; there was no intention to lower standards and benchmarks to accommodate the new influx of learners. The recommendation that advanced further education institutions (known as Colleges of Advanced Technology) should be awarded University status would help to standardise the teaching of skills, maintain research in balance with teaching and promote common standards of citizenship (Shattock, 2012).

Robbins believed that the external advantages to wider society 'may well be of overriding importance' ahead of the benefits to those individuals who attend higher education (1963, p 205). It was not simply an economic investment but, according to Robbins, 'the social advantages of investment in higher education may vastly exceed the commercial return' (1963, p 211). These ideas underpinned Robbins' policy that the Government should pay for higher education. Merging smaller institutions into larger organisations was an important step in offering more higher education to more learners.

The aims and purposes of higher education set out by Robbins (1963) have parallels with those of UHOVI. Robbins' assertion that 'universities should complement each other in the provision of new courses' (1963, p 106) and that the optimum size of an institution 'must be determined by its educational function, its organisation and the availability of a suitable site' (1963, p 153) is similar to the aspirations of the WG Transformation agenda (2008).

Twelve years after the publication of the Robbins Report, the Glamorgan Polytechnic merged with the Glamorgan College of Education and was re-designated the Polytechnic of Wales in 1975. In the same year, the Caerleon College of Education, Newport College of Art and Design, and Gwent College of Technology all merged to form the Gwent College of Higher Education.

The next section of the chapter focuses on the 1988 and 1992 Education Acts. These provide evidence of a continuing national education policy which strives to increase learner numbers and increase the number of courses and qualifications offered. It also refers to the importance of institutional identity and status within the HE sector.

2.6 The 1988 Education Reform Act and the 1992 UK Further and Higher Education Act.

The crossing of the threshold from an elite, to a mass system of higher education occurred in the UK and Wales between 1988 and 1993, when overall student numbers grew by nearly one half (Parry, 2003). This transition was made without the accompanying changes to structural and institutional systems, the UK was experiencing the full effect of the Robbins report of 1963 and was at saturation point (ibid). Parry (2003) indicates that the higher education sector in the UK was meeting its objectives of increasing learner numbers through offering more and diverse HE programmes.

The growth of the polytechnics such as the Polytechnic of Wales at Treforest and the Gwent College of Higher Education in Newport funded by their respective LEAs, remained a distinct and much needed part of the higher education system from the 1963 Act until 1988. The impetus of the 1988 Act, in separating the funding of higher and further education, was continued by the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act*, legislation that was significant for both sectors. It removed FE colleges from local authority control (with them becoming incorporated in September 1993) and introduced their own funding body, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). (In Wales, this was the FEFCW). At the same time, it established the polytechnics as universities, with their own degree awarding powers and created a unified funding body for higher education, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), together with a common quality assurance framework. The Acts were instrumental in the Polytechnic of Wales, at Treforest becoming the University of Glamorgan (UoG) in 1992 and the Newport College of Higher Education becoming the University of Wales College, Newport (UWCN) in 1996. By removing the further education sector from LEA control, it

enabled FE Colleges to compete in a new marketplace (McGinty and Fish, 1993), and it enabled the former polytechnics to compete on a more even playing field with the established and elite universities of the UK (ibid).

These respective acts of legislation reinforced the notion of further and higher education as discrete sectors, with a divide in terms of funding, governance and inspection regimes. However, the delivery of higher education was dispersed across FE and HE in a myriad of collaborative arrangements, ranging from formal partnerships to franchising and validation (Parry and Thompson, 2002). The public justification offered for maintaining a separation between higher education and the newly-created learning and skills sector in FE was that higher education's contribution to skills and research requirements gave it a national and international remit (ibid). It was claimed that to include an element of HE in the remit of the Learning and Skills Council would be to make it so broad that it would be difficult to manage (Department for Education and Employment, (DfEE), 1999, p 42). For the new University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales, College Newport, their newly established university status helped to develop their international appeal and has helped to offer curriculum and courses to a wider and more diverse group of students than ever before (Verbik, Lasanowski, 2007).

Whilst these changes can be regarded positively, Scott (2012) argues that 'the removal of polytechnics from the higher education sector added to a blurring in the public perception of what a university was and who it was for' (Guardian newspaper, Monday, 3rd September, 2012).

To help answer this, Silver (2007) describes the ways in which universities have had to adapt and transform themselves in order to survive and respond to these changing circumstances. In doing so, the newer universities of the 1960s and the post - 1992 universities (the former polytechnics), have adopted the symbols, structures, vocabularies and missions of the traditional universities. For the post 1992 university, the 1992 education policies helped to align their identities closer to the traditional university than that of the FE College (Silver, 2007). However, they were also aware of the new sensitivities, both in attracting new students and in alienating potential partners in HE and FE (ibid). To emphasize the status of the 'university' too much could have meant that the market of students that would have traditionally entered these institutions could be lost (Foskett, 2011).

Parry and Thompson (2002) describe the period of 1987 – 1997 as one of low policy for the development of higher education in further education settings, where the activity had been hidden from the documented history of higher education, because it had been eclipsed during

the 1980s by the rise of the polytechnics and other large HE providers. Parry and Thompson (2002) contend that during this period, the provision of sub-degree education in the colleges had been differentiated by funding, terminology and legislation in ways that have obscured and confused the identity of HE, whilst increasing its complexity. For the University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales, College Newport this was an era in which to establish a new identity within the higher education field which would continue to increase student growth and offer a wide, varied curriculum.

Parry and Thompson (2002) describe the period following the publication of the *Reports of the National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education*, (the Dearing Report), in 1997 until the creation of the Learning and Skills Councils 2001, as one of high policy. Whilst the Learning and Skills Councils are only applicable to England, this era of high policy was certainly felt in Wales also. The creation of new universities and the de-regulation of the councils in 2007, enabled institutions without a research function to be awarded university status. This is another part of the continuum of change in higher education designed to increase learner numbers and offer a wider choice of courses.

2.7 The Dearing Report (1997) *The Reports of the National Committee into Higher Education*:

In May 1996, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment Gillian Shephard - together with the Secretaries of State for Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland and with bipartisan support, appointed a committee to make recommendations on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education, including support for students, should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom over the next 20 years (Dearing 1997, p 1). The Committee's report was published in July 1997.

One of the many policy objectives assigned to further education at this time was the expectation to expand HE provision for the students who did not traditionally progress to higher education and who would benefit from a local, part-time offer (NCIHE, 1997). To enable the FE colleges to deliver this particular role, it was recommended that responsibility for funding all provision defined as higher education be transferred to the HE funding bodies. This was implemented from the academic year 1999 -2000, to include sub-degree provision, such as HNDs and HNCs. It also included foundation degrees, initiated in 2001 (Dearing, 1997).

Dearing's report, is described by Sir David Watson, a member of the Dearing committee, as 'one of the most eagerly awaited and arguably most distinctive acts of the New Labour government that came to power in the summer of 1997' (Crace and Shepherd, 2007).

In part this was due to the report being the first national, comprehensive study on higher education commissioned by a UK government since the Robbins report in 1963. In the late 1990s, UK higher education was floundering (Crace & Shepherd, 2007). Successive years of underfunding had left UK universities at breaking point. Teaching budgets had been decimated and funding for infrastructure and research had steadily declined (ibid). In 2007, ten years on from the published report, Dearing comments that:

The crisis in 1996 was the result of a period of very fast growth in student numbers, financed in very substantial part by severe reductions in the unit of resource, the amount a university spends on each student for teaching and a massive decay in research infrastructure (Crace & Shepherd, 2007).

Dearing's comment in 2007 underlines the fact that the post 1992 universities were continuing their former roles by prioritising higher technical education and not higher level research. These organisations focused on building what they were already good at, not completely changing their missions (Foskett, 2005). For example the University of Wales, College Newport still focused on providing curriculum in general education, art, media and design, because as Bathmaker (2003) suggests this was what its history and expertise had been built upon.

The Dearing Report (1997) made ninety three recommendations in all, but there were eight key messages: all full-time undergraduates should contribute £1,000 per year of study after graduation on an income-contingent basis; there should be a return to the expansion of student numbers; the world-class reputation of UK degrees must be protected; higher education should make greater use of technology; the government should increase funding for research; there should be more professionalism in university teaching; there should be a stronger regional and community role for universities and there should be a review of pay and working practices of all staff.

The report is noted for its recommendation on the introduction of fees, a significant policy change from Robbins in 1963. However, it is the recommendation regarding the 'stronger regional and community role for universities' that is pertinent to this study. Bathmaker (2003) points out that the UK now has a system with some world class institutions, but that their

success has been developed at the expense of the others offering HE in the UK, particularly the post 1992 institutions with a strong widening access remit. Whereas Dearing was keen for the UK to design a diverse higher education sector, coupled with a diverse student population, the actual situation is that the system has created a hierarchical one' (Bathmaker, 2003). The UK at this time was a system where all institutions which utilised the title of university in their name were now competing for learners in a much more similar field (Foskett, 2005).

2.8 The Leitch Report (2006) *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*

A further example of education and training legislation that influenced the planning of UHOVI was The Leitch Report, *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*, (2006). It recommended that the UK should aim to be a world leader on skills by 2020, and suggested how that aim should be achieved. The Report found that the UK currently ranked 12th out of 18 comparative members of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). It also stated that by 2020: more than 40% of adults should be qualified to Level 4 and above (equivalent to degree-level qualifications), up from 29% in 2005 (Leitch, 2006, p 3). It further emphasised 'the necessity of shared responsibility' that 'Employers and individuals, as well as the government, should increase their investment in training and education. The provision of vocational education and training should be demand-led, adaptable and responsive' (Leitch, 2006, p 3).

This emphasis on shared responsibility was taken on board by the various members of the UHOVI planning groups and this, along with the target of '40% of adults qualified to Level 4 and above' provided a rationale for the strategic partnership to coalesce around.

2.9 The Hazelkorn Report (2016) *Towards 2030. A framework for building a world-class post compulsory education system for Wales.*

The Hazelkorn Report (2016) continues the focus on higher education and its requirement to engage with partners. It focuses particularly on the role of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the need for HE to become more adaptable and resilient in a changing economic context. Two of its chapters help to establish the context in which higher education is now expected to operate (i) the role and connectivity between the higher education sectors in the UK and Wales and (ii) the role and relationship between the HE and FE sectors in Wales.

The report contained two primary recommendations:

1. Welsh Government should develop an overarching vision for the PCET (post compulsory education and training) sector
2. Establish a new arm's length body responsible for the oversight, strategic direction and leadership of the sector.

In her introduction Professor Ellen Hazelkorn (2016) states:

The report is ambitious and forward-looking, mindful of future scenarios for the landscape of Welsh society and the economy towards 2030, and of Wales' position within the United Kingdom and within an increasingly competitive Europe and global economy. Rather than seeing local, regional, national and international agendas as contradictory facets of educational endeavour, this report sees them as operating within a balanced, complementary and synergistic portfolio of activities (Hazelkorn Report, 2016, p.1).

The Hazelkorn recommendations reflect many of the challenges faced by the leaders of the UHOVI, but were published too late to have a positive impact on its outcome.

2.10 Policies and purpose: Conclusion

Since 1999 it has not been uncommon for governments around the globe to follow post-school educational strategies that pursue skills development for economic competitiveness and social inclusion and cohesion (Zepke & Leach 2010). It is unsurprising that the HE sector is often pivotal to such strategies as they are seen as 'the vehicle to develop processes for dissemination of new knowledge at a regional level' (Hagen, 2002 p 207). Along with the Leitch (2006) target referred to earlier, this was undoubtedly a vision for UoG and UWN in the design of UHOVI. Both universities had the strategic foresight to recognise that a new widening participation offer would meet the policy aims of the WG by developing qualifications and a curriculum which was both knowledge and skills focused specifically for a historically under-performing region in Wales (Saunders et al, 2013). At the turn of the twentieth century, the concept of widening participation was influencing political debate far more than before. It had become an important UK policy agenda as a way of increasing student numbers into HE through a wide and diverse curriculum offer. For a region like the Heads of the Valleys in South East Wales, an initiative such as UHOVI was long overdue.

The South Wales valleys are widely recognised as one of the oldest regeneration regions in the UK, having been established as an area for economic assistance by the Special Areas Act in 1934 (WG, 2017). Since the decline in the coal and steel industries, there has been alarming evidence of growth in economic inactivity and unemployment, levels of morbidity, examples

of under-developed communications, poor housing and low levels of workforce skills (WG, 2017). In 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) published a document entitled '*Turning Heads*', a *Strategy for the Valleys, 2020*. This outlined the stark truths that the region was facing. For example, in the 2008 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2008), the three local authorities with the lowest medians in Wales were Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent and Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT), all of which fall within the Heads of Valleys region. UHOVI was a part of the higher education strategy to equip the region with skills and knowledge that could help improve the local economy.

In 1913, the South Wales and Monmouthshire School of Mines had been tasked with educating miners and colliery managers to equip them with skills and knowledge to improve productivity and decrease accidents. Even though a century of HE policy separates UHOVI from this early partnership initiative, the parallels between the two institutions and the ways in which they responded to the needs, both of their communities and the economy, are strong. This chapter provides an historical context for the purpose of the HE system in the UK and demonstrates the importance of higher technical education. It also provides a chronological review of key HE policies. It includes, where relevant, references to the evolution of the USW and the introduction of UHOVI. An institution such as USW and its previous incarnations has evolved and reinvented itself in response to such policies. This strategy includes supporting key partnerships, increasing student numbers and offering a varied and diverse curriculum to a variety of learners.

Table 2.1 is a timeline of a century of UK and Welsh government education policy and initiatives, with landmarks and strategic responses from higher and further education providers in the UK and Wales. A key landmark is the Government of Wales Act 1998 that establishes the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). From this date on education policy in Wales is a devolved responsibility.

Table 2.1: A Timeline of selected UK and Welsh education policy and initiatives, 1911-2014, showing the rationale, impact and strategic responses from Higher and Further Education providers in Wales.

Year	Policy, Report or Initiative	Rationale	Impact UK -wide	Impact in South East Wales	Strategic response to policy directive.
1911	<i>Coal Mines Act</i>	To meet the needs of the coal mining industry by combining theoretical learning with the practical application of science.	The opening of the first UK wide schools of mines (post Oxbridge) as a means of educating colliery managers	The opening of the first ever School of Mines at Treforest in 1913 - the forerunner of the University of South Wales and at Crumlin in 1914 one of the constituent colleges of what is now Coleg Gwent.	A strategic partnership between University College, Cardiff Mining Department and the South Wales Coal Owners' Association to deliver the first ever Joint Mining Diploma in the UK, 1913.
1928	Local authorities take over responsibility for schools of mines	Part of the move towards the democratisation of higher and further education. This was to include mining education.	Schools of mines become part of the Local authorities' further education portfolio, along with technical colleges.	Monmouthshire and Glamorgan local authorities take over the two schools of mines at Crumlin and Treforest.	Local authorities commit to delivering a common curriculum for mining education across the two counties.
1963	<i>The Report of the Committee on Higher Education</i> Robbins Report, UK Government.	'A national system of mass higher education' across the UK.	Mergers take place between colleges of higher education and technical colleges to form polytechnics.	Glamorgan College of Education merges with Glamorgan Polytechnic to form the Polytechnic of Wales, 1975. Caerleon College of Education, Newport College of Art and Gwent College of Technology merge to form the Gwent College of Higher Education, 1975.	Strategic partnerships in South Wales in the form of full mergers to meet UK-wide HE policy imperatives.
1988 and 1992	<i>The Education Reform Act, UK.</i> <i>Further and Higher Education Act, UK.</i>	Funding of FE and HE sectors separated. FE colleges removed from Local authority control, 1 st April, 1993.	Polytechnics become universities.	The opening of the University of Glamorgan (1992) The opening of the University of Wales College, Newport (1996)	FE colleges and post 1992 universities acquire more independence and freedom to plan strategic partnerships.

			FE colleges become incorporated.		
1997	<i>The Reports of the National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education</i> Dearing Report, UK	Future of the higher education system in the UK.	All HE in FE to be funded by HE funding bodies.	A stronger regional and community role for universities. This points the way towards the introduction of strategic partnerships such as UHOVI.	The introduction of strategic partnerships across the UK.
1998	<i>The Government of Wales Act</i>	Establishes the National Assembly, 1999. Devolved powers allow more distinctive Welsh policies to tackle national challenges	Not applicable to the rest of the UK.	N/A	Education policy becomes a devolved power in Wales.
1999	<i>Education and Training Action Plan for Wales: Education and Training Action Group. An Evaluation and Action Plan for Wales, Cardiff, Welsh Office. (ETAP)</i>	The development of 21 Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCETs). Brings together education and training providers at a local level in Wales	N/A	All post sixteen providers had to commit to attendance at local CCETs as part of a national strategy.	Strategy was to seek ways of encouraging collaboration and co-operation between local providers.
2002	<i>Reaching Higher. Higher Education and the Learning Country. A Strategy for the higher education sector in Wales. Welsh Assembly Government.</i>	'Higher education must not be conceived in narrow institutional terms. HE must make links within the sector and also across sectoral boundaries' (Reaching Higher, 2002, Vision paragraph 13)	N/A	UHOVI is a strategic partnership that makes 'links within the sector and also crosses sectoral boundaries' (Reaching Higher 2002)	The UHOVI (2009) strategic partnership reflects the vision statement of Reaching Higher made 7 years earlier.

2002	<i>The Learning Country – Vision into Action. Welsh Assembly Government.</i>	One of its objectives was to ‘Explore the introduction of Foundation Degrees through HE/FE partnerships, linked to our agenda for skills and vocational learning’ (The Learning Country: Vision into Action (2002) This is a successor document to the Learning Country (WAG) published in 2001.	N/A	See above	This reference to HE/FE partnerships by the WAG pre-dates the UHOVI strategic partnership by 7 years.
2005	<i>Wales: a Vibrant Economy. The Welsh Assembly Government’s Strategic Framework for Economic Development.</i>	A key priority was: ‘Investing to regenerate communities and stimulate economic growth’. P5	N/A	UHOVI is planned as a means of helping to regenerate the HOV area.	This Welsh Government policy featured in the discussions to regenerate the HOV region of South East Wales.
2006	<i>‘Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills’. The Leitch Report.</i>	‘A compelling new vision’ to become a world leader in skills by 2020. Up-skill adults Target 40% of adults to achieve Level 4 and above qualifications	Skills training becomes a key element for discussion by higher and further education providers across the UK.	Leitch provides additional UK impetus to support the delivery of skills in HE and FE.	This Leitch target was adopted by UHOVI as one of its core objectives
2006	<i>The Review of Local Service Delivery, Sir Jeremy Beacham, Welsh Assembly Government</i>	This was aimed primarily at local authorities and recommended increased joint working across organisations and sectors.	N/A	Brings local authorities into the debate, although there was no commitment to transformation.	The rationale behind the Beacham Report was to make services work better not to restructure.

2007	<i>Promise and Performance. The Report of the Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education in Wales in the context of the Learning Country: Vision into Action. Webb Report</i>	Provides evidence for Welsh Government to pursue transformation agenda. Emphasis on meeting the regional needs of industry by encouraging partnerships between local providers. Recommendations: reduce the number of FE colleges. encourage HE/FE partnerships, working with industry. appoint employers as chairs of partnership consortia.	N/A	More evidence is provided of the strategy of partnerships to deliver policy.	Strategic partnerships should liaise closely with industry Rationale for UHOVI reflects recommendations of Webb Report (2007).
2008	<i>Skills that Work for Wales: A Skills and Employment Strategy and Action Plan, Welsh Assembly Government</i>	Follow up to Leitch Report (UK), but specific to Wales.	N/A	See comments for Leitch Report (2006)	The acquisition of skills becomes a key aspect of UHOVI planning.
2009	<i>Review of Higher Education in Wales – Professor Mervyn Jones Welsh Government</i>	Follow-up report from <i>the Reaching Higher</i> (2002) (Welsh Government) report. Strong support for ‘consolidating critical mass’ and HE/FE partnerships to improve access and progression into HE. (Jones 2009)	N/A	Mergers between HE and HE, FE and FE and HE and FE– see examples provided above.	UHOVI (2009) is an example of an HE/FE partnership as described by Jones Report (2009). UoG & UWN merge to form the University of South Wales in 2013
2009	<i>Transformation – Y Swrnai: Transforming</i>	This was a follow-up to the <i>Making the Connections</i> (2006) proposals and added	N/A	As above	As above

	<i>Education and Training Provision in Wales</i> , Welsh Assembly Government	more emphasis to the need for strategic partnerships in Wales.			
2009	<i>For Our Future – the 21st Century Higher Education Plan and Strategy for Wales</i> . Welsh Assembly Government	This follows up the Jones Report and emphasises the roles of the HE and FE sectors working closely together to deliver social justice and meet the needs of the economy.	N/A	As above	The UHOVI strategic partnership is a practical example of one of the objectives included in the vision statement of For our Future (2009)
2014	<i>Further and Higher Education Act (Governance and Information) (Wales) Act</i> .	Colleges are given more autonomy and classified as ‘Not for Profit Institutions Serving Households’ - NPISH	Similar legislation passed in England based on the same rationale that FE colleges were too close to government. This did not apply to Scotland and Northern Ireland where college budgets were in the control of their governments	FE colleges acquire more autonomy.	With an increase in autonomy, further education colleges become less dependent on the UHOVI partnership to achieve institutional priorities.

Chapter 3: The Higher Education Policy Context in Wales

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the higher education policy context that led to the introduction of UHOVI. It outlines key legislation that has a bearing on national HE policy. The chapter is organised into two sections, the first of which includes the Welsh Government (WG) '*One Wales, a progressive agenda for the government of Wales*' (2007) policy and the WG Transformation agenda (*Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales: Delivering Skills that Work for Wales*) (2008a). These identify the importance of the further education sector as the provider of qualifications and curriculum to improve social mobility and boost the economy in the HOV region. This is followed by a section which describes broader education policy in Wales from 2000 to provide the national context.

3.2 The policy context leading up to the Welsh Government transformation agenda (2008)

Following a referendum on devolution and legislation (Government of Wales Act, 1998) the National Assembly for Wales was initiated in 1999. As part of this process, in 2001, after legislation (Learning and Skills Act, 2000) and the seminal report of the education and training group (ETAG) the FEFCW and the TECs were merged to form Education and Learning Wales (ELWa) equivalent to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in England. In 2006, ELWa was merged with the WG which took over responsibility for funding and planning of post 16 education and skills. In 2014, FE Colleges were granted increased freedoms via the (Further and Higher Education (Governance and Information) (Wales) Act 2014). This gave the FE colleges sufficient independence from government to enable the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to reclassify FE Colleges in Wales as 'Not for Profit Institutions Serving Households' (NPISH). These legislative changes were creating FE colleges with more independent governing bodies capable of making appropriate strategic choices that could guarantee the sustainability of their colleges. As part of the transformation era, these choices included strategic partnerships with other FE and HE providers.

*Up to May 2011 the Welsh Government was known as the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). For the purposes of this study, only the term Welsh Government (WG) will be used.

The '*One Wales*' (2007) policy set out the WG's plans to ensure learning for life and the creation of a fair and just society. It described the WG's intention to develop an education and

training system that offered a broad range of learning opportunities and was responsive to the needs of all learners and employers.

The publication of the transformation policy in September 2008 invited stakeholders to come forward with innovative proposals for the transformation of post-16 delivery, with notable focus on improving learner choice and reducing duplication of provision. Transformative change was also supported by reforms to curriculum and qualifications in Wales and by strategic approaches to capital investment in the education and training estate. This was complemented by new effectiveness frameworks for schools and post-school providers (Thomas, 2011). Essentially, the transformation agenda was the catalyst for an all-age, system-wide approach to education and training in Wales.

The aim behind the transformation of an education system on this scale inevitably demanded all stakeholders to collaborate and work closely together, including the WG, unitary authorities and providers.

This new education and training policy signposted a clear intent by WG to secure outline plans to improve learning opportunities for all post-16 learners in the shortest possible time. Very shortly afterwards, the WG then produced '*Transformation - 'Y Siwrnai' / 'The Journey'*' (2009a), indicating what progress had been made and the progress they expected all stakeholders to make in the immediate, short and medium term. This report also highlighted the WG's intention to extend the transformation policy to cover all phases of education and training, via the adoption of an approach of tri-level reform. The '*Transformation - 'Y Siwrnai' / 'The Journey'*' (2009a), highlighted in particular the desire of the WG not to

impose a single post-16 transformational model or rigid framework, but rather, to encourage, via support and funding, proposals that created a more flexible approach which 'enabled stakeholders, who have the very best of local knowledge, to steer change in a way that serves each geographic area of Wales; one based on local needs and aspirations (WG, 2009a, p 6).

A key objective of this reform was to improve the quality, choice, effectiveness and efficiency of learning. Linked to this concern for quality and choice, a priority action emerged from the policy documents '*Skills that Work for Wales*' (2008b) and the '*For our Future' - 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales* (2009b). These strategies also reflected the importance of higher education's contribution to economic development and social justice in Wales. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), recognised that HE

institutions' responses to government policy, including strategic actions to deliver widening access are influenced by diverse factors, including missions, geography and partnerships (HEFCW, 2010, p1).

This policy position indicates the importance of higher education institutions working collaboratively with schools and FE colleges and with employers to widen opportunities for learners and to support the growth of new and existing businesses and public services. Overall, it is clear that the WG was intent on embarking on a transformation agenda that would radically alter existing school, college, work-based training and university structures.

The WG transformation agenda 2008, followed on from the Webb review of further education in Wales in 2007. As already noted, the transformation journey focused on making radical changes to the education system, but with a strong focus on the post 16 sector. There was undoubtedly an aim to maximise funding by realising the opportunities of European funding and in particular introduce a geographical focus that identified the social and cultural conditions such as local economic and employment conditions that the post 16 education providers in Wales were operating in.

3.3 The development of education policy in Wales from 1998

At the turn of the twentieth century, the newly devolved WG had not initially advocated the reconfiguration of post 16 education and skills. The key statement of government educational policies, for example, makes no mention of reducing the number of FE Colleges (WG, 2001). Describing FE as 'pivotal' in the delivery of post-sixteen education and training, it emphasized the importance of partnerships and referred to the consortium principle to enable partners to share staff and resources (WG, 2001, p 53). The preferred approach was to promote the development of twenty one community consortia for education and training (CCETs) recommended in the ETAG report (1999) which brought together education and training providers at a local level. The role of the CCET was to 'seek ways of improving the quality, efficiency and client focus of local services through collaboration between local providers' (Morgan et al, 2004). These new bodies were seen by WG as having a crucial role in bringing together partners at a local level (WG, 2001).

From 2005, a number of WG reports aimed at changing the structure of the public sector. The WG announced its 'delivering the connections' action plan in June 2005. A report commissioned by the WG (*The Review of Local Service Delivery*, Beacham, 2006) aimed primarily at local authorities, recommended increased joint working across organisations and

sectors and across services within them. The central aims of the Beacham Report (2006) were to enhance capacity, improve efficiency and increase the range and quality of public services. No major reorganisation of structures was proposed. The priority was to make the existing system work much better.

As already noted, in 2007 Sir Adrian Webb published his report *Promise and Performance. The Report of the Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education in Wales in the context of the Learning Country: Vision into Action*, with a key conclusion that ‘research indicates that efficiency gains in an FEI college are most efficient when turnover reaches circa £15m a year; but only 55% of FEIs are operating at this level’ (Webb, 2007, p 67). He argued for a programme of reconfiguration to ensure that FEIs were operating at a minimum size that could guarantee sustainability. This re-sizing could be achieved through federations, mergers or new colleges and no standalone college should have a turnover of less than £15m (Webb, 2007). He also proposed the setting up of nine 14-19 commissioning consortia to plan and deliver a wider entitlement to learners and set out the areas to be covered by each. (Webb, p 77). The WG responded to Webb and concluded that

Fewer larger organisations could offer benefits to learners and better value for money. However it also recognised that there are different circumstances in different parts of Wales and no gold standards for provider size can be applied, especially in rural areas and for Welsh medium schools (WG 2008b, para 10.15, p74).

The WG document stated that reforms should result in ‘more partnerships between providers, more HE and FE mergers... more tertiary arrangements’ (WG 2008b, para 10.16, p74). The word transformation had replaced reconfiguration and signalled that fundamental changes were needed that did more than make efficiency gains, or enhance quality, this was about transforming the structures of the entire post-sixteen education sector across Wales.

This shift in focus between reconfiguration and transformation led to a proposal for four broad models of transformation. They included: 16-19 provision involving schools and FE Colleges working closely with each other to deliver the Welsh Government *Learning and Skills Measure (2010)* a statutory basis for 14-19 Learning Pathways which was designed to ‘transform provision and support for learners, raise achievement and attainment, prepare young people for high skilled employment or higher education and enable Wales to compete in Europe in the 21st century’ (WG, 2010). The model also supported joint governance arrangements or by the transfer of a school 6th form to another school or to an FE College to create a tertiary college;

a reduction in the number of work based learning contracts; collaboration between colleges and universities with the possibility of mergers between colleges or between colleges and universities - and finally, the creation of adult community learning partnerships to deliver provision for 19+ learners (WG, 2010).

In terms of specific recommendations for higher education, Webb (2007) was clear ‘that good partnerships are exemplified by a shared mission for the delivery of HE in FE, progression routes for learners, and the management of quality by the HEI (2007, p84, para 8.25). In addition, Webb was specific with regard to the advice given to the then WG DCELLS (Department for Children, Lifelong Learning and Skills) with the following recommendation:

Working with HEFCW, establish and fund a programme of new foundation degrees in key areas of the economy. These should be developed and delivered by consortia of employers, HEIs and FEIs, with an employer chair (Webb, p114, R84).

Webb’s call for employers to chair consortia made up of HE and FE partners, plus representatives from local industries pre-dates UHOVI by two years. The recommendation to appoint a chair from industry was an attempt to make HE and FE accountable to the needs of the local economy.

An important review of the mission and direction of the transformation agenda was chaired by Professor Merfyn Jones (Jones, 2009) who pointed out that the reconfiguration of the HE sector had been at the heart of policy in Wales since the publication of *Reaching Higher* (WG, 2002). The review argued that ‘reconfiguration relies too heavily on financial factors or assumptions about benefits accruing from general capacity increase’ (2009, p 73). Jones suggested there ‘should be an emphasis on outcomes and efficiency delivery not on configuration as an end itself’ (2009, p 77). However, there was a compelling case for consolidating critical mass particularly in wider configuration, including merger and there was strong support for HE-FE partnerships which would improve access and progression into HE for non-traditional learners. The review concluded that this approach for HE partnerships was consistent with the transformation agenda (2008). WG accepted the Jones Review’s (2009) recommendations.

While emphasizing the importance of collaboration, WG (2009) expected ‘to see proposals emerging for further reconfiguration of the HE sector, including institutional mergers and collaboration’ (2009, para 75). It was left to governing bodies to decide to merge or not. The Universities of Glamorgan and University of Wales, Newport merged in 2013. However, the proposed merger between the new University of South Wales and Cardiff Metropolitan

University failed despite strong ministerial pressure. Inherent in the commitment of policy makers, senior managers and governing boards to the UHOVI concept was that collaboration as a strategy was in itself an aspiration and that collectively, HE and FE partners could achieve more together than if they were to continue as separate entities.

Additional contextual background to the introduction of UHOVI was provided by a Learning Innovation Expert Group that was commissioned by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) 'to investigate innovative pedagogies for the Post Compulsory Sector'. This group was asked to examine how to engage with students from disadvantaged communities, having firstly examined national and international research. One of the key objectives of the group was: To consider the challenges of widening participation on learning and teaching in the Heads of the Valleys as identified in the *Turning Heads, A Strategy for the HOV 2020* (WG, 2006).

In this report, Wales is described as a country where a quarter of those of working age are not available for work. High levels of inactivity have led to locally concentrated areas of de-skilling and destructive cycles of low expectations, disaffection and social exclusion. The Heads of the Valleys is an area of economic and social deprivation. Most of the potential students will be in the lower socio-economic groups whereas more than half of the applicants taking traditional pathways through higher education are from higher socio-economic groups (Connor and Dewson, 2001).

In a wider, UK educational context, the Leitch Report (2006), prompted a shift in emphasis for HEIs to deliver higher level skills and workforce development. This HE commitment was driven largely by the needs of the learner reinforced by the wider issue relating to the national economic need. HEIs across the UK from this point on have been offering different forms of work-based learning options which have been varied in terms of scale and scope of provision. The different approaches can quite possibly be determined by the motivations of those leading the HEI institutions, those that have followed an institutional mission which defined the identity of the organisation, or those that have followed an ad hoc approach recognising an opportunity to expand and grow when the opportunity has presented itself (House of Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee, 2009, p 2).

Many of the HEIs that took on board Leitch's recommendations did so through the use of foundation degrees, recognising value in a qualification that brought together the acquisition of HE level academic knowledge and work based skills through targeted employer engagement.

A study conducted in England by Pollard (2008) of the perceptions and intentions towards entering higher education by working adults aged between 25 and 55, with no university level qualifications, highlighted that 55% of respondents reported that they would consider further study if encouraged. The encouragement could come from a sustainable model of lifelong learning that was more than just offering skills and qualifications, but a network of organisations that supported learners to learn (ibid).

In the context of the HOV region of SE Wales, UHOVI was built on a model of progression of and commitment to learning, starting with early involvement in problem-based exploration; i.e. encouraging learners to want to learn; which could begin with something as straightforward and informal as a chat over a cup of coffee at a venue which is familiar and safe. This is followed by entry into more structured and accredited study. The three key underlying concepts were informal, non-formal and formal learning as discussed by McGivney (1999) and Coffield (2000) and reinforce specific learner directed support in the form of confidence building, childcare, financial support and advice and study skills to support learning.

It is unsurprising that the HE sector is often pivotal to such strategies as it is seen as ‘the vehicle to develop processes for dissemination of new knowledge at a regional level’ (Hagen, 2002, p 207). As already noted the WG were prepared to fund the regeneration of the HOV region to the tune of around £110 million and had agreed the *Turning Heads* policy paper in 2006. This wider regeneration policy certainly provided the opportunity for the HE sector to contribute to a nationally supported agenda. It appears that both UWN and UoG between them had the strategic foresight to recognise that a new and innovative curriculum offer that was designed to improve knowledge and up skill a historically under-performing region in Wales, such as Merthyr Tydfil, would interest the Welsh Government. It was straightforward enough to recognise that the universities had similar civic engagement missions in order to attain critical mass for widening access activities through the pooling of lifelong learning expertise and resources. It could be assumed that the subsequent removal of duplication, the simplification of communication with stakeholders and the enhancement of quality would lead to improved levels of engagement.

The business plan devised by UoG and UWN was to create the University Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI), an initiative designed to respond positively and proactively to Welsh Government, UK and European policy directives by promoting skills training and lifelong learning alongside economic development (UHOVI Business Plan 2007). The business plan

outlined a radical new partnership which would move forward Welsh Government and Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCW) agendas for two universities in South East Wales working together in cost effective ‘win-win’ ways (ibid).

The UHOVI Business Plan recognised sector priorities such as the objective of all young people leaving school literate and numerate so that employers can build on the skills necessary for business. These priorities are outlined within *Wales: a Vibrant Economy (2005)*. This aimed to fill the provision gaps such as employability skills, team working and problem solving. It focused on developing and offering a wide- ranging curriculum which appealed to popular interests in science, health care, sociology, psychology, environmental studies, media, journalism, animation, broadcasting, digital technology and the performing arts (Saunders et al, 2013).

At the time (circa 2006-2008), these were not just identified growth areas for employment in the HOV and wider region, but were also popular subjects which acted as ‘learning levers’ that reached out to those populations otherwise disengaged from education, training and subsequent employment. The design of UHOVI therefore had relevance to social inclusion imperatives contained within the Welsh Government policy document *The Learning Country: from Vision into Action (2006)*, especially in relation to tackling long-term unemployment and disengagement in the HOV region.

UHOVI was also designed to reinforce the WG policy *Turning Heads (2006)* strategic developments within a key region depicted by the *Wales Spatial Plan (2004)*. It considered the links between the valleys region and the cities of Cardiff and Newport in order to maximise resources and improve employment mobility. It was felt that such ambition could only be achieved through advanced cross-sector partnerships as advised by *The Beacham Review (2006)*, bringing together the expertise and resources of higher and further education institutions as well as employers, social enterprises, and grassroots community organisations (ibid).

UWN and UoG were guided by the WG’s response to *the Leitch Review (2006)*, by the regional statements of needs and priorities and by the sector skills councils to improve skills in the region which in turn would boost productivity and better support employers (Leitch, 2006). Speaking ahead of the launch of UHOVI in 2010, the Welsh Government’s Minister for Education, Leighton Andrews AM stated:

UHOVI is a unique partnership between universities, colleges and training providers which will increase skills levels in the Heads of the Valley, playing a key part in the economic resurgence of the area as a whole (Evans, 2010).

This message was supported by Helen Marshall (2010) UHOVI Project Director, who said:

With increased local access to learning and a greater choice of courses, more local people will be able to study right up to degree level locally, meeting the needs of local businesses for skilled staff and raising aspiration across the region (Evans, 2010).

This view provided by the UHOVI project director added to the economic and social context referred to in chapter one provided the necessary evidence for WG to support the *Turning Heads* (2006) policy and in turn, the UHOVI initiative.

It is worth noting one aspect of the pedagogic and cognitive approach that underpinned UHOVI to support local people and local businesses was in ensuring that the concept of informal, non-formal and formal approaches to learning were embraced. Informal and non-formal learning can be considered by higher education institutions to be non-competitive in terms of improving engagement in learning by under-represented populations (Saunders et al, 2013). There are numerous instances where individual universities engage in loss-leading access initiatives that have no business case for at least two reasons (Saunders et al, 2013). First, the immediate short-term returns for student recruitment to accredited higher education programmes and awards are small (ibid). Second, the withdrawal and drop-out rates for those who engage are unacceptably high, leading to a profound increase in demands for learning support services (Saunders et al, p 88). This is an interesting situation because even before UHOVI had attempted to improve Level 4+ qualifications and skills, it is probable that given the deep-rooted social and economic challenges of the HOV, this core aim would be almost impossible to achieve within the proposed timeframe indicated by Helen Marshall (2010). The preferred way in which UHOVI could improve level 4+ qualifications and skills was through a co-ordinated strategic partnership approach.

In 2011 an independent task and finish group headed by the former Director of Education for Neath and Port Talbot LEA, Viv Thomas, investigated the structure of educational services in Wales noting that:

Further collaboration and partnership is patently required to ensure that learners in the

14-16 and 16-19 age range are offered real opportunities and choice. Partnership between schools and FE is demonstrably taking place in some parts of Wales. Competition and confusion is seen in other parts of our country (Thomas, 2011, p 14).

It also reflected that

Part of the way forward for FE is to collaboratively address further coordination at a Wales level and greater cooperation with regional consortia. However, we also recognise that much of a college's work and business continues with education and skills post 19 and that this must be maintained. Clearly, bespoke or tailor-made programmes for industry and business will feature high in the post 19 sector and will be even more necessary in times of financial stringency (Thomas, 2011, p 13).

The Welsh Government encouraged education providers to develop a more co-ordinated and harmonised approach to meeting local and regional demand, invariably involving direct collaboration with individual FE College and HEI providers. Working directly with HEFCW, Sector Skills Councils and WBL providers, the Welsh Government was seeking to: 'establish a strategy to develop sectoral learning networks to enhance skill development and access to post 19 learning pathways' (Thomas, 2011, p 15).

The HEFCW strategic approach and plan for widening access to higher education (2010) indicates that universities would try to build on the existing strategic learning partnerships and offer a strong FE/HE interface in order to secure clear articulation and progression pathways into higher education (HEFCW, 2010, p 10). This approach would also help to facilitate robust, full-time and part-time progression pathways into higher education. In order to achieve this, both FE and HE would need to continue to strengthen their employer relationships and learning networks to ensure that learning outcomes better meet the skills needs of local industry (WG, 2008a). UHOVI provided the ideal platform to meet this WG aim in the HOV. At the time that UHOVI was providing the ideal platform on which HE and FE could work collaboratively, the rest of Wales and indeed much of the UK was feeling the delayed effects of a global economic banking crisis. UHOVI gave the partner FE colleges the opportunity to be confident and ambitious in their approach to developing level 4+ qualifications and skills.

However, despite this, much of the South East Wales 'connections corridor' and 'Heads of the

Valleys' (Wales Spatial Plan, Update, 2008), reflected that areas have problems with low essential skill and qualification levels, making a place at university too ambitious a first step on the learning ladder. Coupled to this is the almost visible poverty of ambition that exists in the minds of some existing and potential learners. If one adds the relatively high levels of economic inactivity, poor levels of health of some parts of the population and problems with travel in parts of the region, this pervasive culture could conspire against the Welsh Government's transformational education vision. Upgrading the skills of those in and out of work, including basic skills will be a key priority (Wales Spatial Plan, Update, 2008, p105).

At the time of UHOVI's discontinuation in 2016, FE colleges throughout Wales were continuing their work with partner higher education institutions. These collaborative arrangements were sufficient to enable students to achieve the academic standards required for their awards. However, there is always the possibility, following the end of the transformation era, that the newly-merged FE Colleges, now of a sufficient size and financial status, may consider applying for their own foundation degree awarding powers. The ongoing risk for the further education sector in the second decade of the twenty first century is that whilst the transformation agenda has ended, it did set a precedent in terms of options for collaboration with other providers. It could be argued that from now on, further education colleges across the UK could be considered as merger options, not just with other FE colleges but with HE partners also. This could run the risk of FE colleges losing some of their identity and institutional autonomy as part of a larger organisation, led by a higher education partner.

The concluding part of the literature review in Chapter four examines the UK-wide use of strategic partnerships to deliver higher and further education policy. It then focuses on the policy context in Wales and the social and economic conditions that led to the introduction of UHOVI in 2009.

Chapter 4: The strategic role of partnerships to deliver government policy

4.1 Introduction

This final part of the literature review begins with an examination of collaborations and partnerships across the FE and HE sectors in the UK. It initially considers the purpose of partnerships as a strategy to deliver UK national HE policy. In the early 2000s, for example, the new Labour Government's policy was to offer what they felt were genuine widening participation opportunities for harder to reach learners. Creating partnerships between HEIs and FE Colleges was one of the key strategies in achieving this specific policy aim. Whilst the literature in this initial section often focuses on UK-wide HE policy, it is also relevant to the situation that existed in Wales and helps to explain the contextual background to the introduction of UHOVI in 2009.

The second section considers the mechanism and structures required within a partnership to deliver widening participation activity. It goes on to explore the key challenges and issues that both the institution and the individual partners face.

Finally, the third section considers the key changes in governance and management and the challenges posed specifically to FE institutions working in partnerships with HEIs to deliver widening participation opportunities to learners, specifically in Wales.

4.2 The purpose of partnerships

A working definition of partnerships is when two or more organisations or groups of people cooperate to achieve a common purpose and that the common purpose is normally recognised as being of benefit to both or all parties (Davies and Vigurs, 2006a; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). The creation of partnerships as a strategy for business and operational planning is apparent in the public and private sectors, business and commercial activities and range across both legal and informal relationships. (Davies and Vigurs, 2006a). Partnerships can be collaborations, networking arrangements and informal and formal co-operations that sometimes take the form of full mergers or even take-overs. As a generic term, the word partnership can also encapsulate informal 'one off' arrangements between like-minded organisations (ibid).

National governments have promoted the use of partnerships as strategies, not only to encourage improved ways of working between state organisations, but also as a key approach

by government towards policy making (Powell and Exworthy, 2002). In its White Paper (2003) *The Future of Higher Education*, the UK Government exemplifies this point and commits to funding key partnerships between HE and HE and HE and FE partners

We are creating a strategic development fund, administered by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), to support change. The fund will support structural change including strategic alliances, merger and collaboration between higher education institutions and between higher education and further education (Clause 7.13, page 80).

In Wales, the WG's Transformation Policy (2008) specifically encouraged strategic partnerships and mergers across the FE sector and encouraged a reduction in the number of FE colleges. Additionally, building strategic partnerships was important in providing a policy context for some targeted HEIs and FE Colleges (WG, 2008). This point will be further explored in section three of this chapter.

A wider literature review reveals examples of both the UK and WG's use of partnerships as a strategy to deliver policy. This was particularly apparent around the turn of the new century, 2000. The UK's national strategy of the then Labour Government was based on the creative tension between the higher education system having access to a free market and the competing requirements of social inclusion (Beckmann and Cooper, 2004; Mulderrig, 2003). This deliberate approach by government helped maintain 'old' Labour's position of addressing the imbalances of social inequality and developing policies on the basis of social justice (ibid). An alternative view was expressed by Burchill (2001) who described an 'unrestrained forcing model followed by a social contract of arm's length accommodation based on compliance' (2001, p 148) that ensures that responsibility for the implementation of government policy rests with the partnership and failure to achieve government targets lies with the specific organisations, rather than with the government itself (ibid). This interpretation of partnership places responsibility on the local providers to deliver on the promises of the partnership and removes any sense of blame from central government.

As an example, Ramsden, Bennett and Fuller (2004) offer evidence of the role of HEIs within the UK government's strategy to lessen the impact of the market economy, whilst supporting human capital development for economic growth (Ramsden et al, 2004). They examine

learning partnerships for the post-16 education sector in England that were established in 1998 to deliver a strategic role for education within the context of social inclusion and regeneration. For Ramsden et al (2004), the resulting effect confirms the nature of Government-led policies that restrict rather than empower local communities. They also contribute to a society seen to be more risk-conscious and fearful of the future with short-term remedies that are not fulfilled (ibid). The disappearance of Learning Partnerships confirms this feature (ibid). These existed as a short-term initiative in a long history of experimental projects, which date back to the 1970s Manpower Services Commission and its predecessors. (Ramsden et al, 2004, p 162). It could be suggested that the Welsh equivalent were the WG 14-19 Learning area Networks (LANs) which saw a similar fate. The New Labour Government could see the shortcomings of the use of such partnerships and in 2000 announced that 'new Local Strategic Partnerships were to be established to rationalise the existing plethora of local partnerships and that central government is actively seeking to reduce partnership requirements on local agencies' Learning and Skills Development Agency, (LSDA, 2001, p 1). These were to be overseen by Government Office civil servants who were to identify whether or not bureaucracy had been reduced. These examples provide further evidence of central control of and through partnerships (Ramsden et al 2004).

Cardini (2006) and Davies (2002) also view the use of partnerships as a means of promoting a democratic model of delivery through devolution of power. The objectives of central policy can be achieved in a direct way (Clarke and Glendinning, 2002). This moves responsibility for policy implementation to local government and quangos (quasi non-governmental organisations). The role of central government in promoting partnerships fits into this model of greater centralized control, direction and compliance whilst avoiding responsibility. Thus responsibility for outcome measures can be delegated to the providers instead (Clarke and Glendinning, 2002).

Partnerships take many forms and have a variety of purposes. These can include the exertion of central control, strategy and application. They can be seen as a way of prolonging the life of an at risk public sector organisation that faces cuts from central government in a challenging financial climate (Hudson & Hardy, 2002). Ironically, partnerships can also be seen as a defence against further interference by Government (ibid). HE in FE partnerships may have the potential, in the face of deep cuts in public expenditure, to offer such a strategy in supporting local communities (ibid). Hudson and Hardy (2002) explore the processes of partnerships as an arm of the modernisation objective of New Labour whereby partnerships

can provide the structures within which ‘joined-up thinking’ can flourish across public and private sector organisations.

4.3 FE and HE partnerships in the UK

Partnerships between FE and HE have a history that dates back to the 1940s when a number of previously partnered colleges to the University of London became universities in their own right.

(e.g. the University of Nottingham) (Hilborne, 1996, p 61). Further associations developed in an ad hoc way and at the discretion of the institutions concerned (ibid). This was at a relatively slow pace until the late 1980s and early 1990s when up to half the FE colleges in England and Wales became involved in partnerships with Higher Education (Bird, 1996; Parry, 2005). At this stage, government displayed little or no concern or ‘low policy’ as identified by Parry and Thompson (2002), with such partnerships.

Many such partnerships developed in relation to the provision of pathways from Access courses (in which learners aged 21 or more were provided with an alternative route to higher education without requiring traditional qualifications) and offered greater flexibility of HE via the FE colleges (Parry, 2005). Further increases were due to the expansion of HE numbers, mainly from polytechnics or post-92 institutions to meet the demand for places that could not be met within those institutions themselves. This also enabled increased HE numbers without a commitment to heavy investment costs of new builds (ibid). This reveals how strategies were driven more by the immediate concerns of resourcing, rather than alliances with FE colleges to promote widening participation and improved progression for local communities (ibid). FE colleges had been involved through Local Authority arrangements with HE and polytechnics and had seen their numbers grow (ibid). The only reason why the proportion of higher education students taught in FE colleges did not fall was because of the phenomenon of franchising (Parry, 2005, p 2). This strategy of prioritising financial and resource needs over the educational imperatives of widening participation represented a key challenge for HE and FE providers that commit to collaborative arrangements (ibid).

This growth of partnerships through franchising sustained HE provision in many colleges throughout this period (Parry & Thompson, 2002). The post 1997 period, described as ‘high policy’ (Parry and Thompson, 2002, p 35), signified much greater attention from both the UK and Welsh governments and its agencies and had been prompted by the Dearing inquiry report

(1997) as well as earlier reports (for example, DES, 1991) that had pointed to fundamental policy directives that culminated in this period of greater direction from government. Both the UK government and the devolved administration in Cardiff identified HE in FE as a key policy aim (Parry & Thompson, 2002). As early as the 'low policy' period, there had been indications that there was to be a growing focus on an increase in HE student numbers including a national target for HE student numbers. Yorke (1993) reveals that as early as 1987 and 1991 two Government White papers had strongly stressed the need for a greater uptake of higher education, with the latter advocating a participation rate of one person in three by the year 2000 (1993, p 169).

Expanded HE numbers were regarded as a policy steer to support HE in FE, either by direct or indirect strategies. However, the expansion did not fulfil FE colleges' aspirations for greater independence in running their own HE provision. The move to indirect funding, alongside the need to enter into structured partnerships with degree-awarding institutions was not popular with colleges (Parry & Thompson 2007). This indicates that some prospective partners in collaborations were motivated by resource needs and not necessarily by those of widening participation. The literature has revealed that partnership initiatives driven by policies of the UK national government have resulted in a series of challenges that are not exclusive to higher education in England, but applicable across the HE sector in the UK. In another example, Abramson (1996) highlights income-generation motives for expansion of HE in FE, although partnerships between FE colleges and HE institutions can be regarded as 'A blend of commercial and academic imperialism' (Woodrow, 1993, quoted in Abramson, 1996, p 8) and not necessarily an opportunity to build genuine, mutually agreed partnerships.

Such was the increasing interest in the provision of higher education through HE in FE partnerships, that HEFCE commissioned research and two reports were produced in 2003. One was concerned with strategy (HEFCE 2003/16) and a second report with support and development and aimed at practitioners (HEFCE, 2003/15). This latter report's immediate remit was to evaluate the use of the HEFCE Development fund that had been established to support development of HE in FE specifically those initiatives that were directly funded. The two reports also looked specifically at how FE and HE institutions collaborated. They clearly identified that FE colleges had a role to play in the expansion of HE student numbers and that they were well placed to recruit and teach non-traditional students, and were able to do so at a lower cost than HEIs (HEFCE 2003/16, p 3). Whilst these reports are specific to England, their

findings would prove to be similar to the situation that existed in Wales with regard to HE/FE collaboration.

Interestingly, there is no reference to staff conditions of service and salary comparisons that supports supposed lower costs in FE compared with HE. The reference to lower costs is one that has been challenged in recent empirical studies of HE in FE. Delivery in FE Colleges tends to be in smaller groups with more intensive support and FE Colleges are under-resourced (Marks, 2002). The reports offered guidance for strategic planning and management and various examples of good practice were presented for practitioners to consider.

4.4 Mechanisms and partnership structures

The second part of this chapter will review the literature that considers the mechanisms and structures of strategic partnerships, exploring the main issues and challenges of collaborations and partnerships across the UK.

Davies and Vigurs (2006b) examine why partnerships between further and higher education exist in the first place, as opposed to mergers of the institutions concerned. Using the model of transaction cost economics they analyse the principles that underpin this approach which can be summarised in the question ‘to make or to buy in’? If the analysis demonstrates that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages of partnership and the benefits of merger, the likelihood of opting for a partnership rather than a merger is high. It is not until the transaction costs become high that a merger is likely to take place (ibid). UK Government policy, as early as 1992 (DES, 1992), claims that releasing both higher education and further education to operate on a more entrepreneurial basis, would be more likely to act in the interests of the public. This UK Government policy document suggests ‘we might expect that partnerships will always be a preferred option since these preserve control for senior management of all partners’ (DES, 1992, p 14). The underpinning philosophy of the benefits of the market can be identified in this approach.

Brown (2001) provides insight and analysis of collaborations in the HE sector. He identifies four models of collaboration in higher education, ranging from ad hoc collaboration with both HEIs and FE colleges to mergers but notes that the ad hoc collaborations are the most common form of alliance. Patterson (2001) also analyses the range of partnership between FE and HE providers across the UK. His argument is that institutions move from an alliance approach (‘let’s be friends’) through legal and contracting partnerships (‘let’s be partners’) to a full

merger ('let's get married') with various stages in between (Patterson, 2001). This range covers the types of partnerships that FE and HE institutions can opt for, but it also indicates a potential for confusion. Ultimately it will be the growth of student numbers that determines the type of partnership that the partners opt for (Patterson, 2001). As such, these options have the potential to result in two polarised outcomes:

- i. A positive outcome that is represented by an organic, collaborative arrangement
or
- ii. A negative outcome that is represented by a partnership characterised by confusion and divided aims

The costs and benefits of partnerships to FE colleges were analysed by Trim (2001a; 2001b) who presents partnerships with potential for networking, thus giving access to knowledge and expertise that would normally be closed to them. The post-incorporated college, according to Trim, is focused on maintaining independence which will be valued as key to the mission and vision of the organisation. However, it is very likely that 'power of control will to a certain extent remain with the institution of higher education' (Trim, 2001a, p 112). There will, of course, be the additional advantage of maximising the strengths of both HE and FE partners which could result in access to research support that will benefit staff and the links with local businesses who hold higher education links in combination with the vocational skills base of the further education college (Trim, 2001b).

The link between institutions of higher education and tertiary level colleges is considered vital from the point of regional development particularly the transfer of knowledge and skills acquired. FE colleges can undertake research programmes together and this will help produce qualified staff for academia and facilitate technology transfer through research cooperatives (Trim, 2001b, p 192).

As an example of a specific HE and FE partnership, Mellors and Chambers (1996) analysed the collaboration between the University of Bradford and Bradford College between 1990 and 1996 and concluded that 'despite positive developments, there still remains a sensitivity to the maintenance of independence and the need to reduce the threats to institutional autonomy' (1996, p 178).

Competition between FE colleges is cited by Lumby (1998) as a threat to effective partnerships, given the commitment to meeting market requirements of the post-incorporated FE College. Lumby (1998) refers to the criticism made of the increased competition and its potential

damage to students as cited in the Kennedy Report (1997). An indication of what would occur in the future with FE partnerships is explained by Belfield and Bullock (2000) when they outline the pressures on FE colleges to demonstrate the achievement of marketisation through over-extending their remit in franchising-out courses to partners in the community or business. Such use of public money is questioned in terms of quality concerns and provision of public funds to private companies and in particular, some of the franchisees are private sector firms which are obtaining subsidies for training their workers (Belfield and Bullock, 2000, p 7). Although Belfield and Bullock (2000) are not referring specifically to partnerships with higher education, their point highlights the pressure on further education colleges to focus on funding and could raise questions around their motives for entering into partnerships. The same argument is also true of HE.

Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher (2006) provide evidence of discontentment amongst HE staff within partnerships where HE staff questioned the appropriateness of the funding to HE and lack of clarity about how any funds received moved into the faculties (2006, p 36). They argue that 'without a doubt, the issue of transparency and control of funding is paramount to those in both the FE College and the HEI that are involved in partnership (Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher, 2006, p 45). Where less attention is given over to developing effective communication, trust deteriorates and relationships rupture (2006, p 44).

In terms of the positive side of HE/FE partnerships, for HE, critical success factors would include: improved progression routes, enhancement of a regional profile, market penetration, market expansion or diversification (Davies and Vigurs, 2006). For FE there could be benefits from indirect income generation, an enhancement of the institutional mission to serve a local community and extending the curriculum portfolio (ibid). For the FE College, there could also be examples of an enhanced prestige from association with an HEI and particularly in times of financial constraint, survival and the maintenance of independence (Trim, 2001a). For both HEIs and FE colleges there is access to networking and opportunities for development of knowledge and expertise (Trim, 2001b). Connolly, Jones and Jones (2007) claim that 'organisations will only collaborate when the key decision-makers believe that they can secure protection, if not enhancement, of the key organisational resources'. (2007, p 160).

The structure of partnerships can help embed the key values of culture, ethos and trust that are highlighted as essential elements of successful collaborative arrangements (Bridge et al, 2003; Foskett, 2005; Robinson and Burrows, 2004; Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher, 2006). What

the literature alludes to, however, are the benefits of consortia as a form of partnership where consortia are in effect the management and operations arm of the partnership (Smith and Betts, 2003, p 227). In this context, consortia do not seem to present the potential problem of a differential in power relationships in such sharp contrast as might be the case in a franchise relationship (Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher, 2006, p 43).

This suggests that the continuing success of a partnership requires a 'buy in' from all partners from the inception of the partnership. This must apply, not only to the philosophy underlying the collaboration (a commitment to the 'greater good'), like widening participation but also to a transparent approach towards funding. If there is no mutual agreement between partners with regard to the funding methodology to be applied, trust will be lost and the partnership will not be sustainable.

Parry and Thompson (2007) found in an analysis of the responses to the HEFCE consultation of 2007 regarding HE in FE, that the 'Code of Practice' (HEFCE, 2000) for consortia was endorsed as representing fair and transparent management practices by which all partnerships should abide. This contrasts with the policy in England of HE in FE and the potential threat to partnerships. For example, although the 'University Challenge' (HEFCE, 2007/07) refers to FE Colleges drawing on the strengths of the respective institutions through realisation of the benefits of collaboration (2007, p 6), the objective is to establish independent university centres that support the provision of high-level skills. Whilst partnership is to be encouraged, it is not to be focused on associations with HE institutions but, a multi-partner approach to funding will demonstrate the strength of the commitment and provide a firm foundation from which to grow HE (Parry and Thompson, 2007). A typical multi-partner approach could involve regional education consortia or regional development agencies, local education authorities and community groups and organisations, but need not be restricted to just these organisations (HEFCW, 2007, p 6).

Partnerships between HE and FE have traditionally focused on what have been referred to as 'the borders' of levels four and five or sub-degree level between HE and FE (West, 2006). The border areas have resulted in some boundary issues between FE and HE that reflect not just issues of structure but also the more fundamental discourses around the role of education within a globalised economy and the role of education (ibid). West (2006) asserts that the 'border lands' of HE and FE are the basis for partnerships and that the blurred boundaries are in some sense the testing ground for our notions of what constitutes each (2006, p 11). For West (2006),

the real question is around the diminution of HE in FE rather than its expansion (2006, p11). At the turn of the 21st century, FE in England experienced a reduction in the number of directly-funded students following HE courses. This was reduced by over a quarter by 2002 with ultimately 140 further education colleges receiving direct funding and 260 indirect funding in 2006-07 (Bathmaker et al, 2008).

Higher National Diplomas had been moved into HEFCE control in 1988 and were followed by Higher National Certificates in 1998, leaving only the non-prescribed curriculum funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (Bathmaker et al, 2008). This was the elimination of Advanced Further Education and its transference into HE control (Bathmaker et al, 2008, p 19). In this example, partnerships can be regarded as the policing of HE in FE (see, also, Bird, 1996). Parry (2006) also refers to FE Colleges' role in the 1990s and suggests that the prevailing policies lessened the role of further education colleges as providers of higher education in their own right (2006, p 399). The introduction of Foundation Degrees (FD), although initially identified in the Dearing Report (1997) as the expansion of HE in FE at sub-degree level, were also offered to HEIs who provided the majority of part-time FDs and 33 per cent of full-time FDs (HEFCE, 2010). This expansion of FDs in HE highlights the complications and confusions that have been present in the 'border lands' for some time but which have been further complicated by the provision of FDs by both FE and HE (West, 2006).

These contextual complexities provide a background to the challenges of participation and progress under mass conditions and the blurring and questioning of boundaries that once framed an elite system (Parry, 2006, p 406). An additional issue relating to HE and FE partnerships is identified by Bathmaker et al (2008) who highlights the concerns of FE colleges in terms of their perception of the unequal relationship between HE and FE and the lack of confidence by FE colleges in their continued dependence on an HEI for their HE work (ibid). As a consequence, FE tends to associate duality with dependence and difficulty (Bathmaker et al, 2008, p135).

4.5 Issues of quality within HE/FE partnerships

The notion of quality is seen as an aspect of both quality assurance and its achievement through early franchise arrangements (Hilborne, 1996; Selby, 1996; York, 1993). From around the turn of the twentieth century, HEFCE (2000) favoured consortia arrangements whereby HEIs could maintain quality assurance and were aware of advantages in the involvement of a higher education institution, both from the view of quality and accountability (West, 2006, p 20).

‘Quality in the 1990s was reported as being the quality of teaching and learning experienced by HE students in FE colleges, similar to that of comparable students reading similar courses in universities’ (Hilborne, 1996, p 59). Hilbourne (1996) notes that there are differences between the quality of the provision and the quality assurance system, which highlight that all may not be well with the quality assurance systems that universities use to assure themselves and others. He does suggest however ‘that the standards of university awards and the courses which lead to them, offered in collaboration with other institutions, are satisfactory’ (Hilbourne, 1996, p 60).

Quality assurance procedures of HE in FE can be effective and provide a pathway to further development of HE processes as preparation for potential foundation degree awarding powers, also allowing FE colleges integration into the HE framework. HEFCE reports from 2003 (HEFCE, 2003/16) and 2009 (HEFCE, 2009) also provide evidence of the focus of staff development for FE staff on quality assurance systems, although there were differences in opinion amongst FE colleges as to the need for a separate HE quality assurance system (HEFCE, 2003). The most striking feature of the information on quality was the polarisation between those who believed that ‘a separate quality assurance system for HE was essential and those who saw no difficulty in reconciling their HE and FE systems’ (HEFCE, 2003, p 15).

There is no evidence to show that a separate HE system results in a more successful performance in the quality assurance audit. As the institution responsible for quality assurance however, a university may take a different view. The question of quality may be perceived to be merely a technical, but nevertheless, important matter. This could also be viewed as an indicator of more serious problems at the heart of HE itself. Quality assurance systems might be used to genuinely maintain standards and eliminate those FE partners who are deemed to have unacceptable standards. On the other hand, QA standards could be used to impose a particular ‘brand’ of HE that the universities wish to deliver. With the introduction of Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) systems for FE colleges and their partner HEIs (QAA, 2006) the question becomes even more complex. The position of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) itself is interesting. There is the potential for the QAA, as an independent agency, to maintain the standards of HE or possibly to introduce a vocationalised HE curriculum for further and higher education institutions.

Smith and Betts (2003), analyse the introduction of HE/FE consortium arrangements for the purposes of developing and delivering Foundation Degree courses. They raise the issue of

quality. FE/HE partnerships of any sort produce challenges for quality assurance. FE institutions are not universities. They have different cultures, learning philosophies, resource strategies, management styles and research traditions (ibid). Yet, ultimately, in the context of QAA processes the university is held responsible for the quality of the provision in that area (Smith & Betts 2003, p 231). Partnerships may be caught between the demands of maintaining notions of academic standards and the demands from both government and individual students to extend opportunities for widening participation (ibid). There is a prospect of conflict between these two objectives. Bathmaker (2010) suggests that HE-led partnerships may dissolve as a result of the expansion of dual institutions of HE in FE and the mixed economy colleges may develop higher profiles in HE, through the Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP). FE Colleges may seek to deliver their own brand of HE through their own awarding powers (ibid).

This section of the chapter has reviewed the literature that focuses on the generic issues and challenges of HE and FE partnerships. Whilst it has provided information predominantly from HEFCE policy and its impact on the English HE sector, it is applicable across the UK. It underpins government policy decisions that in turn have an impact on HE and FE institutional strategies. The final section will review the specific contextual background in the Welsh higher and further education sectors.

4.6 Governance and management

This third section considers the importance of institutional governance and management in the context of government strategies to create partnerships, collaborations and mergers within a Welsh context. It explores the changes of the HE and FE sectors in Wales from 1979 to the present day, primarily focusing on the impact of change post incorporation of colleges (1993). These changes can be considered under four phases of successive UK Governments and the devolved administration in Cardiff:

These are:

1. 1979-1993 First phase: Central Government intervention, Thatcherism and the new managerialism in public sector management
2. 1993-1998 Second phase: Further Education Incorporation and the introduction of the devolved government in Wales
3. 1998-2008 Third phase: The era of voluntarism
4. 2008-2014 Fourth phase: Transformation agenda in Wales

This next section will address the changes in governance and management of further and higher education in Wales from 1979, through to the present day. Examining the theoretical roots of new public management provides a better understanding of the HE and FE sectors and what motivates them to work in collaborations and partnerships, an area which in general has been under researched (McGinty and Fish, 1993).

Within each phase, key government policies indicate that the pathway of the post-16 education sector is one of continuation rather than fragmentation. Included within this journey are the peaks and troughs of government involvement that vary, on the one hand, from voluntarism (a principle or system that relies on the voluntary action of others rather than on implementation by government), to a more interventionist approach on the other. Continuity is provided by successive governments, building on the work of previous ones, despite them being of different political persuasions. Some governments are more interventionist than others. One example of government intervention is the incorporation of further education colleges brought in by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government. This contrasts with the more hands off approach of Tony Blair's new Labour government.

The Welsh Government (post devolution) has gradually built from a period of non-intervention, after 1998 and the Education and Training Action Plan (ETAP, 1999) to its Transformation Strategy, (2008) that gave opportunities for pro-active FE colleges and HEIs across Wales to take action by considering appropriate strategic mergers and partnerships with other institutions.

These policies and strategies can be seen as key drivers of change for both the HE and FE sectors. The timeline included in Chapter two has already identified them, along with the strategic response from HE and FE providers. In summary, these are: the 1988 Education Reform Act, the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act and the 1997 national referendum on devolved powers for Wales. Key reports and reviews post incorporation are the Education and Training Action Plan for Wales 1999 (ETAP), Learning Country, Vision into Action' (2002), the Webb Review 2007, the Transformation Agenda 2008, the Thomas report 2011 and the Humphries Review of FE governance, 2011.

UK Government policy towards the public sector in Wales began to change with the election of the Conservative Government in 1979. LEAs, seen largely as being overly bureaucratic, began to be blamed for the perceived failures of the education service at all levels across the different sectors. Institutions were 'producer centred' and protected from the rigour of the

marketplace. Customers, defined as students, parents and businesses took second place to the interests of professionals. The Government's view on the role of local authorities was made clear by various ministers. Kenneth Baker, the UK Government's Education Minister, attacked 'trumped up little councillors who tried to dictate terms to polytechnic directors'. (REF) The theory of new public management was beginning to manifest itself and with a Conservative Government intent on decreasing the powers of the state, FE and HE provided the perfect platform from which to explore this new way of thinking.

During the Thatcher Government (1979-1990) there was a switch to monetarism and to an ideology that emphasised the duty of individuals to provide for themselves as opposed to an over protective role for the state. A new wave of privatisation was Thatcher's strategy to introduce consumerism, competition, and business efficiency into a state sector that she regarded as failing and divisive to state prosperity. The post-16 education sector was to play a significant role in this new wave of government interventionism (Ferlie et al 1996). This new agenda, whilst initiated by the Conservative Government, was deliberate in its aim to remove the paternal arm of the local education authority from around the FE sector and introduce a new set of rules - borrowed from the private sector and based on enterprise and commerce (ibid).

The appointment of governors from the world of business to further and higher education boards was the Government's way of exposing public sector institutions to the rigours of the market place with a clear focus on the customer. Kenneth Baker, summed up this philosophy by stating (HC Deb 12 November 1986-11-13)

For too long we have left too much to the professional educators and the professional providers. The users, the customers, have had too little say and too little opportunity to make their contribution... enormous powers have been entrusted to the LEAs and not always with the happiest results.

Baker recognised that the education establishment was preventing change (HC Deb 12 November 1986-11-13). Whilst acknowledging that the customer might choose badly or irresponsibly, this should not be used as an excuse to deny choice and responsibility to the great majority (Tebbit 1987 in Whitty 1989 p 329). And so, with a Conservative Government in power and the start of the demise of state-owned industries, the further education colleges and HE institutions across the UK were either perceived as being under threat or on the cusp of an opportunity, depending on which view one took.

By the mid-1980s, the Conservative Government focussed on the composition and powers of education governing bodies. The first priority was to remove the membership of local authority governors. The members of governing bodies were there to help raise standards and improve performance. This could be better achieved if the governing body elect was more balanced and its contribution clearly defined (Whitty 1989).

In 1991 Kenneth Clarke announced the Government's intention to remove FE colleges from local authority control and hand the bulk of responsibility for funding to the new further education funding councils. College assets and the employment of staff would transfer to new business-led governing bodies. In 1993, FE colleges followed the path of higher education in becoming an independent sector that was market-driven and wholly autonomous. The key change in the management and governance of FE colleges in Wales throughout this Conservative-led era was the incorporation of FE Colleges where power was devolved from LEAs to the institutions and in so doing affecting the nature and composition of the FE governing body. Kerfoot and Whitehead (1998) refer to this new era as 'the big bang approach to management' identifying a shift in culture from benign liberal paternalism to a hegemonic masculinity.

FE governing bodies ensured that proposed reforms were carried out, so ensuring their integration within the new set up was vital. These changes were also designed to create a new culture and philosophy in FE colleges. Jones (1995) argues that aggressive managerialism legitimised through this dominant discourse resulted in a 40% growth in the sector between 1993-1996 with lower funding than in 1992.

This stage in the history of direct government involvement in the management of the further and higher education sectors is characterised by incorporated colleges and new universities. Significantly, it also allowed FE colleges to make their own collaborative arrangements with local higher education providers that would not be subjected to the scrutiny of the local education authority. Post 1993, the newly appointed governors working within the incorporated colleges were predominantly recruited from the world of private business for reasons already noted. It is not surprising that they were far more comfortable in discussing finance, staffing and site management than they were curriculum, learning and teaching (Jones, 1995).

Peters and Pierre (1998, p 232) suggest 'that governance is about process, while New Public Management (NPM), is about outcomes'. They go on to say that 'governance is ultimately concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action' (Peters and

Pierre, 1998). Stoker (1998, p17) also comments that ‘governance refers to the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors has become blurred’.

In effect, the two successive Conservative governments under Thatcher (1979-1990) and Major (1990-1997), had created the opportunity for the FE colleges to operate free from local control, but under the directive of central government. They were scrutinised by newly formed governing bodies that had expertise in the private sector and were the conduit between the old world and what would become the new. This period provided an opportunity for effective senior managers and governors to mould the professional identity of their colleges with the power to act within their capacity as leaders of the new, powerful, incorporated institutions. Despite the interventionist nature of the policy, this was perceived as being ‘under the radar’ of Westminster and the Welsh Department prior to devolution. The professional identity of the FE sector shaped towards the latter part of the Conservatives’ and the early Blair years, is a key theme in initiating change in the management and governance of the FE sector.

If FE managers and governors were attempting to mould the sector’s new professional identity, it was not before time. Robson (1998, p256) argues that ‘To many outside education, FE teachers appear as an anomalous group, with an ambivalent status and an unclear identity’. This point reaffirms the belief that the Labour administration was more preoccupied with other political matters and consequently did not prioritise intervention in the FE sector at that time. However she goes on to suggest that the

FE teaching profession may have been particularly vulnerable, not for reasons that have to do with the competence or commitment of its members, but because of its history, its composition and its marginality within the educational system, as a whole (Robson 1998, p280).

It could be argued that during this period between 1994 and 2002, FE operated under the guise of proposed rationalisation and mergers but never really felt threatened by them, again suggesting that a voluntarist approach was apparent. In Wales, that indicates that the FE teaching professional was not as vulnerable as Robson suggests. In fact, it was quite the opposite as management boards and governing bodies gained momentum and strength, having had the best part of six years (1993 to 1999) to really set their own agendas and implement their own strategic visions. The next key date to note is 1998 and the introduction of the devolved government in Wales, bringing with it responsibility for further education colleges.

The Education and Training Action Plan for Wales (ETAP) 1999 had provided a number of strategic recommendations that could affect the future shape of further education and training in Wales. The Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCETs) were the direct result of ETAP and were meant (under a voluntarist approach) to encourage the collaboration of local partners in the world of education and training. It could be argued that ETAP was instrumental in shaping future reviews and reports, including the Webb review of 2007. At the time it was received, however, it consisted of no more than a set of recommendations and whether or not it was to be implemented depended on the appetite of the devolved government to intervene in a sector that had enjoyed six years of incorporation.

A key policy of WG, was the 14-19 learning pathways ‘Learning Country, *Vision into Action*’ (2002). This policy was designed by the Welsh Labour Government in Cardiff to widen the choice of provision for young people through a network of partnerships where providers worked collaboratively for the benefit of the learner. It was implemented throughout Wales, with the FE sector as an integral partner in the development and delivery of provision, largely in part because of its expertise in providing vocational courses and opportunities.

The Webb Report (2007) encouraged collaboration between all providers. The idea was that local consortia would reduce the number of delivery options and would help fulfil the ‘making the connections’ philosophy propagated by WAG. Webb significantly described the FE sector as ‘pivotal’ in helping achieve successful outcomes for the recommendations in his report. Interestingly, Sir Adrian Webb, the Chair of the group that devised the Report, had been a key member of the Education and Training Action Group (ETAG) in 1999 and Vice Chancellor of the University of Glamorgan, further emphasizing that the journey of FE was one of continuation rather than one of fragmentation.

Webb (2007) recommended that the FE sector

- should become the recognised skills driver for an area,
- should reconfigure so that no stand-alone institution has a turnover below £15 million,
- that within five years there should be regional consortia, each with a single further education college by process of merger,
- that there is a single institution for further and higher education for Cardiff and the Vale
- and that colleges are full participants in 14-19 consortia.

Webb's recommendations could be considered a key landmark in the drive towards the rationalisation of further education in Wales and whilst not government policy, Webb provided the Welsh Government with compelling evidence to enable them to proceed towards rationalisation or transformation. The subtitle for the Learning Country - '*Vision into Action*' (2002) is important as a catalyst for the later Webb Report (2007) and for FE governing bodies and management to take action before action was taken against them. Webb's (2007) vision for Welsh FE was one that aligns with the theoretical concept of new managerialism and was a key theme in the change of FE management and governance. By the time Webb had published his report in 2007, FE college managers and governors had had the best part of fourteen years (since incorporation) in which to create strong professional identities based on the concept of new managerialism, operating under a voluntarist approach from central government.

The years 2007 onwards were initially influenced by Leighton Andrews who was appointed WG Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning. Under his stewardship it became apparent that a more direct approach was deemed necessary to deliver the transformation policy and the issue of the vulnerability of individual colleges and universities became significant. In this climate it was inevitable that the professional identities of individual stand-alone colleges and universities would come under severe threat. His appointment, following the announcement of the transformation agenda in 2008 heralded the dawn of another era of change in management and governance in the FE sector across Wales.

The *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales Policy* (2008) provided stakeholders with a national framework to transform the post-16 network of learning providers. In this way the expected outcomes were for young people and adults to access more and better learning programmes and to acquire the skills needed to improve life chances and employability (ELC 2011). This policy was enabled and shaped by the difficult economic climate in the UK. FE college managers were aware that funding was declining and could possibly continue to do so. The argument for economies of scale became more focussed and balanced budgets became key performance indicators for incorporated colleges, along with the quality and standards agenda. The days of operating under the radar appeared to be over.

Since 1993, government strategy varied between the two extremes of, on the one hand voluntarism and on the other, a more interventionist approach. In this climate, the FE sector in Wales has not only survived, but has positively thrived in a post-incorporated world. The public sector new managerialism ethos was grasped and implemented through the commitment of FE

senior managers and governors. The impetus behind transformation undoubtedly changed the face of Welsh higher and further education. Whilst the higher education sector had responded by having two regional mergers of HE institutions (1) between Trinity College, Carmarthen and Swansea Metropolitan University, to form Trinity St David's University (2012) and (2) University of Glamorgan (UoG) and the University of Wales, Newport (UWN) to form the University of South Wales (USW) in 2013, the FE sector implemented more far-reaching changes.

Twenty six colleges from the mid-1990s had become thirteen by 2015 as a result of the sector responding to the pressures imposed by the more direct approach of the WG in the years since 2005. The newly-merged FE colleges represent over 230,000 learners, with several having learner populations of 25,000 or more and budgets over £45 million. For the managers and governors of the current FE colleges and universities in Wales, the challenge is still to be able to 'transform lives through teaching, driving social mobility and equipping the UK's workforce with skills that the economy needs. To generate the ideas and expertise that encourages innovation and improve the health and wellbeing of the nation' (O'Prey, 2017, p1) against a background of increased budget cuts.

The literature review presented in this chapter has indicated that collaborative partnerships were a crucial strategy to deliver higher and further education policy, both in the UK and Wales. The following chapter; chapter five, describes the research methodology used by returning to the core aim and objectives of the study as well as its organisational context and theoretical basis.

Chapter 5: Research Methodology

5.1 Introduction

The focus of my research is based upon the challenges I faced whilst working in several collaborative groups as a member of staff at the University of Wales, Newport between 2002-2013 and latterly, the University of South Wales from 2013-2015. As part of my job role I accepted a secondment to the strategic partnership, UHOVI between 2010 and 2012 and then a full-time position at UHOVI between 2013 and 2015. My role was initially to design and develop curriculum, specifically with the objectives of (i) engaging with learners and (ii) in partnership with FE providers, enabling learners to progress onto HE programmes or employment. In this latter role, I began to read more widely about partnership arrangements and specifically the merits of different approaches.

I tried to focus on research methods that suited the topic I was researching. However, I found myself leaning towards the method that most appealed to me and not necessarily the topic I was trying to address. Whilst I was sure I wanted to research UHOVI as a strategic partnership, at first I wasn't sure what methodology to employ. The research was exploratory in nature. UHOVI was the subject of the research, so adopting a case study approach seemed to make sense. UHOVI had never been researched or analysed before so I chose to consider the experiences of the staff that worked for and with UHOVI, particularly with regard to their experience of partnership working. I concentrated the research on a group of staff with diverse roles within UHOVI; those that managed and led the partnership; others who were instrumental in designing and developing the qualifications and curriculum for learners in the community and FE colleges and finally the staff that were responsible for providing the administrative management and support. The roles of the administrative staff ranged from marketing to learner support and business and management.

Case studies can take many different forms and directions and it has been suggested that this can pose a conundrum for researchers (Van Wynsberghe and Khan, 2007). Bassey (1999, p 12) offers some useful clarifications by describing three different types of educational case study. These are theory seeking and theory testing; storytelling and picture drawing; and finally evaluative. My study is broadly evaluative in nature and investigates the ways in which the participants make sense of their experiences, working for and with UHOVI.

I had planned to analyse UHOVI by investigating the case study history which explained why the UHOVI partnership was funded by the Welsh Government. As such I became interested in the historical, political and social issues that underpinned UHOVI and its policy context. I traced the lineage for UHOVI to the South Wales and Monmouthshire School of Mines in 1913 and drew parallels between the policy contexts within which the founders of that institution worked and those who created UHOVI in the 2000's. This became the first focus of my study - to help understand the policy implications of introducing a widening participation, higher education led strategic partnership in the twenty first century.

Having settled on this as a focus, I quickly realised there was the opportunity to analyse the context of partnership as a strategy to enable UHOVI to meet its aim and objectives. This was not my initial intention, but I found that familiarising myself with the literature on collaborations and partnerships furthered my understanding of what UHOVI was able to achieve, along with its limitations.

5.2 Core aim and objectives of the study

The core aim of the study is to investigate UHOVI as a strategic partnership to deliver Welsh Government policy.

The three research objectives were identified (as included in Chapter one) and are:

- To examine the experiences of participants involved in collaborative working and relationships across the UHOVI partnership
- To identify perceptions of the strengths and limitations of UHOVI and partnership arrangements for the management and delivery of level 4+ qualifications and courses
- To understand what lessons can be learned from applying Huxham and Vangen (2005) concept of collaborative advantage to the strategic partnership of UHOVI

5.3 Methodology

I decided to employ an evaluative approach, based on a qualitative data collection methodology. This seemed to be the most appropriate and rewarding approach for me to explore the research. I wanted an 'emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world' to the 'practices and norms of the natural science model' (Bryman 2004, p20). Furthermore, I was interested in 'the precise particulars of such matters as people's understandings and interactions' (Silverman 2005, p9).

Whilst the statistical data within the thesis is limited, what I did gather on student enrolments and higher education credits gave some validity to the interpretation of the qualitative research findings. The focus of this study is evaluative in the broadest sense of the word and as Robson (1993, p 171) suggests ‘evaluation is primarily concerned with describing and finding the effects of a particular approach, policy or programme’, in this instance UHOVI as a strategic higher education led partnership. Evaluations have many different methods and approaches and Patton (1981) lists over a hundred types of evaluation. I believe that my study meets the features of evaluation as described by Robson (1993, p 181). These are:

- Utility - this research will be useful both to my own professional practice concerning the development of curriculum and qualifications, but also to the wider education public sector’s understanding of the role of partnerships as strategies for achieving project aims and objectives
- Feasibility - in terms of cost effectiveness and practicalities. The only costs involved my time and email contact was used to cut down on postage costs
- Propriety - this research will be undertaken fairly and ethically. A research ethics committee form was completed and submitted to the school research committee before engagement with fieldwork
- Technical adequacy – the research will be undertaken with technical skill and sensitivity. This includes an awareness of ethical issues. This research was undertaken in line with the ethical guidelines set by the Social Research Association (SRA, 2003).

There is both a personal and political dimension to this research. On a personal level, it directly relates to my former role at UHOVI, as a curriculum leader of a widening access programme between 2010 and 2015. Also, I have my own ambition of gaining a greater understanding of the skills required to form effective partnerships, whilst designing effective curriculum and qualifications. On a political level it focuses on the role of government policy as a process that influences the ways in which education practitioners operate.

The method chosen utilised a complementary purposes model (Robson 1993, p 290) which ‘rather than focusing on a single specific question... may be used to address different but complementary questions within a study’. Within a mixed methods study, different data collection and analysis methods are utilised, with the aim of triangulating and increasing validity. The use of triangulation has been linked to achieving validity in research by adopting

a range of research strategies (MacDonald and Tipton, 1993). Denzin (1978) proposes four types of triangulation, one of which is methodological triangulation.

Data triangulation was used and involved semi-structured interviews with the three identified groups of staff that worked for and with UHOVI. The data from the interviews was considered alongside the quantitative data relating to student enrolment numbers and higher education credits. The triangulation of data involves using several methods to reveal multiple aspects of a single, empirical reality (ibid). My choice of research and the focus of my research is shaped by who I am and what I do. This has been described as ‘personal stance’ (Savin-Baden 2004, p 365) My personal stance includes my previous roles at the University, my personal history, my past experiences, my present role, my values, my gender, and my social class which have all contributed to my choice of research subject and approach. This character set will challenge my application of research methods which in turn means that I will have to be both reflective and reflexive.

The interviews used an interpretative methodology that explored the meanings that the staff attributed to their situation working in and with UHOVI (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The aim was to obtain participants’ perceptions of their world rather than impose the researcher's view upon them. This was important for me as an ‘insider’ researcher. My role in developing and delivering curriculum and qualifications in the UHOVI partnership meant that I had a subjective view of this world of practice. There is a strong link between identity and practice (Wenger, 1998) and as an academic member of staff in UHOVI meant that my identity would implicitly and explicitly affect my research. As a result, I needed to own and explore my role and power relationships within the research process (Foley, 2002).

5.4 Organisational context and theoretical basis of study

Qualitative research cannot be viewed as a neutral or objective exercise as both the approach and application of the research is influenced by a range of factors including the researcher’s role and status, the culture of the organization in which he or she works and his or her own gender and background (Foley, 2002). The focus of my case study was informed by my own ‘pre-knowledge’ (Kvale, 1996), and this includes my own working knowledge of level 4+ curriculum and qualifications, the experiences I had of designing and developing HE programmes in partnership with FE colleagues and developing an awareness of problematic issues associated with collaboration and partnership working.

To provide the organisational context in which the research took place, it is helpful to consider UHOVI's structure and identity. UHOVI was an HE-led strategic partnership, organised to provide progression and transition pathways for students from entry level through to level 4+ and beyond. Further to this, it was a 'large higher education partnership in a sub region of Wales which has for many years been associated with a low skills stereotype involving unemployment, poverty, and deprivation' (Saunders et al 2013, p 76). UHOVI was tasked with improving skills and qualifications by ensuring that learning was accessible at local levels within South East Wales. Higher education provision was to be distributed in numerous locations, including businesses, social enterprises and further education colleges as well as locally-sourced community hubs and centres. There was a distinctive vision for UHOVI to have a physical presence through new build plans for a lifelong learning campus in each of the two towns of Merthyr and Ebbw Vale (Saunders et al 2013, p 83).

It is vital that the research reflects the uniqueness of UHOVI. The original partnership involved key stakeholders within an overarching governance process for the commissioning of provision by colleges, universities, and work-based learning providers in the HOV region. The organisations began the task of embedding higher education in the HOV region through an initial partnership, the membership of which included:

- The University of Glamorgan
- The University of Wales, Newport
- Coleg Gwent
- Coleg Merthyr
- Ystrad Mynach College
- Coleg Morgannwg
- The local authorities of Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT), Merthyr, Caerphilly, Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent
- Careers Wales

My study's conclusions are arrived at through an analysis of the qualitative data derived from the semi-structured interviews and underwritten by relevant statistics on UHOVI enrolments and credit acquisition. In addition, the research findings of Huxham and Vangen (2009) into collaborations are used to 'test' whether or not they have relevance to my qualitative research. Huxham and Vangen's (2009) framework is presented as a set of seven overlapping perspectives or critical success factors that have informed my understanding of partnership

working. This enables a conclusion to be made about UHOVI's capacity to achieve collaborative advantage or inertia throughout its lifetime.

5.5 Sense making

The concept of 'sense making' (Weick, 1995) can also be applied to this study. Sense making literally 'means the making of sense' (Weick, 1995, p 4), and although originally based on organizational theory, can equally be applied to the UHOVI staff participants in this study. These staff are making sense of their identities within a new and innovative HE /FE partnership, located in an office in the middle of Merthyr, away from the traditional university campuses and tasked with designing, developing and delivering level 4+ courses and qualifications.

Individuals interpret the changes around them and adjust their thinking and understanding of events accordingly. Sense making may allow us to develop an understanding of how the UHOVI staff actually make sense of working within a strategic partnership and how each of the individuals perceives organisational pressures and demands.

5.6 Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy allows the researcher to satisfy the specific needs of the research project (Robson, 1993). My sample therefore includes staff that had specific job roles and remits: senior leadership, academic and administration. I was able to interview roughly equal numbers from each category. I considered it to be important to investigate how people with different responsibilities understood the importance of local, regional and national policy contexts and how this may vary according to the kind of job role and level of responsibility they held within the organisation. The staff with strategic responsibilities in the organisation were the senior leaders, namely the two deputy directors of UHOVI. I also interviewed a Vice-Principal from a partner FE college. Those identified as having administrative and operational roles within the organisation were the Business Manager, the Marketing Manager, the Registrar and a Schools' Progression Officer. The third group were the staff responsible for the design and development of curriculum and qualifications, these were the Academic and Curriculum Managers for UHOVI and two FE College Curriculum Managers responsible for developing the UHOVI curriculum.

In many ways the sample was restricted because UHOVI was a relatively small project (less than twenty employees). Added to this, UHOVI had been discontinued by the time I interviewed the participants. I was fortunate that the participants I interviewed were either still

working at the University in different roles, or had moved jobs but were still working in the higher education sector. This helped me to have access to them. My sampling frame was designed as follows:

- Senior leaders – 3 participants,
- Academic staff – 5 participants,
- Administration staff – 4 participants.

5.7 Sampling strategy

Interviews took place by appointment, at either a university campus, or at an FE college campus. They were exploratory in nature, seeking to develop hypotheses rather than generate facts or figures (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The principle inclusion criteria were:

1. Being involved in the development and delivery of the UHOVI strategy
2. Being involved in the design, development and delivery of UHOVI qualifications and courses
3. Being involved in the development and delivery of the UHOVI operational strategy

I considered that a sample of twelve people would be sufficient to generate a broad range of data in relation to the key research questions. As Cohen et al (2000) makes clear, in using a purposive sample there can be no pretence that it is representative of the wider population, rather it is ‘deliberately and unashamedly selective and biased’ (2000, p 104). Delamont (2002, p 84) argues that the method used for putting together a sample is ‘not that important’. However, she indicates that it is crucial to be honest and reflexive and to think carefully about how data will be affected by the selection of the sample. She adds that careful thought does need to be given to matters such as the age, gender, race and class of the sample.

Table 5.1: list of participants and designated roles in the UHOVI partnership

Participant no	Job role category	Job remit and role	gender	race	Age group
1	Senior Leader	Leadership and management of WBL partnerships	Male	White (GB)	50+
2	Senior Leader	Leadership and management of FE College partnerships	Male	White (GB)	40+
3	Senior Leader	Leadership and management of FE provision with UHOVI	Male	White (GB)	50+
1	Academic	Design and develop level 4+ curriculum and qualifications (specifically Foundation Degree Programmes with FE Colleges)	Female	White (GB)	50+
2	Academic	Design and develop level 4+ curriculum and qualifications (specifically Foundation Degree Programmes with FE Colleges)	Female	White (GB)	50+
3	Academic	Design and develop level 4+ curriculum and qualifications (Managing FE provision)	Female	White (GB)	40+
4	Academic	Design and develop level 4+ curriculum and qualifications (Managing FE provision)	Male	White (GB)	30+
5	Academic	Design and develop level 4+ curriculum and qualifications (specifically level 4 bite size modules for community adult learners)	Male	White (GB)	40+
1	Administrator	Registrar	Female	White (GB)	40+
2	Administrator	Business Manager	Male	White (GB)	30+
3	Administrator	Marketing Manager	Female	White (GB)	30+
4	Administrator	Progression Officer	Male	White (GB)	20+

As already noted, UHOVI employed fewer than twenty staff. The above sample optimised the available participants ensuring that they could each comment and add value to the study's core aim and objectives.

The consent form was mailed to participants (electronically) at least one week before the interview. A signed copy was handed back to the interviewer at the outset of the interview before any data was collected. The consent forms were sent out to all participants, accompanied by a participant information sheet and a covering letter. The participants had at least one week from the initial contact of the researcher to decide whether or not to take part in the research.

5.8 An awareness of temporality

Chapter two of this thesis draws parallels between what was the original institution, the South Wales and Monmouthshire School of Mines (1913) with the current University of South Wales (2013). All participants were aware of the history of the University and the roles it had performed throughout the previous century. As a single institution, it had intermittently worked with partner organisations to offer higher education opportunities to local learners through courses and qualifications designed to have impact on local and regional economies. The majority of staff interviewed were all able to reflect on the broader identities and missions of the University of Glamorgan, of the University of Wales, Newport and later the new identity and mission of the University of South Wales. In terms of temporality, therefore my results are 'embedded in and affected by the time and space in which they are conducted' (O'Connor 2007, p 263). Another aspect of temporality is where the interviews took place and the impact this may have had on the participant experience of the interview.

All the interviews took place on either a university or FE College campus. This was a pragmatic decision as it saved on travel time and there was also the room availability. All interviews took place during the working day and were arranged around the participants' diaries.

5.9 Ethical considerations

In order to satisfy the ethical questions raised by the research, a formal research proposal was submitted to Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee for approval. This was reviewed and approved in December 2018. This was an important process to go through in light of my former position, employed by the University and having worked for UHOVI.

5.10 Insider research

Insider research is the term applied when researchers carry out research 'in and on' their own organisation (Coghlan 2003, p 456) or 'with communities or identity groups of which one is a member' (Kanuha 2000, p 440). My role as an insider enables me to consider the challenges of insider research as well as some of the benefits associated with it. Familiarity is seen as a particular problem for qualitative researchers investigating educational settings (Delamont 2002, p 47), a problem which is arguably exacerbated when the research is conducted by insiders. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that whilst in 'strange' settings a researcher's faith in his or her preconceptions may be quickly undermined. In familiar surroundings they may be harder to put to one side (1995, p103). Coghlan advises insider researchers to 'learn to look at the familiar from a fresh perspective' and to recognise 'how their perspective is grounded in their functional role or occupational sub-culture' (2003, p 456).

My insider role as a member of the UHOVI team could initially have affected my ability to conduct impartial research. For example, my early experiences and observations of working within the field of widening participation were of formal meetings turning into talking shops and unfocussed strategic planning. Such ineffective planning, in my opinion, was time-consuming and detrimental to the needs of learners. These were, however, my earliest memories of adult, community learning and I was inexperienced in my role. Despite this critique, I now reflect positively on the work undertaken by the individual staff members responsible for leading and managing the strategic partnership that was UHOVI. To me, their contribution to the strategic partnership had always demonstrated the utmost professionalism and expertise. My ambivalent views, based on early perceptions rather than later, more considered conclusions, provided me with another reason for conducting this research - to look at the UHOVI partnership as the 'familiar from a fresh perspective' (Delamont, 2002).

My research was also conducted three years after UHOVI has been discontinued and has given me the opportunity to analyse the partnership more objectively and allows me to place any preconceptions to one side.

The issue of power is an important factor in the relationship between the researcher and participant. In this study I recognise that I am researching within a 'context of unequal power relations' (Griffiths 1998, p 37) in various dimensions which is intensified by my insider status. The first element of this is the issue of the power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee regardless of the researcher's status in the organisation. Whilst power can reside

with interviewer and interviewee alike, typically more power resides with the interviewer. It is the interviewer who defines the situation and who generates the questions and the interviewee who is under scrutiny whilst the interviewer is not (Cohen et al, 2000, p 122). A further dimension to be considered is that of gender inequality and how the aforementioned aspects of power could be compounded when female participants are interviewed by a male researcher.

Despite the potential challenges power relations can bring, there are undoubtedly benefits to insider research. For example, Kanuha (2000) found that being an insider enhanced ‘the depth and breadth of understanding of a population that may not be accessible to a non-native scientist’ (2000,p444). Similarly, Hobbs (1988) suspects that, when investigating entrepreneurship and policing in the East End of London, his insider status meant that he had access to settings and information that ‘might not otherwise been available to him’ (1988, p 15). Sherif (2001) makes a similar point about access but adds that the status brought her an ‘enhanced rapport with individuals’ (2001, p446). Certainly, in this study it was an advantage to understand the structure of UHOVI sufficiently well enough to be able to plan the sample effectively. Similarly, knowing who to contact to arrange interviews and venues was extremely helpful. Like Sherif (2001), I felt there was an enhanced rapport with those participants whom I knew already.

5.11 Data collection framework & thematizing

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe building a conceptual framework which can explain the main topics to be studied, including key factors and the possible links between them. From the beginning I thought my study would be inductive, that the themes would appear clearly in the data, rather than having to pre arrange categories. However, as Miles and Huberman (1994, p 18) state ‘any researcher, no matter how inductive in approach, knows which bins are likely to be in play in the study and what is likely to be in them’.

My own pre knowledge provided the conceptual framework for the focus of my study. At the back of my mind were concerns regarding UHOVI’s capacity to become an effective strategic partnership.

My three research objectives identified in Chapter one provided the focus of my study and were used to generate scripted questions which were read out during the interviews. The following examples illustrate some of the questions used with the participants:

- What was your understanding of the purpose of UHOVI?

- What does UHOVI mean to you?
- What was your understanding of Welsh Government policy with regard to higher and further education before and during UHOVI?
- What was your understanding of strategic partnership working?
- Please explain how you developed the UHOVI curriculum in the context of the partnership group

I also used unstructured questions to probe a deeper sense of understanding. For example ‘are there any other issues that you would like to address that you feel are important?’

5.12 Data analysis and transcription

The data I obtained from the interviews was transcribed by me following the interviews. I was advised to transcribe the data as soon as possible and transcription is a first stage of this process. As Kvale (1996, p 163) describes, transcripts are an artificial creation that move from an oral to written mode of communication, and as a result ‘every transcription from one context to another involves a series of judgements and decisions’. Transcripts are therefore ‘de-contextualised conversations’ (Kvale, 1996, p165). As a transcription is de-contextualised, I found it useful to listen to the tapes whilst I read through the transcriptions during the first phase of my data analysis. By both reading the text and listening to the words, I found myself transported back to the original interview and this triggered memories concerning the temporal (O’Connor 2007, p 258) elements of the interviews.

I found the process of transcription an incredibly time consuming process. I also decided to analyse the data manually rather than relying on a computer package, as I believed this would bring me closer to the raw data and enable a deeper understanding of it. Data collection and analysis took place concurrently between December 2018 and April 2019.

5.13 Data analysis model

Thematic analysis and codes were used to analyse the data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p 56) ‘codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study’. As I was undertaking an inductive approach to my research I did not have a provisional start list of codes before I commenced my data analysis, but allowed the codes to emerge from within the context of the data. However, as mentioned earlier, my own pre-knowledge (Miles and Huberman, 1994) will influence the type of labels and categories which emerged. Rather than adopting a particular model of coding I drew on the work of Miles and Huberman (1994, p 65) who offer the following rule of thumb to assign

the single most appropriate (“better,” more encompassing) code among those related to a given research question.

The data analysis method used cross-case analysis within the three sub-groups interviewed as followed:

- UHOVI Senior Leaders
- UHOVI Academic staff
- UHOVI Administration staff

The starting point was to identify a label (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and colour code emerging themes and sub themes within each group. I then colour coded the themes and sub themes where there were overlaps across the groups. For example all three groups were in agreement that widening participation, (specifically designing and developing level 4+ qualifications and courses for disadvantaged groups) was inherently the right thing to do. This theme was colour coded green. An example where the groups provided differing views to each other was regarding learner support. Whilst all participants recognised the need for and value in supporting all learners, the level at which this support should be offered, differed. This was colour coded red. These are examples of how I proceeded to label the themes against each of the group’s data and used for the analysis.

5.14 Rationale for choice of method

After much deliberation, I decided that the semi structured interview was the most appropriate method in gaining the evidence I needed to answer the key research questions.

The semi structured interviews were chosen in preference to alternative methods such as

- structured interviews;
- focus groups;
- questionnaires.

My rationale was that semi structured interviews offered the opportunity for UHOVI colleagues to provide rich and detailed information to the research questions (Bryman 2004, p320). The chosen method allowed participants to ‘project their own ways of defining the world’ (Cohen et al. 2000, p146) or have the ‘leeway in how to reply’ (Bryman 2004, p321),

which I felt was important given their different roles, expertise and experiences of working for and with UHOVI on a daily basis.

I also felt that by using semi structured interviews, aligned with my insider status at UHOVI allowed me to better understand a response from a participant or explore a discussion point more deeply. It also helped me to clarify responses where participants were unclear, to probe where responses were especially brief or to pose a question differently where it appeared that a participant had misunderstood it.

Had I used a structured interview, I felt that this would have constrained a participant's response, perhaps potentially distorting the data. Similarly the use of questionnaires would not have enabled me to probe for a response or clarify something which could have been unclear to the participant or to me in their answer. Whilst a focus group would have been an interesting method to adopt and would have elicited some rich and detailed responses, there were some practical considerations such as constraints on my as well as the participant's time, as well as the logistical challenges of getting people together who now work across South Wales and further afield, and for different organisations.

I considered approaching staff from the Welsh Government and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to participate in the research, but I wasn't convinced that they would provide the detail concerning the operational planning of courses and curriculum in their responses that colleagues whom I knew and worked with on a daily basis could provide. As such I was confident that my research methodology and sample was more than adequate to answer the key research questions.

This chapter has explored the theoretical basis of my research and the methodological focus I chose in order to explore the experiences of the staff working for and with UHOVI. Chapters six and seven explore the findings from the three groups interviewed as part of my sample. This is supported by Huxham and Vangen's (2009) framework for collaborative advantage and collaborative inertia where appropriate.

Chapter 6: Findings from the qualitative research

6.1 Introduction

This is the first of two chapters that address the research findings. The chapters are sub-divided into four sections and draw upon the interviews with the twelve participants who have been referred to in the previous chapter as three senior leaders, five academics and four administrators. These are introduced briefly in the first section below.

All four sections relate to the principal research objectives. The first section considers the participants' understanding of UHOVI as a concept and why each felt UHOVI was an important higher education intervention for the region. It then focuses on a specific question concerning the UHOVI core aim and objectives, asking for participants' understanding of what each felt UHOVI was designed to do. This includes an analysis of the participants' responses with regard to whether or not the UHOVI partnership delivered Welsh Government policy. This is crucial to an understanding of the study's research aim and objectives as it focuses on participants' perceptions of two distinct elements of government policy leading up to the introduction of UHOVI in 2009: (1) transformation and the formation of strategic partnerships to deliver policy and (2) delivering a government policy that recommended the up skilling of prospective HE learners and contributing to the regeneration of the Heads of the Valleys region. The timeline in Chapter 2 (Table 2.1) includes several examples of WG policy and national reports that referred to the Welsh Government's transformation agenda, recommendations for strategic partnerships and skills-based training to deliver on these priorities. The section concludes with the participants' views on personalised learning as a teaching and learning strategy that was employed by the UHOVI partners.

The second section deals with the concept of partnership as a strategy and how it was understood by the participants and whether there was a common understanding of UHOVI as a strategic partnership. It considers the nature of the different versions of partnership across the HE and HE providers, HE and FE institutions and UHOVI's relationship with the WG and HEFCW. Following the findings in chapter six, chapter seven opens with the third section that reviews participants' understanding of how UHOVI managed change in a higher and further education environment that was constantly evolving.

Chapter seven concludes with section four and an exploration of the reasons for UHOVI's discontinuation in 2016. Each of the four sections is supported where relevant by Huxham and Vangen's (2009) own empirical research into partnerships and collaborations.

Section 1

6.2 The importance of UHOVI to the Heads of the Valleys region in South East Wales

This section begins by discussing the findings from a question about why the participants felt UHOVI was important to the HOV region. All participants indicated that UHOVI was a widening participation initiative with a remit to help regenerate the HOV region through the delivery of innovative qualifications and curriculum. Whilst none of the participants directly referred to the Leitch report (2006), as a key influence, their common/collective understanding of the task at hand to regenerate the HOV relates to some of the key objectives in this wider UK policy document. Interestingly, the participants' answers suggested that UHOVI meant more to each of them than merely a job. For example, UHOVI appealed to the first of the senior leaders, (a seconded member of staff from the UoG that had worked at the university for over twenty years), because, as he stated

I was born in the region, still lived there and saw UHOVI as an opportunity to lead a policy initiative that could initiate social, cultural and economic change within my home town through creating meaningful partnerships (Senior leader 1).

UHOVI was described as an important 'intervention' by the second of the senior leaders, (a seconded member of staff from UWN with an expertise in quality assurance). He alluded to his own background, 'working within the youth justice system and with people from deprived backgrounds, offering them second chances'. He recognised the 'benefits that developing new and imaginative pedagogic practices could have for teenage learners who are otherwise alienated from educational processes and institutions'. The third of the senior leaders noted that 'he had worked in the FE sector for over twenty years at the same FE College' and displayed an obvious affinity for the organisation and for the FE sector. He was also well informed of the importance of UHOVI to the region, noting that

UHOVI was to act as the conduit for a single planned curriculum which plotted learning pathways from levels 1 and 2 into levels 4 and 5 and which could support the local authority in its transformation to become a new tertiary system (Senior leader 3).

The first academic participant, who was responsible for developing foundation degree programmes within the FE Colleges, referred to the commitment of UHOVI to provide ‘opportunities for people from the HOV to develop higher level skills to contribute to the regeneration of the region’. The second academic, responsible for developing bite size provision within the community, spoke of the ‘importance of raising the awareness of higher education and its power to positively change people’s lives’. Although there was an element of repetition in what participants said, other issues also emerged. For example, the third academic referred to ‘the importance of personalised learning as a teaching and learning strategy to ensure that learners took responsibility for their own learning’. Whilst this participant did not define what he meant by ‘personalised learning’ his point was supported by the first administrator. This member of staff was responsible for the business planning and UHOVI fee plan and had worked in the UoG department for Widening Access for most of his career. He suggested that ‘the UHOVI offer empowered people to help them better their own lives through the learning opportunities offered’. This theme of teaching and learning strategies will be addressed later on in this section. The fourth academic, (a former academic member of staff at UWN with a vast experience of working with adult learners), also mentioned how ‘UHOVI was especially good at designing curriculum and learning opportunities for community learners, delivering quality teaching and learning in the communities in which they lived’. He added that ‘UHOVI provided people that lived in the HOV region with the opportunity to study at a higher level in a subject that could help them to think about their own work and life opportunities with a renewed vigour’. Whilst a commitment to learning, providing quality educational opportunities and helping people were key motivations for all the participants, they also all implied a deeper and wider sense of purpose. The importance of UHOVI to the region as an intervention appealed strongly to each of them because of their own backgrounds, lived experiences and commitment to their respective roles within the partnership.

6.3 Knowledge of UHOVI core aim and objectives

Participants were asked what they knew about the core aim and objectives of UHOVI and how this was communicated to them when they first started working for the partnership. Several

participants repeated comments that they had made earlier when describing why UHOVI was important to the region. All three senior leaders were confident in their own knowledge, reflecting a collective understanding of the core aim and objectives. They indicated a clear synergy between the WG transformation agenda, economic and social regeneration and a single, holistic planned curriculum which could lead to more effective progression for learners from HOV communities to FE and on to HE at USW.

Huxham and Vangen’s (2009) framework for ‘understanding aims in collaborations’ (Table 6.1) is useful in helping to facilitate ‘a better understanding of the motivations of those involved and the ways in which multiple and sometimes even conflicting aims can prevent agreement and block progress’ (Huxham and Vangen 2009, p 31). Their framework emphasizes that some aims will be assumed rather than explicit and some will be hidden... that the dilemma for agreeing common aims is when clarity of purpose provides a much needed direction, but an open discussion can unearth irreconcilable differences’ (2009, p 32). The responses provided by all the senior leaders indicate that initially there was a mutual and explicit understanding of the UHOVI core aim and objectives.

Huxham and Vangen’s (2009) framework for ‘understanding aims in collaborations’ indicates whether or not aims are explicit, assumed or hidden.

Table 6.1 : Framework for understanding aims in collaborations

(One participant’s perspective)	Explicit	Assumed	Hidden
Collaboration Aims	The purpose of collaboration		By definition these are perceptions of joint aims and so cannot be hidden
Organisations Aims	What each organisation hopes to gain for itself via the collaboration		
Individual Aims	What each individual hopes to gain for himself via the collaboration		

The senior leaders’ responses can be contrasted with those of the five academic and four administrative staff interviewed. Whilst all nine participants noted that UHOVI was a widening

participation project/initiative; that it was part of a wider regeneration scheme designed to up-skill the region, some of the participants were keener to stress the strategy of partnership between the two universities as being more important than the core aim to help regenerate the region. To use Huxham and Vangen's (2009) framework, the 'hidden aim' becomes all important. The first administrator, was keen to point out that

The core aim of UHOVI was to evidence to WG that two universities with similar identities could create a functioning higher education partnership which could provide a service within and to their local community (Administrator 1).

The first academic participant makes a similar point, suggesting 'when fishing, you invariably use a sprat to catch a mackerel' suggesting that UHOVI was the bait to catch /create something bigger. This view is also supported by the second administrator, an officer at UHOVI responsible for developing and organising progression activity for all learners. He recounted a conversation he had had with a senior member of staff from one of the FE colleges, who informed him that 'what you've got to remember is that higher education is not our core business'. These views do not imply the same level of understanding of the UHOVI core aim and objectives that all three senior leaders held. Huxham and Vangen (2009) indicate that 'agreeing aims is an appropriate starting point because it is raised consistently as an issue' (2009, p 30). This statement applies to the first and second administrators and the first academic staff participants that were interviewed. Huxham and Vangen's (2009) research offers an explanation to support this analysis.

A key criteria for WG in funding a large scale initiative like UHOVI was the necessity for a 'joined up approach' between two or more organisations, in essence a collaboration. What Huxham and Vangen (2009) stress though is that 'making collaboration work effectively is highly resource consuming and often painful' (2009, p 42). What this suggests is that, at a strategic level, the UHOVI core aim and objectives were explicitly understood because the three senior leaders were instrumental in helping to agree them. For each of the academic and administration staff, theirs was more of a specific operational role, where their function was not to question the aim, but to fulfil task orientated duties.

Huxham and Vangen's (2009) framework distinguishes between the various types of aims and emphasizes that some aims will be 'assumed'. For example, the third administrator responsible

for managing the UHOVI marketing strategy indicated that 'UHOVI developed a large portfolio of level 4+ qualifications with all of the FE Colleges for a variety of learner groups right across the HOV region to ensure that UHOVI did all it could to hit its target'.

Some aims were identified as 'explicit'. For example, the first senior leader suggested that

UHOVI developed niche, work-based learning level 4+ qualifications with an identified FE college for specific cohorts of learners within a HOV region. This was meant specifically to improve employability within that local community (Senior leader 1).

As already noted earlier, other aims will be hidden owing to a lack of agreement over them. An example was provided by the third academic participant, who in contrast to the scenario in the previous paragraph, suggested that her 'role at UHOVI was to develop niche level 4+ qualifications that would enable learners to progress onto USW undergraduate courses'. Both strategies may be acceptable in their own right, but represent a dichotomy within the operational group, with the former driven by the more immediate needs of employers and the latter a strategy of hitting targets by recruiting more learners to the parent university.

UHOVI was tasked with increasing level 4 + skills and qualifications in a region which is the most deprived in Wales, with one of the lowest HE participation rates across the UK. The fourth academic participant, (a former academic member of staff at UWN with a vast experience of working with lifelong adult learners), stressed this point stating that

it would take a generation if not longer to tip the fortunes of those most deprived in the HOV. UHOVI, whilst it was well intended, would merely be only able to scratch the surface, thus wholesale change and regeneration that made a real difference to the region would be nearly impossible (Academic 4).

Of the nine academic and administration participants, six of them indicated that 'the UHOVI task was so enormous, it would have been impossible to achieve'. The evidence indicates whilst these six participants had a common understanding of the UHOVI aim and objectives, they also felt that they were too ambitious to achieve in the timeframe proposed at its introduction in 2009. This could suggest this perception of an over-ambitious aim, could have a demotivating impact on the same staff later in the partnership.

The same six participants indicated that the aim for UHOVI was to assist the two universities in achieving the wider WG policy of transformation and to navigate a pathway for the two universities to merge. The third academic noted that 'the merger of two Welsh universities that

historically had been in competition with each other would be seen by policy makers in government as a great success, possibly bigger than the outcomes that UHOVI could deliver in terms of learner achievements'. This indicated that these six participants felt that UHOVI was intended as the catalyst towards achieving a different objective of merger between the UoG and the UWN.

Another reason why half of the participants interviewed had a different understanding of the UHOVI aim and objectives may be because the aim and objectives were not clearly defined from the introduction of the partnership. The first academic participant indicated that 'some colleagues lost sight of what it was they were supposed to do, or rather cynically deliberately didn't do what they were supposed to do!' Whilst she pointed to the academics responsible for creating UHOVI as visionaries, complimenting them on their efforts for creating the partnership, some of the other academic and administrative participants indicated that UHOVI was always a struggle because it was never really fully understood in terms of what it was or what it was supposed to do. The first administrator suggested that 'getting the funding for UHOVI was a real coup for the two universities; but having a loosely defined aim was both great and bad at the same time'.

This point is further illustrated by the naming of UHOVI and why there may have been confusion concerning this. As the fourth administrator, (another former employee at the UoG responsible for managing individual student data at UHOVI), notes, 'how could people know what it was they were supposed to be doing, when they didn't even know what the name of the organisation was?'

None of the participants could comment with any great authority about where the UHOVI name came from, but what they were all able to recall was the successive changes in name, whilst retaining the same acronym UHOVI. What started life as the 'University Heads of the Valleys Institute', quickly became the 'University Heads of the Valleys Initiative' and in Phase 2 (2013-2016) was only referred to as UHOVI, disassociating itself from both the Institute and Initiative labels. As the fourth academic noted 'having three name changes within a period of six years is rather excessive and indicates a level of ambiguity which UHOVI staff kind of assumed as a part of their daily working tasks'. However, as the third administrator suggested 'most of the UHOVI partners and learners applauded the last change of name because they felt that learners

in the HOV region needed to identify with something that wasn't a university or an FE college, UHOVI as an acronym suited this purpose'.

Perhaps the biggest sense of frustration noted by half of the administrators and academic staff was that by the time UHOVI had the power to choose its own name, (post 2013), USW no longer appeared to prioritise UHOVI as an institutional strategic aim. It had become clear to them that UHOVI's strategic importance to the University had diminished. They felt that the University's attention was focused on developing strategic priorities elsewhere. As the first academic indicated 'the ambiguity concerning the UHOVI aim and objectives, eventually caught up with it, and we all ended up losing out'. What is interesting is that Huxham and Vangen (2003) argue that 'those involved in the naming process are in a powerful position at that time' (2003, p 406). In the UHOVI example, the confusion over the exact name of the partnership initiative reflects uncertainty over its core aim and objectives.

This element of UHOVI's core aim to 'deliver WG policy to up-skill and regenerate the Heads of the Valleys region', is vital in this investigation of the strategic partnership. It has been established that one key element of WG policy was to encourage transformation and the introduction of strategic partnerships throughout Wales. UHOVI was an excellent example of higher and further education providers in a specific area of South East Wales combining to meet this policy imperative. However, it is essential that whilst this aspect of WG policy may have been adhered to by the various UHOVI partners, it is also necessary to determine whether or not participants felt they achieved the other element of their core aim to deliver 'WG policy to up-skill and regenerate the Heads of the Valleys region in South East Wales.'

6.4 Developing teaching and learning strategies within the strategic partnership

One of the aims of this study is to identify the perceptions held by participants of the strengths and limitations of UHOVI in meeting its core objectives. To examine this, participants were asked specifically about the underlying strategy to deliver quality teaching and learning opportunities. The opinion of the third academic participant was that 'the development of qualifications, curriculum and pedagogy was essentially the UHOVI product'. The same academic participant suggested that

Delivering personalised learning through the development of new qualifications and courses was important to distinguish UHOVI from other education providers. What

UHOVI did was to ensure that the background of the learners was taken into account when developing the curriculum. Bringing HE and FE academic staff together through UHOVI meant that discussions were able to take place regarding the actual learners that would be taking the courses and qualifications (Academic 3).

He was keen to stress that discussions took place within a curriculum group and that the staff recognised what learners had achieved, together with the 'distances' they had travelled as UHOVI learners. This was a key element of their own learning processes. He was also keen to point out that

The UHOVI curriculum group, in their development of curriculum and qualifications, offered potential learners personalised learning opportunities that were neither simplistic nor patronising, that every learning opportunity was unique to the individual (Academic 3).

He went on to say that

Prioritising personalised learning was vital to the success of UHOVI and its learners and the use of pedagogic approaches such as inquiry based and problem based learning resonated with the learners within this specific region of SE Wales (Academic 3).

This point was also supported by the first administrator who suggested

UHOVI was not about offering educational opportunities to everyone and anyone. It certainly wasn't about offering education for education's sake. Each qualification, course and learning opportunity had been considered and validated in terms of its value to the local economy (Administrator 1).

This point is further illustrated by the second of the senior leaders who indicated that

UHOVI was about designing and developing courses that were underpinned by progression, whether to the next level of learning or to employment. It was about incrementally building the enrolment of student numbers on courses that had been identified within the HOV community to provide economic and social mobility (Senior Leader 2).

In order to achieve this aspiration, a key theme had been identified by all the academic participants whose roles were concerned with student support. They were keen to point out that any pedagogical approach had to provide the appropriate support to encourage the learners, but

that it didn't make them too dependent on UHOVI, on the FE College or on the HEI. They each recognised that UHOVI learners would need more 'support' than traditional HE learners, but knowing where to draw the line was difficult. This 'line' was again a point of ambiguity amongst the participants in relation to the aim and objectives of UHOVI. Whilst the academic staff were keen to offer as much support as possible to ensure that every individual learner could achieve, this view was tempered by some of the administration staff and the first senior leader who were conscious that 'support costs time and money' and that the actual delivery of teaching and learning was the responsibility of the FE College and the HEI. For the academic staff participants in particular they identified that providing personalised learning for all learners was essential. However, this was difficult to agree across the UHOVI partnership. This point is supported by Huxham and Vangen's (2009) framework for understanding aims in collaborations. Whilst there was agreement from all participants regarding support for and personalised learning, in this instance the individual job role, rather than their personal experiences influenced their views. The same senior leader, along with the first and third administrators were responsible for ensuring that UHOVI 'balanced the books' whereas the academic participants were responsible for developing curriculum and qualifications that could help to change people's lives.

All the academic participants noted that they were focused on developing personal confidence in learners as a key part of each of their learning journeys and as a key part of the UHOVI offer. This was as important as improving each learner's academic knowledge and skills. In order to achieve this, learners needed to meet a specific criteria before they could enrol. A well-designed induction programme which included details of study skills, literacy and digital competence provided the initial support which helped UHOVI to create an environment that both HE and FE colleagues bought into.

Section 2: Partnerships as a strategy to deliver policy

6.5 Introduction to section 2

This section focuses on the participants' understanding of the concept of partnership. The study explores whether or not UHOVI was ever a partnership of equals. This includes the specific relationship between the two lead universities, the universities and the further education colleges and between UHOVI, the Welsh Government and HEFCW. The section reviews UHOVI as a partnership utilised to deliver widening participation in the Heads of the Valleys - a key part of the regeneration of the region. The section is again supported by Huxham and Vangen's (2009) perspectives, in this case their specific views on shifts in power and trust.

6.6 Understanding the concept of partnerships

When asked what they understood the term partnership to mean, some participants found it difficult to answer. For example, the third administrator admitted to not having ‘really thought of it at all, meaning it’s a relationship of equals... but perhaps it’s not a relationship of equals at all!’, whilst the third senior leader considered partnership to be a concept which was only ever ‘partly understood’, adding ‘I am not sure exactly what the best definition is as people and organisations can regard them in very different ways’. The fifth academic participant, (an employee at a UHOVI partner FE college tasked with developing curriculum and qualifications for the FE College), stated that

A partnership involves two or more organisations tasked with achieving a common goal, where the desired outcome is better than trying to achieve it alone. However, achieving the desired outcome really tests the partnership (Academic 5).

This point echoes the findings of Huxham and Vangen (2009) who recognise that ‘a sharing of power is essential for successful collaborations, but many practitioners reflect on the pain that it causes’. They also indicate that ‘typically, people argue that the power is in the purse strings... implying that those who do not have control of the financial resource are automatically deprived of power’ (2009, p 32). This point appears to fit with the first academic’s view who stated that

The Director of UHOVI was the Pro Vice Chancellor for UoG, the UHOVI employer terms and conditions were aligned to those at UoG, the driving force behind UHOVI was coming from Glamorgan (Academic 1).

This view was based on the fact that the UoG was the largest institution in the UHOVI partnership and indicates that UHOVI was not a partnership of equals, but a partnership dominated by a hierarchy, with the largest HEI being UoG at its centre. Tables 6.2 and 6.3 show the comparative sizes of UoG and UWN in Phase 1 of UHOVI between 2009 and 2012. The data indicates that UoG was enrolling on average more than 50% more learners from across the five UHOVI unitary authorities than UWN over this time.

Table 6.2: Total HE enrolments by learners in the five UHOVI unitary authorities enrolled at University of Wales, Newport (UWN) between 2008/09 to 2011/12.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
UHOVI total individuals	0	105	380	640
Non UHOVI total individuals	2,215	2,090	1,855	1,675
Overall number of individuals	2,215	2,195	2,235	2,315

Table 6.3: Total HE enrolments by learners in the five UHOVI unitary authorities enrolled at University of Glamorgan (UoG) between 2008/09 to 2011/12.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
UHOVI total individuals	0	70	315	1,095
Non UHOVI total individuals	4,815	4,850	4,400	4,390
Overall number of individuals	4,815	4,920	4,715	5,485

6.7 The partnership between Higher and Further education

With regard to the specific relationship between the universities and the further education colleges, an interesting point is made by the fifth academic participant who also recognised that UoG held the power within UHOVI. However, he was also more than aware that UHOVI could not achieve success without the participation and ‘buy in’ from the FE colleges, noting that

I always knew that for UHOVI to succeed, the partnership needed the co-operation from our FE College. For example, UHOVI would struggle to meet targets if we didn’t agree to develop new foundation degree programmes’. This was more of a problem for the University than it was for us, because they were ultimately accountable for its success (Academic 5).

This statement suggests that the FE College was able to exert a degree of power because the threat of pulling out of the partnership was always there, ‘the power of exit’. All participants suggested that they were aware of this.

This threat is also recognised by the first senior leader who suggested that

The FE colleges were vitally important to the UHOVI partnership because they had clear access to the potential students that the level 4 qualifications and curriculum were being

designed for. However, I don't think they ever fully realised how big UHOVI could be or what it could achieve. Perhaps it was naivety or perhaps it was just too much to take on (Senior leader 1).

One explanation that could help to explain this situation is offered by the first academic participant who questioned whether 'the FE colleges deliberately didn't fully commit to UHOVI, because by holding back, they were able to retain an element of power or control over the partnership'. The fifth academic participant from one of the FE colleges made a crucial point when suggesting 'there were the instances where we could really challenge the position of UoG, knowing that they needed us as much as we needed them!' This point is supported by Huxham and Vangen's (2009) empirical research which suggests that 'the common practice unsurprisingly is that people act as though their perceptions are real and often display defensiveness and aggression'.

Another example that considers UHOVI as a strategic partnership between HE and FE is addressed by the third senior leader. He was keen to offer that 'UHOVI provided the opportunity for the FE colleges to build a curriculum portfolio of HE courses through one organising body (UHOVI) rather than having to work with their previous four or five different HEIs. This arrangement enabled his FE College to build more productive, stronger relationships with a chosen HEI'. He further suggested that UHOVI was a 'partnership of convenience which helped to make his FE College stronger and more diverse and in so doing, contribute to the regeneration of the region'.

6.8 The partnership between UHOVI and the Welsh Government

Interview questions about the partnership between UHOVI and the Welsh Government elicited some interesting feedback. The second senior leader suggested that

The universities were more than aware of the political pressure on the WG to be seen to be doing something in the HOV region. At that time, there was enough funding available via the WG and Europe to make a considerable difference to the organisations that were organised enough to bid for it (Senior leader 2).

The first senior leader provided some context for the type of relationship each of the universities had with WG pre UHOVI, indicating that

The momentum leading up to the introduction of UHOVI had been provided in 2003 by the Reaching Wider initiative, 'First Campus' - a widening access project initiated to attract young people into higher education. It had been formed as a partnership of four universities: UoG; UWN; Cardiff Metropolitan and Cardiff University. Its purpose was very similar to UHOVI's and in many ways can be seen as its forerunner (Senior leader 1).

UoG and UWN were in a favourable position to deliver widening participation activity in the HOV region together because they had already proved to the WG that they could do it. Creating a larger HE-led partnership, by including FE colleges and wider work-based learning partners would help each of the universities and the FE colleges to attract more and different types of learners – something that tied in conveniently with the WG target for 40% of the working population to hold level 4+ qualifications by 2020. Initial reports to HEFCW indicated that First Campus made some impact on learner aspiration but more significantly indicated that HE-led partnerships could flourish and grow, using widening participation activity as the vehicle for delivery. It was in this context that the second of the senior leaders suggested that 'the universities approached WG directly for funding for UHOVI, knowing that the WG needed to see results in the HOV. Creating UHOVI was essentially a win win situation for them and for us'.

The same senior leader also indicated that

Despite the WG support for UHOVI, it should have been fairly obvious to everyone that UHOVI was not going to be the 'easy fix' that could magically solve the social, cultural and economic problems in the HOV region of SE Wales. All partners were aware that it would be virtually impossible 'for 40% of the working age population in the HOV to achieve level 4 and above qualifications by the year 2020' (a target figure published in the *Skills that Work for Wales*, Welsh Government, 2008b policy documents). This was because of the dramatically low Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and GVA output and significantly high levels of deprivation across the region (Senior leader 1).

Nevertheless, this did not prevent the two universities from jointly approaching the WG for funding to develop the concept of UHOVI. This senior leader again noted that 'typically, a higher education proposal of this kind would usually be funnelled through the Higher

Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). This wasn't the case with the planning of UHOVI for a start in 2008/09'. He also alluded to 'UHOVI being able to easily meet the initial WG policy objectives because the universities had been instrumental in setting achievable targets for the first few years of delivery'. Working directly with WG from the outset not only enabled the universities to secure the funding to make UHOVI a reality, but it also helped UHOVI to really concentrate on growing both widening participation activity and the collaborative nature of the partnership. These views don't necessarily state that UHOVI was a partnership of equals, but it does suggest that there was a fundamental reliance on the partnership for both WG and for the two HEIs to help each other to meet a wider regeneration policy aim.

6.9 The Partnership between UHOVI and HEFCW

The participants were asked whether they recognised any difference or change in UHOVI between Phases 1 and 2. The responses to this question echoed several of the themes within the Huxham and Vangen (2009) framework, with the theme of 'shifting of power' being identified as a key difference in reporting strategies that were employed during the two phases. Most of the participants recognised that UHOVI changed over the course of its lifespan, with most citing the change occurring at the time of transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2 and most suggesting the reason for this change was because of reporting structures, i.e. HEFCW assuming control from WG.

Understanding and exploring the points of power can enable an assessment of where and when others are unwittingly or consciously exerting power and where and when others may view them as exerting power' (Huxham & Vangen 2009, p 34). This is an interesting point as all participants believed that HEFCW was 'consciously exerting power' over the UHOVI partnership at the start of Phase 2, whereas many felt that this wasn't the case in Phase 1 when UHOVI reported to WG. This is summed up by the first administrator who indicated that 'when UHOVI first started it had energy and a real sense of purpose. UHOVI staff and university staff were engaged and wanted to be involved as much as possible. However, by the time Phase 2 had started, the momentum had dwindled, the motivation to be innovative had gone'.

In this context, Huxham and Vangen (2009) allude to the contention that 'participants willingly accept that manipulative behaviour is appropriate within a partnership context, because they feel that at the very least the job or task would get completed'. Whilst the first administrator did not suggest that manipulative behaviour is appropriate in a partnership context, he did

recognise that in changing from Phase one to Phase two UHOVI lost the ‘spirit of collaboration’ which made it so unique in the very beginning. His perception was that HEFCW in Phase 2 was more concerned with recording the ‘numbers and targets’ than the actual impact UHOVI was having on real people’s lives recorded through their own stories. He suggested that ‘UHOVI had worked really hard to build and establish collaborative working partnerships to deliver widening participation activity, only for it to all fall away abruptly’ a point emphasized by the first senior leader who said he

spent the best part of 18 months driving up and down the valley, meeting with the various community leads and FE Colleges to build partnerships in the pursuit of developing new, exciting and appropriate curriculum opportunities for learners (Senior Leader 1).

Table 6.5 indicates the total number of learners enrolled onto UHOVI courses between 2008/09 and 2015/16. It is interesting because it reveals that UHOVI enrolled the most learners in the final year of Phase 1 (2620 learners) and doesn’t achieve this number again. This indicates that UHOVI was at its most productive in 2012-13 after three full years of development and delivery.

Table 6.5: Total number of UHOVI learners enrolled onto UHOVI courses between 2008/09 and 2015/16

	Academic Year	Number of individual UHOVI learners enrolled
Phase 1 of UHOVI	2008/09	0
	2009/10	175
	2010/11	695
	2011/12	1735
Phase 2 of UHOVI	2012/13	2620
	2013/14	1740
	2014/15	1950
	2015/16	2290

6.10 Identifying trust as a key element of successful partnerships

The final part of this section identifies the theme of trust and its importance within the UHOVI partnership. Whilst none of the participants were asked a specific question on trust, most of them referred to it as being a key factor in their understanding of partnerships and in the context of UHOVI and its capacity to become a partnership of equals.

The first administrator, in providing his response to whether he felt UHOVI was a partnership of equals, suggested that he ‘was being forced to take a job at UHOVI because his post at the university was being made redundant’. It became apparent to him that UHOVI was actually responsible for his role at the university becoming redundant. UHOVI was essentially replacing the widening access branch of the university. As he noted, ‘it was difficult to accept that my safe job at the University for the past fifteen years was being terminated’. This, however, was not the case for all members of staff. As the fourth academic said

UHOVI was touted to me as a wonderful opportunity; there was never any talk of my job role at the University being under threat in those early conversations. UHOVI was offered on a secondment basis and I was made to feel that I was being handpicked to do a job because I had demonstrated that I was good at it (Academic 4).

Huxham and Vangen (2009) suggest that for most participants starting work in a partnership, common wisdom seems to be that trust is a precondition for successful collaborations. However, the common practice appears to be that suspicion rather than trust is the starting point. It is clear from the participants’ responses that staff were joining UHOVI for different reasons. The same academic whose job at the University was made redundant, went on to say that ‘for a long time after I had joined, I was suspicious of everyone that worked at UHOVI’. He unfortunately ‘did not have the luxury of choosing’ (Huxham and Vangen (2009, p 34), whereas it appears that some of his colleagues did. The fourth academic indicated that to a point he became suspicious of his UHOVI colleagues and this suspicion grew more so moving from Phase 1 to Phase 2.

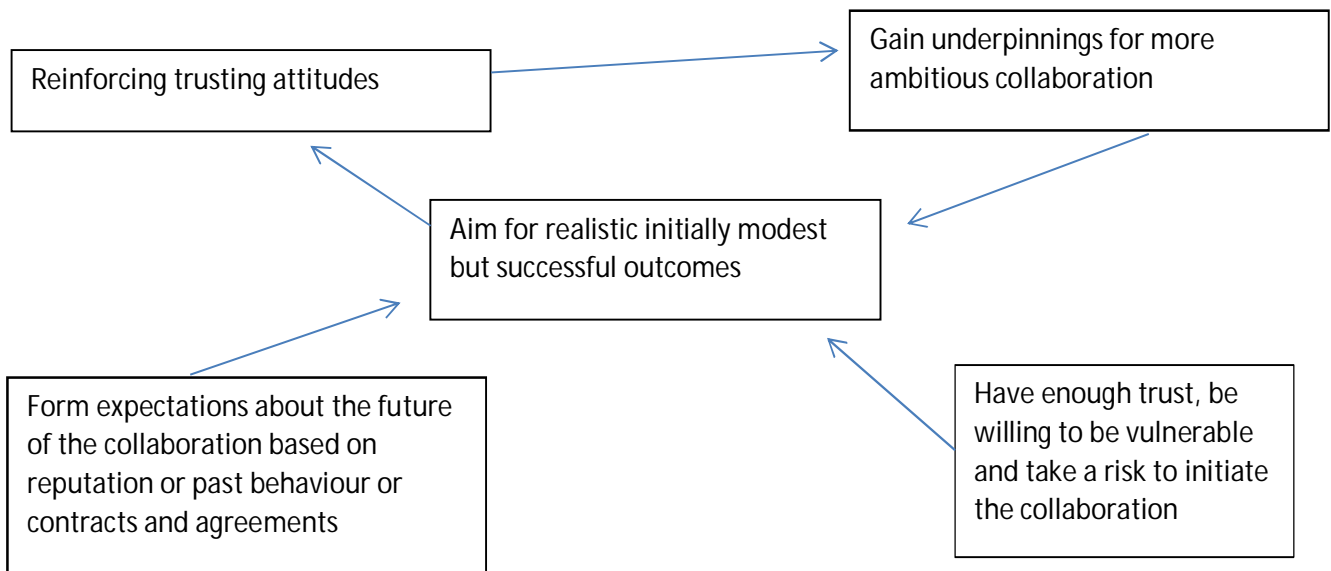
Interestingly, four of the twelve participants were suspicious of the chosen location for the UHOVI offices. They felt that locating UHOVI within the HOV community and not on a university campus made it easier for the universities to move the goalposts in terms of the aim

and objectives, to suit the University’s needs rather than those of UHOVI. They argued that it was a case of ‘out of sight out of mind’ which contributed to the staff feeling detached from the University.

One academic referred to the UoG campus in Treforest as the ‘mother ship’ with three of the nine academic and administrative staff suggesting that the situation quickly created an ‘us versus them situation’. Their suspicion of USW and its management of UHOVI indicates a level of pain that Huxham and Vangen (2009) identify within their own research and again reflects the ambiguity felt by some participants from the inception of UHOVI.

Huxham and Vangen (2009, p 34) indicate that because of such situations, trust building becomes really important within the collaboration. Based on their own research, they have created a trust building loop (Figure 6.1) which identifies two factors which are important when initiating a trusting relationship.

Figure 6.1: The Trust Building Loop



The first factor in trust building is concerned with the formation of expectations about the future of the collaboration. These expectations will be based either on reputation or past behaviour or on more formal contracts and agreements’ (Huxham & Vangen 2009, p 35). The first senior leader indicated ‘that trusting individuals/organisations who clearly had their own agenda was

difficult'. The example he offered 'was in relation to the way in which the UHOVI core aim was narrated to him'. Reading between the lines of what is an organisational aim and what is an individual aim is sometimes difficult. The failed attempt between the UWN and the University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC) to merge a few years before the introduction of UHOVI is an example where there wasn't the level of trust needed between the two institutions, nor with Welsh Government to make the merger work.

With regard to UHOVI, however, there were some guiding principles that helped to shape the initial development and conversations between UWN and UoG which were underpinned by the core aim. For example, the same first senior leader suggested that

UHOVI could build on the success of the Reaching Wider: First Campus infrastructure through rolling out collaborative action beyond the 10-16 year old secondary school target population. It could plan longer term progression for learning into undergraduate studies and develop imaginative pedagogic practices which recognised the social and recreational context for learning as a fundamental means to re-engaging learners who were otherwise alienated from educational institutions. UHOVI had the opportunity to demonstrate an evidence-based, world-class initiative for a new university partnership which improved standards of employability, mobility and citizenship in deprived valley areas. Agreeing to prioritise these guiding principles/objectives helped UHOVI to reinforce trusting attitudes across the partnership and create a foundation from which more and further ambitious collaborative projects could develop (Senior leader 1).

The second factor according to Huxham and Vangen (2009, p 35) involves risk taking. The argument is that partners need to trust each other enough to allow them to take a risk to initiate the collaboration. If both of these factors are possible then the evidence demonstrated by utilising the Trust Building Loop, indicates that trust can gradually be built through starting with some modest, but realistic aims that are likely to be successfully realised. This point reflects the words of the second academic participant who indicated that

Decisions were made behind closed doors, especially curriculum-related where heads of faculties in the universities could and would pull a course from being validated whenever they wanted, and the FE College, could refuse to push or market a foundation degree if they so choose (Academic 2).

A related point regarding the leadership of UHOVI overlaps with some of the other perspectives. Huxham and Vangen (2005) recognise that stakeholders can bring to partnerships different priorities, ideologies and cultures and consequently agreeing joint aims, sharing power and developing trust can present significant obstacles to either collaborating at all or achieving any real progress.

Huxham and Vangen (2005) also note that whilst there are opportunities for partnership working to be highly productive, clearly there is also scope for divergence and lack of consistency. Six of the participants indicated that this was the case at some point in their time spent at UHOVI. As other research shows, this can be the case with partnership working in general, where conflicts in collaborative working can emerge if partnerships adopt proposals that contradict the self-interest of an individual organisation or do not address their concerns (Lotia & Hardy, 2008, Miller and Ahmed, 2000). An example of this was alluded to by the second administrative participant who suggested that the 'University of Glamorgan was more committed to making the UHOVI partnership work from the outset than the University of Wales, Newport'. This is obviously a bold statement and indicates an individual perception that the partnership was not one of equals. However it also emphasizes the commitment, passion, energy and time that the UHOVI staff invested in their work. UHOVI was as much about making a partnership work between HEIs and FE colleges as it was designing and developing level 4+ qualifications and courses for learners that could really benefit from them to improve their own lives and local communities.

The evidence from the semi-structured interviews suggests that all participants were concerned with building and maintaining the UHOVI partnership as well as developing quality level 4+ curriculum and qualifications for people living and working in the HOV region. Whilst the senior leaders were more aware and better informed of the Welsh Government strategies to encourage and support collaborative partnerships, the evidence also suggests that everyone involved directly with UHOVI felt a personal responsibility to make UHOVI work effectively. The same evidence indicates that as a group of staff, the UHOVI team was aware of the need to work together across HE and FE to seek solutions to the shared challenges, both in making the UHOVI partnership work and for the potential learners in the HOV that would benefit from accessing level 4+ courses and qualifications. In concluding this point, the third administrator indicated that

at the of start Phase 2, UHOVI was made aware in no uncertain terms that it needed to deliver better value for money, and perhaps it is this change that was the undoing of UHOVI; because the autonomy and scope in which to design new curriculum and qualifications came to a sudden halt (Administrator 3).

This importance of the change in perception of priorities between Phases 1 and 2 will be examined further in chapter eight.

The final point regarding the leadership of partnerships and the importance of trust being embedded in the partnership, relates to the fact that UHOVI was led by two Associate Directors, one from each of the universities, UoG and UWN. It was noted by all participants that the Associate Directors initially line managed the UHOVI staff from their own respective universities. This was a situation that created some tensions within the UHOVI team, with the first administrator commenting that

UHOVI on the whole was a united team, but on occasion, there was a breakdown in communication and I think this stemmed from the Newport appointed staff wanting to retain their culture and the Glamorgan appointed staff equally wanting to retain theirs when working in UHOVI (Administrator 1).

This comment underlines that, on occasion, when facing difficult challenges in their roles as staff members of UHOVI, participants reverted to the known cultures of their parent universities and possibly failed to embrace the newly-formed collaborative culture necessary for effective partnerships. Chapter seven will continue with the findings from the semi-structured interviews with particular reference to the impact of change on the UHOVI partnership and the key reasons for its discontinuation in 2016.

Chapter 7: Findings from the qualitative research

Section 3: The impact of change on the strategic partnership

7.1 Introduction to section 3

During its seven years of existence between 2009 and 2016, the UHOVI partnership was subjected to several changes that varied from different external funding sources to the diverse, fluctuating membership of its management group. Qualitative evidence from the semi-structured interviews indicates that participants were aware of these changes and that in the long term, UHOVI as a strategic partnership, was negatively impacted by the uncertainty created by these changes. In the words of the first academic participant, UHOVI went from ‘having an imagination to something that didn’t’. This point is further highlighted by the same academic participant who said:

What we started to see, was that UHOVI was perceived as being a supportive mechanism for the FE colleges to develop an HE provision, UHOVI was regarded as being useful and helpful. But when the FE colleges realised they could actually do this for themselves by having their own full-time permanent HE and FE directors, then the role of UHOVI became much more nebulous (Academic 1).

This view was offered in reference to the on-going development of curriculum. Interestingly, the same participant chose to discuss the period at the start of Phase 2 in 2013 as an example of change in practice. She specifically referred to the changes felt operationally by the staff tasked with maintaining a collaborative partnership in the development of curriculum and qualifications at this time. The aim was to ensure that between them, the partners could develop curriculum and qualifications that would aid learners to overcome the barriers of social and economic disadvantage that were prevalent across the HOV region. This academic participant was adamant that

At the beginning of UHOVI Phase 1, there were clear objectives for the partnership to follow. As members of the collaborative curriculum group we were tasked with identifying objectives such as pedagogic approaches that were relevant and appropriate to the needs of the particular learner group. The curriculum had to be relevant, achievable and valuable. And finally, following from the previous objective, the curriculum group

prioritised qualifications and curriculum that held clear progression routes into both vocational and academic higher qualifications and the workplace (Academic 1).

The first academic participant also indicated that

The curriculum group at the start of Phase 1 was mindful of, yet excited by the unique opportunity to develop innovative forms of teaching and learning, curriculum and assessments in a collaborative arrangement. We recognised the immediate value in bringing HE and FE together to pool expertise and experiences. It was felt that together, we could address some of the key challenges (Academic 1).

However, she did suggest that these strategies were far more prevalent during Phase 1 than in Phase 2. Whilst this participant was keen to refer to changes in curriculum, as this was her area of expertise, there are also other key changes relating to strategy that were commented on by other participants.

Two of the five academic participants drew parallels between the way UHOVI was set up and the ways in which UHOVI learners were being asked to learn. They suggested that UHOVI in Phase 1 in particular was an environment which addressed collaborative learning, one that was not too dissimilar from that experienced by the UHOVI learner. In Phase 2, however, there was a noticeable distance being created between the learner and UHOVI, UHOVI and the FE College and UHOVI and the HEI. UHOVI was demonstrating that it was dynamic and flexible enough an organisation to transform, but eight of the twelve participants suggested that it wasn't for the better.

Whilst the academic participants were keen to comment on areas that were close to their own job roles, administrative participants commented on other areas of change, specifically the UHOVI membership structure. Huxham and Vangen (2009) suggest that 'if an initial collaborative purpose is achieved there will usually be a need to move to a new collaborative agenda and this is likely to imply different membership requirements' (2009, p 38). This appears to be true of UHOVI. The first administrative participant pointed out that the membership structure for UHOVI in Phase 2 was very different from Phase 1. For example, he indicated that the Director of UHOVI in Phase 1 was the Pro Vice Chancellor of the UoG. For Phase 2 the directorship was taken on by the Head of Marketing at the University of South

Wales, a non-academic staff member of the University, a role that requires a very different perspective, responsibility, status and standing.

Collaborative structures are often taken for granted as having stability of membership and this feature can often be under-appreciated as an essential feature of ensuring the success of the partnership. The practice however, is that policy steers, whether internal or external, often generate the restructuring of partnerships and organisations (Huxham and Vangen 2009, p37).

7.2 The UHOVI Marketing campaign and the impact of change

All twelve participants commented that the UHOVI marketing campaign was positive. They all agreed that UHOVI's unique position within the HOV community and its distinct identity was a key attraction for any prospective learners. As the second senior leader indicated 'potential community learners with a fear of educational institutions were able to identify with the culture of UHOVI. UHOVI was about inspiring and encouraging them 'to have a go' in an environment that was safe and close to home'. This aligns with Marshall's view that 'UHOVI will play an important role in helping a large pool of talented and able people, living and working within the Heads of the Valleys Region to help them achieve their true potential by providing employer-focused relevant higher education courses in their local community'. (Marshall, Wales Online, 11th November, 2010). All participants agreed that the UHOVI brand and marketing strategy was designed specifically for the HOV communities and reinforced the message of the Minister of Education, Leighton Andrews, that UHOVI 'was making higher education more accessible for those who want to learn' (Andrews, Wales online 11th November, 2010) . All of the participants indicated that UHOVI's strength was in its unique branding, deliberate in its attempt to steer away from the traditional, stereotypical university.

Following this early success in which UHOVI's marketing strategy had underpinned the values of widening participation, seven of the nine academic and administrative participants were keen to point out that four years after the introduction of UHOVI, immediately following the merger of the two universities in 2013, USW was also employing its own marketing strategy as 'the biggest university in Wales' a strategy with a completely different message from that of UHOVI. This, they felt undermined the aim, values and purpose of UHOVI. This is addressed by the third academic participant, who stated

UHOVI was incredibly successful at delivering a whole range of educational activities within the valleys region but I don't think it got any credit at all for what it did because it ceased to be a convenient organisation for the University of South Wales. I don't think that UHOVI ever got the credit it deserved and I think that's partly because they kept changing their minds down on the mother ship about what they wanted to do with UHOVI and with the staff. You can't achieve targets if the targets keep getting changed. How can you score a goal if the goalposts are constantly being moved around the pitch? (Academic 3)

The references here to 'mother ship' and 'goalposts being moved around the pitch' indicate that for this participant, the University had changed its priorities and had focussed more on the corporate needs of the parent institution than on the needs of potential UHOVI learners.

7.3 The need for flexibility to respond to change

The perception of 7 out of the 12 participants was that the priorities of UHOVI changed in 2013/14. The first administrator indicated 'that whilst UHOVI was responsive to the needs of the learners, it should have built upon the success of Phase 1 and should have improved the quality of its provision in Phase 2'. This point is supported by the fourth academic participant who indicated that 'the joint approach in Phase 1 between the FE College and the two universities facilitated through UHOVI in its curriculum development, ensured that learners were supported in a number of ways to progress'. One of the key features of the UHOVI curriculum was the development of 'bite size' level 4+ modules, designed to introduce new learners into HE for the first time. He argued that

UHOVI was the conduit to FE and HE staff agreeing a flexible approach in the design and delivery of new courses. Where FE staff weren't as sure of the quality assurance processes and protocols of HE, UHOVI was able to provide that advice and guidance (Academic 4).

The bite size modules offered learners a range of exit points where HE credits could be banked and used if necessary in the future. This approach was one that both the HE and FE staff bought into. This was not new to either sector, but was consolidated by the UHOVI partnership.

Table 7.1 and Table 7.2 indicate the total HE credit values between 2008/09 to 2011/12 utilised through the two universities of UWN and UoG, and the credit values between 2012/13 to

2015/16 utilised at the newly introduced USW. The data indicates that UHOVI steadily increased its percentage of HE credits against the overall institution's allocation, except in the two years in Phase 2, 2013/14 and 2014/15 where it dropped. What this data indicates is that in the final year of operation (2015/16), UHOVI accounted for 20% of the overall HE credit allocation at the USW. This supports the claims from all the academic participants that in Phase 1 UHOVI had employed a flexible approach to delivering HE in this region of Wales.

Table 7.1 UHOVI Total HE Credit Values: Combined University of Wales, Newport & University of Glamorgan

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
UHOVI credit	0	9380	39685	82160
NON UHOVI credit	490570	648140	609010	586030
Overall credit	490570	657520	648695	668190
UHOVI credit as % of overall credit		1.43	6.13	12.3

Table 7.2 UHOVI Total HE Credit Values: University of South Wales

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
UHOVI credit	110,595	55,650	60,740	127,630
NON UHOVI credit	549,625	596,695	580,015	511,925
Overall credit	660,220	652,345	640,755	639,555
UHOVI credit as % of overall credit	16.8	8.53	9.48	19.96

From its beginning, UHOVI essentially put the learner at the centre 'of its decision making'. However, as the fourth academic participant noted 'as UHOVI moved into Phase 2, the partnership was not as flexible as it had once been, it seemed that the learner wasn't getting quite as good a deal', this could possibly contribute to the drop in HE credits during 2013 and 2014.

7.4 Learner support as a necessary element of continuing success

As a starting point in Phase 1, the HE and FE staff tasked with developing and delivering UHOVI courses needed to be aware of the diverse needs of learners and explore ways in which support could be built into course design. The fifth academic participant argued that he was

keen to ensure that UHOVI didn't just bring HE and FE together, where HE staff would look down and FE staff would look up at each other. UHOVI provided the opportunity for HE and FE staff to share and collaborate, using their expertise to ensure the learner got the best possible deal (Academic 5).

However, as the first senior leader suggests, 'moving into Phase 2, the FE Colleges were far more confident in being able to develop curriculum without the immediate support of UHOVI and could afford to use them less and less'. Edwards (2001) indicates the importance of being able to relate creatively to knowledge and supporting people to cope with 'super complexity', 'uncertainty', 'pressure to produce', and use knowledge. Ten of the twelve participants indicated that UHOVI in Phase 1 provided the chance for learners to re-engage with learning, a key step in helping to restore identity, aspiration, confidence and self-esteem. Whilst this was still the aim in Phase 2, discussions concerning student planning, financial support, financial planning, became far more prevalent in the curriculum group discussions. As one academic put it, 'pedagogy was replaced with planning'. This indicates that in the opinion of this participant, learner support was not as important to the curriculum group as it had been in Phase 1.

A key message communicated by all the academic and administration staff was that whilst learners identified themselves as UHOVI learners, the majority of support for learning came from the HEI and the FE College. The fourth academic participant stated

UHOVI provided some support, but did not have the adequate infrastructure in place to provide the level of support that these learners needed. This was an issue that continued to raise its head time and time again right across Phase 1 and Phase 2. UHOVI provided support for the staff from HE and FE, but support for learning had to come from the HEI or FE College in which the learner was studying (Academic 4).

In the words of Huxham and Vangen (2009, p37), in order for partnerships to achieve collaborative advantage, all staff need to own common strategies of teaching, learning,

pedagogy and support for learning. They argue that effort put into building mutual understanding and developing trust can be shattered very easily.

In terms of other changes, for example, the structure of the organisation or the change of a key individual, can cause a collaboration to take on a completely different meaning. (Huxham and Vangen, 2009, p37). Whilst Huxham and Vangen (2009) recognise that change in most partnerships is inevitable, to avoid pain and ambiguity, a nurturing process must be in place which is both continuous and permanent (2009, p39). UHOVI offered neither, it moved from Phase 1 to Phase 2 with the nurturing process only present in Phase 1. The gains made in Phase 1 in relation to the strategies of teaching, learning, pedagogy and learner support, were almost forgotten by the staff because of the unsettled nature of Phase 2.

7.5 Change and the response of leaders

Lowndes and Skelcher (1998, p 313) suggest that

Each stage of partnership requires a different approach to governance, and that the key challenge for partnerships lies in managing the interaction of different modes of governance, which at some points will generate competition and at other points, collaboration.

The qualitative data from the interviews also appear to imply this. All participants are to some extent positive about the UHOVI collaboration, although with regard to certain aspects have negative comments to make. Three of the twelve participants suggest that towards the end of Phase 2 the FE colleges were almost working in competition with the universities because ‘they could do it better on their own’.

Interestingly, the qualitative data from all three of the senior leaders is generally more positive about the UHOVI partnership and its outcomes than the academic and administrator groups. One reason for this might be that they were responsible for leadership and the others weren’t. What Huxham and Vangen (2009) indicate is that for managers who wish to lead more actively, the implication appears to be that part of their activity must be concerned with the design of structures and processes that are effective for that particular purpose (Huxham and Vangen, 2009, p40). All senior leaders implied that UHOVI had effective structures in place, including: curriculum development, support for learning and advice and guidance and that they worked hard as a team to improve on the processes year on year. The third senior leader suggested that

‘UHOVI provided the college with the structure to cater for its HE needs specifically regarding joint curriculum planning’.

The three senior leaders’ views were supported by some of the other participants. For example the first administrator indicated that ‘having the opportunity to work on an initiative which was very different to anything I had done before and actually feel like I was helping people was what made UHOVI such an appealing proposition’. However, eight of the participants indicated that UHOVI in Phase 2 had different priorities from those in Phase 1. This is exemplified by the fifth academic participant who went on to say:

UHOVI in Phase 1 was solely about developing innovative curriculum, qualifications, using imaginative pedagogy. It was exciting and regarded as a real opportunity to do something different. I think UHOVI in Phase 1 excited the staff that were involved, and perhaps to a point scared some, because it was something that ventured into the unknown. However, in Phase 2, UHOVI became much more of a number crunching exercise. Hitting target, reporting to management board, became far more the topics of conversation and you could visibly see colleagues becoming more and more nervous (Academic 5).

Huxham and Vangen (2009, p39), suggest that in this context, nurturing is an important form of getting things done to achieve successful outcomes. All of the academic staff indicated that the nurturing of UHOVI learners was vital to their success in progressing to higher education. They suggested that UHOVI ceased being a nurturing organisation at the start of Phase 2 and this could possibly have contributed to a decline in student enrolments and a 50% decrease in HE credits between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Huxham and Vangen (2009) suggest that those who are successful seem to operate from two perspectives ‘in the spirit of collaboration and towards collaborative thuggery, often carrying out both types of leadership in the same act’ (Huxham and Vangen, 2009, p 41). Many of the participants appear to recognise this in their perceptions of UHOVI, drawing clear distinctions between Phase 1 and Phase 2. They indicate that Phase 1 was successful and this was achieved largely through the spirit of collaboration and partnership. Yet they recognise that Phase 2 wasn’t as successful, suggesting that the commitment to collaboration wasn’t as strong. This point again reinforces Huxham and Vangen’s (2009) perspective about collaborative thuggery.

The qualitative evidence indicates that this latter element could be perceived as being present in Phase 2.

7.6 Collaboration as an end in itself

As already indicated, the core aim of UHOVI was to

effectively connect the physical, economic and social aspects of regeneration in the Heads of the Valleys to underpin and support the transformation of the region, by commissioning a coherent programme of informed curriculum within a single planning framework, on a more visible and enduring basis (UHOVI, 2010).

All participants indicated that the strategic partnership was central to achieving UHOVI's core aim and objectives. However, half felt that the act of collaboration between partners became more important and subsumed the activities relating to the needs of learners. Huxham and Vangen (2009, p 39) state that 'they are concerned with what makes things happen in a collaboration, that this concern is with the formation and implementation of the collaborative group's policy and activity agenda'.

This is an interesting point because the three senior leaders all indicated that it was the two universities that approached the Welsh Government in the design and development of UHOVI because they felt that they could build upon the existing First Campus model to help WG with the wider regeneration of the HOV region. Initially, the partnership, structures and processes came very much from the universities themselves. All the academic participants noted that UHOVI was the catalyst that helped create the partnership between the universities and the FE colleges, but the real power and leadership came from the universities.

However, in terms of the perceived influence of the Welsh Government over the UHOVI team, the second senior leader suggested 'that UHOVI was the victim of local and regional policy objectives being superseded by national policy aims; that these changes to policy were felt right at the centre of the operation'. In effect this participant felt that the UHOVI partnership was just unable to 'keep up' with this strategic change.

The second Senior Leader's comment indicates that 'national policy changes were being felt right on the front line of curriculum development and by the staff tasked with developing it'. It also supports Huxham and Vangen's (2009) views that structures, processes and participants

can be thought of as different media through which collaborative leadership is in practice enacted. The important point here is that after its initial phase, the structures, processes and participants were not controlled by the staff working in the UHOVI partnership. It suggests that structures and processes are sometimes imposed externally, for example by a government. Huxham and Vangen (2009) state that 'leadership is not solely the role of members of the collaboration, that external stakeholders can often direct the territory of a partnership' (Huxham and Vangen, 2009, p 40). This echoes the perceptions of half of the participants who felt that the pressure from the Welsh Government was to make the strategic partnership work above all other priorities.

7.7 Partnership fatigue as a consequence of the change process

Evidence from participants indicates that the theme of 'partnership fatigue' was a contributory problem that impacted on the sustainability of the UHOVI initiative. This is further developed in Section four as a contributory factor to the discontinuation of UHOVI. UHOVI was planned in 2009 as part of a wider Welsh Assembly Government *Turning Heads...A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys* (2006) that included: health; economic inactivity; image; the environment as well as higher education policy to regenerate the Heads of the Valleys. This comprehensive strategy included other projects which were also being developed around this time. For example, the third senior leader from the FE College indicated that he

Was having to maintain positive relationships with the LEA and school 6th forms knowing their ambition to retain their 6th forms. This was in spite of the WG transformation agenda to reduce the number of post 16 providers (Senior leader 3).

The closure of all 6th forms within the Merthyr Local Education Authority (LEA), presented a huge opportunity for one of the FE colleges that could be deemed more important to this particular FE College than the UHOVI partnership. Thus the FE College was involved in multiple, competing partnerships at this time, all of which were important in helping to regenerate the region. Similarly, the two senior leaders from the universities were involved in the building of new campuses in Newport and Cardiff respectively. The third senior leader stressed the importance of the WG Transformation agenda (2008), stating that 'it was intended to transform the post 16 education landscape in Wales, the sheer scale of the networking activity that was taking place at this time added to a lack of clarity and an element of complexity in each of the partnerships'. To develop this point, the same senior leader stressed that

The level 1, 2 and 3 curriculum offer within the college was the key driving focus for the College. With school 6th forms closing, it was imperative that we planned and were ready for the new tertiary system (Senior leader 3).

All the senior leaders mentioned the importance of the new campus 'builds' to their respective universities. These were identified as significant, not as a form of distraction, but to illustrate how busy their respective organisations were at this time. For example, the second senior leader indicates that 'the new builds were there to cater for a new cohort of students, designed primarily to attract full time, fee paying students from across Wales, the UK and with a clear intention to attract the international market'. This level of transformation was far bigger than the UHOVI offer. This message wasn't lost on around half of the participants and especially the first academic participant who felt that

Whilst UHOVI was important business to all partners, with the obvious value involved, it was never close enough to being core business for any of them. There was always the feeling that every partner was being pulled in a different direction at any given time (Academic 1).

It was suggested by the fourth academic participant that 'UHOVI was regarded as 'additional' business to the universities and by 2013 it had lost something of its original appeal'. Huxham and Vangen (2009) identify the factor of partnership fatigue, where the partners become tired of being pulled in all directions. Interestingly the data in table 7.3 indicates that the HE credits steadily increased from 2010 to 2013, but between 2012/13 and 2013/14 the HE credit values drop from 110,595 by approximately 50% to 55650. This supports the data in Table 7.3 that identifies the decline in enrolments from Phase 1 to Phase 2.

Table 7.3: The acquisition of higher education credits by UHOVI, 2008/09 – 2015/16

Academic Year	UHOVI credit	Increase/decrease in credit pa
2008/09	0	0
2009/10	9380	-
2010/11	39685	+30305
2011/12	82160	+42475
2012/13	110595	+28435
2013/14	55650	- 54945
2014/15	60740	+5090
2015/16	126630	+66890

Huxham and Vangen (2009) suggest that some participants try to link agendas across initiatives, but that these initiatives may not overlap and as such partners lose interest, partnership fatigue sets in. Both the quantitative and qualitative data suggests this to be the case regarding UHOVI circa 2013/14.

The fourth administrative participant also indicates that ‘UHOVI could have been suffering partnership fatigue at all levels, strategic and operationally’. A point that was made by all the senior leader participants also seems relevant here. They noted their concern that UHOVI at the start of Phase 2 started being referred to specifically as a ‘project’ by HEFCW and by the staff that were involved in its delivery. The third administrative participant voiced similar concerns ‘that projects invariably have a start, a middle and an end, meaning that UHOVI could potentially end in the summer of 2016’. Her concern was certainly compounded ‘by the need to continue to build and maintain positive relationships at a time when all partners were now aware that there was an end in sight’. This she suggested ‘was not only more time consuming but energy sapping and frustrating for all involved’. Undoubtedly, this would have been a key factor in the partners experiencing pain and fatigue at this time. This qualitative evidence indicates that partnership fatigue was a contributor to UHOVI not achieving the collaborative advantage it quite possibly could have. It was a central element of the process of change and based on the observations of most of the participants there was a decline in enthusiasm from all involved with UHOVI post Phase 1. The ambition of the newly-merged institution of USW contributed to the partnership fatigue within UHOVI because of their new and competing

strategic aims and objectives.

Section 4: An Exploration of the reasons for the discontinuation of UHOVI

7.8 Introduction to section 4

This is the final section of the two chapters that deal with the research findings and it draws upon the interviews with all twelve participants. The section is structured to reflect the key reasons why UHOVI was discontinued in 2016 as a strategic HE-led partnership in the HOV region. Participants' views offer diverse explanations which overlap with the findings outlined in the first three sections. Their responses have been organised into external and internal factors.

7.9 External factors that contributed to the discontinuation of UHOVI

All twelve participants alluded to a range of reasons for the demise of UHOVI, with a lack of funding being the most significant one. Whereas the second senior leader indicated that it was always the intention to 'mainstream UHOVI into the main university, that the initial WG funding stream was only ever meant to pump prime development and enrolment' the fourth administrator pointed to

the economic instability within the wider UK economy, noting that the banking crisis had created a situation where the national economy was on the slide, whatever original good intention there may have been to continue UHOVI indefinitely would have to have been reconsidered. There just wasn't the public money or European money to support something like UHOVI (Administrator 4).

This point has resonance with Keep (2008, p 1) when he refers to the new Labour policy in 2008 of being at the high point of post compulsory funding. The financial situation in 2013 at the time of UHOVI Phase 2, however, was different across the UK. These participants' views reflect a difference in opinion between a senior leader and an administrator and indicates an ambiguity within the partnership. Whereas the senior leader was aware of the wider HEFCW strategy to 'promote collaborative arrangements that delivered coherent regional learning opportunities, that UHOVI be funded until 2016/17 with the intention that the provision be mainstreamed into standard USW part time' (HEFCW Institutional Plan for USW 2015-2016, p19) it appears that the fourth administrator was not as well informed of the detail, preferring

to pass comment on an issue that was affecting the public sector on a national basis not just a regional one.

The HEFCW Widening Access Progress of Work Plan for 2015-2016 cites the intention to 'Fund UHOVI to July 2016 and mainstreaming into USW provision, including full-time, part-time, bitesize and 14-19 provision with partner schools and colleges' (WA Approach A9, 13).

The use of the term 'mainstreaming' indicates that earmarked funding for UHOVI would be over by July 2016. Whilst it may be argued that the learners from the HOV area could still be accommodated within USW's core budget, there is no escaping the fact that the additional £10 million of funding from the WG over UHOVI's first four years had made the initial growth in learner and credit numbers possible. Once mainstreaming had occurred in 2016, UHOVI would have to compete with other curriculum demands as part of the overall USW strategic plan.

The lack of continuation funding, post 2016, is an external factor that was cited by all participants as contributing to the discontinuation of UHOVI. This was followed by ten of the twelve participants pointing to the merger between UoG and UWN in 2013 as another key factor that was external to UHOVI. The third academic suggested that 'the merger of the two universities into USW, one of the largest universities in the UK, pretty much meant the end for UHOVI. UHOVI had served its purpose' reflecting that UHOVI had demonstrated to the WG and to HEFCW that these two universities would be able to serve the HE sector more effectively as one united institution.

The final external factor that one of the senior leaders, two of the academics and two of the administrators noted was that UHOVI was discontinued because 'the policy was never tight enough in the beginning'. This was a phrase used by the first administrator who suggested that

UHOVI just was not well enough understood within the HE and FE sectors. It took too long to create an identity and by the time it had done this, it was time to finish. The very first policy document from WG that ensured the funding for UHOVI was celebrated within the respective universities, but it was more a celebration of them being able to income generate rather than change the world (Administrator 1).

This statement is appropriate, because when asked what the aim and objectives of UHOVI were, the resounding answer was to deliver widening participation across the HOV region. It

appears, in the view of the same administrator, that the concept of UHOVI was ‘tight’ enough to warrant £10 million of WG funding over its first four years, but not enough to continue into Phase 2 after the pump priming funding had been discontinued.

7.10 Internal factors that contributed to the discontinuation of UHOVI

Changes in the nature of the curriculum were highlighted by several of the participants as a possible cause for the loss of momentum of UHOVI. The third academic suggested that it was due to a ‘change of direction in the courses offered. UHOVI was about offering qualifications and courses that were focused and were designed with progression to a full time degree course in mind’.

As the second administrator noted

Yes UHOVI offered bite size in Tai chi, but there were links to the health, sport and exercise foundation degree and degree programmes offered at an FE College and at USW. The traditional widening access offer that UoG and UWN were famous for all but stopped when UHOVI opened. Lots of traditional adult learners learning through a diversity of courses were lost (Administrator 2).

In reflecting on this question, the fourth academic asked ‘did UHOVI feel a pressure to provide a curriculum that merely addressed the needs of the economy?’ and in answering his/her own question suggested that

The days of learning for learning’s sake have well and truly disappeared. There wasn’t the money or status to teach basket weaving or flower arranging anymore. If a course or qualification didn’t wipe its feet, it didn’t run, simple as (Academic 4).

The third administrator also alludes to this point indicating that

I agreed with the UHOVI objectives, our role was to up skill a region to provide them with courses and qualifications that would up skill them and as such help to improve the region’s economy. However in taking this more organised and structured approach, we were alienating or excluding a large portion of the community that we had traditionally worked with up to this point in our respective host institutions through our host widening access strategies (Administrator 3).

A comment was also made concerning the ‘apparent lack of importance placed on UHOVI learners in comparison to the mainstream students’. The fourth academic suggested there was

A bit of ignorance around staff perceptions of UHOVI and it was more because it was something that was done differently to everything that was normal practice. I.e. UHOVI created a bit of a problem for everyone that were on the fringes of it, because it wasn’t their core jobs (Academic 4).

The concerns made by a number of the participants regarding the location of the UHOVI office was again referenced in response to this question. Some of the participants felt that being located ‘off university campus at a time when the two universities were merging made it easier for the new senior leadership team of USW to discontinue UHOVI’. Whilst none of the senior leaders indicated this, the second administrators noted,

In the last eighteen months of UHOVI, UHOVI colleagues were arranging more and more meetings at Treforest rather than in Merthyr. It felt like you needed to be seen as a member of staff within the university, not a member of staff outside of it. Perhaps colleagues started to look more after themselves and their own futures rather than explicitly the objectives of UHOVI (Administrator 2).

Whilst this isn’t a reason for the discontinuation of UHOVI, it does indicate the levels of ambiguity and distress that UHOVI staff were faced with. This in turn caused a lack of motivation on the part of UHOVI staff which had also been apparent over their concerns about the impending merger of the two universities. It also reveals the differences in approach by senior leaders and those academic and administrator participants. The next and concluding chapter eight consists of a summary of the findings, followed by comments, conclusions, a consideration of critical success factors and recommendations.

Chapter 8: Findings and implications for research, policy and practice

8.1 Introduction

The core aim of this study has been to investigate UHOVI as a strategic partnership to deliver Welsh Government policy to up skill and regenerate the HOV region in South East Wales. In order to achieve this I used the following research objectives:

- To examine the experiences of former UHOVI and current FE college staff involved in collaborative working and relationships across the UHOVI partnership
- To identify perceptions of the strengths and limitations of UHOVI and partnership arrangements for the management and delivery of level 4+ qualifications and courses
- To understand what lessons can be learned from applying Huxham and Vangen's concepts of collaborative advantage to the strategic partnership of UHOVI

These research objectives prompted me to utilise, as part of the research methodology, semi-structured interviews, conducted with former UHOVI staff and colleagues from the partner FE colleges. The interviews consisted of research questions based on the following themes:

- Understanding UHOVI and knowledge of the UHOVI core aim and objectives
- Partnership as a strategy
- External and internal changes, partnership fatigue and its impact on the sustainability of UHOVI
- The reasons for the discontinuation of UHOVI

This concluding chapter focuses on findings and implications for further research, policy and practice. The findings are based on participants' answers to the research questions and the examples of practice and research identified in the literature review in chapters two, three and four. The most significant empirical research is that of Huxham and Vangen (1996-2017), especially in relation to their views on collaborative advantage and inertia. For clarity, the implications for further research, policy and practice are organised under the same four sections used in chapters six and seven. The final part of this chapter focuses on critical success factors, the achievement of which enabled UHOVI to reach a degree of collaborative advantage in Phase 1, but which were largely absent from Phase 2.

8.2 Understanding UHOVI and knowledge of the UHOVI core aim and objectives: Findings and implications

All three participants in the senior leaders' group were familiar with the purpose of UHOVI as part of a combined HE/FE strategy. They all recognised that UHOVI was a key part of the WG regeneration plans with the objective of increasing access to level 4+ qualifications and skills across the HOV region. There was a clear synergy between the values each placed on the dual benefits of higher education in improving individuals' social mobility and the economic prosperity of the region. This was portrayed through their own experiences, living and working for an extended period of time in the HOV and supports Saunders' et al (2013) views that the UHOVI model embraced both the individual and regional dimension to connect effectively the physical, economic and social aspects of the communities of SE Wales to underpin and support the regeneration of the region' (Saunders et al, 2013).

The academic and administrative participants also implied a clear understanding of the purpose of UHOVI, with all participants noting the importance of widening participation activity being instrumental in helping people from disadvantaged backgrounds to change their lives. Whilst all participants referred to the importance of widening participation, only two participants indicated that it was the quality of the widening participation activity that counted. Personalised learning strategies and support for learning were cited as examples of good practice which would improve the quality of activity.

8.3 Knowledge of UHOVI core aim and objectives

All the participants recognised the need for UHOVI to develop curriculum and qualifications that would help and add value to people's lives living and working in the HOV region. However, participants' responses varied considerably in the level of understanding of the core aim and objectives. For example, developing widening participation activity through purpose-designed curriculum and qualifications was noted by all participants. However it was only the three senior leaders who indicated that UHOVI contributed to improving social mobility and economic prospects across the HOV. Whilst social mobility as a positive outcome was mentioned by more than half of the participants, the inclusion of UHOVI's contribution to economic improvements for individuals and for the region as a whole was only mentioned by the three senior leaders.

As was noted in Chapter six, the majority of academic and administrative participants suggested that in the terms of Huxham and Vangen (2009), the hidden aim of UHOVI was to

prove to the WG that a partnership between two HEIs could work and was the precursor of the institutional merger between UoG and UWN.

8.4 Implications for further research

The most significant issues to arise from these findings that have an implication for future HE-led partnerships are the various interpretations amongst participants of the UHOVI aim and objectives. The absence of clarity or consensus regarding UHOVI's aim and objectives raises two questions. The first, were the UHOVI aim and objectives clearly communicated to all members of staff on starting work at UHOVI? Perhaps this point is even more significant at the transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2 in 2013. The second question is did UHOVI actually have a clear policy steer and sense of purpose? Huxham and Vangen (2009) emphasize that some aims will be explicit, some assumed and others are hidden. This rings true for UHOVI. The findings suggest that it was the three senior leaders that understood explicitly the aim of UHOVI, whereas the five academic and four administrative participants felt the UHOVI aim and objectives were either assumed or hidden. A final consideration is that none of the participants could recount the UHOVI core aim and six objectives verbatim, a problem identified by the first academic who stated that 'what had been described as objectives were actually vague aims and added to the ambiguity'.

The implication of these findings is that for any future HE-led partnerships, the project team needs to consider how the purpose, aim and objectives of the project are communicated to the project staff and its relevant partners. It is also essential that the purpose, aim and objectives are understood, how they are agreed upon, by whom, and how they complement each other. For the partnership team to be cohesive and effective in meeting its agreed outcomes, it is also important that it recognises that each partner is likely to have a slightly different understanding of the purpose, aim and objectives. As all funded projects are subject to an ever-changing external environment in which key policy drivers will change, it is vital that all partners discuss and re-define objectives that continue to meet the core aim on a regular basis. Evidence from the qualitative research indicates that the priorities of UHOVI changed between Phases 1 and 2.

8.5 Lessons learned for HE-led strategic partnerships

The following lessons can be learned from the findings of the qualitative research. In order to achieve a degree of collaborative advantage, strategic partnerships should:

- Communicate the project's purpose, aim and objectives so that all staff involved can

better understand how they can contribute to meeting the desired outcomes.

- Review core aims and objectives on a regular basis to ensure they meet the requirements of the changing external environment.

8.6 Partnerships as a strategy to deliver policy: findings and implications

Ten of the participants understood broadly the concept of partnerships, mentioning the sharing of resources and the joint ownership and responsibility of an agreed outcome. Six of the participants mentioned the need for common values and defined expectations. Even though three of the participants felt they couldn't answer adequately, they nevertheless did suggest that any form of partnership needed the basics of trust and mutual respect to make it work. This is supported by the research conducted by Bridge et al (2003) who noted that the structure of partnerships can help embed the key values of trust as an essential element of a successful partnership arrangement. This suggests that these participants understood the concept of partnership in its broadest sense.

When referring specifically to UHOVI and whether or not the participants felt it was a partnership of equals, the majority of participants indicated that it was the UoG that held the power over the UHOVI partnership throughout Phase 1. UoG was the dominant partner because key positions within UHOVI were filled by members of staff from that university. All participants also recognised that as UHOVI moved into Phase 2, UoG and UWN merged to form the USW. At that time UHOVI was still managed by UoG staff. However, none of the participants referred to this in a negative way, all participants felt that within a two-way partnership, one organisation would always be more powerful than the other. Added to this, eight of the participants identified themselves more as UHOVI rather than as USW staff.

Interestingly, the majority of participants also indicated that UHOVI Phase 1 was the more successful of the two phases, even though the partnership was dominated by one partner over the rest. The participants recognised the main strengths of UHOVI as its marketing strategy, the commitment of staff and the investment of WG funding to initiate the process. However the majority of participants also recognised the UHOVI weaknesses such as: the initial divisions between UoG and UWN staff, different processes and ways of working and being located off campus. These were all issues for the majority of participants. Three participants pointed to the way in which UHOVI employed its staff. In Phase 1, the two universities approached the recruitment of UHOVI staff in very different ways. They indicated that they were not in the partnership to mirror each other's decisions and they asserted their own

autonomy, style and strategy. Despite these apparent shortcomings, the partnership was able to be proactive and meet the agreed set targets and outcomes in Phase 1.

As a measure of how collaborations either achieve or fail to achieve collaborative advantage, Huxham and Vangen (2009) suggest that power and trust are shifting entities and this is certainly a theme evidenced by all participants. Six of the participants indicated that UHOVI was a higher education-led partnership that steadily built trust from within the team and with the key partners. These participants recognised that even though they were not trusting of each other to begin with, this did not deter them from doing the job they each felt needed to be done.

Whilst respect and trust grew initially within the UHOVI team, the change from Phase 1 into Phase 2, saw the trust and respect for USW diminish. The majority of participants felt that USW, at this transition stage for UHOVI, was prioritising other work streams. For example, they cited the international student recruitment market as a strategic priority for the University. Eight of the participants suggested it was because of the nature of the widening participation role that UHOVI was tasked with. The first administrator indicated that ‘widening participation is perhaps the least competitive sector within HE compared with the high stakes nature of the international, undergraduate and post graduate markets’. This, he suggested ‘enabled a space for two post 1992 universities to agree on a strategy which appealed largely to the moral and social conscience of all staff members involved with UHOVI’. The participants inherently trusted in the purpose of UHOVI as an initiative designed to improve level 4 + qualifications and skills which would help with the wider regeneration of the region. In turn they chose to trust each other. What the research study findings suggest is that a mutual respect quickly grew amongst the team at the early stage of UHOVI’s development.

An early example of partnership as a strategy was provided by the Webb Report (2007), that specified the importance of employers in advising and influencing higher and further education partnerships. The Webb Report stated that ‘good partnerships are exemplified by a shared mission for the delivery of HE in FE (Webb, 2007, p 84).

8.7 Implications for further research

These findings indicate that there will be challenges relating to attitudes towards trust and power for any new HE/FE partnerships. There appears to be a dissonance between the way in which the majority of participants understood the concept of partnership in delivering Welsh Government policy and the actual practice, with trust and power being key themes. The main implications are related to leadership and management. The participants all bought into the

concept of widening participation and all accepted that a partnership was the preferred method /strategy to deliver outcomes. Whilst not all participants were ‘trusting’ of the partnership, they were accepting of ‘who was in charge’ initially, and this worked. In the words of the first senior leader, ‘Having strong leadership and management helps to build trust across a team’. These findings have implications for any future HE-led partnership to fulfil its main purpose, aim and objectives.

8.8 Lessons learned for policy makers and leaders of partnerships

The implications of these findings are that whilst trust and power are important to the staff that work in a partnership team, collaborative advantage can be achieved if the leadership and management of the partnership are effective and consistent,. This involves an identification of success that is owned by all staff members. Huxham and Vangen (2009) indicate that by setting modest outcomes this will reinforce trusting attitudes and underpin further ambition for the partnership team. In their terms UHOVI achieved collaborative advantage as a strategic partnership up to a point, and only to the end of Phase 1.

For policy makers and leaders of strategic partnerships, lessons that can be learned, based on the findings include:

- Taking cognisance of Huxham and Vangen’s (2009) seven perspectives of collaborative advantage as good practice to inform the planning of strategic partnerships
- Building trust by communicating effectively with all partners in a clear, transparent and consistent manner
- Working with WG and HEFCW to establish and fund a programme of qualifications and curriculum in key areas of the economy. Based on the advice from the Webb Report (2007), appoint a regional employer to chair the strategic partnership board.

8.9 External and internal changes, partnership fatigue and its impact on the sustainability of UHOVI: findings and implications

The aim of designing and developing qualifications and a curriculum which would support the transformation of the region, provided a key focus in the early stages of UHOVI for all partners to coalesce around. The altruistic goal of widening participation was seen as a common good in 2009. As Saunders et al (2013, p76) indicate ‘There is strength and potential through building lifelong learning communities that draw on economic, social and cultural practices.’ This

included support from all partners and significantly from the Welsh Government itself. Four of the participants, including academic and administrative participants, indicate, however, that during the early days of Phase 2, this altruism dissipated. The demonstrable change took place between Phases 1 and 2. Their opinion is supported by the HESA (Higher Education Statistical Analysis) data which indicates that for the first two years of Phase 2, HE credit and enrolment numbers fell significantly. The key reasons, as indicated by the participants, are:

Ten of the twelve participants pointed to the funding methodology as a key factor in the change process experienced by the UHOVI team. Two of the senior leaders and one of the administrators clearly identified that the 'audit and scrutiny' of UHOVI funding was in far more detail in Phase 2 than it was in Phase 1. They did not indicate this as having a positive or a negative effect, but something which just had to be accepted. They each recognised that WG, HEFCW and USW needed evidence of value for money and that every validated course had to recruit a targeted number of learners with clear progression from UHOVI to the USW. These same staff felt that UHOVI in Phase 2 was more about evidencing 'work' than it was 'actually doing it'. Whilst the other participants recognised the importance of funding, their knowledge of the actual funding methodology was not as comprehensive as colleagues whose role was to oversee it. In their case, funding was described in terms of a hindrance and a barrier to getting the real job done which was to develop curriculum and qualifications to 'help people in the HOV'. This point is underlined by Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher (2006) who argue that without doubt, the control of funding is paramount to those in both the FE college and the HEI that are involved in partnership.

All participants noted that the merger between UoG and USW into USW initiated a change in institutional priorities. Six of the participants (which included former members of staff from UoG and from UWN) reflected on 'the good old days of widening access'. All six participants indicated that USW was now driven to 'make money, rather than provide higher educational opportunities for those people that needed them most'. The same six staff referred to changes in leadership teams, institutional governance, staff contracts from UHOVI to USW and referred to them as factors that influenced institutional priorities. The first administrator pointed to the fact that key people responsible for the original concept of UHOVI within both the universities had retired. Their commitment and drive for providing social justice, which was so influential in the shaping of the identities of both universities, had dissipated in favour of ensuring economic viability.

The strategy with regard to the management of student recruitment and development of curriculum, qualifications and pedagogy is cited by all the academic participants as having an impact on the partnership. One of the participants noted that as soon as the FE College members realised that they could develop curriculum directly with the relevant staff members in the university, there wasn't really a need for the UHOVI intervention. This change in approach placed pressure on the partnership, with UHOVI referred to as having a 'nebulous role'. The three senior leaders all suggested that the UHOVI partnership had structures in place and had processes that were improved upon year after year. The third senior leader was eager to note that 'UHOVI provided his FE College with the chance to grow an HE portfolio of curriculum and courses which in turn increased HE enrolment numbers to the highest in his College's history'.

A related point which supports the qualitative evidence is Huxham and Vangen's (2009) view that leadership can be seen as adding collaborative advantage to a partnership if it is mechanistic and leads to an outcome. In Phase 1 of UHOVI positive enrolment statistics indicate that this was achieved. However, enrolments declined in Phase 2.

8.10 Partnership fatigue and its impact on the sustainability of UHOVI

This theme is central to this study. UHOVI was designed to 'improve' level 4+ qualifications and skills in the HOV region. By doing so, this would help the WG to meet its wider policy to regenerate the HOV region. None of the participants involved in this study argued against this and all indicated that it was a good thing to be involved with. However, what was noted by two of the senior leaders, three of the academics and two of the administrative participants was that universities are higher education institutions; their core business in twenty first century Wales is seen as delivering undergraduate and post graduate degree programmes. Outcomes are predominantly measured at level six which equates to the successful completion of an undergraduate degree. FE colleges predominantly offer level one, two and three vocational and academic courses and qualifications to a wide range of abilities and ages, but as one of these participants noted, 'these students on the whole tend to be from the immediate area in which the FE college is located'. The same participants felt that UHOVI was an initiative 'which was essentially positioned between the two sectors. It without doubt filled a space which was needed, but 'it wasn't core business for either sector'. This, they recognised, created a funding problem. The second academic participant indicated that 'the HE and FE funding

methodologies were very different from each other'. This meant that UHOVI was always going to be 'positioned on the side-lines for both the university and the FE College partners'. Unless the achievements of UHOVI were exceptional and 'ground-breaking', UHOVI was always going to be an initiative which resulted in a degree of partnership fatigue and, in the words of Huxham and Vangen may lead to a degree of 'collaborative inertia'. As the first academic noted 'It was only a matter of time before the patience and commitment of the partners would eventually dissipate'.

The first senior leader and the first academic indicated the importance of the pump priming funding from WG to UHOVI (WG provided £10 million over the first four years from 2009 to 2013). Amongst all participants, there was an expectation of further funding to continue into Phase 2. Ten of the twelve participants accepted this, but recognised that it would be less than the original amount allocated for Phase 1. The emphasis was placed on the USW core budget as a means of funding UHOVI if it was to have a long term future. History indicates that this did not happen.

During the lifetime of UHOVI, the daily core business for all partners continued as usual. What the qualitative data suggests is that to avoid partnership fatigue, the aim and the objectives of the partnership needed to be reviewed, if necessary re-defined and included in each of the partners' institutional strategic plans. In this way, all partners would share the evolving vision and strategy necessary to sustain UHOVI.

It was noted by nine of the twelve participants that securing long term funding would have been key to the ultimate success of UHOVI and thus the regeneration of the HOV. However, the data also indicates that UHOVI participants knew in 2014 that UHOVI would at some point end. It could be argued that collaborative inertia and partnership fatigue set in the moment HEFCW took more responsibility in Phase 2 and allocated an end date for the unique funding of UHOVI, with it arranged to be funded as part of the USW full and part-time education budgets post 2016. Did the UHOVI partners at any point address this problem and try to build on the work of UHOVI by financially supporting it from their own core budgets to the same level as UHOVI's original budget? It seems not.

8.11 Implications for further research

Evidence from the findings indicate that changes and partnership fatigue between Phase 1 and 2 had a major impact on the partnership. Uncertainty over funding and whether or not UHOVI would have a long-term existence was a crucial aspect in unsettling the partnership team. In

addition, the consistency of leadership was raised as was the membership of meetings. The impending merger between UoG and UWN also created uncertainty and demotivation, with participants keen to refer to the changes made to USW's institutional priorities.

8.12 Lessons learned for leaders of strategic partnerships in Wales

UHOVI was part of a WG response to the need for change in the HOV region. Evidence suggests that Phase 1 achieved collaborative advantage in that it increased the participation of learners, the number of courses and qualifications and the types of courses and qualifications offered. However, the evidence also points to an element of collaborative inertia from the start of phase 2. The following lessons can be learned with regard to the management of change.

- Maintain consistent membership of the partnership steering group throughout its lifetime, with due recognition of status, job roles and representation of all partner.
- Introduce a long-term, transparent funding methodology that supports strategic partnerships in delivering WG policy.

8.13 Reasons for the discontinuation of UHOVI: Findings and implications

The removal of core funding was the most common external factor to be mentioned as the reason for the discontinuation of UHOVI in 2016. All participants were aware of the original WG's investment of £10 million in the first four years of UHOVI (2009-2013) and were disappointed that this pump priming funding was not replaced by a continuing funding stream that could support their on-going objectives and make UHOVI a longer term success. The first administrator felt that UHOVI suffered because of the 'world banking crisis' that resulted in reduced funding allocations and financial pressures on both the WG and education providers. The second administrator placed a proportion of blame jointly on the WG and HEFCW stating that widening participation activity was always the first form of higher education provision to be cut when things get tight. Two of the other participants recognised that UHOVI should shoulder some of the blame for not securing a continuation of funding because they should have been better at evidencing all the work of UHOVI. One of the academics was keen to make the point that 'a large proportion of UHOVI staff worked tirelessly in the HOV communities to just get people through the door, that this type of work takes a huge amount of time, effort, and energy with very little supposed reward or much to show for it'. This point underlines the perception held by this academic that the altruistic nature of UHOVI and its staff needed to be stressed to convince WG and senior managers in USW that UHOVI was deserving of a longer term commitment in terms of continuing funding.

The second most mentioned reason for the discontinuation of UHOVI was the merger between the UoG and UWN. Nine of the participants thought that the merger took strategic priority for both the universities and for WG, not only in the immediate lead up to the merger, but also post-merger. They felt that the strategic priority for the new university was to maintain a position as one of the largest universities in the UK with a mission to attract more and new learners. A commitment to this institutional strategic priority meant that UHOVI was not given the same attention it had received in Phase 1.

The third reason given for the discontinuation of UHOVI was in reference to a policy issue which spans both internal and external reasons. All five academics made a reference to the changes in curriculum planning and the funding required to deliver the plans. Three of the academics noted the changes in recruitment strategies in which the original UHOVI core aim and objectives were subsumed by a need to hit targets, whereas one of the senior leaders and one of the administrators mentioned the WG policy that would alter the way in which part time higher education in Wales would be funded in Phase 2. They speculated that these changes were in response to the national economic crisis and as such had a huge impact on the operational delivery of initiatives like UHOVI. What one senior leader pointed to was that whilst the WG had never intended funding UHOVI indefinitely, he did think that from its inception, the two universities (University of Glamorgan and University of Wales, Newport) had every intention of ensuring a continuation of funding for the long term.

The speech of the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Glamorgan (Helen Marshall) at the launch of UHOVI (2010) promoted the long term aspiration for UHOVI (in this example it was 10 years) and underlined the perception of the senior leader and administrator. Due to the problems with the UK national economy, the newly-merged USW was unable to prioritise the continuing funding of UHOVI as a separate entity in Phase 2. Evidence in Chapter seven indicates that HEFCW had planned to mainstream UHOVI funding into USW's core, full and part-time budget from 2016 on. (HEFCW Widening Access Progress of Work Plan 2015-2016). In effect, UHOVI's discontinuation can be attributed to the removal of its core funding as a unique educational entity. HEFCW could argue that they were allocating widening participation funding to USW for the same purpose as that of UHOVI. It was left to USW to allocate its core budget to its new strategic priorities. By September 2016, UHOVI was not one of these.

8.14 Concluding comments and limitations of the study

This final section reflects on whether UHOVI addressed the key challenges in its bid to deliver its specified core aim and objectives. Arguably, the majority of critical success factors that contributed to UHOVI achieving collaborative advantage in Phase 1 are absent from Phase 2. The research findings of Chris Huxham and Siv Vangen (2009) have been invaluable in supporting my own findings from the qualitative interviews. They indicate that complex partnerships such as UHOVI present many challenges and for collaborative advantage to be achieved, there must be a synergy, both between partners and between the various success factors. Based on the qualitative evidence, the critical success factors that help determine the performance of UHOVI as a partnership can be summarised as:

1. Understanding the purpose, core aim and objectives of UHOVI
2. Building trust in strategic planning teams and subordinate staff
3. Employing effective leadership, management and communication strategies
4. Guaranteeing consistent membership structures within the partnership groups
5. Prioritising good teaching and learning and support for learning
6. Utilising a transparent funding methodology that is owned by all strategic partners and funding bodies

Qualitative evidence provided by the participants has indicated that to a degree, these factors were adhered to throughout Phase 1 of UHOVI. As indicated, this amounted to an element of collaborative advantage within the strategic partnership. However, the same participants indicated that much of the positive practice of Phase 1 was not maintained into Phase 2. As a result, and in the words of Huxham and Vangen, a degree of collaborative inertia occurred.

This contributed to the inability of UHOVI to sustain itself as a strategic partnership beyond 2016. In addition, there is evidence that other internal and external factors had a negative impact on the sustainability of the strategic partnership in Phase 2. These additional factors made a major contribution to the discontinuation of UHOVI:

Internal factors

- Changes in institutional strategic priorities by all partners between Phases 1 and 2
- Partnership fatigue within the strategic partnership, caused by competing institutional priorities.

External factor

- The economic crisis across the UK that had a significant negative impact on the funding of public bodies, including higher and further education institutions.

This factor was emphasised by all the participants as having a major impact on the sustainability of UHOVI. The promise of ten years commitment (Marshall, 2010), was not fulfilled as UHOVI was discontinued after only seven. In the words of the second senior leader:

The regeneration of communities takes years, generations in fact. When we launched UHOVI we thought we could make a difference to the HOV communities, but only if we were allowed enough time to do so. Unfortunately this was not to be, as other priorities took over after the merger (Senior leader 2).

Whilst there was genuine sadness expressed by all participants over the discontinuation of UHOVI, the financial reality was that the USW had to manage its core budget efficiently. This could result in the withdrawal of curriculum programmes that were not financially viable. The ending of UHOVI's pump priming funding in 2013 also placed financial pressure on the University at a time when the economic crisis was affecting the delivery of public services in the UK.

Finally, the audited accounts for USW in the year 2016-2017 (the year following the discontinuation of UHOVI), indicate that the university published an operating surplus of £9.486 million. At the same time, the collective universities of Wales recorded a combined deficit of £16.786 million. This financial context is provided by a Wales Online article that led with the headline 'The dire state of Welsh university finances revealed as costs spiral, debt balloons and incomes fall' (Wightwick, 2019, p1). David Blaney, Chief Executive of HEFCW, in response to this challenging financial situation for the HE sector in Wales, stated 'We encourage universities always to ask themselves whether collaborative activity could help to address some of the challenges they face and we certainly wouldn't rule out mergers if institutions considered there to be a sustainable business case (Wightwick, 2019, p5).

The merger of UoG and UWN had formed the USW in 2013 and pre-dated by three years the challenging financial situation facing the HE sector in Wales in 2016-2017.

In the same article, Nick Hillman, Director of the independent think tank, the Higher Education Policy Institute, warned that ‘universities, while resilient are not guaranteed survival and their importance should not be taken for granted’ (Wightwick, 2019, p1).

The concerns expressed in this article underline the misgivings of the UHOVI participants who had referred to the financial pressures on the HE sector across the UK. USW’s recording of a significant surplus in 2016/17 provides a financial context in which to review the decision to discontinue UHOVI.

Identifying critical success factors that are applicable to the UHOVI story is also useful for considering the potential for further research in this area and the limitations of this study. Whilst the flexibility of a qualitative approach enabled me to gather a substantial amount of rich data and to gain significant insights into the ways in which the participants viewed UHOVI and understood the role of partnerships in delivering WG policy, it is important to acknowledge some of the limitations. The first is the size of the sample. Ideally the sample would have been a lot larger, but given the size of UHOVI and the fact that it no longer operates, this was always going to be difficult to improve upon. The study could also be criticised for the participants not being drawn randomly, but the issue is the same as the previous one, UHOVI wasn’t a large organisation, employing less than twenty staff. Another consideration could have been to interview more staff who are currently employed at USW, having formerly being involved with UHOVI.

It would have been useful to undertake a more mixed methods approach drawing on more analysis of quantitative data regarding individual student progression from UHOVI into USW. I could have interviewed the UHOVI students and in doing so been able to make stronger claims about UHOVI from the students’ perspectives, gaining a useful insight into the curriculum, qualifications and learner support from the student’s perspective. Finally, it would have been interesting to interview WG and HEFCW staff members. This would have provided a central policy perspective to the study, particularly with regard to the prioritisation of funding for initiatives such as UHOVI and their roles in helping to regenerate targeted communities in Wales.

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Appendix 1

Semi Structured Interview questions FE and UHOVI members of staff: 1: Senior leadership. 2: Academic staff. 3: Administration staff.

- Understanding Higher Education in SE Wales - what did this mean to you?
- Was the change from phase 1 to phase 2 proactively planned by management, or reactive because of external UK and WG policy initiatives.

- **The role and purpose of UHOVI in the context of delivering WG education policy**
 1. What was your understanding of the purpose of UHOVI? How was this purpose communicated to you?
 2. UHOVI existed between 2008/09 and 2015/16. Did its role in delivering policy evolve during this time? In what ways?
 3. Did UHOVI adopt a different or similar policy after the merger between UoG and UWN in 2013? Please explain.
 4. Do you think UHOVI successfully delivered its objectives against the background of WG policy? Please explain.

- **The role of UHOVI as a strategic partnership**
 1. Why did the UoG and UWN decide to work together in the first place?
 2. What were the main reasons for involving the local FE College partners within the wider partnership?
 3. Why did the universities become involved with validating/delivering HE in FE? Was there a genuine desire to promote HE in FE to improve skills and qualifications within the region, or was there a more strategic plan for the university to concentrate on 'higher level work' and move WP into FE?
 4. What were/are the benefits of working in a closer partnership with local FE Colleges as opposed an arm's length validation only process?
 5. What do you perceive the role of UHOVI in the partnership? What did you perceive the role of HE and that of FE in the partnership?
 6. What were the examples of good practice discussed at partnership meetings?
 7. What were the main challenges discussed at partnership meetings?

8. Did the role of UHOVI evolve during this time to meet the needs of the partners? Please explain.

· **The role of UHOVI in delivering effective teaching and learning opportunities for learners**

1. Who were the UHOVI learners? Was there an emphasis for UHOVI to deliver level 4 qualifications and above to one group more than to another?
2. What were the different requirements of the UHOVI learners?
3. The largest HE credit used by UHOVI was specific to Foundation Degree programmes, Do you think the learners would have taken alternative qualifications if FDs hadn't been available? Please explain your answer.
4. In your view were there differences between HE, and HE in FE learners? Please identify any differences.
5. How did UHOVI ensure that the learners had the appropriate support and HE learning culture?
6. How did the UHOVI learners find out about and access the courses?
7. Why do you think learners enrolled onto UHOVI courses?
8. Did the role of UHOVI evolve during this time to meet the needs of learners? Please explain.

Appendix 2

Semi Structured Interview Questions: Senior Leadership

Explain the background to the study and its output (the thesis).

Explain the procedure (taping and noting; transcriptions)

Emphasise confidentiality and anonymity for individuals.

Distribute background to the thesis

Collect signed agreement slips.

Start of meeting or before collect information on (if possible):-

Appendix 3

Data collected for the purpose of a Professional Doctorate in Education.

This is to identify what will happen to any information or data that is collected in interviews.

It is normal practice to tape-record and/or take notes in interviews and focus group meeting to help ensure the accuracy of the researcher's understanding of information given. As a result each participant will be asked to sign a slip giving me permission to record and use the material for analysis and report writing.

I wish to stress that none of the information provided will be used in a way that can be attributed to you specifically. At the risk of sounding over formal but for your information I have copied the code of ethics covering this research below.

Individual staff will not be identified. Data pertaining to any individual will be available only to that individual but will otherwise remain strictly confidential. Hard data will be stored in locked files and soft data will be password protected, basic data being available to the researcher only.

All staff interviewed or included in the interviews will have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without prejudice should they wish to do so. There is a policy of keeping data collected during research for re-analysis or inspection by the commissioning body (subject to confidentiality restrictions) for a period of five years post completion of the project after which the data will be destroyed.

In addition all research staff are committed to the professional codes of conduct and relevant legislation (e.g. the Data Protection Act).

Appendix 4

Statement explaining the research being undertaken by Tom Croke for the completion of a Professional Doctorate in Education

The research is focused on the analysis of a large Higher Education Partnership located in the Heads of the Valleys region of SE Wales to better understand if it was successful in meeting one of the original core objectives ‘to improve level 4 and above qualifications and skills to meet Leitch targets in the heads of the valleys region’ (UHOVI core business plan 2008). The qualitative research is primarily concerned with the staff perceptions of UHOVI meeting WG/HEFCW policy objectives, UHOVI as a partnership and UHOVI learners. The staff have been identified and categorised into three groups: senior leaders, academic staff and administration staff.

It is also recognised that the participants were either working for UHOVI, for the HEI or for the FE College.

All interviews are confidential and no person will be identified in the research. Ethics statements are also distributed to those participating.

Appendix 5

I understand my rights as explained to me and am happy to give my consent for the researcher to record and use my interview data.

Print Name:.....

Sign:.....

Job Role/s at UHOVI :

Date.....