

**The Virtual University in a Globalizing World: a
Comparison of Policy Initiatives
in France and the UK**

Catherine Chabert

**This thesis is submitted in candidature for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**School of Social Sciences
Cardiff University**

December 2009

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SUMMARY OF THESIS:

This thesis sets out to compare and contrast the conception, initiation and implementation of virtual university policy-making in higher education in the UK and France between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s.

This thesis falls into a longstanding tradition of cross-national comparative education research. The central thrust of the argument presented here is that the more recent developments in the field cannot be understood as being solely a matter of implementing digital technology into higher education. Indeed, the core issues considered here relate less to the forms that this digital technology may take, and more to how competing models of the virtual university feed into broader questions of the type of learning-society they imply. The comparative method adopted is based on a well-established qualitative research tradition. With this tool, the model of the policy network is explored and is shown to have shaped the planning and implementation of the policy initiatives compared. Data consist of semi-structured interviews with policy actors, as well as a wide range of policy texts.

The discourse on the knowledge-based economy strongly advocates the need for higher education to 'modernize' its structures and its curricula in order to support the requirement of the information society of tomorrow. Digital technology has been at the centre of the policy-making of the knowledge-based economy. Strongly associated with this is a tendency to over emphasize our powerlessness in the face of globalization. One of the outcomes of this comparative research is that human agency is as strong as ever and that far from national characteristics being swept away by global policy trends, the dominant relevance of local and regional characteristics in the design and implementation of such policy initiatives remains robust and enduring. The thesis argues that one of the key dimensions of the discourses surrounding the initiatives was not primarily about virtual higher education provision but rather was concerned with purely political agendas.

Acknowledgements

I would like first of all to thank my employer, Cardiff University, for supporting this project by funding it and giving me study time through the many years it took to get to this day. Successive heads of department have supported my studies during this time: Dr Madeleine Havard, Prof John King and Dr Richard Evans. Thanks to them I was able to complete this thesis, but I would particularly like to thank my current head of department, Richard, for his encouragement, for the genuine interest he took in the subject and, above all, his crucial support.

Secondly, I would like to thank my two supervisors, Prof Gareth Rees and Dr Neil Selwyn. I am sure I have pushed Gareth's patience to its limits more than once with my endless excuses for not having done what was agreed. The clarity of his judgement, the depth of his comments and the tactfulness of his advice have guided me throughout this epic journey. Needless to say, any and all shortcomings in this work are mine and not his. As for Neil, after years of painstakingly going through my endless drafts, I can't blame him for not waiting for me and leaving Cardiff for the Institute of Education, University of London. He kindly kept in touch after that and continued to offer his help.

Thirdly, I would like to thank my work colleagues for their kind support, Gwen in particular; and Heather for making sure I had my weekly stress-releasing run.

Fourthly, my gratitude goes to all the people who agreed to take part in the interviews, in particular Prof Robin Mason from the Open University, who sadly passed away in June 2009.

Finally, on a more personal note, I would like to thank Janine, Yadan and Sue. But above all, if I have not dropped out of this lengthy project, this is entirely due to Bernard, my partner, and Emma and Georges, our children. Bernard's linguistics finesse has addressed all the shortcomings of my written English. Their anchoring love throughout this journey has made it possible.

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List of Acronyms

API	Age Participation Index
ASEF	Asia-Europe Foundation
AUF	Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie
CEC	Commission of European Communities
CNED	Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance
CNRS	Centre National de Recherche Scientifique
CPGE	Classe Préparatoire aux Grandes Ecoles
CREPAC	Centre Régional d'Education Permanente et d'Action Culturelle of Aquitaine
CVCP	Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DESS	Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures Spécialisées
DEUG	Diplôme d'Etudes Universitaires Générales
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DipHE	Diploma in Higher Education
DT	Direction de la Technologie
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EU	European Union
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HESO	Higher Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IUFM	Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres
IUT	Institut Universitaire Technologique
IPRs	Intellectual Property Rights
JANET	Joint Academic Network
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
MEN	Ministère de l'Education Nationale
MENRT	Ministère de l'Education Nationale, de la Recherche et de la Technologie
NCIHE	National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education
PAGSI	Programme d'Action Gouvernemental pour la Société de l'Information
OBHE	Observatory on Borderless Higher Education
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RENATER	Réseau National de Télécommunications pour la Technologie, l'Enseignement et la Recherche
SDTETIC	Sous-direction des Technologies Educatives et des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication
SCTICE	Sous-direction des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication pour l'Enseignement
SFC	Scottish Funding Council

List of Acronyms

STS	Section de Technicien Supérieur
THES	Times Higher Education Supplement
U3M	Université du Troisième Millénaire
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNT	Université Numérique Thématique
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization

Introduction

This thesis is centrally concerned with exploring the relationships between globalization, the knowledge-based economy and higher education.

The aim is to investigate cross-national policy-making in the area of higher education and technology – exploring how countries have responded to the perceived policy imperatives of the knowledge economy and international competitiveness. In particular, the thesis aims to use a comparative approach to investigate the development of national ‘virtual universities’ policy programmes in two European countries, the UK and France, since 2000.

It is assumed that only a comparative research framework will provide the tools needed to draw out and explore the similarities, convergences and divergences between these policy initiatives. From this perspective this thesis modestly extends a well established tradition of academic study in the field of comparative education research (for example Broadfoot, 2003; Dale, 2005; Green, 1999; Vulliamy, 2004).

Before elaborating on this, it is important to stress that the rationale behind the decision to focus on higher education rests on the strategic place it has come to occupy over the last two decades. The sector has always been closely linked to the state and the history of its universities has been played out, for the best part of a millennium, alongside and under the protection of central governmental power. More

recently, higher education has been called upon to solve present and future problems, and the political emphasis on human capital has meant that higher education has moved to the forefront of governmental agendas (for example, Ball, 2008; Green, 2006; Grubb and Lazerson, 2006). Increasingly, developed countries appear to widely adopt the discourse of the 'knowledge-based economy' and international competitiveness, and thus, the key question arises as to whether cross-national challenges lead to similar cross-national policy solutions. It is this fundamental anchoring in the time line of a state that makes higher education an ideal 'laboratory' in which to examine such questions. As such, this thesis connects with and extends existing academic research on the topic of higher education and globalisation (for example Brown and Lauder, 2006; Green, 1997; Robertson, 2005; Scott, 1998).

The originality and specificity of this thesis however is drawn from the fact that it proposes an *in-depth comparison* of two state funded virtual universities launched in 2000. Research on the subject of cross-national virtual higher education provision has tended to focus on providing a snapshot of developments at a given time and, consequently, research projects tend to be based on data gathered via large surveys. Examples of this are, for instance, the 2004 Observatory on Borderless Higher Education survey of all Commonwealth universities (Garrett and Jokivirta, 2004); or, in the same year, the European Commission's report on 'Virtual Models of Universities' (PLS RAMBØLL, 2004) which studied the 15 European member states of the time. In contrast to this, the present research involves a detailed qualitative analysis, which includes textual analysis, of a large number of documentary sources (policies and reports but also transcripts of oral evidence taken before the Select Committee of Education and Skills), and interviews with key people involved at different levels of the two virtual universities and at the different stages of their development.

A brief word is needed to justify the selection of these two countries. Three reasons led to this choice. Firstly, since their massification, higher education in these two countries is under similar political and economic pressure and, as such, shares some common features; at the same time, some aspects are fundamentally different – for example the degree of autonomy of institutions. It is the nature of similarities and dissimilarities such as these which is seen as holding potential meaningful

information on key aspects of governance of higher education. Secondly, it so happened that both countries launched a publicly funded virtual university project in the same year (first semester of 2000) and such a chronological parallel undoubtedly constitutes an index for comparative research on developments closely related to digital technologies – a fast changing field (Laurillard, 2005). Thirdly, and more personally, having studied in universities in both countries, and having been an academic member of staff in a British university for the last fifteen years or so, higher education is an area of activity in which I have been professionally and personally immersed. More broadly, being bi-national French-British means that I am able to decipher and comprehend both cultures without the support of any intermediaries. It may be helpful to elaborate, at this juncture, on how the researcher came to this research project.

In the late 1990s, working as a lecturer at the Language Centre of Cardiff University, I progressively developed an interest in on-line provision and eventually developed a particular programme of French-into-English translation. At the time, there was virtually no central support available at the university (ten years later, at national level, the HEFCW has produced an overarching strategy on new technologies, and, locally, two teams – partially centrally funded – provide support, organise training seminars, etc. within the university). Consequently, I gained knowledge and expertise in this field via personal research and in developing a small network of colleagues in and outside my institution. It can be said that, originally, my interest in the subject was that of a practitioner eager to develop her own understanding of her professional practice with a particular emphasis on how, from an institutional point of view, new developments such as virtual provision could be / needed to be introduced. I perhaps ought to say, finally, that my academic background was in Philosophy (first degree) and *Science de l'Information* (Masters), both qualifications obtained in France in the 1980s.

Before outlining the shape of this thesis and presenting the broad content of each chapter, a brief chronology of each virtual university is presented. This was thought necessary for two reasons. Providing an overview of each initiative's main stages and key dates will a) free the researcher from having to follow the rigidity of chronological order when analysing empirical data (though this would probably be an

easier route) and, thus, enable her to present data in a themed way which better suits her research project (chapters 5 and 6); and b) familiarise the reader with both developments before getting into the nitty-gritty of the analysis so that they enter this cross-national comparison with a good idea of how each virtual university unfolded. These brief accounts are drawn from chronologies published a few years after the launch of the virtual universities. On the French side, the lead person of the initiative, Dr Françoise Thibault, published an account outlining the main events surrounding the project (Thibault, 2006). On the UK side, the chronology which follows is mainly based on documents provided by the HEFCE for the parliamentary enquiry (Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2004a), the chronology published in the 'E-University Compendium' (Bacsich, 2004) and the overview of UKeU published in 'The UKeU Reports' (Bacsich, 2005a).

The UK policy initiative, which throughout this research is referred to as UKeU¹, was launched in February 2000 by David Blunkett, then Secretary of State at the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The project was allocated £62 million by Government on the basis of a collaborative venture between higher education institutions and the private sector; the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) had the role of setting up the venture and the responsibility for the funding. In October, consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) published a business model based on a structure involving two companies: a holding company whose shareholders were UK higher education institutions and an operating company whose Board was composed in equal proportion by representatives of the higher education sector and companies from the private sector. The role of the operating company was to get matching private sector investment through the joint venture, oversee the design of the technology platform and manage the marketing. This model differed from the original HEFCE idea of running a virtual university with a handful of high profile universities. During 2001, universities were invited to put forward programmes suitable for fully on-line teaching which were likely to be attractive to overseas students; negotiations with the private sector began and Sun Microsystems joined the

¹ The name of this initiative has actually been source of confusion throughout its short life. Some commentators even think that this lack of agreement on its name may be partially responsible for its failure (Bacsich, 2005b). In documents, it is variously referred to as 'eUniversity', 'e-University', 'eU', 'e-Learning Holding Company Ltd', 'e-U Hold-Co Limited', UK eUniversities Worldwide', 'UKeU' and 'eUniversities'.

operating company. 2002 saw the appointment of John Beaumont as Chief Executive Officer; this started the staff build-up (by March 2003, there were 72 FTE staff housed in a 7000 sq. ft. building on 14 Buckingham Gate, London) and company set-up, whilst work on the platform was developed; the full launch was announced for autumn 2003. By the summer of 2003, the HEFCE began to express concern over student intakes (898 students against a 6,500 target) and appointed independent advisers PA Consulting to conduct a business review. The report published in December 2003 suggested that UKeU was in breach of grant conditions and that the business plan was unlikely to be delivered. In February 2004, having decided to reject the revised plan offered by UKeU, the HEFCE announced its decision to restructure the venture. In March 2004, a new Board at UKeU started the wind-down. In the following weeks, the remuneration for 2002-03 of John Beaumont became public (£226,373 inclusive of benefits and performance related bonus) and motivated a parliamentary enquiry conducted by the House of Commons Select Committee of Education and Skills.

In France, the initiative – the *Campus numériques français* – was officially launched in June 2000 after several months of discussions and negotiations between the minister in charge, Claude Allègre, the different institutions already working in the field of distance learning, representatives of the *Présidents d'Université* and the division within the ministry responsible for ICT in universities. Eventually, a month before the announcement was made, a consensus was reached around the idea of running three consecutive annual calls for projects with the aim of “developing new distance learning programmes” (*« développer de nouvelles formations à distance »*). In total, 18 million euros were assigned to the three calls. Higher education institutions had to form consortia with other universities and public or private institutions to propose programmes in certain areas. To form a ‘*campus numérique*’, these programmes had to include a pedagogical rationale for distance learning provision (either fully on-line or blended learning), the learning resources envisaged, and details on networked facilities available to support the courses. In addition to the funding available through these calls, an ensemble of accompanying measures designed to support higher education institutions in the development of this side of their activity was organised for the first two years. After the second call, following a new appointment at the head of the division leading this initiative (from the *Ministère*

de l'Education nationale (MEN) in 2002), the final call sought projects of a different nature. Placing a strong emphasis on the production of digital learning material and on virtual learning environments, the third call marks a radical change of direction for the policy initiative with funding being re-oriented according to these new priorities. Consequently, half of the existing *campus numériques* saw its funding interrupted in 2003. Over the three years, 90 per cent of all universities were involved in at least one *campus numérique*. Of the 130 projects put forward, 77 received financial support for the first two years (32 of them were funded for a third year) and 64 gained the *campus numériques* status by 2002. Shortly after the third call, in autumn 2003, the MEN decided to organise these programmes around five broad academic disciplines (medicine, management, law, engineering and technology, and science and environment) and, essentially, create banks of digital learning and teaching materials which would be accessible by lecturers and students whose higher education institution belonged to one of these five *Universités Numériques Thématiques* (UNT). In brief, for the reasons examined in chapter 6, the UK initiative failed and was wound-up in 2005, whilst the French initiative continues, albeit in a modified form (see chapter 6), to this day.

The thesis includes 6 chapters. Chapter 1 consists of a review of existing literature on issues related to higher education and globalisation – how states respond to new pressures originating from globalization (and in particular the emphasis on the ‘knowledge-based economy’), and how they have gradually shaped their approach to the governance of post-compulsory education. Chapter 2 compares the two policy sectors in which the two policy initiatives studied took place, in order to start teasing out the main similarities and differences present at the time of the initiatives, i.e. the first half of the 2000s. Chapter 3 presents the research design of this thesis. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 introduce and consider data obtained, and respectively treat of reports and policies on the two virtual universities; the models each country opted for and their relationship with the sector; and lastly an evaluation and fate of each initiative. The conclusion returns to the research questions and recaps the findings made, before outlining future research directions.

Chapter 1

Globalization and the Virtual University

“I am leaving from here for the G8 Summit in Cologne. There will be important problems to discuss there, including one that is high on our domestic agenda – education. We will discuss how G8 countries should equip themselves for the knowledge-driven society of the next century. And how we can share our educational strengths with one another and with the rest of the world. ... One of the most important contributions we can make is to ensure that our universities and colleges are open to able students from around the world. In a world of lifelong learning, British education is a first class ticket for life. I want to see the benefits of that education, that ticket, given to as many as possible across the world. It is in our interests and it is in their interests that we should.” (Blair, 1999)

The above extract is from a speech given by Tony Blair in June 1999 in which he outlined the annual Prime Minister’s Initiative. It was chosen as an opening quotation for this first chapter because the UK policy initiative studied here finds its formal roots in this document but also because it epitomises the ‘prevailing orthodoxy’ (Coffield, 1999) of the time. The rhetoric of this orthodoxy, which can be discerned in most of the policies on higher education issued by supra-national and national institutions in the 1990s and early 2000s, unfolds as follows: globalization, supported by important developments in technology, puts advanced industrialised economies under new pressures and as international competition intensifies, new social needs are emerging. Economies of this kind cannot sustain their position against competition from newer economies where costs for traditional factors of production are much lower. To compete, advanced industrialised societies need to maximise the use of human capital; they need to be innovative in the goods and services they produce. To

be innovative, a better general level of education and a highly skilled work force able to maintain its 'employability' by retraining at different stages of its life are needed. At the heart of this 'knowledge society' or, at least, 'knowledge-based economy', education is seen as the key to solving these economic problems of competition and employment, particularly the higher education sector. So runs the orthodoxy.

This chapter sets out to consider the theoretical and rhetorical origins of education policies that foster knowledge-based economies. It is proposed to do this in four steps. Firstly, to uncover these origins requires an understanding of how conceptions of globalization have influenced the development of cross-national policy mechanisms and how such conceptions have increased pressures on states to develop a very specific type of higher education provision – that of the virtual university. Secondly, with the definition of the virtual university proposed, it becomes evident that in order to grasp the nature of the two policy initiatives studied here, it is essential to critically examine notions forming the core of the 'information society', i.e. the 'network society', the 'post-industrial society' and 'human capital'. Such notions provide an essential frame of reference for linking these macro notions to the micro level of policy-making, via the meso level of state governance. Thirdly, the chapter considers the question of whether states are progressively becoming powerless or, on the contrary, whether they are adapting and developing new mechanisms in order to retain national control over national issues. Fourthly and finally, the chapter aims to define the means by which a comparison of how France and the UK framed their policies on virtual higher education provision can best be conducted.

1. Globalization and the Virtual University

Some social scientists researching in the area of education and training have traced the origins of the knowledge-based economy (and associated ideas) to the 1950s when an increase in the pace of structural change in society began to attract social scientific attention (for example, Brown *et al.*, 2001; Lauder *et al.*, 2006). The phrase 'information society' captured the notion of a movement toward a new information era. Two theorists in particular, came to be associated with this view: Daniel Bell (1973) and Manuel Castells (2000). Their conceptions of the coming 'new society' are not without problems (some of which are examined below), but when examining

discourses surrounding policies on lifelong learning or ICT infrastructures, the influence of these theorists is evident. Before this, however, something needs to be said about globalization *per se*.

Defining Globalization

The term 'globalization' is routinely deployed in social scientific discourses, in policies, and in the media without any real attempt to discriminate between its multiple senses. And yet, it is a highly contested concept which has been the subject of debate among social and political scientists for the last three decades. As Dale and Robertson (2002) observe: "'Globalization' is too broad and too ambiguous a term to be used unproblematically in determining the effects on national education systems of the structures and processes, institutions and practices, that it connotes." (p.10). A preliminary step in any serious attempt to define globalization is to consider some of the breadth and ambiguity Dale and Robertson (2002) are referring to. For example, are we to understand globalization as a process leading to an inevitable cultural standardization? If so, how standard is this standardisation and how inevitable is this process? Tomlinson (1999), for example, suggests a resistance of national cultures to this process and even an increase of social movements based around national identity. Castells (2000) suggests that worldwide markets, supported by global flows and networks, have succeeded in re-organising economic activity on a global scale and have created a new global informational capitalism. But what of the ever powerful and crucial role governments play in managing their national economies and their welfare systems? Has the increasingly blurred distinctions between external and internal, international and domestic affairs created by these powerful cross-border trends, contributed to a progressive loss of state authority and legitimacy? Conversely, are states re-inventing themselves, giving rise to new forms of governance such as government networks (Slaughter, 2000)? Such are the (yet to be resolved) macro questions that theorists of globalization have raised. As can be seen, depending on where the emphasis in the debate is placed, these approaches are essentially *cultural* (Tomlinson), *economic* (Castells) or *political* (Slaughter). They also, by and large, tend to divide between what Held and McGrew (2003) designate as approaches that are either those of '*globalists*' or '*sceptics*' – this latter group occasionally

differentiating two approaches to scepticism, with either an emphasis on continuity and *tradition*, or on changes and *transformation*. Globalists (sometimes called ‘globalizers’ to emphasise the active role played by their discourse and analyses in strengthening arguments in favour of globalization) tend to argue that globalization is a reality and an inevitable development. Traditionalists, on the other hand, dispute the notion and argue that recent changes are not fundamentally different to previous changes. Moving beyond this polarity, transformationalists tend to suggest that the key lies in new forms of governance.

Somewhat more dynamically, Held and McGrew (2003) suggest:

“Globalization denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction. It refers to a shift or transformation in the scale of human social organization that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across the world’s major regions and continents.” (p.4)

In other words, the emphasis has moved from a sense of *a priori* forces at play to a more mediated process in which human agency is the central component. It is the prominence of flows and patterns of social interactions (however driven) which, aided by twenty first century technology, gives rise to the “expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction”. This shift of emphasis to the role of human agency has allowed Lauder *et al.* (2006) to conclude that:

“[Globalization] is not a force in its own right divorced from the multiple political and economic decisions that shape contemporary educational policies and institutions.” (p.31)

In placing to the forefront the notion of agency, this emphasis on ‘human social organization’ challenges conceptions which stress our powerlessness in front of ‘global forces’ and stresses how this shift, or transformation, is the subject of intense mediation, be it via politicians, policy-makers or journalists. This position – essentially sceptical about globalization – merits a closer examination. Some commentators argue that globalization is an exaggeration on the part of analysts

(Thompson 2000), or a myth (Hirst and Thompson 2002) or an ideology (Steger 2003).

As Hirst and Thompson (1996) explained, changes to our societies since the 1970s have been accompanied by a perceived loss of national control. This position, clearly spelt out in their introductory section, asserts that:

“‘Globalization’ is a myth suitable for a world without illusions, but it is also one that robs us of hope (...) One can only call the political impact of ‘globalization’ the pathology of over diminished expectations.” (p. 6)

In other words, changes in the economic sphere of our societies are dominantly read as having developed to such an extent that national political powers have become unable to regulate forces; and this is reinforced by the lack of expectation and hope in a world of disillusion. Hirst and Thompson (2002) choose the powerful notion of myth to introduce their views because, as they explain:

“The old rationalist explanation for primitive myths was that they were a way of masking and compensating for humanity’s helplessness in the face of the power of nature. In this case we have a myth that exaggerates the degree of our helplessness in the face of contemporary economic forces.” (p.6)

One of the purposes of their book is to demonstrate “... that we are not helpless before uncontrollable global processes” (Hirst and Thompson, 2002:7).

Another valid analysis is Steger’s, for whom globalization is a largely ideologically loaded discourse being:

“... Notoriously difficult to resist and repel because it has on its side powerful social forces that have already pre-selected what counts as ‘real’ and, therefore, shape the world accordingly. The constant repetition and public recitation of globalism’s central claims and slogans have the capacity to produce what they name. As more neoliberal policies are enacted, the claims of globalism become even more firmly planted in the public mind.” (Steger, 2003:96)

Of Steger’s five key claims two stand out: “globalization is inevitable and irreversible” and “globalization benefits everyone”. Steger concludes that the

language used by politicians and analysts to talk about globalization is strongly politically motivated and "... consists of powerful narratives that sell an overarching neoliberal worldview, thereby creating collective meanings and shaping people's identities" (Steger 2003:112). The idea that the same claims repeated over and over again via different means of communication impact on social expectations, becomes pertinent when analysing and comparing the rhetoric of the knowledge-based economy which surrounded both policy initiatives.

Whilst this concern with globalization-as-activity does not resolve the contested nature of the concept of globalization, it at least points to the inadequacy of modelling globalization as the interplay of non-mediated, non-managed monolithic social structures. For the purpose of this project, therefore, globalization will be understood as being the result of a specific form of social action. This implies that there is a need, firstly, to map out global trends and the different lines of power and control that they emanate from (be they at local, national or regional levels). This will hopefully enable access to such things as whose priorities are at play and to what purpose. Clearly, whilst this implies a central concern with *political* processes, given that national policies on higher education in the 1990s were mostly concerned with building the economic future of nations, the so-called 'knowledge-based economy', it is fair to say that the *economic* dimension of globalization is equally salient. In fact the two, politics and economy, are interwoven in a complex way as an aspect of the analysis of the role of the state in this global economy (as is shown in this section). However, claiming that the present thesis will essentially concern itself with the political and economic dimensions of globalization does not mean that cultural processes in higher education are viewed as irrelevant. Indeed, since the focus of this research is to compare how two European states arrived at the idea of 'virtual' higher education provision as a solution to economic problems, the cultural identity of each country will necessarily be significant. However this is a background consideration rather than a central concern¹.

¹ For studies focussing on this dimension of higher education and globalization, see for example Demont-Heinrich (2005) for an analysis of the interaction between language, national identity and nation state, or Max-Neef (1991) for a study on graduates from developing countries who have to complete their studies in the US, the UK or Australia in order to gain credibility and recognition.

What then are the implications of this debate about the nature of a globalized environment for the structuring and re-structuring of higher education? Do the 'globalist' and 'sceptic' positions exert any influence on the conceptualisation of higher education within the literature? On the whole, yes. For 'globalists'², globalization has brought changes which have radically reconfigured social life and world order. Some, for example, stress how global influences have altered the role and nature of higher education to the point that the university has become a 'ruined institution' ("The Western university is dead", dramatically claims Barnett (1997)). Others, on the contrary, see globalization as something positive which will bring the much needed alterations to universities which otherwise are seen as fundamentally inadequate and obsolete (Tehrani, 1996).

Conversely, those who doubt the depth of the effects of globalization dispute the fact that current trends are fundamentally different from past eras, and argue in favour of historical continuity. Neave (2000), for example, argues that the complexity of today's higher education situation is nothing more than a continuation of the long and complex history of universities. Robins and Webster (2002) argue that change can be best thought of as an accumulation of new layers of complexities over existing past layers, and that in this way, "a more sociologi[cally] grounded narrative of change in higher education [shows] ... continuities, as well as transformations" (p.6). For others, the survival of 'élite instincts' in the mass systems of today's higher education is explainable by the wider ambivalence about the development of society (Scott, 1995). Robertson *et al.* (2006) argue that, with globalization, a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between states and education is required and suggest the notion of scale "[which] refers to nested layerings of territories, for example, territories we might call local, sub-regional, national, supra-regional, or global levels" (p.228).

In sum, these competing approaches hint at the complexity and somewhat polemical nature of discussions of globalization. The point to be made for now is that the sceptic

² Terms such as 'globalists' and 'sceptics' refer to ideal-types and, as Held and McGrew (2003) explained, they are useful labels to identify the principal areas of contention. However, it should be stressed that they refer to two groups which are not diametrically opposed, nor internally homogeneous in their interpretations of globalization.

and globalist views of globalization have their place in any discussion about the increasing convergence of higher education models.

Defining the Virtual University

Literature on the 'virtual university' has evolved over the last ten years. There seems to be a 'before and after' implementation phenomenon (Chabert, 2006). Until about 2004, the majority of papers were glorifying the project of the 'virtual university', uncritically adhering to the futurological definition of the information society. Voices denouncing "a seemingly inexorable technology-driven destiny and the seductive enchantment of technological transcendence" (Noble, 2002:282) were few. After 2004, reflecting on the many failures of projects around the world (which are unexpected for such commentators), the literature sought to analyse the root causes of such failures (for example, Guri-Rosenblit, 2005; Lewis *et al.*, 2005), looking for reasons and solutions (McQuinn Wilson, 2004; Bacsich, 2005; Slater, 2005b; Wilcox *et al.*, 2005). At the turn of the millennium, claims such as Mac Keogh's (2001) were frequent:

"It is now conventional wisdom that those countries which fail to move from the industrial to the Information Society will not be able to compete in the globalised market system made possible by the new technologies. Lifelong learning is called on to prepare adults for the information society ... While society in general may be changing rapidly, the conventional education system is still some way from adopting structures and processes appropriate for meeting the lifelong learning needs ... There is a powerful societal and economic rationale for using ICTs to facilitate lifelong learning. They can enhance pedagogy through providing access to a vast wealth of information sources and providing new channels of communication and interaction between students, their peers and tutors, as well as access to new forms of learning experiences. Another important rationale is the potential to extend lifelong learning opportunities to those currently excluded from learning, those residing in remote areas and disabled and disadvantaged groups." (p. 223)

The above quote neatly represents the tenor of most academic literature and educational policies published around the year 2000; its main features are:

- A narrative of 'decline and fall' as identified by Robins and Webster (2002), claiming that those who 'fail', will 'not be able to compete' (the focus being

on 'conventional education systems' which have to change in order to survive).

- A typical globalist approach to globalization which unconditionally accepts the 'conventional wisdom' that global changes sweep away institutions which 'fail to move to the information society'.
- An uncritical acceptance of the human capital theory to justify changes (and more generally of the 'educational gospel').
- A typical futurological and technological account of societal developments, as identified by Webster (2006).
- Last but not least, the belief that technology will solve a wide range of problems ('enhance pedagogy', 'access new forms of learning experiences', provide learning opportunities to 'those residing in remote areas and disabled and disadvantaged groups'), implying that 'conventional education systems' fail to address these issues. It is relevant to note that this argument has also been quickly seized upon by policy makers in the hope of overcoming barriers to people's participation in learning. However, as argued by Selwyn and Gorard (2002), if institutional barriers to participation (lack of flexibility, lack of credit for informal prior learning, poor guidance, etc.) might be alleviated by the use of technology, 'traditional' provision could also diminish these barriers. Furthermore, provision of hardware and internet access does not equate with a reduction of inequalities; as Goldsbury (1999) showed, access to and use of ICT remain unequal even with direct government intervention (such as the 'National Grid for Learning').

It becomes apparent that the 'virtual university' tends to be defined in contrast to the 'conventional university', also referred to in the literature as the 'liberal-national university' – a pertinent designation as it refers to both the long tradition and history of the 'liberal' institution and its national identity. There are two trends to such accounts. A minority of commentators focus on the 'decline and fall' of the university (Barnett (1997) reviewed above belongs to this group). For them, as the liberal-national university is progressively losing its features, it leaves behind an institution which bears little resemblance to what universities 'should' be like. The second group of commentators, the larger of the two, (for example, Tiffin and Rajasingham, 1995; Gell and Cochrane, 1996; Field, 1997) advocates the idea of an educational

technological revolution. For them, the revolution is happening because teachers and students can interact closely, benefiting from greater time flexibility; broadband connections enable thousands of students to take the same course, giving the best tutors the status of “superstar teachers who command high audiences and very high salaries” (Becker, 2006:294). As observed with Mac Keogh (2001), their argument is based on the idea that universities are no longer adequate and have become irrelevant institutions. Technology (and globalization) will be the drivers of the new institution, the virtual (global) university. Each account brings out the differences between the liberal-national model and the virtual-global model of the university. And each overstates the internal coherence of each model whilst overdrawing the contrast between the two models (Robins and Webster, 2002).

In the context of this research, the term ‘virtual university’ is understood as referring to the realities of existing universities *in transition* – as opposed to the ‘self-mythologization’ described in futurological discourses (Robins and Webster, 2002) – and these realities are emerging from the dynamics analysed in this review, i.e. globalization and theories of the information society. The virtual university therefore covers a variety of developments and a variety of organisational models. It can be a consortium of universities that offers e-learning courses jointly, internet portals that direct visitors to courses offered by any of several different universities, or individual universities holding e-learning courses on a virtual campus instead of a physical one.

Policies on the subject of virtual higher education provision tend to draw on the same rhetorical structure and place a strong emphasis on the effects of globalization on the individual state. They presume that the country needs to urgently develop its overall level of ICT in order to reach the level of development of other, more advanced nations. These nations ‘ahead’, always perceived as competitors, derive their strength and supremacy from the fact that they are part of the ‘information society’; thus nothing less than the future of the country is at stake. This discourse is both futurological (as it claims to know what the future holds if the present is changed) and technological (the future of society essentially depends on the advancement of its technology which in turn determines the transition to a new form of society).

The actual meaning of the notion ‘information society’ is quite unclear and to some extent a pattern similar to that of the notion of globalization is found, i.e. a widespread notion despite its underdeveloped definition. Webster (2006) proposes five possible definitions of an ‘information society’ (technological, economic, occupational, spatial and cultural). Each has its own criteria and aims to distinguish the information society from another type of society. Emphasis on the technological and the spatial tends to dominate arguments in favour of the virtual university.

The technological definition often compares the provision of networked computers to the provision of electricity linking every home, office, etc. (for example, in Nora and Minc (1978) discussed in chapter 4). It is characterised by discourses tending to stress the urgent need to increase the availability and standard of equipment in a specific branch of society as a solution to wider societal problems. An example of this approach can be found in policies promoting the development of ICT to address the challenges of the ‘learning society’ (for example, in the UK, the ‘University for Industry’ initiative). But, as Gorard and Selwyn (1999) assert:

“The application of ‘technological fixes’ to underlying socio-economic determinants of participation will solve some problems, create others, and leave many unaffected.” (p.523)

This conception is frequently encountered in policies on the role of higher education in the development of the information society, where the priority is on equipping institutions and students. For example, the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) recommended that institutions make necessary arrangements for all students to have access to networked computers by 2000-01 and that all students were able to connect to their own laptop by 2005-06. These recommendations were made in connection to “the global marketplace in which UK higher education competes” (NCIHE, 1997:12) (for a detailed analysis of ICT measures in the Dearing Report, see Chabert (2001) and chapter 4). Not only is this a questionable approach, but as the speed of change of technologies renders any exercise of ICT planning difficult, Trow (2002) is right to remind policy makers to be cautious in this domain.

The spatial perspective places the emphasis on new options our societies have with the networks forming electronic ‘highways’. As their rapid connections reduce time

and space, a whole new way of life is promised. This notion plays a central role in the discourse on higher education and the virtual university in particular. In theory, as technology provides the means to learn where and when one wants, the entire approach to teaching and learning is on the brink of a revolution, and once again, the threat of being left behind and eventually disappearing is underlined. ICT in education is one of the elements of the 'national information infrastructures' (NII) on which millions have been spent (Selwyn, 2008). These infrastructures cover all ICT networks and related components accessed and utilized by citizens in both public and private sectors (Martinez, 1997). Depending on the approach of individual states, this infrastructure can differ substantially (for a comparative analysis of seven case-study countries, see Selwyn and Brown, 2000). Thus, in the context of the present comparative research, a detailed analysis of policies in this field is essential. This is proposed in chapter 4.

These conceptions commonly afford a central position to the notion of network, be it physically, virtually or symbolically. For this reason, it appears to be essential to examine Manuel Castells's approach to the information society, which, for him, is more adequately called 'the network society'.

2. The Knowledge-based Economy

The 'Network Society'

Manuel Castells's (2000) argument in favour of the coming of an 'information age' places the emphasis on economy and asserts that society is currently going through fundamental changes. For him, the radical alteration of the functioning of economy throughout the world will lead to a new society, the 'network society'. His main argument is that the growth of networks and 'information flows', with the support of the recent 'information technology revolution', has been such that it has resulted in a profound alteration of world economic processes. According to Castells, the replacement of capitalism (industrialism) by 'informationalism', or 'informational capitalism', was an absolute necessity for the survival of the economy (Castells, 2000:100). This new form of capitalism is characterised by a new informational,

global and networked economy, and has at its core two fundamentally new attributes: the primacy of networks and the prominence of knowledge.

Castells argues that networks have been central to the shaping of globalization in many respects. For him, networks have empowered their 'users' – states, companies and/or individuals – but this came at a cost. Firstly, to have access to the network gives power but it is also almost a matter of life and death, as to play a full part in the 'network society' necessarily means being on the network. Secondly, as Castells puts it "the price to pay for inclusion in the system is to adapt to its logic, to its language, to its points of entry, to its encoding and decoding" (2000:405). In other words, accessing the network requires some form of formatting, or shaping, imposed on these states, companies or individuals *by* the network. In sum, this logic implies: a) new disadvantages for states, companies and individuals left out of the network, and b) some form of standardization as a result of the imposed formatting. This, Castells summarises as: "the logic of the network is more powerful than the powers in the network" (2000:208).

In terms of the prominence of knowledge, Castells begins by stressing that, in all societies, knowledge and information³ were critical features of productivity and growth. What is radically different with 'informationalism' or 'informational society' is the fact that the main source of productivity and wealth now comes from a specific form of social organization based on information generation, processing and transmission (Castells, 2000:21). That is:

"What is specific to the informational mode of development is the action of knowledge upon knowledge itself as the main source of productivity." (Castells, 2000:17)

In other words, just as networks are necessary for the expansion of informational capitalism, so is 'informational labour' (i.e. a range of jobs which generate change, with workers able to think, conceive, plan and, generally, manage knowledge as required by the new society (Webster, 2006:113)). This group of 'knowledge experts'

³ Castells borrows Bell's (1976) definition of 'knowledge' ("a set of organized statements of facts and ideas") whilst his understanding of 'information' is borrowed from Porat (1977) ("data that have been organized and communicated").

– to borrow Drucker’s (1993) phrase – holds the core of informational capitalism together and is present in all the decisional key points on the network, be it at the level of the state or the multinational corporation. The notion of ‘policy community’ is likely to apply to these ‘experts’ who, most likely, share knowledge, interests and values. Castells underlines the occasional connection between position of power and personal interests via financial rewards, lucrative appointments and different forms of corruption. The example given concerns the European Commissioner for the Internal Market and Industrial Affairs, Martin Bangemann, who, after mixing his political influence with his personal interests, was forced to resign by the European Parliament (Castells, 2000:146). This is mentioned here as Bangemann’s (1994) report on ‘Europe and the Global Information Society’ is considered in chapter 4 as it was central to the development of new technologies in Europe.

Castells’s networks are powerful, globalizing and, one might say, quasi tyrannical. Before considering whether conceding such importance and power to techniques and technologies is scientifically valid, the place Castells gives to the states in this networked society needs to be considered. For him, if states have lost some of their power, their influence remains. Economically, Castells’s conception of the ‘network enterprise’ is paired with the idea of a strong state able to support the developmental stage of the new economy, able to coordinate support between different levels of ‘territoriality’ (local or regional governments), able to impose a liberal trade order (the construction of the European Union is given as an example of the states’ political pressure in favour of liberalization of their economy and facilitation of the process of integration (Castells, 2000:212)). Politically, Castells’s position accords with the approach presented earlier in which states are called upon to play a new role, as globalization, however conceived, grows in strength. This is done via new organisational forms, new procedures of power-making and new principles of legitimacy (Castells, 2004:303-4).

The transformative capacities Castells assigns to informational labour and technologies are not without problems. For him, the motor of all economic and social change is the ‘information technology revolution’. Technological development and economic re-organisation are at the centre of the theory, whilst cultural, social and political changes are only implied. In other words, a technologically determinist

principle underpins societal developments presented in *The information Age*. Indeed, as Kumar (2005) and Webster (2006) argue, for Castells, the development of societies is organised according to successive eras and these eras are defined according to changes in the media or the emergence of new media (in Castells's case agricultural to industrial, industrial to informational).

The line of argument in favour of a fundamental change to what constitutes the core of society – or what should constitute it – pre-dates the work of Castells. As has been shown, Castells's main concern lies with this core notion of the 'information age' and how it has come to alter economies around the world. The idea that the shift of the economy from one sector to another had wide-reaching repercussions for society has been at the centre of the work of sociologists like Daniel Bell and, in order to better understand arguments contained in the rhetoric of the knowledge-based economy which surrounded both policy initiatives, it is necessary to critically examine how notions such as knowledge-driven economy and human capital have progressively gained authority and influence in higher education policies.

The 'Post-industrial Society'

As Northern American higher education was expanding and rapidly becoming a mass provider, a reflection on the increasing role of knowledge in advanced societies was emerging. Sociologist Robert Lane (1966) considered the notion of a 'knowledgeable society', defining 'knowledge' as encompassing comprehensive societal change. A little later, the notion of the 'knowledge worker' was developed by the Austrian born management consultant Peter Drucker (1969), to refer to the rising number of graduates from technical institutes and universities who bring their skills and knowledge to their work place to spur economic development (Waks, 2006). But it is with Daniel Bell's (1973) *The coming of Post-Industrial Society* that these notions are sharpened and developed. For Bell, as the quantity and quality of information and knowledge⁴ are changing – greater amounts of information being used and increasing

⁴Throughout this thesis, Bell's (1979) definitions of the two terms, 'information' and 'knowledge', are adopted. Information refers to "data processing in the broadest sense" and knowledge refers to "an organised set of statements of facts or ideas, presenting a reasoned judgement or an experimental result, which is transmitted to others through some communication medium in some systematic form" (p.168). However, occasionally, the two are used interchangeably for the sake of style.

demand for knowledge of a higher order ('theoretical knowledge') – a new epoch is beginning to emerge, an altogether new type of society: an 'information society'. Bell considers the consequences of this emergence from economic and social perspectives. He predicts a continuing demand for professional and technical workers which will progressively lead to a significant decrease of low-skilled employment. The core of the 'post-industrial society' is the 'professional technical services' as well as "the expansion of a new intelligentsia – in the universities, research organisations, professions, and government" (Bell, 1973:15).

In Bell's post-industrial society, universities have moved to the *centre of the society* (Bell, 1974:232), and he provides an analysis of what this means in terms of the rising cost of public financing. As a growing proportion of the Gross National Product is devoted to education and training, Bell argues that knowledge should be seen as an investment of the society in its future⁵ (Bell, 1974:176). Considering the fundamental relationship between powers, i.e. the state and the higher education sector, Bell points to their reciprocal dependency and stresses the need to address some central issues ('turning points'):

"Inasmuch as knowledge and technology have become the central resource of the society, certain political decisions are inescapable. Insofar as the institutions of knowledge lay claim to public resources, some public claim on these institutions is unavoidable." (Bell 1974:263)

The first on his list of issues is the public financing of higher education and the sensitive problems deriving from it. Bell asks: what type of higher education institutions should be supported, undergraduate, graduate, professional? If new institutions were to be created, whose priorities should they serve: those of the states, the region or the nation⁶? With regard to his assessment of the problems generated by his version of the massification of higher education – some of which had already arisen as the expansion process in the US was already well under way at the time of his writing – one cannot help but be struck by the relevance of issues raised over three decades ago to the present situation. Whether it is the recent UK debates on student

⁵ Bell (1974) compared expenditure figures on education for 1949 and 1969 which doubled from 3.4 per cent of GNP to 7.5 per cent (p.213).

⁶ This enumeration of levels of responsibilities refers to the political structure of the US in which 'states' refer to the 51 states, and not the 'state' as in 'nation state'.

fees and the role of regional/national authorities (see for example, the Rees Review (2005) in the Welsh context) or, in France, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, the increasing number of vocational degrees (*licences professionnelles*) mostly taught in newly built universities, all these echo Bell's concerns with who should bear the cost of university education and/or what type of graduate is needed.

There are, of course, problems with Bell's theory, not least concerning its most basic idea of the advancement of a 'new society'. Commentators such as Kumar (1978) or Webster (2006) question the idea that economic and social changes brought about by a change in quantity and quality of information and knowledge would be sufficient to justify the idea of a new type of society. Equally, his assumption that a linear progression from low to high skilled work would create its own demand for high skilled employment has also been subject to criticism. Brown *et al.* (2001) point out that the shift of the economy to the service sector has not meant that these jobs are highly skilled; the "rapid expansion is primarily based on increasing the numbers of low skill and low waged jobs" (Brown *et al.*, 2001:18). Last but not least, the 'technological determinism' of Bell's approach is not without problems – a point developed later.

In sum, however scientifically unconvincing his description of the future information society, its characteristics and their economic and societal implications, this kind of discourse has undeniably entered the minds of politicians and governments as the 'prevailing orthodoxy' referred to above. Bell's theory is helpful in mapping recent changes which occurred in higher education, as it proposes an explanation of the fact that knowledge has, progressively, during the second half of the twentieth century, become a factor of production, sidelining both capital and labour (Drucker, 1998). With the rapid growth of knowledge-intensive service sectors (such as education, communications and information), an estimated 50 per cent of Gross Domestic Product in the major OECD economies is now knowledge-based (Stevens, 1998).

'Human Capital'

At the heart of the gradual move to a knowledge-driven economy is the idea developed by Bell according to which 'knowledge is becoming the central resource of the society'. This is closely related to the notion of 'human capital' – another central notion to be able to decrypt recent changes which occurred in higher education.

Two American economists Becker (1964) and Schultz (1971) developed the theory as we know it. For them, the notion of labour is a compound of different elements in which knowledge, skills and know-how of the workers are seen as contributing to the productivity of work. Human capital, in other words, refers to all the expertise individuals bring to work and is seen as contributing to the wealth produced by their work. Thus, if one considers the two categories traditionally defined in economics – investment and consumption⁷ – then, just as investment in machinery is essential to the long-term production of wealth, human capital, via education and training, should be seen as investment that will produce income in the future.

Coffield (1999) observes that Becker, ten years later, further developed his ideas and emphasised the fact that the attention paid to the economic effects of education and other human capital did not mean that the other effects were unimportant. But as these other factors were forgotten, the theory of human capital as we know it today, is a simplified version of the original theory. And it is a problematic notion.

According to the theory, there is a clear relationship of cause and effect between level of education of the workforce and economic development. If nations benefit from investing in education, so do individuals as the theory asserts that human capital is a stock of assets one owns and one can develop in order to enhance one's income. One of the fundamental elements of the knowledge-based economy emerges from this theory.

Many commentators have considered the subject in depth (for example Green, 1993; Rees *et al.*, 1997; Fevre, 1997). Coffield (1999) showed concerns with policies

⁷ Investment involves expenditure on assets which will produce wealth in the future and consumption, expenditure which produces immediate benefits (Woodhall 1997, p.219).

inspired by the theory for which education is the solution to a wide range of educational, social and political problems. In placing the responsibility on individuals for economic prosperity, parts of society which would require consideration are left untouched; as Coffield contends:

“[The human capital thesis] diverted attention away from structural failures and injustices and blamed victims for their poverty.” (Coffield 1999, p.482)

The theory, as it appears in most political agendas today, tends to consider workers alongside the other elements required for the proper functioning of the economy, i.e. machines, capital and the land. This means that just as it is essential to maintain adequate machinery and investment, individual workers are seen as part of the technological upgrading of the economy. For Brown *et al.* (2001), reducing individuals to ‘a bundle of technical skills’ excludes all dimensions of their social and cultural identity. To keep up with the pace of change, the necessity of updating knowledge and skills is not ‘a technical formality’ as it includes ‘cognitive, emotional and cultural facets’.

Another problem with the theory is its assumption of a linear progression from low to high skilled work and that this will create its own demand for high skilled employment. As Brown *et al.* (2001) explain this ignores complexities of the empirical world and is not backed up by evidence. Referring to Bell’s prediction that the knowledge society would result in an end to low skilled employment, Brown *et al.* point out the fact that the shift of the economy to the service sector has not meant that these jobs are high skilled; the “rapid expansion is primarily based on increasing the numbers of low skill and low waged jobs” (Brown *et al.* 2001, p.18).

Despite these well documented problematic issues, numerous policies designed to support the development of a knowledge-based economy attest to the widespread acceptance of the terms of the orthodoxy (some of which are examined in chapter 4, for example ‘Europe: and Information Society for All’ (CEC, 1999)). So do the considerable sums of money allocated (over £5 billion towards educational ICT during the 1997 to 2007 period in the UK alone (Selwyn, 2008)). Such terms are now regarded as a matter of common sense (Lauder *et al.*, 2006), and have even become,

according to some commentators (for example, Grubb and Lazerson, 2006), an ‘educational gospel’.

This section then has begun the process of setting out what might be called the theoretical architecture of the study. It has been argued that discourses that proceed from and constitute the received version of the knowledge-based economy (for example, the quotation from Tony Blair at the head of this chapter) draw upon an often unspecified view of globalization for their authority. Through a consideration of competing conceptions of globalization, it has been argued that “[Globalization] is not a force in its own right divorced from the multiple political and economic decisions that shape contemporary educational policies and institutions.” (Lauder *et al.*, 2006:31). This, in turn, has led to an attempt to define what is understood by ‘virtual university’ and to show the close link between this form of higher education provision and notions such as the ‘information society’ and the ‘knowledge-based economy’. This was followed by a consideration of Castells’s and Bell’s models of the ‘information society’ and how, in theoretical terms, they can be used to map the interactional elements shaping educational policies in the ‘globalised environment’. What remains then, in order to complete this theoretical architecture is to examine how, under the influence of these supra-national trends, the education policy-making process in particular and the relationship between higher education and the state in general, have evolved and how this impacts on qualitative research in this field.

3. Globalization and Policy-making

Given that this thesis compares two European state-led initiatives in higher education, both financed by tax payers’ money (at least the initial phase) and that universities are national institutions whose development and expansion happened alongside and under the protection of the state (Scott, 1998), addressing the question of the extent to which states have retained, or lost, their power of governance over education is central. In the midst of their global environment, states have encountered resistance, from both regional and global levels to strictly national policy-making, and have had to progressively shape their responses to the discourse of multilateral agencies (for example, the European Union, the World Trade Organization). Understanding this

complex interplay of the global with the local, what Appadurai (1996) calls 'vernacular globalization', is essential, in particular the question as to how globalization has changed the role of the state in higher education policy-making. To do so, the new modes of governance are examined, specifically those which impact on public services, higher education in particular: governance towards 'modernisation' and, governance and policy-making.

Historically, the identity and strength of the 'modern' state was considered to derive from a centralized political order, geographically circumscribed, in which the relationship between central political power and the people governed, progressively became more cooperative and organised (Giddens, 1985; Mann, 1986). The recent growth of international and transnational organizations and companies which have multiplied with the support of what Held and McGrew (2003) described above as "the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows" (p.4), has affected the functions and roles of the state. The increasing fragmentation and complexity of the public realm they imply (Jessop, 2007) has led some commentators, for example Rhodes (1994), to talk about the 'hollowing out' of the state whereby power shifts outwards to international markets and supra-national entities. Tensions generated by the superimposition of the two – state and globalization – have been the subject of on-going debates which, as previously noted, have tended to form two groups.

For globalists, layers of governance have spread across political boundaries giving rise to a body of regional and international law. This, in turn, has led these transnational networks to progressively permeate the state. As a result, the bond between territory and national political power no longer exists – often cited in textbooks as a representative of this group is the non-academic Tokyo-based business consultant Kenichi Ohmae (1990, 1996, 2005) who, in 1990, coined a new phrase to reflect this broken bond: 'the borderless world'. The state finds itself progressively embedded in webs of regional and global policies which make it increasingly difficult to pursue domestic agendas without cooperating with other institutions. Consequently, education, globalists assert, can no longer control or be controlled. This approach, pushed to its extreme, implies that, as Green (2006) contends, "national governments would cease to control their education systems, [and] would gradually converge

towards some regional or global norm, divested of any specific national characteristics” (p.192).

The sceptics would contest these arguments. For them, the state is still the principal form of political rule across the globe and is likely to remain so. They point to a transformation of political institutions and argue that “sovereignty, state power and territoriality stand today in a more complex relationship than in the epoch during which the modern nation-state was being forged” (Held *et al.*, 1999: 9). The state has an increasing importance in the promotion and regulation of cross-border activity and domestic political institutions remain influential in shaping policy choices (Melo, 2004). Thus, some claim that behind some of the most successful economies today is a series of state-informed and state-embedded institutions (Weiss, 1998). As states promote economic globalization and its associated political institutions, they gain increased power over and autonomy from their economies (Gritsch, 2005). ‘Sceptic/transformationalist’ commentators (for example, Green, 2006; Robertson *et al.*, 2006) point to the fact that, as far as *compulsory* education is concerned, governments in advanced states have retained control over central areas such as curricula, assessment and certification (for example, in England and Wales, a national curriculum was introduced for the first time with the 1988 Education Act). As Green (2006) contends:

“Governments across the world still exercise considerable control over their national education systems and still seek to use them to achieve national goals. The nature of these goals, and the balance of priorities in different regions, has undoubtedly changed over time... However, in the majority of countries governments still see education as a process of nation-building which involves both economic and social objectives.”
(p.194)

As a result of this superimposition of the state and globalization, old mechanisms of ‘control through hierarchy’ are being progressively replaced by new forms of control to take into account influences from trans-national bodies and regions and sub-regions (Hood, 2006; Rhodes, 2006). ‘Governance’ refers to these new forms of political power and it is perhaps best understood when contrasted with the weakening of older forms of statist regulation. As Rhodes (1997) argues, governance is about change:

“Governance signifies a change in the meaning of government, referring to a *new* process of governing; or a *changed* condition of ordered rule; or the *new* method by which society is governed.” (Rhodes, 1997:46, original emphasis)

Beyond this transformation in governing, governance has different meanings. For example, Rhodes (1997) emphasises the idea that coordinating economic activity requires new ways to transcend the limitations of hierarchy and markets, whereas for Hirst (2000), the stress is primarily on the fact that fundamental changes are taking place away from central government of the state as the principal provider of control and regulation within a national territory. Pierre (1995), on the other hand, points to the decreasing legitimacy of collective solutions and to a marketisation of the state itself. However, Cole (2009) suggests the following core characteristics:

“Governance signifies: challenges to traditional state-centric modes of delivering public policy, the development of inter-organisational relationships, the emergence of new policy actors and forms of interaction (with a special emphasis on public-private interactions), the importance of new levels of policy action, organisational reforms and the growth of new types of response to the problems of governability and capacity building that affect modern societies.” (slide 7)

These new features of governments have in common an opening up to non-national governmental institutions – be they within the state at local or national level, or outside the state at supra-national level. Indeed, if one looks more closely at the characteristics listed by Cole, whether it is the tendency to involve other public bodies in the policy-making process, or to work more closely with the private sector, or to incorporate new layers of decision-making, they all point to a move away from a monocratic coordinated central government (Hayward and Wright, 2002). In the context of the comparative approach taken here, it needs to be stressed that analysts of the concept of governance have shown that there are national traditions of governance – a significant idea in this context of globalization (for example, Mayntz, 1991; Kooiman, 2003; Le Galès, 2005; Cole, 2009). Cole (2009), for example, argues how in the early 1980s, there was a paradigm shift, with the welfare model replaced by a dominant neo-liberal paradigm. In this neo-liberal governance paradigm, the market is dominant and market approaches have penetrated public administration. These tendencies have been most fully expressed in the UK, US and other Anglo-Saxon countries, but all advanced liberal democracies have espoused *some* form of neo-

liberalism. Citing Levy (2006), Cole describes the ‘three varieties’ of capitalism as (French) statism, (German) corporatism and (Anglo-American) neo-liberalism.

What are the implications of these new forms of governance on public policy-making? Answering this question brings the discussion back to the idea of ‘change’, how the idea translates into *modernisation* and what are the implications for the role of *policy networks* (Rhodes 2006). Both aspects are now examined in turn.

A recurrent theme of official discourses about the knowledge-based economy was – particularly at the turn of the twenty-first century – the imperative that public services became more modern, and this both in the UK (see, for example, Cabinet Office, 1999) and in France (see, for example, Jospin, 1998). In view of the pivotal role that higher education was given in governmental strategies, the sector was seen as a high priority in the schedule of modernisation of public services. More specifically, looking at the initiatives studied in this thesis, injunctions to adapt to new contexts and new roles were repeatedly made. In the UK, in, for example, the speech given by David Blunkett to launch the virtual university, there was an underlying rhetoric on the need “to prepare for the twenty-first century”, to “adapt and change to stay ahead” (Blunkett, 2000). Similarly in France, when Claude Allègre gave a press conference in January 2000, he argued that higher education should be “one of the motors of modernity” (Allègre, 2000). But what exactly do these appeals to modernisation mean? As Newman (2001) argues:

“At first sight, modernisation presents itself as a rational and common-sense project to update public services in order to meet the expectations of modern consumers ... and to meet the business requirements of the ‘modern’ world.” (p.83)

However, modernisation, when analysed from a governance point of view, takes on another dimension, one that is politically ‘loaded’. Newman (2001), focussing on New Labour, argues that modernisation programmes endorse neo-liberal values and aim to pursue neo-liberal reforms towards greater opening up of public services to market mechanisms and business solutions to social and public policy problems. In some cases, relations between institutions are developed to the point of *partnership*. Newman (2001) argues that the Blair government was characterised by the

introduction of incentives for partnership working. She explained that as partnerships were called upon to tackle complex policy issues, the emphasis was on:

“[T]he need both for better horizontal integration (partnership working between public sector organisations, voluntary sector bodies and private sector companies) and for stronger vertical integration (between central, local and community tiers of government).” (Newman, 2001:106)

This is a point which requires some attention as partnerships are a central feature of virtual universities. Landry (1994) has identified eight different forms of partnership, starting from the very informal communication of information, the exchange, the coordination, the consultation, the cooperation, the partnership, the co-management and, ending with the most structured, the merger. As Newman (2001) says above, partnerships can involve different types of partners: partnership between states, within public services, public-private, public-communities, and between private businesses. In higher education, research has been operating on the basis of partnership between institutions and various types of partners for a long time (although it is relevant to note that the tendency to set up partnerships with the private sector is not a widespread phenomenon in France where most of the research is financed by the state, via the *Centre National de Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS)). Partnerships are seen as bringing extra coherence, strength and resources but, as Tremblay (2003) argues, they can give rise to new tensions as compatibility of objectives may not always be evident – a point which is developed in chapter 5.

The study of networks in governments has been the subject of academic interest for decades (see for example Lowi (1964) for analysis on the triangular nature of the relationship between a few privileged groups and central government, Heclo (1978) on the issue networks, to cite two of the pioneers in the area). As Le Galès's (2002) distinction between government and governance shows, both need networks to ‘oil the machinery’. For him, government refers to structures, actors, processes and outputs, while governance relates to all the institutions, networks, directives, regulations, norms, political and social usages, public and private actors that contribute to the stability of a society. Thus, whether in relation to networks from the 1970s or the 2000s, Rhodes's (2006) comment applies when he says: “Insiders, acceptable to government, responsible in their expectations, and willing to work with and through

government (...) are consulted before documents are sent out for consultations. They don't lobby. They have lunch." (p. 427). What is new is their increased centrality, the wider range of partners at play and the different levels of decisions.

If pressures to alter ways of governing states and 'modernise' public services have generated such changes, it is pertinent to try to assess how global trends and policies meet. Intuitively, at least on two fronts, there appears to be an immediate conflict between globalization and policy-making. The development of globalization seems to correspond with a symmetrical diminution of state power and thus, of policy-making. At the same time, global forces appear to be able to impose policy choices on states – states which, in return, seem to have virtually no control over global forces (Hay, 2006). However, as has been argued, such a conception, which presents globalization as a catch-all explanation, is somewhat simplistic and should be avoided. There is *not* such a thing as non-mediated, non-managed 'global forces'. Having said that, there is little doubt that processes that characterise globalization supported the development and strengthening of these trends at both supra-national and national levels. This meant, for the states, a progressive re-thinking of the way domestic affairs were governed in order to take account of a wider range of pressures. There are instances when states voluntarily agree to cede some power to the regional or global levels in order to address certain problems; in other words, they seek to solve problems and/or gain advantage in their domestic politics by conceding some power to institutions set above individual nation-states. As a result, European integration has removed many competencies from the central state level, even in areas of core sovereignty such as monetary policy and defence (Cole, 2009). Two types of such strategies have been identified: the '*exit*' and the '*adaptive*' strategies (Hobson and Ramesh, 2002). With exit strategies, states use the regional or global realms to reduce or overcome domestic constraints. With adaptive strategies, internal pressure is exerted on governments in order to seek a global agreement (Lauder *et al.*, 2006). In the context of education, with the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for example, states can refuse this concession of powers when it entails too great a loss for them. But there are instances when, on the contrary, conceding national powers is seen as a solution. For example, the endemic problem of underfunding of Western European higher education led a handful of nation-states (Germany, Italy, France and the UK) to take the first steps towards a shared structure for higher education in Europe, and,

as they signed the ‘Sorbonne Declaration’ in 1998, they started what came to be known as the ‘Bologna Process’. This large regional agreement (it now involves 40 European countries) is a good example of the ‘exit’ strategy. These states ceded some of their national powers in order to try to solve a particular internal problem – in this case, the funding of higher education – and attract students from emerging countries and facilitate internal circulation of students across Europe, thus creating regional trends across Europe through the convergence of European higher education systems. Scott’s (1998) argument that, as a result, British higher education is becoming less unique can be extended to all the other countries involved in the Bologna Process. An example of an ‘adaptive’ strategy would be when the United States government sought a global system that would enforce intellectual property rights (IPRs), in order to realize the trade potential of IPRs (Hobson and Ramesh, 2002). As Lauder *et al.* (2006) argue “[this Hobson and Ramesh’s] theory provides a welcome advance in understanding the basis for negotiations and trade-offs that states undertake to deal with political and economic problems” (p.46).

To sum up this section which constitutes the second stage of the present literature review (moving the analysis from the notion of policy trends to that of policy-making), it has been argued that pressures from non-governmental, non-national entities have forced states to alter their ways of governing national affairs and have often tended to hide behind modernisation to impose deep structural changes. The interaction between global policy trends and public policies is particularly relevant in this thesis and the point stressed previously about the agency of these ideas and the fact that states were not powerless against them was strengthened. The increased centrality of the role of policy networks in modes of state governance has also been demonstrated. This latter point provides a useful link to the third part of the present analysis as its importance is now examined in view of identifying a suitable analytic framework for the present cross-national comparative research.

4. Cross-national Policy-making and Comparative Research

As a pre-condition to how similarities and differences are to be identified and described in the comparison ahead (how both virtual universities were framed, implemented and evaluated), an analytic framework needs to be selected.

Given the points made in preceding sections, it seems obvious that limiting the present analysis to the Departments which overlooked the initiatives would leave out significant elements which are parts of the formal and informal linkages that contributed to the initiatives in both countries.

How then should we compare the ways in which both projects were framed, implemented and evaluated? There are obvious theoretical problems with policy models. On the one hand the researcher needs to impose some conceptual order on the policy process to analyse it, on the other, the risk is to remain at the surface of the process, to look at the formal structure and thus leave out the complexity and messiness of the process. Policy analysts such as Jenkins (1997), Minogue (1997), John (1998) warn against the temptation of the researcher to oversimplify a process which, by nature, is 'messy'. Ball (1990:9) for example claims: "It is easy to be simple, neat and superficial and to gloss over these awkward realities. It is difficult to retain messiness and complexity and still be penetrating". Minogue (1997:11) concurs and says: "[Policy theorists have an] understandable concern to build up explanatory models at a level which transcends the messy complexity of activities on the ground, they ... extract some bits of actuality and leave out ... others".

A useful explanatory device which rejects a linear conceptualization of policy processes between policy text production and policy implementation, is Bowe *et al.*'s (1992) notion of a 'continuous policy cycle'. Policy-making is more than the policy text and involves several complicated processes, through which it is worked and reworked throughout a cycle. A policy cycle is composed of three major moments which form the 'contexts' contributing to the policy-making process. It starts with the *context of influence*, where policy is normally initiated. This is followed by the *context of policy text production*. The third context is the *context of practice*, where the 'real consequences' of the responses are experienced (Ball, 1994; Ngo *et al.*, 2006).

Having said this, a comprehensive model is needed for, as John (1998) argues, the policy researcher needs some means of analysis to comprehend how the process

works. The present *comparative* research imposes the condition that both policy models are identical: one could not consider the option of comparing the two countries via two different policy models as this would lead to an erroneous comparison. Having considered the main alternatives, i.e. ‘stages’ models, institutional approaches, group and network approaches and socio-economic approaches (John, 1998), the *network model* has been assessed as the most adequate for the task ahead for the reasons below.

Marsh and Rhodes (1992) define the policy networks as a meso-level concept dealing with the micro level of analysis of the role of interests (and particular policy decisions), and the macro level of analysis dealing with broader questions such as the role of globalization in the shaping of higher education. Talking about networks at play in higher education, French analyst Musselin speaks of the *configuration universitaire* (Musselin, 2001). She explained that:

« La notion de « configuration universitaire » sera utilisée pour désigner le cadre au sein duquel s'inscrivent, prennent sens et se répondent le type de gouvernement développé par les établissements, le style de pilotage adopté par la tutelle et les modes de régulation internes des disciplines. Autrement dit, pour décrire comment s'articulent trois formes d'action collective : les universités, les autorités de tutelle, la profession universitaire. » (p. 170)

“The notion of ‘*configuration universitaire*’ will be used to designate the framework within which the type of governance developed by institutions, the style of steering adopted by the government and the internal regulatory modes of academic areas can be found, make sense and interact with each other. In other words, [it will be used] to describe how three forms of collective action – universities, government and academic staff – are connected.”

This notion stresses the importance of interdependence. None of the three entities she identifies as forming the core of higher education can be analysed independently from the other two as none are autonomous spaces.

The policy network approach should also support the multi-level analysis which, as explained above, will be the basis of the overall structure of the comparison. But

perhaps one of the most appealing aspects of the policy network model – besides the important argument developed earlier about the dominant place networks have come to occupy as the monolithic approach to governing crumbled under the growing influences of other sources of power – is its notion of the *policy community*. Used as a descriptive device, it refers to a limited number of participants who know each other well and who share the same values and policy goals (Cole and John, 2001). This latter aspect is particularly relevant in the context of the present research because it so happens that academics involved in the initiatives tended to share common characteristics in terms of expertise in the field of ICT and higher education and, to some extent, career path. This means that they formed a fairly small group who, in most cases, were likely to know each other. Networks are also helpful because, through their analysis, new forms of governance such as partnerships are better accounted for (Rhodes, 2006). This is something which will be re-visited later on.

There are, of course, some problems with the policy network theory. Critics have pointed to the looseness of the idea of networks. The inclusivity it implies can lead to an attempt to encompass everything and nothing (John, 1998). The other point of criticism concerns the way the approach does not have an account of institutions and the state (Kassim, 1994). Potentially, the former point poses a serious problem as one can see how describing political relationships as networks may mean, as John (1998) contends, describing most of politics. The way around this is to carefully circumscribe the main components of the networks analysed. In the context of the present research, the fact that this will be done within the strict framework of a comparison should help to maintain and limit the boundaries of the investigation. The second point of criticism is not so relevant here because the overarching theoretical framework of the comparison encompasses influences of globalization and thus, as shown above, the way this has affected state power and public policy-making. Thus, the adoption of the layered approach introduced previously – which corresponds to what Marsh refers to as the ‘meso’ theory – should minimise this second concern.

Having identified the model which seems the most appropriate is helpful. However, to do this, in the context of the present comparative research, it is essential to be able to

decipher some of the intricacies at play at different levels of policy-making, be they local, national or supra-national. Here, Dale's (1999) work on mechanisms shaping national policy is relevant. His starting point was to explore how and with what consequences globalization affects national policy. For him, globalization is a phenomenon different from previous forms of international influences and the nature of its impact is influenced and shaped by five different mechanisms – harmonisation, dissemination, standardization, installing interdependence and imposition. For Dale, they all differ from the pre-globalization mechanisms of 'policy borrowing' and 'policy learning' mainly because:

“... their locus of viability is external, their scope embraces policy goals as well as policy processes, they are externally initiated, they draw on a wider range of forms of power, and they cannot be directly sourced to other individual nations.” (Dale 1999:49)

For each mechanism, eight characteristics of effect mechanisms were considered, ranging from the degree to which the reforms were voluntarily accepted, how explicit the process was, whether the effects could be restricted to policy programmes or whether they involved policy goals, to who issued the reform. At this stage, it is not necessary to go into detail on these points, it is sufficient to say that as the two countries studied are member states of the European Union, it is likely that the mechanisms which served as vehicle to the supranational influences were the same in both countries.

To recap, the framework which forms the overarching structure of the comparative analysis which follows, whilst acknowledging the importance of discourses surrounding policies (chapter 4), will be based on the notions of policy network and policy cycles (chapters 5 and 6).

Conclusions

Perhaps one way of summing up what has been argued in this chapter is to start with its final section and move backwards. Broadly speaking, this chapter aimed to show how higher education policies are designed, what their main current themes consist of, how these broad policy themes come to be formed and how they cross national

boundaries. It has been argued that policy-making is the result of continuous cycles and that the meso-level of policy networks is central to decipher a policy initiative. It has also been shown that, with the progressive influence of ideas related to the knowledge-based economy, higher education has come to the centre of the state's concerns. Consequently, policies designed to support the development of the post-industrial society strongly emphasise the role post-compulsory education can play in developing human capital. Lastly, but perhaps centrally, a review of the literature concerned with these notions has shown how problematic most of them are and how, despite these theoretical weaknesses they, nevertheless, have come to the forefront of the dominant rhetoric on the information society. The central role played by the discourse accompanying these trends has been ascertained and, as such, has been identified as requiring examination in order to assess the role played by globalization.

The positioning of the technological 'reconstruction' of education in the wider societal momentum of the information society cannot be fully comprehended if analysed as a solely technologically determinist framework based on the idea that there is a linear progression between the level of technology and the level of development of a nation. As this review has demonstrated thus far, the bond between education systems and states is as strong as ever, firmly based on a human capital approach towards economic success. Therefore these issues ought to be studied within this larger construction, bearing in mind earlier findings, i.e. that these global trends ought to be primarily seen as *political* and considered as factors of *transformation of states*. This approach fully concurs with that of Selwyn and Brown (2000) who contend that these issues cannot be seen as being merely part of "a linear progression of educational investment determined by the demands of technological change" (Selwyn and Brown, 2000:662), but rather should be studied as an integral part of the political economy of skill formation.

This perspective reveals tensions otherwise not so apparent. For example, tensions in the current agenda on the knowledge-based economy and policies on technology in higher education. The virtual university is at the heart of a hiatus between a strong emphasis on social inclusion *and* economic competitiveness. As Selwyn *et al.* (2001) explain:

“On the one hand, is a powerful rhetoric regarding the use of technological-based learning to re-skill and up-skill the workforce and increase the country’s economic competitiveness. On the other hand, is the government’s exhortation to use technology as a means of overcoming the exclusion of various groups from both renewed educational opportunities and the wider opportunities of the information age.” (p.265)

Similarly, as Selwyn *et al.* (2001) continue, these educational priorities bear a built-in tension between increasing levels of participation and widening levels of participation.

Some research questions are beginning to emerge from this chapter. One of them concerns the ways in which policies designed to support the knowledge-based economy have come to shape higher education. It seems judicious to ask to what extent the similarity of national policies calling for a better suited higher education leads to similar universities. In other words, have national characteristics a role in the increasingly global policy trend which dominates the area of post-compulsory education? It also seems that further investigation of the relationship higher education / state with respect to national strategies of ‘modernisation’ of higher education could inform on-going debates on globalization and on the significance of current changes. Finally, in what ways would a research framework based on a cross national comparison of policy cycles on virtual university answer these questions?

Thus, to gain a better picture of the context of the two policy initiatives compared, the next chapter looks at the main characteristics of each higher education sector and the ways in which these policy trends have contributed to their massification. Ultimately, it is hoped that, from this closer analysis, the first elements of the comparison will emerge and will provide enough insight to anchor issues examined here in their national contexts and identify the main research questions pursued in this work.

Chapter 2

UK and French Higher Education Systems

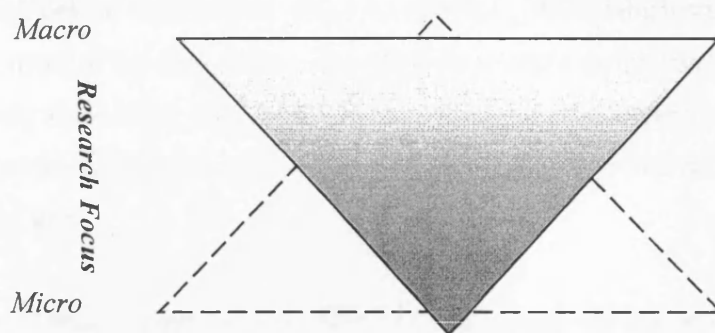
« La notion d'université n'existe pas, il y a des universités, au sein des universités, il y a des départements, il y a des individus. » (J. Wallet¹)

“The notion of university doesn’t exist, there are *universities* and within these universities, there are schools, there are individuals.”

This chapter sets out to progressively (in four steps) get closer to each higher education system and compare them. This gradual sharpening of focus starts with a review of the extent of developments in the field of virtual provision at the time of the two policy initiatives. Then, the analysis moves to the supra-national level of policy-making to identify agencies that have a stake in the area of higher education. As was shown in chapter 1, the last decades have seen a growth in the cross-national exchanges of ideas and themes and it is, thus, relevant to try to identify potential sources of pressures which feed into national policies. Leaving the macro level, the analysis then moves to national level and compares firstly the characteristics of each higher education policy sector (meso level), then the features brought by the massification of both sectors (micro level). Through this comparative analysis, the aim is to address central issues such as what the state of higher education was at the turn of 2000, and how policies designed to foster the

¹ Dr Jacques Wallet works at *Université de Rouen* and is responsible for the campus numériques FORSE, *Formations et Ressources en Sciences de l'Education*. The above quotation comes from his interview held in July 2005.

development of the knowledge-based economy have transformed higher education. Throughout this gradual move from macro to micro level, the wider theoretical issues discussed in the previous chapter are invoked in order to deepen understanding of how theory winds its way into context-specific practices. These comparative analyses are the cornerstone of this research and this is reflected in the hierarchical organization of the chapter. Thus, the chapter can be likened to an inverted pyramid with the focus narrowing down from the macro level to the micro level. However, and conversely, the empirical scrutiny of each of these levels increases as the comparison moves to the micro level. This inversion of focus to scope could be represented as follows:



1. Virtual Higher Education Provision in 2000

The actual extent of this activity is not easy to measure. As has been argued in the previous chapter, the term 'virtual university' is understood as referring to the realities of existing universities in transition and thus, the nature of this area of activity varies widely across countries and across national higher education sectors.

'Distance learning' within higher education is a mode of delivery which has a long history. Originally, 'correspondence courses' formed the basis of such provision (see for example, Rowntree, 1992; Lockwood, 1995; Keegan, 1996; Burt, 1997; Rumble, 2000; Tait, 2008) and finding out to what extent this paper-based form of delivery has moved to digital-based distance learning would be the subject of all together a different thesis.

What is proposed, here, is a snapshot of these developments mainly in the UK and France, at the time of the launch of the UKeU and the *Campus Numériques*.

In 2004, the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) conducted a survey of all Commonwealth universities (Garrett and Jokivirta, 2004) to which 122 responded (47 of them based in the UK). An incremental change in most institutions was noted since their last survey in 2002. It was also noted that on-line learning had had the greatest impact on campus rather than in distance learning mode (although this was mostly due to the widespread adoption of Virtual Learning Environments rather than significant on-line elements in curricula). That same year, the European Commission sponsored a report on 'Virtual Models of Universities' (PLS RAMBØLL, 2004) which studied the 15 European member states of the time. They, too, found an increase in the level of integration of ICT in teaching since 2002, but, though they also found considerable variation in this area, they noted the dominant tendency to use digital technology in a rather limited way. They concluded that:

"Most universities are still at the stage where the use of ICT consists of treating the computer as a sophisticated typewriter and as a means of facilitating communication via traditional pedagogy and didactics in the actual teaching situation, e.g. through the use of presentation programs, databases or simulation modules ... Only a minority of universities have yet reached the stage of using ICT as tool to redesign educational programmes, content and curricula on the basis of novel didactic frameworks." (PLS RAMBØLL, 2004:ii)

In terms of the way provision was organised, they found that half of the universities surveyed were involved in co-operating with other universities in their country to offer joint e-learning courses and that this tendency was on the increase, whilst public-private partnership was a fairly limited phenomenon. The emphasis placed, nowadays, on partnership has already been touched upon: specifically, the link between partnership and new modes of governance. At this early stage of the comparison, it is significant to note the fact that virtual universities tend to work on the basis of partnerships. According to the report for the European Commission, these take different forms: national networks or consortia supported by national or regional levels, bilateral or multilateral partnerships or

consortia between universities, or ad-hoc project-based co-operation. In 2004, half of universities in the EU were involved in co-operating with other universities in their own country to deliver e-learning courses jointly; the report also identified a third of universities involved in cross national co-operation, whereas only 18 per cent were involved in partnerships with the private sector (PLS RAMBØLL, 2004).

In the UK, in addition to obvious large providers traditionally associated with ‘distance learning’ – the Open University and the University of London External Study system – when the e-university project was launched in February 2000, digital technology in UK higher education learning and teaching had had central support through various initiatives since the late 1980s. The main two policy initiatives in this field were the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP) which ran between 1992 and 2000 with a total budget of £40 million, and the Fund for Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL), between 1995 and 1999, with a budget of £14 million. As the CHEMS report (1998) points out:

“The real impact of initiatives such as these can only be judged in the future on the basis of the effectiveness of the dissemination and implementation of the funded projects, and, as is clear from other initiatives both in the UK and overseas, such dissemination is fraught with difficulty.” (p. iv)

Outside state run higher education, in the UK and abroad, political and economic priorities on high skills had given rise to a multiplication of ‘corporate universities’ (often called ‘degree-mills’²), particularly in the US³ but also in the UK. One of these UK-based providers is particularly relevant, British Aerospace. In 1998, the company launched its ‘Virtual University’ which comprised a Faculty of Learning, an International Business

² According to the Report on Borderless Education, such ventures on continental Europe were mostly in Central and Eastern Europe, though Germany had a state of the art institution, the International University, sponsored by multinational companies such as Alcatel, IBM, Microsoft and so on. There were none in France. (CVCP, 2000a:111)

³ In 2000, there were an estimated 1,600 corporate universities, mainly in industry sectors technologically-driven and working worldwide (healthcare, banking, telecoms, manufacturing, financial services). Amongst them, in the pharmaceutical sector: Pfizer, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Glaxo-Wellcome, Pharmacia & Upjohn; in the automotive sector: Unipart ‘U’, Ford, General Motors, Saturn Corporation, Daimler Benz Chrysler; and: IBM, Microsoft, Sun Microsystems, Dell Computer, Ernst & Young, Andersen Consulting, McDonald, Disney (Kenney-Wallace, 2000).

School, a Faculty of Engineering and Manufacturing Technology, a Benchmarking and Best Practice Centre, and a research centre, spread over 33 locations (Kenney-Wallace, 2000). The 'Vice-Chancellor' of this 'university' was involved in the UKeU and interviewed for this research.

There have been several different terms employed in describing this area over the last ten to fifteen years. In related UK-based literature of the last twenty years, the following phrases are found: Computer Assisted Learning (CAL); Computer Mediated Communication (CMC); computer-based learning; IT-assisted teaching and learning (ITATL); Communications and Information Technology (C & IT); or, and most recent of all, eLearning (Chapter 4 proposes an analysis of European policies at the origin of this term introduced in 2000) . This proliferation of terminology reflects different stages of development and different emphases but also, and more relevantly, the lack of national co-ordination which has characterised this field during this period.

In France, in 2000, higher education distance learning accounted for just over 40,000 students, the equivalent of two average size universities (Thibault, 2007). Three main providers were involved: the *Fédération Interuniversitaire d'Enseignement à Distance (FIED)*, the *Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance (CNED)* and the *Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM)*. 1997 marks the start of a nationally coordinated set of policies supporting distance learning via digital technology – the main component being the initiative of the *campus numériques* – and, thus, there was little activity of this kind prior this date (Albero and Thibault, 2006). The FIED is composed of 23 *Centres de Télé-enseignement Universitaires* based in universities and provided, in 2000, for about 28,000 students studying traditional university subjects like humanities and sciences, mostly by paper-based distance learning. The CNED, created in 1939 to deliver courses by correspondence and radio so that secondary school education could continue during the war, progressively grew as its portfolio of courses expanded to include preparation for national administrative and teaching examinations (in 2000, the CNED employed 3,000 staff and 5,000 part-time tutors, and counted 350,000 enrolments). By 2000, the CNED was also running courses prepared in partnership with some universities (9,000 students).

Finally, some continuing education departments also offered distance learning provision (for between 3,000 and 4,000 students). In addition to this university-based provision, the CNAM also offered higher education professional qualifications, representing 3,000 enrolments. As this rapid overview of the area of distance learning in French higher education provision shows, when the *campus numériques* were initiated, the field was composed of a fragmented set of agencies which had developed over time with little overall consideration for the coherence of the ensemble. This was addressed after 1997 (discussed below).

As can be seen, the nature, shape and development of the ‘virtual university’ are fundamentally dependent on the characteristics of the sector they emerge from. For this reason, the comparative analysis of both higher education sectors which follows is essential for the rest of this work. However, before moving to this analysis, it is helpful to consider the extent of developments in the field of global higher education policy-making in order to gain a better understanding of the potential sources of influence that can contribute to reshaping each higher education sector.

2. A Global Higher Education?

This section examines and identifies the major supranational agencies involved in shaping higher education systems, their role and what mechanisms are at play in carrying forward specific conceptions and in disseminating ideas. Is it justified to talk about a ‘global higher education sector’?

This is a broad question which encompasses many aspects of higher education. Its study covers topics such as analysis of student mobility, trans-national education, various forms of research collaboration and institutional partnerships (Stensaker *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, these topics have been studied from a number of perspectives (for an analysis of the change drivers and their effects on the sector see, for example, Marginson and Rhoades (2002), for a study of geographically defined processes see, for example,

Gornitzka *et al.* (2003)). It is particularly the role played by supranational and national agencies in the globalization of higher education which is of interest here.

There are a variety of organisations specifically dedicated to the promotion and advancement of higher education. In the UK, aside from the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and the British Council, some of the more prominent ones include: the UK Higher Education International Unit, funded by the funding councils and Universities UK. This organisation “coordinates, promotes and undertakes activities designed to support UK universities in a globally competitive world” (International Unit, 2009); the UK Higher Education Europe Unit is “a sector-wide body which aims to raise awareness of the European issues affecting UK higher education and to coordinate the UK’s involvement in European initiatives and debates” (Europe Unit, 2009). In France, the *Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)* and *CampusFrance* are charged with promoting higher education provision outside France. The former, a Montreal-based organisation was created in 1960 to co-ordinate and enhance French language higher education worldwide and is mainly funded by the French government (over 70 per cent); as will be seen, it played an active role in the French initiative. *CampusFrance* (previously called *Edufrance*) promotes French higher education institutions abroad through its presence in 35 countries mainly in South America and Asia. Other organisations – such as the *Commission Nationale de Coopération Décentralisée (CNCD)*, the *Haut Conseil de la Coopération Internationale (HCCI)* or the *Comité International de la Coopération Internationale et du Développement (CICID)* – also aim to enhance, in one way or another, the position of French higher education across the world⁴. In the context of ICT-based education, a few transnational networks (such as the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) and the European Distance Education Network (EDEN)) have emerged, increasing their number of institutional members in the 1990s, their role mainly being to disseminate data and good practice (CVCP, 2000).

⁴ For a critical analysis of most cross-border projects with Francophone Africa, see Jokivirta (2005) who argues that they have been spearheaded by the developed countries of the Francophone world, with little involvement from local or regional actors.

In addition to these, there are also other well known multilateral agencies which do not tend to be associated with higher education and yet claim to include this area of post-compulsory education in their remit. These include the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank (WB), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to cite the main ones.

The WTO and its work on the liberalization of services through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is an example of new development in the governance of economic activity. Increasingly, international economic institutions address issues that were previously dealt with at the level of states (Robertson *et al.*, 2006). In the case of the GATS, the process began in 1994 (with the Uruguay Round) and is based on “successive rounds of negotiations to achieve a progressively higher level of liberalization” (WTO website). It ended with the Doha Round which was suspended in July 2006. ‘Services’ are all services except services provided by national governments which do not have a commercial purpose. If, as Robertson *et al.* (2006) argue, “any institution that requires the payment of fees, even in the public sector, falls within the category of private commercial activity and is then covered by GATS” (p.235), then higher education falls into this category and this process of progressive liberalization creates the conditions for higher education to fully open to free trade. However, to date, the European Commission has maintained the formal exclusion of education, health, culture and social services from these negotiations. If this was to change, that is, if European higher education was to become fully open to free trade, there would be two potential outcomes for European states. Firstly, foreign providers would be guaranteed a right of access and operation (and would be given degree-granting authority and eligibility for government grants). Secondly, the private sector would be in a position to undermine public delivery of courses through challenging government monopolies. Faced with the far reaching consequences this could have, it is not surprising that European states have refused, from the outset, to include education in the negotiations; other major members of the WTO

(Australia, Brazil, India, Japan and the US) joined the position of the EU and decided to suspend all negotiations in July 2006⁵.

The *first* international conference on higher education held by UNESCO was only in 1998 – which, in itself, is revealing of the rise of the awareness that higher education was becoming a strategic issue. It emphasised an altogether different position than that of the WTO, arguing that higher education should be considered as a public good and as such should lead to “the consolidation of equity, justice, solidarity and freedom in the world” (UNESCO, 2005). A decade later, the notion of public good was replaced by an altogether different ethos. In a statement, the general rapporteur of the second conference held in July 2009, Suzy Halmi, sums up the conference noting that “the high degree of participation of ministers and political decision makers demonstrates awareness of the importance of higher education in building knowledge-based societies” (UNESCO, 2009). In the space of these ten years, the emphasis moved from the notion of a ‘public good’ to join the dominant knowledge-based rhetoric. For Stiglitz (2002), the strong political bias of the policies of these supranational organisations and of the national policies they sought to influence, originates from their underlying neo-liberal roots. Lauder *et al.* (2006) further develop this point of view and argue:

“There is a continued presumption that small states following orthodox economic policies – market and individual choice – offer a universal template for efficiency whether it be in education or in other spheres. Although softened at the edges, the [neo-liberal] approach has assumed the status of common sense amongst the elites that serve these organizations.”
(p.41)

Increases in student exchanges, staff mobility and overseas enrolments are also significant indicators of the degree of the globalization of higher education. Two drivers are particularly significant: supranational schemes and international league tables. The

⁵ “The Doha Development Agenda negotiations are to be suspended because gaps between key players remain too wide. Mr Lamy reached the conclusion to suspend the negotiations after talks among six major members broke down on Sunday 23 July. Ministers from Australia, Brazil, the European Union, India, Japan and the United States had met in Geneva to try to follow up on instructions from the St Petersburg Summit on 17 July.” (WTO, 2006)

former were created to support the development of these movements across countries and regions. They take the form of reciprocal placements between EU countries (with the *Erasmus* scheme, created in 1987, which, today, involves thirty European countries) and placements of students from outside the EU to European universities (since 2004, the *Erasmus Mundus* scheme which, as the European Commission (2007) states, attracts “... the world’s best graduate students and teachers [and,] ultimately, when Europe’s universities benefit, the EU economy benefits too” – once again highlighting a direct connection between higher education and the wealth of countries).

Intra-EU cooperation is not limited to the exchange of students. In 1998, on the initiative of Claude Allègre, education ministers of the four most powerful European states – the UK, Germany, France and Italy – committed themselves to harmonize the architecture of higher education qualifications and impose the ‘3-5-8’ reforms⁶ (also known as the ‘Bologna Process’) (Cole, 2005). As Rizvi and Lingard (2006) point out, this is an instance where states cede some of their autonomy in public policy developments to intergovernmental organisations. The idea of the restructuring of systems of higher education is to ensure a fairer and more efficient system of credit transfer, and thus support mobility across national systems, something considered highly desirable in the global economy (Rizvi and Lingard, 2006). Implementation has been – and still is – difficult. In some cases, moving to 3-5-8 meant re-designing whole curricula (it is the case in France as – as will be shown later in this chapter – degrees were 2 years (*DEUG*) plus 1 year (*licence*)). In other cases, the 3-5-8 structure has been partially implemented (it is the case in the UK where most masters are one-year long only).

Another driver of this supranational activity is the annual publication of international league tables such as the Shanghai *Jiao Tong* and the THES which contribute to intensifying competition among universities. As some commentators argue (Dill and Soo, 2005; Marginson, 2006, 2007; Deem *et al.*, 2008), these tables are becoming increasingly influential in shaping core activities of universities.

⁶ ‘3-5-8’ corresponds to the number of years full-time study requires to achieve a degree (3 years), a master (2 years), a doctoral thesis (3 years).

This brief overview has shown that alongside higher education-specific agencies (whose role is mainly to recruit new overseas students) are large multilateral organisations whose remit is wider than education. There is one which could potentially radically transform higher education systems. However, until now, if European states have agreed to harmonise the overarching structure of their qualifications, they have clearly refused to let go of their national degree-granting authority. So can it be said that higher education is global? No. It is more appropriate to talk of a partial internationalisation of higher education systems – a position that commentators such as Cole (2005) and Green (2006) have previously adopted. These globalised agendas and processes interact with traditions, ideologies, institutions and politics that have developed on *national* terrains and that cannot be ignored – the implementation of the Bologna process is a good example of this. Whether we are witnessing the emergence of a global *market* of higher education is a different question as it narrows down the discussion to notions of supply and demand. There is no doubt that the human capital agenda of neo-liberal politics identified in the previous chapter has heavily contributed to placing mechanisms of supply and demand at the centre of higher education sectors – the league tables are an example of this. However, as previously argued, large parts of the world are not included in this ‘global market’. This question requires further unwrapping and will be revisited.

It seems apparent that the *macro* perspective adopted until now is only half the story. It is essential to get a closer look at the national terrains mentioned above and for this reason, one must turn to each state, in particular the policy sectors from which the initiatives emerged.

3. Higher Education Policy Sectors – A Comparison

In February 2000, when David Blunkett announced the launch of the virtual university, higher education was under the umbrella of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). In 2001, following a re-shuffling of the Cabinet, ‘employment’ moved to a new Department (The Department for Work and Pensions) and The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) was created (whilst science and research

funding remained with The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)). This remained unchanged until 2007. Then, the DfES was split in two, with compulsory education and the Department for Children, Schools and Families on one side, and post-compulsory education and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) on the other⁷. At the same time, research councils moved out of the DTI to the DIUS. In June 2009, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills was created, once again proposing a different emphasis, which, this time, was not referred to by using any terms exclusively related to education (as were 'education' or 'universities'). In 2001, to justify the introduction of the word 'skills' in the new department's name, Gordon Brown explained that the aim was "to make Britain one of the best places in the world for science, research and innovation, and to deliver the ambition of a world-class skills base" (THES, 2001). As can be seen, the link made by the British government between (higher) education and work – be it 'employment' or 'skills' (though these refer to different concepts) – is not recent and the marked emphasis on higher level skills from 2007 with the amalgamation with 'innovation' and 'universities', shows how this strategy progressively focussed on higher education institutions.

In France, between 1981 and 2007, higher education was within the ministry of national education, called in the late 1990s, *Ministère de l'Education Nationale, de la Recherche et de la Technologie (MENRT)*. Although within this Department, it always had some autonomy with either a separate sub-department or its own Secretary of State⁸. At the

⁷ The succession of Secretaries of State since 1997 is as follows: between 1997 and 2001, David Blunkett was Secretary of State for Education and Employment; between 2001 and 2002, Estelle Morris was Secretary of State for Education and Skills (she resigned); Charles Clarke (until 2004), Ruth Kelly (from 2004 to 2006) and Alan Johnson (from 2006 to 2007) followed her; and between 2007 and 2009, John Denham was Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills. Since June 2009, Lord Mandelson is Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.

⁸ It is quite a complex task to follow successive nominations in France as ministries were divided in different ways each time an appointment was made. Between 1997 and 2000, Claude Allègre was minister of the '*Education nationale, la recherche et la technologie*'. Between 2000 and 2002, Jack Lang was minister of the '*Education nationale*'; Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg, minister of '*Recherche*'; Jean-Luc Mélenchon, '*ministre délégué*' at the '*Enseignement professionnel*'. Between 2002 and 2004, Luc Ferry was minister of the '*Jeunesse, de l'Education nationale et de la Recherche*'; Claudie Haigneré was '*ministre déléguée*' at the '*Recherche et aux Nouvelles technologies*' and Xavier Darcos was '*ministre délégué*' at the '*Enseignement scolaire*'. Between 2004 and 2005, François Fillon was minister at the '*Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche*'. Between 2005 and 2007, Gilles de Robien was minister at the '*Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche*' and

time of the initiative, ICT-related initiatives in higher education had a dedicated section within the ministry, the *Direction de la Technologie* (DT). Up until September 2001, the team working on the initiative was based in a sub-section called the *Sous-direction des Technologies Educatives et des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication* (SDTETIC). After this date, and until 2006, it was re-named the *Sous-direction des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication pour l'Enseignement* (SCTICE). These successive adjustments and re-arrangements of different sections and sub-sections typically reflect French administration and, as Lochak (1986, 1992) argues, after each general election in France from the 1980s, the Ministry of Education was one of the most susceptible ministries to the reshuffling of its members, unlike ministries such as *Industrie et Equipement* for example.

This historical sketch shows that, during the period this research is focussing on (mid 1990s to mid 2000s), on both sides of the Channel, responsibility for higher education was regularly passed from one Department to another depending on the respective priorities of each government. This in itself reveals how strategic, and problematic, the governance of higher education was for central government. This is a significant factor because, as Lowi (1964 and 1972) argues, each policy sector has its own politics and thus, evaluating policies and their outcomes, necessarily implies identifying the public sector from which they emerged and its specific structures and actors. Policy sectors, such as agriculture, health and education have their own issues, structures and actors. However, whilst policies may be strongly stamped by the policy sector they emerge from, to limit the present analysis to the DfES and the MENRT would leave out significant elements which were parts of the formal and informal linkages and which contributed to the overall set-ups in both countries. As seen in the previous chapter, policy networks in policy-making are central to the understanding of the processes and influences at play. Thus, the idea that policy sectors could be considered as self-contained mini-worlds unaffected by the outside is clearly misleading.

between 2007 and 2009, Xavier Darcos came back as minister of the '*Education nationale*'. Since 2007, Valérie Pécresse is minister of the '*Enseignement supérieur et de la recherche*'. Since June 2009, Luc Chatel is minister of the '*Education nationale*' (MEN, 2009).

The UK Context

One of the characteristics of British higher education is that it is a devolved matter. Policies and budgets are defined by the four constituent countries of the UK: in England via the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) (called DfES at the time of the UKeU), in Scotland via the Scottish Executive, in Wales, via the Welsh Assembly Government and in Northern Ireland via the Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI). The role of these executive bodies vis a vis higher education is to determine an annual policy framework and allocate funding for institutions (168 in total in 2000). Since 1992, in England, Scotland and Wales, these executive bodies interact with funding councils (this is not the case in Northern Ireland where there is no intermediary between the Department and four higher education institutions). These funding councils – non-departmental public bodies (the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)) – act as intermediaries between the executive power and the higher education institutions and are often referred to as ‘buffer bodies’. It becomes therefore clear that when researching the UK initiative, the fact that the British higher education sector is divided into three autonomous components (albeit not with the same degree of autonomy across the four countries) should be borne in mind; each one is likely to have its own priorities and agenda and there is therefore the possibility of getting uneven responses to a UK wide initiative.

Figure 2.1 below shows that each funding council has a flow of activity which can be divided into two: interactions with the Executive (shown on the left) and the funding council, and interactions with the higher education institutions (on the right); and in both cases, as shown later, the flow goes both ways:

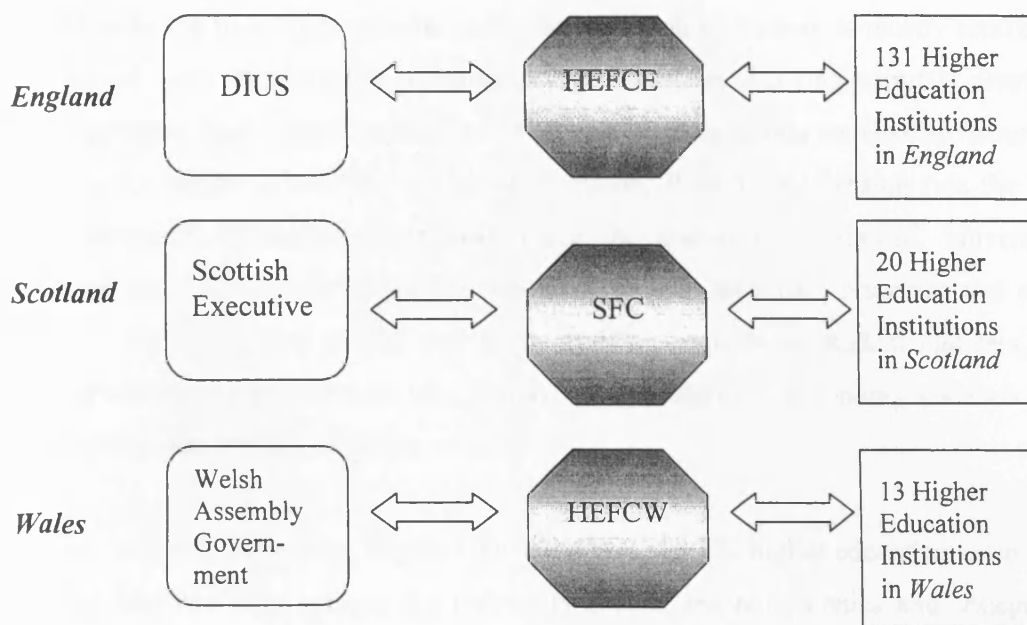


Figure 2.1 Flow of activity between the Executive, the funding council and the higher education institutions in England, Scotland and Wales

As far as the flow to and from executive/funding councils is concerned, the DIUS, the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government ultimately decide on policies and issue funding. In the case of England, this is done once a year in the autumn via a Grant Letter sent to HEFCE. Whilst this document gives guidance on spending priorities, this does not imply that the relationship between the executive and the funding councils is one way, top-down. One of the roles of the councils is to provide advice to Government on funding and development needs of the sector. To this end, the funding councils regularly commission and conduct research which ultimately feeds into national policies. As for the funding, which constitutes, as John (1998) pointed out, one of the instruments policy sectors wield to encourage or penalize organisations and people, it is usually broken-down into three main headings, listed here in descending order: teaching, research and other funding. The size of this 'other' sub-budget varies depending on which areas and/or initiatives are supported and its role is to support and encourage institutions to implement policies on specific initiatives defined by the executive.

The flow to and from funding councils/higher education institutions is mostly centred on the annual cycle of allocation and monitoring of funding. Funding councils distribute block grants to their institutions and assess quality of teaching (via the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education – England, Scotland, Wales) and research (via the UK-wide Research Assessment Exercises). Once the grants are distributed, universities independently decide how to spend them, according to their own priorities and every year, in December, they supply data to the funding councils on student numbers, etc. Higher education institutions in the UK have a high degree of autonomy vis a vis both executive power and their funding council.

Before the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, the UK higher education sector was divided into two large groups, the university sector, and polytechnics and colleges of higher education. This binary organisation in which both sides were offering higher education qualifications, albeit with different funding mechanisms and different validation systems, became one sector in 1992 (Pratt, 1997). As a result, thirty-four polytechnics in England and Wales⁹ became universities, as did some colleges of higher education. Consequently, statistics produced and published by the government before 1993/94 gathered enrolment figures from the fifty-two universities: “in Great Britain [which] were formerly funded by the University Funding Council” (HESA, 1995), plus two universities in Northern Ireland. From 1994/95 onwards, statistical data published by HESA reflected the 1992 Act and collated enrolment figures from 182 institutions (a total which gradually came down to 166 in 2000/01 following successive institutional mergers). Unless otherwise stated, data provided below reflects this statistical split (i.e. before and after 1994).

Turning to the financing of the sector, Table 2.1 below is derived from the OECD data (the report from 2004 is used as it provides data for the period studied here, i.e. years just

⁹ The list of these thirty-four polytechnics is: Anglia Polytechnic, Bournemouth, Brighton, Central England, Central Lancashire, Coventry, De Monfort, East London, Glamorgan, Greenwich, Hertfordshire, Huddersfield, Humberside, Kingston, Leeds Metropolitan, Liverpool John Moores, London Guildhall, Manchester Metropolitan, Middlesex, Nottingham Trent, North London, North Staffordshire, Northumbria, Oxford Brookes, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Sheffield Hallam, South Bank, Sunderland, Teeside, Thames Valley, Westminster, West of England, Wolverhampton (Pratt 1997:2).

before and after 2000) and shows that, between 1995 and 2001, if the budget (expenditure) increased (8 points in the 6 years), it was not sufficient to cover the relatively important increase of student enrolments (12 points in the 6 years) and as a result, expenditure *per* student actually decreased (4 points lower than at the start of the period studied).

Table 2.1: Index of change between 1995 and 2001 (1995 = 100, 2001 constant prices) showing changes in expenditure on tertiary level education per student in the UK

	Change in expenditure	Change in the number of students	Change in expenditure per student
United Kingdom	108	112	96

Source: Table B1.5 in Education at a Glance, 2004 – OECD.

Another meaningful set of indicators considers expenditure per student and national income. Table 2.2 below shows that, during the same period, although the GDP per capita increased (by 14 per cent), expenditure per student actually decreased (by 2 per cent). In other words, whilst the UK economy was generating increasing levels of income, this increase did not translate into a corresponding increase of public spending for post-compulsory education.

Table 2.2: Change in expenditure on tertiary institutions per student and national income in the UK (in equivalent US dollars converted using PPPs¹⁰ (2001 constant prices))

	1995		2001	
	Expenditure per student	GDP per capita	Expenditure per student	GDP per capita
United Kingdom	10,981	23,006	10,753	26,715

Source: Table B1.6 in Education at a Glance, 2004 – OECD

¹⁰ Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) are currency conversion rates that both convert to a common currency and equalise the purchasing power of different currencies. In other words, they eliminate the differences in price levels between countries in the process of conversion (OECD, 2004).

In short, considering the UK-wide project launched by the DfES, it can be said that the devolved political organisation of power of the UK higher education system and the role of the funding councils in implementing policies originating from London are likely to be two central aspects of the research. Lastly, financial data from the OECD clearly point to a shortage of public funding – something which is also likely to arise throughout what follows.

The French Context

Historically, national control over qualifications, curricula, staff appointments, salaries and status is inherited from Napoleon's reforms of 1806 and 1808 when a standardised organisation of secondary and higher education around five faculties (theology, medicine, law, science and humanities) was created. Successive reforms restructured the higher education sector, but the aim remained to develop a national system which, ideally, would reproduce identical institutions, identical curricula and identical career paths for staff across the whole of France (Musselin, 2001; Menendez Weidman, 2001). Over the last fifty years, one of the strong emphases of policies was on strengthening universities as institutions to counter the power of the faculties and their deans (*doyens*) – the most important reforms being in 1968 and 1984. The Act which followed the May 1968 events, the *Loi Faure* (November 1968), replaced faculties by the *Unité d'Enseignement et de Recherche (UER)*, created the role of '*Président d'Université*' and opened the faculty bodies to students, middle tier academics and administrative staff (Mignot-Gerard, 2003). Since then, the *Présidents d'Université* (equivalent of the Vice-Chancellors in the UK) are members of the *Conférence des Présidents d'Université (CPU)* which, over the years, has seen its role becoming stronger, lobbying the Ministry and influencing institutions. In 1984, the *Loi Savary* reorganised universities. *UER* became *Unité de Formation et de Recherche (UFR)* and a pyramidal structure constituted by the *directeurs* of departments, *directeurs* of *UFR* and the *président d'Université* formed the decision making process. Along with this hierarchy, three university boards were created (*Conseil Scientifique, Conseil des Etudes et de la Vie Universitaire, Conseil d'Administration*) (Mignot-Gerard, 2003a). However, the Ministry kept central control

over the validation of schemes leading to national qualifications, allocation of budgets and staff appointments and careers, on the principles of uniformity and equality. Mignot-Gerard (2003) showed that behind this apparent homogeneity lay a complex situation which allows a wide range of local configurations, allowing for different types of relation between the *directeurs d'UFR* and the *président d'Université* (from cooperation to competition) and different types of leadership and relations between leaders and the various boards. As a result, *UFR* within a university do not always form a coherent group composing a coherent entity. When one adds the strong national administration to the picture, one understands why French universities as institutions were, for a long time, weak institutions, suffering from a lack of identity and steering projects (Musselin, 2001).

However, observers agree that from the 1990s onwards, as the sector, like other Western higher education sectors, encountered problems related to massification (see for example Deer, 2005), the increasing heterogeneity of institutions, together with problems of funding, fuelled the ministerial drive to further develop the autonomy of universities (Musselin, 2001; Mignot-Gerard, 2003; Carpentier, 2006) and thus pursue what for some was its neo-liberal agenda (for example, ARESER, 1997; Laval, 2004). According to Musselin (2001), what profoundly changed the relationship between the *Ministère* and institutions was the four-year contractual funding process (*contrat quadriennal*) which Lionel Jospin, then in charge of the Ministry, and Claude Allègre, responsible for the implementation of this new policy, set up in 1989. These contracts required universities to define priorities and objectives for four years and look for external sources of funding. They were part of an ensemble of policies coming under the umbrella term 'modernisation of universities' (the *Agence de Modernisation des Universités (AMU)*, which was created to offer support to universities for management), all aiming to extend autonomy in order to move forward the progressive disengagement of the state. Coupled with these changes, the *Ministère* was re-organised to reflect the shift of power between the executive and the institutions. According to Musselin (2001), ten years later – which coincides with the setting up of the *campus numériques* – the effects were visible, albeit with a move away from the original qualitative approach of the contracts in favour of the

more strictly administrative task of allocating budgets (ten per cent of overall budget is allocated on the basis of the contracts). Mignot-Gerard (2003) concurs and claims that:

“The position of the President has changed. He actually became the principal interlocutor of the Ministry for everything concerning his university. Within universities, the contracting process helped the Presidents to strengthen their positions and they developed a new conception of their role: in that they believe they are allowed to define political priorities, or to disseminate information on their projects; one can say that they became the legitimate leaders within their university.”(p.75)

In terms of budget, both tables (Table 2.3 and Table 2.4 below) show equivalent data to that displayed above for the UK, for the same period. In the 6 years, although student numbers slightly decreased (2 points), the budget (expenditure) increased fairly substantially (by 11 points). As a result, expenditure per student progressed in the 6 years (by 13 points).

Table 2.3: Index of change between 1995 and 2001 (1995 = 100, 2001 constant prices) showing changes in expenditure on tertiary level education per student in France

	Change in expenditure	Change in the number of students	Change in expenditure per student
France	111	98	113

Source: Table B1.5 in Education at a Glance, 2004 – OECD.

Comparing expenditure per student with national income shows that, during the same period, both the GDP per capita and level of expenditure per student increased and this at a proportionally identical rate of 12 per cent.

Table 2.4: Change in expenditure on tertiary institutions per student and national income in France (in equivalent US dollars converted using PPPs (2001 constant prices))

	1995		2001	
	Expenditure per student	GDP per capita	Expenditure per student	GDP per capita
France	7,801	23,580	8,837	26,818

Source: Table B1.6 in Education at a Glance, 2004 – OECD

Increasing financial pressure forced universities to look elsewhere for funding. The principle of keeping student fees to a minimum, which only represent 5 per cent of universities' income, has, so far, been maintained, thus money needs to be found from elsewhere. Regions saw their role increasing (in particular with the *Université 2000* plan studied below); Rey (2005) points out how the management of universities progressively became horizontal, locally engaging three types of partners: state/region, universities, local elected figures, and moved away from the previous vertical way of functioning via central governance from the state. Other potential sources of income were provision delivered via continuing education and distance learning (Herin, 2003).

As can be seen, the picture is complex and, when one considers these details of re-organisation, it becomes quickly apparent that the sector is not as highly centralised and state controlled as it is often portrayed abroad. The *Ministère* tried to engineer a move towards autonomous institutions whilst retaining strongly centralised control over some of the running of the sector. The process of decision making within universities has evolved but not evenly across the sector. A final point needs to be added: ever since the political upheavals of May 1968, higher education in France remains a 'highly contentious and politicised issue' (DeAngelis, 1998:132). Students seldom hesitate to take to the streets to force government backdowns – a subject always heavily reported by the media.

Bearing in mind the specifically state run initiative studied in this research, the diversity of higher education institutions and of their local configurations will need to be considered, together with the new role of the *Présidents* and of the regions.

Comparison

This section ends with a comparison of the two sectors. Following this analysis, it could be argued that similarities emerge in aspects which concern fairly recent changes whereas dissimilarities tend to be found in features resulting from the long national history of higher education. For example, it is obvious that, on both sides of the Channel, cabinet re-shuffling has been a recurrent aspect of the period studied; the analysis conducted in chapter 1 contributes to explaining the origins of these fluctuations and the gradual move towards employment and training. Another commonality is the financial consequences of the massification of the sector, although as will be shown in the next section which looks at changes in enrolments, in France at the turn of 2000, following a sharp increase in the 1980s, numbers started to stagnate whilst, in the UK, they were rapidly increasing. Having said this, overall numbers were very similar. The first significant outcome of a comparison of levels of expenditure reveals a consequent difference in levels of expenditure per student between the two countries: comparatively, with relatively similar GDP per capita, France spent less than the UK over the period 1995-2001 (Tables 2 4). However, France matched expenditure on post-compulsory education with its GDP whereas the UK actually chose to decrease its spending although the national economy was doing well – and this at a time when student numbers were soaring. Another common feature concerns the gradual importance given to regions, whether with the devolution process in the UK or, in France, the successive decentralization reforms started in 1982 (for an analysis of French territorial politics after Decentralization, see Levy (2001)).

Differences which come out of the comparison include a higher level of autonomy of UK higher education institutions vis a vis central government and funding councils, compared with France where, as has been shown, reforms towards greater autonomy have taken

place but key functions remained under state control. Finally, the fact that there exists an intermediary body between institutions and the government in the UK (funding councils) is not found in France.

4. Massification of Higher Education – A Comparison

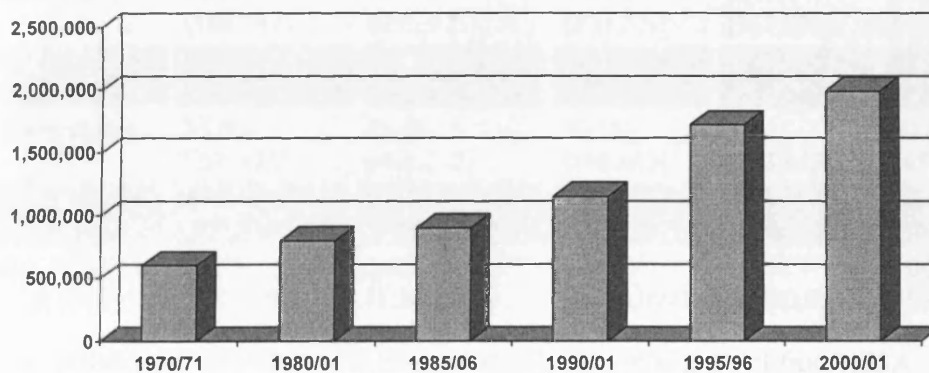
The priority given to the idea that today's and tomorrow's 'good functioning' of society requires the majority of the population to have a general higher level of education combined with the acquisition of key transferable skills in order to be able to adapt flexibly to the changes of the employment market has resulted in a gradual increase in demand for higher education qualifications. According to Trow's model (1973), how the Age Participation Index (API) relates to the massification of higher education can be understood in terms of elite, mass and universal systems of higher education (see Neave and van Vught, 1991; Scott, 1995, 1998; Smith and Webster, 1997; Kogan and Hanney, 2000). From this perspective, 15 per cent represents the boundary between an elite and a mass system, and 40 per cent, between a mass and a universal system. In these terms, Britain's higher education sector ceased to be an elite system in the mid 1980s, ten years after its French counterpart. As demonstrated elsewhere (Chabert, 2001), and in agreement with other observers (for example Scott, 1995), the linearity of this model only partially reflects the reality: "[The notion of massification] imposes a linear regularity on developments which are neither linear nor regular" (Scott, 1995:1). Where and when massification happened is a determinant of the nature of this massification. Themes dominating public policies of the last thirty years of the twentieth century have been examined in chapter 1 and the main aim of this section is two-fold: to tease out differences and similarities of the two sectors, and assess the extent to which policies supporting the development of the knowledge-based economy have contributed to the transformation of both sectors. Consequently, to get a better understanding of the nature of the massification of higher education in each country, the following aspects of each sector are now compared: changes in participation in terms of overall enrolments and types of institutions; changes in distribution of enrolments between under-graduate and

post-graduate programmes; origin of students (for the UK) and types of baccalauréat (for France).

The UK Context

As Figure 2.2 below shows, although there has been a continuous increase over the last three decades, it is really during the 1990s that growth was most pronounced with enrolments nearly doubling in ten years to reach almost two million (short of some 150,000 enrolments) in 2000/01.

Figure 2.2: Total enrolments in UK higher education institutions between 1970/01 and 2000/01



Source: Figures before 1994 are rounded up and taken from the Times Higher Education Supplement, other figures are from HESA.

As stated earlier, higher education in the UK is today a compound of different types of institutions and to see how this massification has been felt across the sector will help to illustrate the present situation. Although one frequently hears and reads about the

'Russell Group'¹¹ and the 'post-92 universities'¹² also called 'ex-polytechnics', these groups of institutions are not separately listed in HESA's tables. Table 2.5 below distinguishes enrolments for the following sub-groups of institutions: the Russell Group, the 'old' universities¹³, the thirty-three ex-polytechnics listed above, and any other institutions which do not belong to any of the above sub-groups but are counted in HESA's figures. In order to show both, changes in proportions across types of institutions and increases in enrolments, two types of data are presented: firstly a percentage of the overall total, secondly, in brackets, the number of enrolments per type of institution.

Table 2.5: Enrolment figures, in percentage and in absolute numbers [shown in brackets], by types of higher education institutions, in the UK, between 1980 and 2000 (numbers have been rounded up to the third significant number)

Institutions	1980/81	1991/92	1995/96	1997/98	2000/01
Russell Group	21.2% [169,747]	14.7% [175,975]	19.4% [333,779]	19.8% [357,024]	20.7% [412,320]
'Old' universities	17.1% [136,867]	12.7% [152,103]	20.6% [354,003]	21.2% [381,883]	21.1% [420,140]
Ex-polytechnics	25.8% [206,335]	33.4% [401,255]	33.1% [568,683]	33% [593,843]	32.9% [654,390]
Other institutions	35.9% (*) [287,051] (*)	39.2% (*) [470,667] (*)	27% [463,629]	26% [467,314]	25.3% [503,775]
Total	100% [800,000]	100% [1,200,000]	100% [1,720,094]	100% [1,800,064]	100% [1,990,625]

Source: 1980/81 and 1991/92 cited in Pratt (1997:26); 1995/96 to 2000/01 from HESA.

(*): estimated figures.

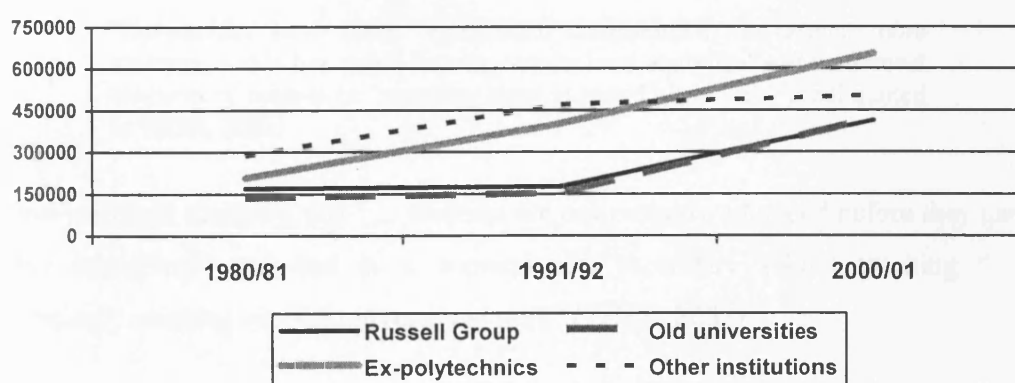
¹¹ Nineteen universities belong to the Russell Group. In England: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, King's College London, Leeds, Liverpool, London School of Economics and Political Science, Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield, Southampton, University College London and Warwick. In Wales: Cardiff. In Scotland: Edinburgh and Glasgow. In Northern Ireland: Queen's, Belfast.

¹² Thirty-five pre-92 universities which do not belong to the Russell Group form the 'old' universities group. In England: Aston, Bath, Bradford, Brunel, City University, Durham, East Anglia, Essex, Exeter, Hull, Keele, Kent, Lancaster, Leicester, London Business School, Loughborough, Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, Reading, Salford, Surrey, Sussex, York. In Wales: Aberystwyth, Bangor, Lampeter, University of Wales College of Medicine, Swansea. In Scotland: Aberdeen, Dundee, Heriot-Watt, St-Andrews, Stirling and Strathclyde. In Northern Ireland: Belfast and Ulster.

¹³ Those two sub-groups (Russell Group and 'old' universities) are constituted of institutions which have always been universities and therefore were counted in official statistics before 1994/95.

Enrolments in the Russell Group have more than doubled in twenty years (1980-2000) with an extremely rapid growth between 1991-1995 and 1997-2000, and have maintained around 20 per cent of overall enrolments. The 'old universities' group has seen its figures tripling in twenty years (especially, again, during the early 1990s) and its proportion of overall enrolments has increased from 17.1 per cent in 1980 to 21.1 per cent in 2000. If ex-polytechnics have maintained an overall proportion of 32-33 per cent of total enrolments since 1991, they have, in real figures, more than tripled their enrolments in two decades. It is interesting to note that with nearly the same number of institutions, the density of student population is much higher in ex-polytechnics than in 'old universities' (in 2000, there were an extra 230,000 students enrolled in ex-polytechnics compared with 'old universities'). Finally, as far as colleges grouped under the fourth heading are concerned, although one can see an increase in the number of enrolments, the proportion of enrolments over the last five years has decreased from 27 per cent to 25.3 per cent. These trends are better captured with Figure 2.3 below which clearly shows which type of institutions has mostly benefited from the massification of the sector. The chart also plainly shows the split 40/60 between pre-92 and post-92 institutions.

Figure 2.3: Enrolment figures, by types of higher education institutions, in the UK, between 1980 and 2000



To sum up, increases in student numbers were felt across the whole sector but significantly more so in non-research led universities. Therefore it can be said that higher education policies related to the knowledge economy have resulted in a major increase of the number of students on vocationally oriented programmes. In terms of the overall distribution of students between pre-92 and post-92 institutions, it appears that, over the two decades studied, the split 40/60 (in favour of the latter group) slightly moved to 42/58 reflecting the increase of enrolments for the Russell Group (from 19.4 per cent to 20.7 per cent between 1995 and 2000) and the diminution of enrolments for the 'other institutions' group (from 27 per cent to 25.3 per cent for the same period). However, this is relatively marginal and, thus, it can be said that, despite the overall increase in numbers, massification has not altered students distribution across types of institutions.

The expansion of higher education in Britain has had bad press. When New Labour came to power, the press made the most of the Prime Minister's exhortation to the government to concentrate on "Education, education, education". To try to adjust to the increasing number of students, better use of existing buildings was made with more flexible timetables and construction and/or acquisition of new buildings. As far as staff were concerned, between 1994 and 2000, 13,704 full-time academic staff were recruited whilst the number of part-time academic staff doubled, from 12,020 to 23,535 (HESA, 2002). Comments such as this one are found in the specialised press:

"Universities have made "intellectual compromises" to attract more students ... this has meant leaving out the hard analytical and theoretical elements of courses or "recasting them in sound bites." (F. Furedi quoted in THES, 2002)

Voices are heard claiming that "... students are not properly educated before they get [to higher education]" and that as a consequence, secondary school teaching "... is increasingly creeping into the university system" (THES, 2002).

One last set of data is required to better understand participation in higher education: the spread of enrolments between under-graduate and post-graduate and between students' domicile. For these, the period studied has been extended to 2007/08 in order to cover a

longer stretch of time so that trends are more visible. This is necessary because the criteria employed here are likely to evolve over a medium term period. Firstly, the split of enrolments between under-graduate and post-graduate studies across the entire sector is shown (Table 2.6).

Table 2.6: Percentage of enrolment in higher education, per level of study, in the UK, between 1996/97 and 2007/08

	1996/97	2001/02	2007/08
Under-graduates	79%	78%	78%
Post-graduates	21%	22%	22%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: HESA

Over three-quarters of enrolments are at undergraduate level and if this proportion has slightly decreased in the decade studied, this is marginal and appears to be stable. This evenness during this period means that both levels have evenly benefited from the growth of student numbers.

Finally, HESA records student enrolments according to their home address and identifies three geographical zones, the table below summarises these records.

Table 2.7: Percentage of enrolments per domicile, in higher education, in the UK, between 1996/97 and 2007/08

	1996/97	2001/02	2007/08
UK	89%	88%	85%
Other EU	5%	4%	5%
Overseas	6%	7%	10%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: HESA

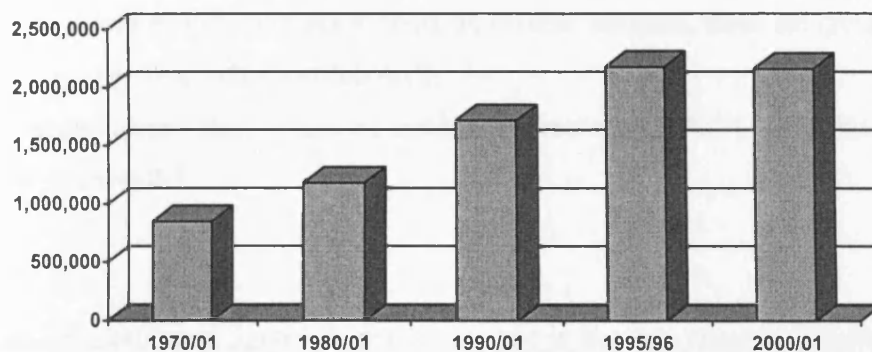
Whilst enrolments from continental European students stayed at a stable level, the portion of UK students slightly dropped to the benefit of overseas recruitments. As this happened during a period of expansion, the diminution of the proportion of UK enrolments means a comparable number of enrolments over the 10-year period.

The French Context

At first glance, in terms of enrolment figures, the situation in France appears similar to that of the UK, seeming to follow an identical trend of expansion with increasing numbers. However closer examination shows firstly that in absolute terms the level of participation has always been higher in France than in the UK: in 1970/71, 850,600 students were enrolled in higher education, a figure only reached a decade later in Britain. It also shows, interestingly, that enrolment levels in both countries are converging. In 2000/01 there were 2,161,064 students in French higher education and 1,990,625 students in UK higher education and it is likely that this convergence will progress as France is forecasting a slow but continuous decrease over the next decade and Britain is planning to continue its expansion of the sector.

The chart (Figure 2.4) below shows that annual enrolment figures hugely increased until 1995/96. After this date, figures started to stagnate at around 2,150,000 with a slight increase or decrease from one year to another. This is due to a regular diminution of the birth rate (1975-82: 14.24 per thousand, 1982-90: 13.86 per thousand, 1990-99: 12.76 per thousand (INSEE, 2004)). This decline touched all 26 *académies* (with some slight variations) but did not reduce the traditional concentration of students around Paris (the *académies* of Créteil, Paris and Versailles, where still a quarter of student population was enrolled). As far as subjects are concerned, this recent continuous annual loss of students has affected all subjects except economics (+3.3 per cent in 2001/02) and engineering (+4.0 per cent in 2001/02); modern languages suffered the most (-6.2 per cent in 2001/02).

Figure 2.4: Total enrolments in France higher education institutions between 1970/01 and 2000/01



Source: Ministère de la Jeunesse, de l'Education Nationale et de la Recherche.

How even has this expansion been? Answers to this question are given in terms of types of institutions, geographical repartition and schemes. The examination of each of these sides of French higher education will also provide, it is hoped, a useful insight into the way higher education is embedded in French society.

As in the UK, under the broad term *enseignement supérieur* (higher education), different types of institutions are gathered. They include:

- Universities.
- IUT (*Instituts Universitaires Technologiques*) which deliver diplomas (two-year courses).
- STS (*Sections de Techniciens Supérieurs*) which are based in secondary schools and deliver vocationally orientated diplomas (two-year courses). It is likely that these correspond to the UK Further Education sector.
- CPGE (*Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Ecoles*) which offer two-year preparation courses for highly selective entry examinations to the *Grandes Ecoles*.

- IUFM (*Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres*) where future primary and secondary school teachers are trained.
- Any institutions which would not fit in any of the above, mainly engineering and private business schools (in official statistics, these are grouped under the heading 'other institutions').

The spread across these types of institutions between 1970/71 and 2001/02 is shown below in Table 2.8.

Table 2.8: Enrolment figures, in percentage and in absolute numbers [shown in brackets], by types of higher education institutions, in France, between 1970 and 2001 (numbers have been rounded up to the third significant number) - (France and overseas departments)

Institutions	1970/71	1980/81	1990/01	1997/98	2001/02
Universities	74.9% [637,000]	68.1% [804,400]	64.6% [1,108,500]	62.1% [1,331,200]	59.5% [1,286,000]
IUT	2.8% [24,200]	4.5% [53,700]	4.3% [74,300]	5.3% [112,900]	5.5% [118,100]
STS (*)	3.2% [26,800](1)	5.8% [67,900]	11.9% [204,900]	11.4% [245,200]	11.4% [246,900]
CPGE	3.8% [32,600](1)	3.4% [40,100]	3.8% [64,400]	3.4% [73,100]	3.3% [70,700]
Other institutions	15.3% (1) [130,000]	18.2% [215,000]	15.4% [264,900]	17.8% [381,600]	20.3% [438,000]
Total	100% [850,600]	100% [1,181,100]	100% [1,717,100]	100% [2,144,000]	100% [2,159,700]

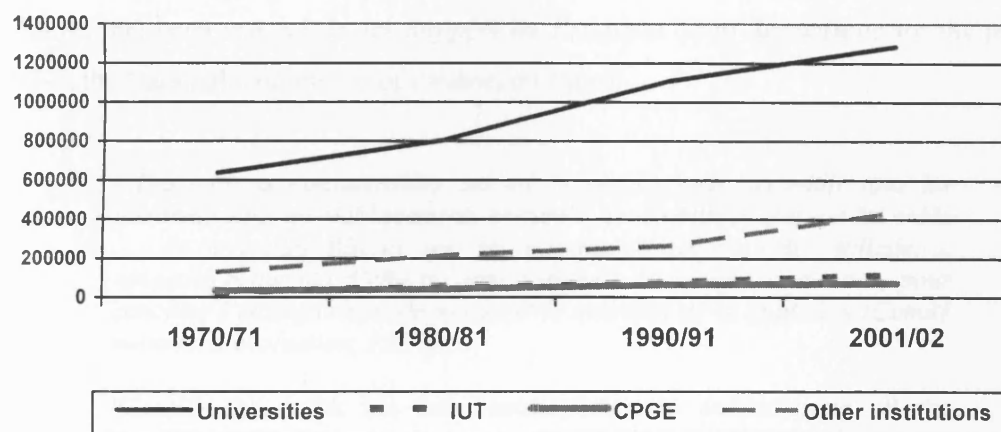
Source: Ministère de la Jeunesse, de l'Education Nationale et de la Recherche – (1) official estimations

(*) As said above, although STS would probably fall under the Further education sector in the UK, figures are listed in this table to fit with data from French authorities

The regular increase, particularly during the 1980s and until the mid-1990s mentioned earlier, can clearly be seen in Table 2.6: each type of institution follows this pattern. However, this decomposition into types of institutions brings to light key characteristics of French higher education. The first directly concerns universities: although enrolments steadily increased until 1997/98, the proportion of young people choosing universities as

a means of getting a higher education qualification has steadily decreased – though universities are still the preferred destination for a majority of students. If in 1970/71, three quarters of them went to universities, thirty years later, this proportion is down to 60 per cent. In other words, massification of higher education in France has progressively altered the repartition of enrolments, reducing the proportion of students attending universities in favour of more vocational types of programmes. In terms of enrolment trends (pictured below in Figure 2.5), if the growth is clearly apparent for universities, it also shows how popular institutions such as business and engineering schools have become during the period.

Figure 2.5: Enrolment figures, by types of higher education institutions (STS not included), in France, between 1970 and 2001



Such expansion has not been without a cost. Not surprisingly over the past twenty years, key components of the sector such as resources, plants and staffing have become increasingly under pressure as more students have entered higher education. Shortage of space became a very acute problem in the late 1980s with many '*rentrées universitaires*' hitting the media headlines with stories of students attending lectures on the floor of overcrowded theatres. During the 1988 presidential election campaign, the Left, then in power, made education their first priority and once re-elected, the prime minister, Michel

Rocard, nominated Lionel Jospin as minister of the *Education Nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports* (Jospin remained at this post until 1992 and, in 1997, became prime minister). In 1989, his programme *Université 2000* was adopted and the equivalent of 6,40 billion euros was allocated (Le Monde, 1999a)¹⁴. Claiming to foresee what higher education would need in the future (hence its name), this programme was primarily designed to address the shortage of space. U2000 planned the construction of numerous new sites in regions where higher education institutions had been either absent or very scarce. The rationale was that it should be possible to find a higher education institution anywhere in the territory within a distance of 150 km (95 miles) with a view to reduce the geographical differences mentioned above. However, moving universities closer to local communities was also a means to render higher education more accessible to a wider population. Whilst this U2000 programme may sound well planned, it appears that, perhaps because of problems with the research and the urgency of the situation which characterises this somewhat hectic period, following this expensive plan, the ‘wrong’ buildings had been erected. In its *Rapport au Président de la République* for the period 1995-9, the National Committee of Evaluation stated:

« Des travaux considérables ont été accomplis pour accueillir tous les étudiants dans les établissements existants, des établissements ont été créés ..., de nouvelles filières ont été ouvertes.... Le contexte, difficile, a nécessité beaucoup d'efforts, dans l'urgence et à tous les niveaux, pour concilier l'enseignement de masse et le maintien de la qualité. » (Comité national d'évaluation, 1999:9)

“Considerable work has been accomplished to accommodate all the students in existing institutions, institutions have been created ..., new schemes have been open The difficult context necessitated a lot of effort, as a matter of urgency and at all levels, to reconcile mass education whilst maintaining quality.”

The Report then gave examples of errors made; for instance, the creation of inappropriate types of institutions or increased number of admissions in areas where the employment market did not warrant it. The employment market mostly needed technicians (STS graduates whose courses are based in secondary schools) and U2000 mostly built new IUTs.

¹⁴ Half of this budget came from the ministry and half from the regions (Le Monde, 1999b).

With regard to staff, between 1992 and 2000, 10,430 new full-time academic staff were appointed (a 27.3 per cent increase) (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2002a), but this does not seem to have really improved the situation if one looks back again at the media headlines of the time. Some claimed that this did not prevent working conditions from deteriorating, reducing the lecturer to a 'mere social studentminder':

« [L'université est] un lieu où l'on ne produit plus de savoir, mais où l'on se contente de répéter très mal celui qu'on a acquis il y a longtemps. »
(J.F. Spitz, quoted in Le Monde, 2000a)

"[Universities are] a place where knowledge is no longer produced but rather where one contents oneself with repeating, badly, what one would have learnt long ago."

Last but not least is the problem of the 30 per cent to 40 per cent dropout rate in the *premier cycle* (first two years) of universities. The blame often falls upon both lecturers accused of being, on the whole, pedagogically badly prepared for the variety of students they have, and upon students believed to reach higher education insufficiently equipped (Le Monde, 2000b).

The previous analysis of French participation considered the entire higher education sector. The focus is now narrowed to the 85 universities, particularly on the changes between 1990/91 and 2001/02 in terms of subjects and *cycles*.

The intention is to match data collected for the UK as much as possible. However, this is not always feasible mainly because official statistics do not always record data according to the same criteria. A good example of this are data considering under-graduate and post-graduate enrolments. As will be shown below in order to analyse the French equivalent, some sifting through a range of qualifications at different levels was necessary. Also, in some cases, for example, for enrolments per domicile as above, there is no clear correspondence from one country to another. As Coulon and Paivandi (2003) explain, some countries consider nationality as the only factor to define the origin of a student although a student could be a foreign national and not a permanent resident, or could come from a foreign family living in the country. However, it so happens that this

particular indicator would not actually contribute to a better understanding of the context of the *campus numériques* mainly because the initiative was not primarily designed for overseas students. Conversely, finding out what happens before university entrance in France, i.e. the *baccalauréat*, is meaningful as will be explained below.

The table below (Table 2.9) shows the distribution of students per *cycle*. The Anglo-Saxon binary division undergraduate/postgraduate does not strictly speaking apply to French universities where qualifications are grouped into three *cycles*¹⁵:

- *Premier Cycle* refers to the first two years after the *baccalauréat* and leads to a diploma of higher education in general studies (*Diplôme d'Etudes Universitaires Générales (DEUG)*),
- *Second Cycle* lasts either one year (to gain a BA or BSc, *Licence*) or two years (to gain a MA or MSc, *Maîtrise*),
- *Troisième Cycle* leads either to research (MPhil and PhD, *DEA* and *Doctorat*) or high level of specialisation in a profession (*Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures Spécialisées (DESS)*, no equivalent in the UK).

Table 2.9: Percentage of students enrolled in universities (including IUTs), per *cycle* (France and overseas departments)

	1990/91	1995/96	2001/02
<i>Premier Cycle</i>	53%	53%	50%
<i>Second Cycle</i>	32%	33%	34%
<i>Troisième Cycle</i>	15%	14%	16%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: Ministère de la Jeunesse, de l'Education Nationale et de la Recherche

Figures show a diminution of enrolments at *premier cycle* level, a fairly stable *second cycle* and an increasing *troisième cycle*. This reflects the steady decrease of student

¹⁵ Although the application of the Bologna Declaration has meant that from September 2006 onward, universities complied with the 3-5-8 pattern.

enrolments in French universities (shown above in Figure 2.4) caused by a decreasing number of *bacheliers* going to university since 1995/96. Universities are increasingly seen in France as providers of higher degrees, whilst other higher education institutions, which offer more vocational programmes, increasingly attract *bacheliers*. This calls for more details on this qualification obtained at the end of upper secondary education.

The *baccalauréat* qualification, being the only route to higher education, conditions and shapes the *premier cycle*, and is thus a significant indicator. In 1989, the *Loi d'Orientation* (1989) set up the target of 80 per cent of an age cohort to reach *baccalauréat* level by 2000. The API for 18 year olds has doubled between 1980 and 1994 to reach, in 2001, 70 per cent. Of these candidates to the *baccalauréat*, 62% were successful in 2001. There are three different types of *baccalauréat*: general (which can be taken in literature and languages, or socio-economic sciences or science and mathematics) – which has a strong academic content – and technological and professional – both with a more vocational orientation. The table below (Table 2.10) shows the evolution of student numbers in each of these *baccalauréat* sections over a period of ten years, between 1990 and 2000.

Table 2.10: Student numbers per *baccalauréat* section between 1990 and 2000 (France and overseas departments)

	1990	1995	2000
General <i>baccalauréat</i>	64%	59%	52%
Technological <i>baccalauréat</i>	30%	28%	30%
Professional <i>baccalauréat</i>	6%	13%	18%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: Ministère de la Jeunesse, de l'Education Nationale et de la Recherche

As can be seen, the general *baccalauréat* has seen its numbers decrease whilst numbers of professional *baccalauréat* students has tripled in the space of a decade. This explains why fewer *bacheliers* carry on in university: although, in principle, all *baccalauréat*

holders are eligible to go to university, very few non-general students do (they favour shorter and vocational higher education curricula).

To sum up this sub-section, it appears that, at the turn of 2000, following the huge increase which occurred over some fifteen years until the mid 1990s, the French post-compulsory education sector faced a new situation. By and large, this expansion did not benefit universities but rather shorter courses and more vocationally orientated institutions. In other words, the increasing number of students reaching the *baccalauréat* opted for courses which enabled them to quickly access the employment market as opposed to longer academic routes.

Comparison

The decades leading to 2000 saw an unprecedented growth in the higher education sector of both countries, though at a faster pace in the UK, as pointed out earlier. How have these trends affected 'universities', i.e. institutions which existed before policies aiming to extend this sector of post-compulsory education (in the UK, before the 1992 Act, and in France, before the creation of new types of institutions such as IUT)? In the space of twenty years, enrolments in the Russell Group and 'old' universities have more than doubled (from 306,614 in 1980/81 to 832,460 in 2000/01), whilst in France, in the space of thirty years, enrolments in universities have doubled (from 637,000 in 1970/71 to 1,286,000 in 2001/02). This growth is proportionally similar (though, once again, over a longer period of time in France) but quantities differ: enrolments, in France, have been greater in the UK throughout the period. This results in a diametrically opposite split across the whole sector: 40 per cent of UK enrolments in 'universities', against 60 per cent in French universities. Significantly, these proportions have remained similar in the UK during the expansion and thus it can be said that policies supporting the massification of the UK sector have reinforced the dominance of institutions providing more vocationally-oriented programmes, often shorter than academic ones. As far as France is concerned, it has been shown that the split between the two types of institutions gradually changed, seeing a progressive diminution of the proportion of universities in favour of

non-university institutions. It is, therefore, clear that, in France, expansion has altered the spread across types of institutions. Comparison in terms of the split between undergraduate and post-graduate enrolments cannot be done because the French '*Second cycle*' is somewhere between these two categories and so does not allow correspondence. It is also relevant to point out some strong national characteristics such as the more integrated nature of the French upper secondary phase and the way it conditions the nature of higher education recruitment (engineering a decrease in numbers of *baccalauréats* leading to academic studies). In the UK, the drive behind the near doubling of numbers of overseas students, though the French equivalent is not available, is likely to constitute a national characteristic linked to the dominance of the English language in the world and the active role of supra-national agencies such as the British Council.

These comparative findings need to be read in light of the analyses conducted in the previous chapter, in particular the idea that the economies of developed countries increasingly require a highly skilled workforce with 'knowledge experts' able to work within a new 'global' environment. The number of students doubled in the UK in twenty years (from 800,000 to 1,990,625), and more than doubled in France in thirty years (from 850,600 to 2,159,700). New types of institutions, offering programmes fundamentally different from traditional academic ones, were either created (as in France) or amalgamated with existing ones (as in the UK). As a result, higher education, in both countries, now includes a wider than ever before range of institutions. The whole issue, as Bell (1974) pointed out, revolves around the kind of programmes these institutions should offer and whose priorities they should serve. The above findings indicate that, in the UK, 60 per cent of higher education enrolments are in non-traditional academic institutions and thus on programmes which tend to be shorter than degrees (such as two-year undergraduate courses like Higher National Certificates (HNC), Higher National Diplomas (HND) and Diplomas in Higher Education (DipHE)). Typical areas of studies tend to be art and design; business; construction and the built environment; distribution; health and social care; hospitality and catering; information technology; land and countryside; leisure and tourism; etc. In France, the same trend towards more vocationally orientated programmes can be observed (business school-type of provision

in particular saw an important rise in numbers). Moreover, the decrease of the proportion of enrolments in universities (from 75 per cent of overall enrolments in 1970 to 60 per cent, thirty years later) and the gradual re-shaping of the baccalauréat intake (in ten years, between 1990 and 2000, the proportion of students leaving secondary schools with a 'general baccalauréat' (i.e. leading to traditional academic programmes) has decreased from 64 per cent to 52 per cent) have also contributed to create this gradual shift to short, vocational curricula.

This comparison would not be complete without a consideration of the financial findings obtained in the previous section. During the period studied, and this will be detailed in the next chapter, although economic growth in the UK was more dynamic than in France, expenditure per student in the UK diminished between 1995 and 2001 (whilst in France, it increased despite a slight decline in student numbers). It is relevant, however, to note that amounts spent per student have consistently been higher in the UK than in France (see Table 2.2 and Table 2.4).

Discussion and Research Questions

This chapter has identified and compared the main characteristics of both higher education systems in light of the discussion of the coming of the information society. In particular how this so-called new era justified recent changes in state run areas of the two countries studied. As stated at the outset of this chapter, the intention was to show how these two dimensions were intrinsically linked and how data gathered for the present chapter reflect the extent to which these background ideas and policy trends have progressively contributed to shape post-compulsory education. This last section re-visits previous analyses conducted in chapter 1 in light of the present findings and aims to provide a direction to the research ahead in the form of a few central research questions which will determine the empirical evidence considered in due course.

The increase in student numbers has meant an increasing financial dependence on the state and thus a greater demand for accountability. Endemic problems of funding have necessitated a new, tighter kind of management especially as universities became large and complex organisations. The progressive change in the provision of courses and curricula which has occurred in order to reflect the shift toward the new 'knowledge economy' (Levidow 2002, Robertson 2005), has had various consequences: student diversity and wider range of courses offered meant new, tighter quality control systems were devised together with credit systems, teaching and learning strategies, etc. (Scott 1998), leading to a progressive de-professionalisation of academic work (Trow 2002). Academic areas considered as being less 'relevant' are seeing their funding and number of students falling, in some cases leading to closure of departments (philosophy, chemistry, languages, for example), whilst business, management and IT programmes have enjoyed a growing popularity. But this is not happening smoothly; if universities have progressively become a mass system in their public structures, their past 'private instincts' continue to live, fuelled by the sector's ability to resist changes and retain traditions (for example, Scott 1995).

Earlier discussion showed the origins and rationale on which higher education policy trends which have dominated the 1990s are based. The powerful logic of the idea of the coming of a new era has fuelled reforms of public services in general and of higher education in particular. By and large, the rhetoric which has supported this logic has adopted a typical globalist approach to globalization which unconditionally accepts the conventional wisdom that global changes sweep away institutions which 'fail to move to the information society'. For Robins and Webster (2002), such narrative of 'decline and fall' is strong in the rhetoric of states claiming that those who 'fail' will 'not be able to compete' and thus have to change in order to survive. This is a typical futurological account of societal developments, as identified by Webster (2006), and it is often accompanied by a technological set of ideas arguing that technology will solve a wide range of problems (such as, in the context of higher education, enhancing pedagogy, giving access to new forms of learning experiences, providing learning opportunities to disadvantaged groups, etc.). Interestingly, as seen above, surveys of existing activity in

this area of higher education tend to point to the rather limited impact of digital technology on learning and teaching and a tendency to use them for on-campus provision rather than for distance learning.

As far as the role of supra-national agencies is concerned, the analysis conducted above has shown two central elements which characterise the strategy of the states of developed countries in general, and of the UK and France, in particular. If these agencies can be a source of income, countries have their own set up designed to promote their higher education abroad and thus support recruitment of overseas students (albeit not necessarily highly efficiently). But if they are perceived as a potential threat to the national economy, as it would be the case if higher education was to be included in international commercial agreements such as the GATS, then states have shown how this can motivate their decision to limit their involvement. Yet, when arguments of potential economic benefits are sufficiently convincing, as is the case with the Bologna Process, then, even if fundamental elements of higher education are seen as no longer fitting in (as was the case for French higher education qualifications), states are prepared to adapt their policies according to supra-national pressures.

Thus it can be said that the creation of new types of higher education institutions and new types of qualifications originate from the dominant rhetoric on the increasingly obsolete nature of education systems. And as higher education has progressively been given a fundamental role to play in the transformation of states, their adapting to their new role has been high on the political agenda of their respective government. Revisions and tensions generated by these deep structural changes can be seen in the frequent re-shuffling of ministries in charge of higher education and the successive re-designs of governmental priorities within this area of post-compulsory education.

To answer then the question posed at the outset of this chapter, as to what the state of higher education in the UK and in France was at the turn of 2000 and how policies designed to foster the development of the knowledge-based economy had transformed both sectors, it is argued that beyond the obvious surge of enrolments, massification of

higher education, in both countries, shares some central features particularly in terms of changes in the nature of provision now considered as constituting 'higher education'. It has been shown in particular how, in the relatively short space of twenty years (1980-2000) and with regard to the overall activity of the sector, traditional academic provision was either maintained in a similar proportion or reduced, whilst provision not traditionally associated with higher education (more vocationally focussed syllabi and shorter, flexible curricula) gradually expanded as institutions diversified their programmes and qualifications. Increasingly new sources of income have to be sought to face growing levels of expenditure for which, as seen, states are not matching funding levels.

Such changes progressively alter the purpose of universities toward preparation for occupations, a process Grubb and Lazerson (2006) call 'vocationalism'. Policies underpinning these changes are based, as seen in the previous chapter, on a simplified and narrow understanding of human capital which, increasingly, pushes higher education and its students to a pursuit of credentials. Students increasingly focus on the end 'product' of their studies, the qualifications they will 'sell' on the employment market; updating knowledge and skills becomes 'a technical formality' (Brown *et al.*, 2001).

If this detailed comparison of both higher education sectors sets the scene out of which the two compared policy initiatives emerged, to fully understand the nature of the central issues this comparative framework is beginning to reveal, it is essential to bear in mind the theoretical discussion conducted previously. In other words, in order to explain why and how these specific realities of existing universities have developed in the last thirty years and have seen the rise of policies on 'virtual universities', some of the debates currently going on in the fields of sociology, education and politics need to be brought to the forefront of the analysis.

Thus these comparative findings need to be analysed and compared in light of the fact that current policy trends influencing higher education policy-making are based on the same recurrent discourses related to the coming of a new era in which a knowledge-based

economy is the key. In such context, the lack of precision in some of the key arguments articulated in these policies is not unproblematic and has to be born in mind when formulating the central research questions of this thesis. Finally, how supra-national and national policy-making follow cycles and how this could structure the comparison of both initiatives is also a significant factor for the present research.

In short, these comparative findings, in light of the preceding theoretical analysis, hopefully raise the following central research questions:

- How were policies on virtual universities planned and implemented in the UK and in France? What policy actors and stakeholders were involved in the formulation of initial policy-making? How were policies received by the respective higher education sectors?
- What similarities and differences were apparent in the policy-making processes between the UK and France? How does the development of 'virtual' higher education provision relate to this? What were the consequences for subsequent cycles of policy-making?
- What can 'virtual university' policy-making tell us about the relationship between the higher education sector and the state? How can the similarities and dissimilarities between the two countries' virtual universities be explained?
- In what ways have higher education policies in the UK and France been affected by ideas about globalisation, the 'knowledge-based economy', etc.? How does this relate to the virtual university?

Chapter 3

Methods

“The combination of a new global economic order, with an accompanying policy elite, that frequently, seems to sing from the same hymn sheet, makes the elevation of comparative educational studies to a position of intellectual prominence an imperative.” (Lauder, 2000: 465)

As pointed out in the literature review, the discourse on the knowledge economy, based on the idea that individual and national prosperity rests on skills and knowledge (Becker, 2002), has had, over the last fifteen years, serious implications for education policy and practice. In the midst of intensifying global economic competition, education progressively moved to the central stage of politics, bearing the responsibility for future national wealth. As a result, national policies on education became increasingly similar across Western countries with education systems tending to converge in some key respects (Ball, 2008). Moreover, as national economies claimed to increasingly rely on technology-intense industries and innovation (for analysis demonstrating the shallowness of the official argument, see Brown *et al.* 2001), higher education assumed centrality in the rhetoric of the ‘transformation’ of states. In the context of reforms centred on the ‘transformation’ and ‘modernisation’ of states, the promotion and development of higher education provision based on digital technology became increasingly salient for governments. These global trends in arguments – and the recurrent rhetoric on reforms they tend to come with (Ball, 2008) – lead to a convergence in policy rhetoric. Among other things, this thesis is seeking to assess the extent to which such convergence leads to a convergence in

education practice and outcome. To accomplish this, a thorough comparative investigation of a particular aspect of higher education which encapsulates these policy imperatives is required. The structure of the present research is therefore based on a cross-national comparison of two virtual universities which unfolded at the same time and in fairly comparable countries.

This chapter outlines the comparative research perspective adopted in this thesis, the qualitative methods involved, details of the research process and, crucially, some reflection on the research experience. To facilitate understanding of the later chapters, this chapter provides details of interviewees and documents which form the corpus of the research data.

1. Comparative Research Method

This section explains the principles of cross-national comparative research, in particular methods researchers have developed to face challenges caused by the increasing influence of globalization. The implications this has on the design of the research framework is then examined. Finally, reasons behind the selection of the two countries studied are presented.

Challenges met by Comparative Researchers

As Inkeles and Sasaki (1996) argue, comparative social research aims to develop concepts and generalizations based on identified similarities and differences among the social entities being compared. Thus it is central to identify the characteristic values, ideologies, ways of thinking and intrinsic elements of these social entities, be they societies, cultures or nations. How does this fit with the convergent policy trends identified in the previous two chapters and the potential homogenisation they bring with them? Indeed this question has generated new areas of enquiry in the field of comparative education research (for example Jarvis, 2000; Broadfoot, 2003), to the point of “giving [it] a new lease of life” (Dale, 2005:117). A good indicator of the growing interest generated by these issues is the relatively recent emergence of dedicated academic journals such as *Compare* and *Comparative Education* (based in

the UK) and Comparative Education Review (in the US) – both launched in the early 1990s.

Dale (2005) sums up the problem when he asks:

“What is now to be compared in comparative education? What are the comparable objects of its research?” (p. 123)

His main concern is about comparability in a world in which realities and their blurred boundaries require constant re-defining; a world where states are no longer autonomous and where centrally taken decisions no longer imply that power lies centrally.

The principle applied to the selection of the project’s interviewees attempted to capture something of Dales’ problematic agenda and therefore partly originates from his work done in 2005 on governance and comparative education. Dale aimed to capture the new configuration at play in the governance of education in the context of globalization and proposed a ‘pluri-scalar’ approach to emphasise the fact that policy-making in education was no longer uniquely under the control of states. This approach has some commonality with Patton’s (1990) “stratified purposeful sampling”. When he listed the sixteen possible principles or “strategies for purposefully selecting information-rich cases” (p. 169), he pointed to how this specific approach facilitates comparisons. Indeed, the principle of identifying sub-groups forms the basis of Dale’s and Patton’s approaches but the framework of the former takes the idea into the specific field of educational governance. This layered approach to the selection of interviewees is thus narrowly framed and the risk of getting a ‘haphazard’ range of informants (Wengraf, 2001) reduced to its minimum. The strength of the comparative approach lies in the consistency which is determined by the requirement to gather evidence from equivalent sources. The table below shows the different levels identified as having had a role in the policy-making process and the implementation of the initiatives. This ‘pluri-scalar’ approach (to use Dale’s phrase) drove the selection of the interviewees.

Table 3.1: Identification of the different levels involved in the initiatives, from macro to micro levels

Levels	Institutions/Stakeholders
Supra-national level	European Union <i>Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) [France]</i>
National level	Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – HEFCE & DfES, HEFCW, Scottish Higher Education Funding Council [UK] – <i>Ministère de l'Education Nationale</i> (MEN), DATAR [France] National implementation team : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Steering group, Holding company, Operating company [UK] – MEN, <i>Sous-direction des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication pour l'Enseignement Selection panel, Evaluations</i> (SDTICE) [France] Partners : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Private sector [UK] – <i>Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance</i> (CNED) [France]
Institutional level	Higher education institutions represented by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals [UK] – <i>Conférence des Présidents d'Université</i> [France]
School/ Department level	Design and running of courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Academics [UK and France]

A slightly different angle to the problem of identifying homogenisation brought about by globalization is that pointed out by Vulliamy (2004) who places the emphasis on culturally distinctive traits of states and the fact that they increasingly tend to be seen as peripheral phenomena. He points out the impact that such an approach could have on comparative educational methods:

“This global discourse threatens to undermine the findings and analyses of comparative education research by either completely disregarding cultural context or relegating culture merely to existing as an extraneous variable to be statistically analysed.” (p. 277)

To reiterate, it is the task of the comparative researcher to design research protocols in such ways that what characterises the social entities being compared is observable, analysable and comparable.

Vulliamy (2004) argues that with the growing strength of the rhetoric on globalization the vital role played by culture (i.e. those identifiable characteristics which make up the identity of a state) is progressively being undermined and its role in mediating global policies depreciated. This threat is also flagged up by commentators for whom comparative research in education is in danger of being reduced to a mere technique used for a 'league tables' type of comparison (Novoa and Yariv-Mashal, 2003) or a simple juxtaposition (Cockrill *et al.*, 1999; Musselin, 2001). With this in mind, the in-depth analysis of the two policy initiatives presented in this research has been designed to identify the similarities and differences of both higher education sectors in order to assess how common policy trends translate once filtered through the intrinsic elements of the two cultures.

A rapid survey of the rationales given in cross-national studies in education in which France is involved shows that, roughly, there are three types of approach. Either the choices of strikingly different countries is presented as essential to illuminate the purpose of the research. For example, for Menendez Weidman (2001), the two educational systems studied, France and USA, were selected for their diametrical opposition in order to understand the structural changes that occurred from policy convergence; DeAngelis (1998) selected the Australian and the French higher education systems because they were "in many respects, nearly polar opposites in political system, politics, and higher education policy reform" (p.127). His aim was to argue in favour of diversity and resistance to globalizing uniformity. For a second type of approach, the justification of the choice of countries is somewhat scant. For example, Carpentier (2006) who compares the British and French approaches to higher education funding and only makes a brief reference to issues common to many other countries. The third group gathers studies which simply do not give any particular reason for the selection (for example, Ertl and Phillips, 2006; Guri-Rosenblit, 1999).

Comparative research is necessarily limited by the number of items being compared and the temptation is to compare as many items as possible to cover as much ground as possible. However, comparative studies based on several countries can rarely provide an in-depth investigation and tend to compare structures rather than detailed practices and their meanings. The next section considers the specific criteria imposed

by the originating research questions and how they have guided the choice of the two countries selected.

Consequences on the Design of the Research Framework

The main consequence of the theoretical problems outlined above for research design, is the necessity of designing a cross-national comparison based on data collected at different levels of policy-making and implementation that are genuinely comparable between the two countries. In the present case, this methodological necessity is reinforced by the fact that the process identified as being central to this research, i.e. public policy-making (examined in Chapter 1) also requires a 'layered' approach. As Ragin (2004) explains:

“Most comparative studies start with the seemingly simple idea that social phenomena in like settings (such as organizations, countries, regions, cultures, etc.) may parallel each other sufficiently to permit comparing and contrasting them.” (p. 148)

The clause “may parallel each other sufficiently” is central here because it emphasises the necessity that the cases selected are instances of the same thing. In order to support the selection of two comparable models of virtual universities, the following criteria were identified:

1. To be compared, not only both initiatives had to be of the *same nature*, but they also had to be *contemporaneous* with each other. This latter criterion was seen as necessary because of the speed at which developments in the field of ICTs happened between the mid 1990s and the mid-2000s.
2. They also had to have emerged in countries where the global policy trends identified previously had had an impact (as noted before, the effects of globalization are not evenly distributed).
3. Finally, because the thesis also aims to discover how, in the present context of globalization, national governance is exerted over higher education, it is essential that the initiatives *be conceived and funded by central government* and be *as recent as possible*.

The conjunction of these parameters seriously narrowed down the field of possible objects of study. In 2000 (when this research was initiated), only the French *Campus Numériques* and the British UKeU fulfilled these conditions. The table below sums up the respective common characteristics of each initiative.

Table 3.2: Comparative criteria between the two policy initiatives

Essential criteria	<i>Campus Numériques</i>	UKeU
Comparable Projects	Consortia of universities and public/private institutions in view of complementing face-to-face higher education provision.	A holding company owned by universities to compete with major international virtual universities on the international market of higher education.
Contemporaneity	Between June 2000 and October 2003*. Less than ten years ago.	Between February 2000 and July 2004. Less than ten years ago.
Countries	France	United Kingdom
Steering mode	Centrally initiated and funded.	Centrally initiated and funded.

*October 2003 is the date when a new team took over the project at the Ministry and reshaped, and renamed the *campus numériques* and it would seem an appropriate date as an end date (this is developed below).

The French initiative – named ‘*campus numériques*’ by its authors (literally ‘digital campuses’) – consisted, in theory, of consortia of higher education institutions and other public or private institutions working together to provide on-line courses to students who could not attend traditional provision. The British initiative – whose name was never really agreed upon but which, for convenience, will be referred to as the UKeU in this research – was a holding company collectively owned by the higher education sector, created to compete with international virtual universities in the international market place of higher education programmes. In terms of their contemporaneousness, both were officially launched a few weeks apart (respectively in June and February 2000). To give an end date is a more complex matter, particularly for the French virtual university. The British initiative came to an end in July 2004 following HEFCE’s announcement on 27 February 2004 to hold “immediate talks with e-Universities on restructuring its activities and services”

(HEFCE, 2004). Over the years, the original idea of the *campus numériques* evolved and was reshaped and renamed. This is an interesting dimension of the initiative and the analysis of this process will shed light on the successive priorities of the French government. For the sake of agreeing clear time boundaries, it makes sense to mark the end-point of the French initiative as October 2003 when the ministry decided to reshape activities falling under the *campus numériques* and change the focus, the overall organisation and the mode of funding of the initiative called from then on, *Universités Numériques Thématiques* (literally Themed Digital Universities).

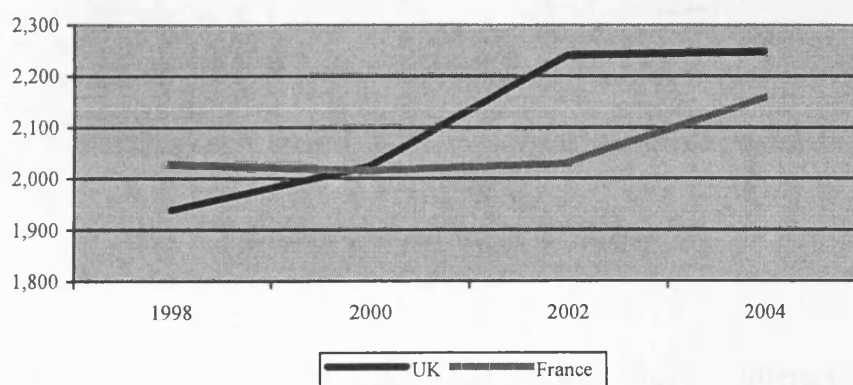
Comparability of the two countries selected

As explained above, one essential parameter is the comparability of the countries where the initiatives emerged. Both countries are European and, as such, fall under the regional political and economic umbrella of the European Union – consideration of the broader environment of these two education policies is an essential component for understanding such policies, as argued by Deer and de Meulemeester (2004). A rapid overview of some economic and demographic factors during the period 1997-2005 and a brief outline of the main political characteristics of each country will contribute to the framing of the data collected for this research. Indicators selected are: population, Growth Domestic Product (GDP) *per capita*, unemployment rate, enrolments in tertiary education, and internet access per household as well as the Information Society Index (ISI) 2000 (source: EUROSTAT, 2007).

Demographically, as far as the total population of each country is concerned, differences are relatively marginal; France has a slightly larger population with, in 1997, 59.7 million people against 58.2 million in the UK. By 2005, as both countries passed the 60 million threshold, the gap between them increased as France counted 62.5 million people and the UK, 60 million. In terms of age groups, the profiles of the population is very similar in both countries with just over a third of the population aged 0 to 24, about 35 per cent between 25 and 49, 16 per cent between 50 and 64 and 15 per cent at 65 plus. As far as the GDP *per capita* is concerned, both countries were above the European average in 1997 but then trends diverged and the UK rose above this whilst France started to decline to, eventually, in 2005, reach the level of the

European average. Unemployment levels in the UK and France follow a similar stable trend during the period 1997-2005 but France is above the European average and the UK below with only half of the French rates. As far as the number of students enrolled in post-compulsory education is concerned, the comparative analysis of the previous chapter has already provided ample information on existing trends. What the diagram below adds to this, is an instant visualisation of enrolment trends in both countries between 1998 and 2004 (though this is for the whole of the post-compulsory education sector). In both countries, numbers increased to reach just over 2 million students in 2000 – as a result of stagnation in France and a sharp increase in the UK. After this date, trends diverged as France maintained its level but the UK continued its progression. In 2002, the trends reversed as the UK saw its numbers stagnate and French enrolments began to soar.

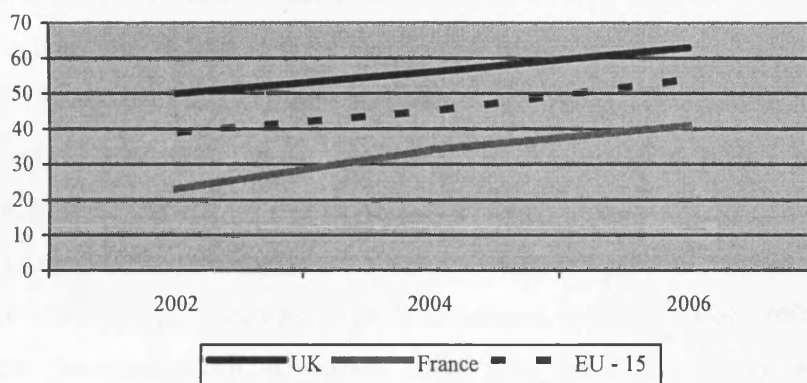
Figure 3.1
Students in Tertiary Education (1,000)
(university and non-university studies)



Indicators gathered by EUROSTAT on the ‘information society’, consider the following six measures: access of households to information and communication technology (ICT), access of enterprises to information and communication technology, expenditure on ICT, e-commerce, market structures of the various telecommunication market segments, and prices of some typical telecommunications services (EUROSTAT, 2004). As far as the level of expenditure in ICT as a percentage of the GDP is concerned, in 2003, the European average was 3%, in France 3.3% and in the UK 4%. In other words, both countries were situated above the European average but the UK was well above this average and well above the

French expenditure in this area. The level of Internet access in households was also considered. As Figure 3.2 shows, this reveals some significant trends. Data collection on the topic only began in 2002 and the period 2002-2006 shows, as one would expect, that internet access has steadily increased in Europe. But there is a significant gap between the UK and France as, in 2002, twice as many British households were connected compared with French households, and during this four-year period, despite the French figure doubling, the gap only slightly decreased with the UK situated well above the European average and France remaining, despite a steady increase, well below this average.

Figure 3.2
Level of Internet Access
 (percentage of households who have internet access at home)



Finally, the Information Society Index (ISI) 2000 provides a different perspective based on indicators such as computer infrastructure, telecom infrastructure (telephone lines, TV ownership, etc.), internet infrastructure and social infrastructure (tertiary school enrolment, newspaper readership and civil liberties). Findings of the ISI cover 55 countries that account for 97 per cent of global GDP and 99 per cent of expenditure on IT. Four categories have been identified as representing the main differences identified in this area. The UK was found to belong to a group called 'Skaters' ("in tune with the fast pace and complicated procedures of the information age, reflecting an established infrastructure and computer literate population.") along side countries like Sweden and USA. France was in a different group, called 'Striders' ("moving purposefully along the information pathway, their citizens absorbing new

technologies for personal and professional use with a mixture of caution and conviction.”) where countries like Hong Kong and New Zealand can also be found (IDC, 2000).

To recap, during the period studied, i.e. 1997 to 2005, demographic similarities abound. Economically, indicators reveal some contrasts; from the two indicators selected, it would appear that the British economy has been, over the same period, a lot more dynamic than the French economy, with a significantly higher GDP and a lower unemployment rate¹. In terms of ICT-related issues, a definite difference has emerged from indicators analysed, both as far as access to internet is concerned and outcome of cross analysis of relevant infrastructures which seem to point to a distinctive difference in attitudes.

A detailed analysis of the political underpinnings of both initiatives is provided in Chapter 4 where the context of the education policies related to the two initiatives is presented. It is however relevant here to point to what seems like a neat cross-over of political majorities between the two countries. In 1981, in France, after more than 23 years of Right-leaning governments, a Left-leaning coalition came to power and governed until 2002 (excluding some short *cohabitation* periods) whilst in the UK, the Conservatives came to power in 1979 to remain in office until 1997 (Cole and Drake, 2000; Deer and de Meulemeester, 2004; Deer, 2002; Carpentier, 2006). Thus, in terms of comparison, it can be noted that in 2000 (year of the launches), French and British governments were closer to each other on the political spectrum than in previous years (i.e. Centre-Left). This similarity is a significant factor because it renders even more necessary the need to unpick the *differences* between each initiative.

The above overview has then considered indicators of the demographic, economic and political situation of both countries – indicators selected for their relevance to the compared objects. The data analysis that follows will be conducted therefore in the light of the following factors:

¹ This conclusion is of relative value as economists would be likely to argue that a more comprehensive range of indicators would be needed to evaluate the dynamism of the economy of a country.

- the comparable demographic profiles of both countries;
- the divergent economic profiles of both countries with, in France, a higher unemployment rate and slower economic growth rate;
- the level of penetration of internet access in French households was significantly lower than in the UK;
- the difference between respective ISI profiles;
- both governments were on the same side of the political spectrum at the time of the conception of both initiatives.

2. Qualitative Research Methods

This section specifically focuses on the methods used to select and analyse data. Data identified as best suited to tackle the research questions of the thesis are interviews and documentary analysis. Sampling of the informants followed the comparative framework outlined above, and details are presented below. Interviews were semi-structured and thus required specific preparation, also explained in this section. Some of the interviews were with high profile people and, as will be explained, needed a different approach from the other interviews. Finally, this section presents the principles and limitations of documentary analysis.

Sampling population

Whilst the selection of interviewees should, ideally, be informed by the research questions under consideration, this does not eliminate the difficulty the researcher faces in the selection process itself. Literature on sampling (for example Warren, 2001) distinguishes randomized and purposive (theoretical) sampling, the former suiting a survey-type approach with, usually, a large number of interviewees drawn upon systematically, specifically to get a representative sample of the whole population (de Vaus, 1996). Semi-structured interviews conducted by a single handed researcher determine that numbers are comparatively smaller and thus the latter approach (theoretical sampling) is more appropriate. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) differentiated between a priori research design, ‘snowball’ design or cases where particular participants are sought out as key informants. The present set of

interviewees was the result of a combination of these approaches: the layered structure identified above guided the sampling process and, in a few instances, informants were selected via recommendations made by other interviewees ('snowball design'). Table 3.1 presented above is now reproduced with a third column which gives details of interviewees (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Identification of the different levels involved in the initiatives, from macro to micro levels, and details on selected interviewees.

Levels	Institutions/Stakeholders	Interviewees
Supra-national level	European Union Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) [France]	
National level	Government: – HEFCE & DfES, HEFCW, Scottish Funding Council [UK] – Ministère de l'Education Nationale DATAR [France] National implementation team : – Steering group, Holding company [UK] – <i>MEN, SDTICE</i> , Selection panel, Evaluations [France] Partners: – Private sector [UK] – <i>CNED</i> [France]	HEFCE : Mrs A. Frost, Mr D. James DfES : Mrs L. Wells Scottish Funding Council : Mr D. Beards <i>Ministère de l'Education Nationale (SDTICE)</i> : Dr F. Thibault, Mr P. Perrey & Dr E. Brodin, Prof D. Richard Technology Director of UKeU: Dr J. Slater Member of Steering Group of UKeU: Dr. G. Kenney-Wallace Member of selection panel: Prof. P. Moeglin, <i>CNED</i> : Dr. J-L. Billoët, Mr P. Mahou, Mr J-L. Faure
Institutional level	Higher education institutions represented by: – Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals [UK] – <i>Conférence des Présidents d'Université</i> [France]	Edinburgh University : Prof. T. O'Shea University of St Andrews: Prof. R. Piper OBHE: Dr S. Bjarnason <i>Ecole Polytechnique de l'Université d'Orléans</i> : Dr J-L. Billoët



School/ Department level	Design of courses: – Academics [UK and France]	UK Open University: Prof. R. Mason Leeds University: Dr L. See, Prof. A. Booth France <i>Université Paris Dauphine</i> : Dr M. Armatte, Mr Y. Boivin <i>Université de Rouen</i> : Dr J. Wallet
Other (‘snowball design’)		University of Dundee: Mrs R. Michaelson <i>Fédération Syndicale Unitaire</i> : Mr L. Weber Prof. A. Kavenocky, Prof. R. Spector

The ‘snowball’ process refers to how an interviewee that fulfils the theoretical selection criteria helps to locate other potential interviewees through their personal and professional networks (for example Arksey and Knight, 1999; Warren, 2001). As the first contacts were made, it soon became apparent that on either side of the Channel, actors involved at the higher levels formed a relatively small group of ‘experts’ in the field of ICT in higher education who had past shared professional experiences. This is indeed a significant aspect of this research which is explained in chapter 1 (the notion of ‘policy community’) and its implications will be pursued later in chapters 5 and 6. As far as the selection of interviewees is concerned, approaching potential interviewees was rendered easier through recommendations.

In total, 36 people were approached (19 in France and 17 in the UK) and 29 accepted, giving 15 interviewees in France and 14 in the UK. The table below lists interviewees by date and location of interviews in order to show how grouping of interviews took place.

Table 3.4: Planning of the interviews

France	April 2005	14/04/2005	Paris	F. Thibault P. Perrey & E. Brodin D. Richard P. Moeglin
		15/04/2005	Paris	M. Armatte L. Weber
	July 2005	04/07/2005	Paris	R. Spector
		04/07/2005	Poitiers	P. Mahou J.L. Faure
		05/07/2005	Paris	A. Kavenoky Y. Boivin J. Wallet (missed him)
		06/07/2005	Orléans	J.L. Billoet
		17/07/2005	Telephone	J. Wallet
UK	April 2005	20/04/2005	Bristol	D. James A. Frost
	February 2006	07/02/2006	London	L. Wells S. Bjarnason
		13/02/2006	Milton Keynes	J. Slater R. Mason
		23/02/2006	Edinburgh	R. Piper
		24/02/2006	Edinburgh	T. O'Shea D. Beards R. Michaelson
			Dundee	
	May 2006	02/05/2006	London	G. Kenney-Wallace
	June 2006	05/06/2006	Leeds	L. See A. Booth

Planning of interviews was heavily constrained by work commitments of the researcher. Interviews had to take place during the second semester – as it tends to be lighter in terms of workload than the autumn semester – and be spread over two years to even out overall workload. Interviews in France took place the first year and UK interviews in the second year – with the notable exception of HEFCE's interviews which were strategically planned to take place shortly after the release of the report of the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, published in March 2005 (Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2005a). Once relative periods of availability were identified, limited funds meant that travelling had to be kept to a minimum (and staying overnight) and thus negotiating interview times was also arranged with their geographical implications in mind. These constraints, along with the availability of some interviewees, led, on two occasions, to some unfortunate consequences (see below). The second group of interviews in France was spread over

three days in three different towns: morning of Day 1 in Paris, afternoon of Day 1 in Poitiers (210 miles away from Paris), return to Paris in the evening (after three interviews) – Day 2 in Paris with three interviews planned in different parts of the city – morning of Day 3 travel to Orléans (83 miles) for one interview, return to Paris in the afternoon. The two-day trip to Scotland gave rise to other complications, not helped by the fact that the researcher had never been to Scotland before – with one interview in Edinburgh on Day 1 and three on Day 2, two in the morning in two different locations in Edinburgh and one in the afternoon in Dundee, returning to Edinburgh in the evening. Retrospectively, it could be argued that this was a little excessive and generated two undesired outcomes: one was the loss of some 15 minutes of an interview in Scotland as a small but essential detail – batteries in the tape recorder – had been overlooked, the other being the loss of an interview (which was later re-scheduled) as its exact location – which café amongst three on a Parisian square (see below) – had not been recorded on the detailed planning of the three-day trip in France. Apart from these two regrettable glitches, the practical side of fieldwork was no doubt demanding but overall positive and the fact that the researcher was familiar with both cultures and languages was, as will be seen, an evident advantage.

One final point needs to be explained on the topic of linguistic requirement, it concerns data and their presentation. Throughout this research, any evidence from France is presented first in French (typed in italics) and, then, in its English translation – the translation being done by the researcher herself. This will allow the reader to refer to the authentic data (i.e. the French version) if it is felt necessary.

Conducting interviews

Here the principles applied to the different stages of the process of gathering oral data including semi-structured interviewing techniques and selection of interviewees are outlined.

This qualitative approach to fieldwork was seen as an appropriate means of addressing the research questions of this thesis mainly because it allows the researcher

to improvise during the interviews in order to follow up interviewees' answers and go into the subject in greater depth (Wengraf, 2001). Semi-structured interviews revolve around a number of themes identified before the interviews, sufficiently open to allow further questions to match responses obtained. A list of questions serves as a guide for the interviews but need not be rigidly adhered to as, in qualitative research, it is often the case that by allowing interviewees 'to tell their own stories in their own words' that elements of information appear that would not be so easy to obtain through a process of direct questioning (Denzin, 1978). This requires an aptitude to improvise and a high degree of concentration during the interview (Warren, 2001), both points which were touched on earlier as being, from the researcher's point of view, linguistically demanding. Interview questions should be formulated using, where possible, the specialised vocabulary, including the 'jargon' of the interviewees – as opposed to the more abstract language of the research questions from which they should derive (Wengraf, 2001).

In the present case, interviews lasted on average one hour (ranging between 45 and 75 minutes). As mentioned above, they were conducted in 2005 and 2006, in other words, two to three years after the termination or the transformation of the projects. The British project was a sensitive issue at the time of interviews and some interviewees requested to be given the topics of the interview in advance (consequently, in order to follow the same protocol with all the interviewees, this was done systematically). In some cases, a degree of tactfulness was required with the interviewees who had personally been involved in the venture, some of whom were 'bruised' by the experience. In other cases, it was more a matter of maintaining a balance between the questions planned and what the interviewee wanted, in some cases, forcefully, to say. Twice in interviews in the UK, the informant asked to have the tape switched off in order to make a comment literally 'off the record'. In each instance, the informant wanted to make reference to specific individual/s. Because of the two to three years that had passed since the demise of the UK initiatives (not too early, to allow some reflection, but, not too late, to provoke memory failure), most interviewees were in a position of 'telling their story of the virtual university' and proposing an analysis of the situation. These were often enriched with the hindsight afforded by these few years.

Interviews related to the French initiative were all conducted in French and held in France, in the work place of interviewees except for one which, because of a misunderstanding², had to be conducted a few days later than planned on the telephone, from the UK. Interviews concerning the British project were all conducted in English and all but one held in the work place of the interviewees (one was held in a private club in Edinburgh).

Amongst these interviewees, five could be considered as ‘powerful in education’. The phrase is borrowed from Walford (1994) who pioneered social research in this field at a time when research in education was increasingly involving policy makers and other figures in positions of power. On the French side (two interviewees fall into this group – both leading higher education institutions), it was relatively straightforward to obtain an interview, something which Walford (1994) justified in explaining that people in higher positions know how to deal with interviews and often are aware of what academic research involves. Three interviewees on the UK side were in a position of power and again, obtaining interviews was no more problematic than having to find a suitable time in mine and their busy agendas. Two points should be added as they are likely to have played a positive role in the entire process of interviewing. On both sides of the Channel, there was a genuine interest in the subject of the research itself, often with an acknowledgement of how little was known about similar developments on the other side. Thus, as these people had played a key role in their national initiative (and were exceptionally well informed about related issues, as Moyser (1988) pointed out), they were keen to meet up to find out more about contemporary developments (most interviews ended with an informal chat, once the tape recorder was switched off, on these developments). The second point bears on what Gewirtz and Ozga (1994) described as a “perfectly harmless researcher”. Being female and a novice in the field of academic research can help in the sense that it is a

² Interestingly enough, perhaps because the researcher was using her mother tongue to arrange the French interviews, she overlooked some details, one of them, small but essential, being the exact café where to meet a lecturer from Rouen University who had offered to meet in Paris. The meeting point was in a typical Parisian square which had three cafés and desperately trying to remember the exchange of emails which had happened some six weeks before, she picked up the wrong café and the meeting didn’t happen. She later found out that this café was a popular meeting place for single people (an interesting detail, especially when she recalled that having waited for ten, fifteen minutes pretending to read the monthly publication of the CNED in the hope that the interviewee would spot her, she approached a man at a nearby table who seemed to be waiting and who seemed as if he could be an academic...). The following day, an alternative day and time were arranged for the interview to take place a few days later, over the telephone, from the UK.

non-threatening combination, which, in some cases, clearly influenced the language behaviour of the interviewee.

A final word needs to be added concerning ethical considerations, in particular the use of a consent form. The following consent forms were issued to all interviewees:

Interviews in the UK	<p align="center">Consent Form for Audio-Recording of Interview</p> <p>Name of Interviewee:</p> <p>Name of Researcher: Catherine Chabert.....</p> <p>Date:</p> <p>A researcher from the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University will be recording the interview. This tape will be used for the purposes of research into Education. The tape will be stored in a secured place until it is destroyed; it will be transcribed and possibly translated into French. Extracts could be used for her PhD and for subsequent academic publications arising from it.</p> <p>I have read and understood the information above and I authorise Catherine Chabert to do as described above.</p> <p>Signature of Interviewee:</p> <p>Signature of Researcher:</p>
Interviews in France	<p align="center">Consentement pour Enregistrement Audio de l'Entretien</p> <p>Nom de l'Interviewé/e.....</p> <p>Nom du Chercheur..... Catherine Chabert.....</p> <p>Date</p> <p>Un chercheur de l'Université de Cardiff, du Département de Sciences Sociales, enregistrera l'entretien qui aura lieu entre vous. Cette cassette audio sera utilisée pour la recherche doctorale et post-doctorale en Science de l'Education. La cassette sera conservée en lieu sûr, puis transcrite et traduite en anglais. Des extraits du texte pourront être utilisés pour sa thèse doctorale ainsi que pour toute publication académique en résultant.</p> <p>J'autorise Catherine Chabert à faire ce qui est décrit ci-dessus.</p> <p>Signature de l'Interviewé/e</p> <p>Signature du Chercheur.....</p>

Each interviewee was informed that the tape containing the recording of the interview would be stored in a safe place and that extracts from the transcription might be translated into French (or English, as appropriate) and used for the PhD and subsequent possible academic publications arising from it. They were also given the option of being sent the transcript of their interview which some declined and some accepted.

In terms of the confidentiality of some of the information given to the researcher, in a few instances, informants asked for the tape recorder to be switched off before continuing the conversation ‘off the record’. It has to be noted that this only happened with UK interviewees. It is impossible to say whether the fact that this did not happen in both countries is at all significant or whether this is purely accidental, whether this is due to some aspect of British culture (perhaps a higher level of sensibility when it comes to what one considers as confidential?) or whether the nature of the topic itself did require some secrecy. Along the same lines, the researcher was, on a few occasions, shown confidential documents and, in some of these cases, the researcher was allowed to read aloud some extract in order to have a record of the content. Obviously, in cases where the content of data is significant for the research, efforts have been made to disguise the speaker’s identity and thus protect the interviewee and, if required, the person/s concerned.

There is an on-going debate related to ‘informed consent’ as it is currently applied to qualitative research in general and to open-ended qualitative research interviewing in particular. However, the complexities associated with consent are not reviewed here. This is simply because in the conduct of this research the matter of the contentious nature of consent and its associated ethics did not arise.

Selecting documentary sources

A number of different types of data, including documents, were used for this research. As can be seen in annexes 2 and 3 – which recap all the field documents used – documentary sources vary in nature. They include government publications, academic evaluations, press releases and press articles. Analysis of such sources requires a close

examination of their authenticity (original or copy) and their trustworthiness (Scott, 1990). This sub-section focuses on three points: documents published *during* the life of the initiatives, those published *post hoc* and, thirdly, information available from official websites (such as from the HEFCE or the MEN websites). Each should be treated differently as they have their own specific characteristics.

The main sources of information *during* the development of each initiative were governmental authorities and national press (details of which are presented below). Both initiatives being funded by taxpayers' money meant that open-published information had to be available throughout the unfolding of the projects. In a situation where there is little time distance between the events unfolding and the data to collect, i.e. when data need to be collected as and when the events unfold, there is no time for reflection and the temptation is to collect *everything to do with* the event studied with the intention to postpone the selection process until later. This results in a mass of information which has to be sifted and sorted according to categories identified as fitting the overall research themes.

A small portion of the UKeU budget has been allocated to public goods, one of them being the archiving of the project. A considerable amount of information forms the compendium commissioned by HEFCE and edited by Prof P. Bacsich. Volume One, published in 2004, contains 4 parts and a total of 23 chapters. In addition to this, 12 reports (known as 'The UKeU Reports – Publications from the Archive of UK eUniversities Worldwide Limited') were released in 2005 and stored on the Higher Education Academy website. A second volume (Volume Two) is due to be published some time in 2009-2010.

Finally, there are the transcriptions of oral evidence taken before the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Skills in 2004 and early 2005 following the closure of the UK virtual university (a total of 101 pages). These include the following witnesses:

Table 3.5: Details of oral evidence taken before the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Skills

Witnesses	Dates	Numbered questions	Documents submitted
Mr David Young, Chairman of HEFCE and Sir Howard Newby, Chief Executive of HEFCE	23 June 2004	Q 1 to Q 138	Memorandum submitted by HEFCE 'The e-University Project'
Sir Anthony Cleaver, former Chairman of UKeU and Mr John Beaumont, Chief Executive of UKeU	21 July 2004	Q 139 to Q 346	
Dr Kim Howells, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, DfES	8 November 2004	Q 347 to Q 479	Memorandum submitted by DfES
Mr Leslie Stretch, Vice President of Sun Microsystems UK Ltd and Mr David Beagle, Account Manager of UKeU project at Sun Microsystems UK Ltd	12 January 2005	Q 480 to Q 593	Memorandum submitted by Sun Microsystems UK Ltd
Sir Brian Fender, former Chairman of UKeU Holding Company and Dr Adrian Lepper, Secretary to the Board, UKeU Holding Company	12 January 2005	Q 594 to Q 653	Memorandum submitted by Secretary to the Board, UKeU Holding Company

As argued in Chapter 1, the context of both initiatives placed a strong emphasis on 'modernisation' and on both sides of the Channel, both governments used these two virtual universities as examples of a 'modernised' state. In other words, the nature of the initiatives meant that there was a strong political intention on the part of public authorities to be seen using the internet to 'communicate' with the public, and thus a lot of data were available on-line. However, by its very nature, the web does not tend to *store* information but rather display information for duration unknown to the visitors and over which they have no control. This obliges the researcher to save (and/or print) anything related to the topic available on-line. The same problem occurs as when an event unfolds whilst the researcher gathers their data: a large amount of information is collected which later requires selection according to specific criteria – a

process by which information becomes data. The positive side of this situation resides in the fact that institutions have little distance with the unfolding of the event and have therefore a limited capacity to ‘filter’ the information released (it can be said that information available from HEFCE website was better managed than on the French side).

Analysing data

The preliminary approach to this can be summed up in saying “Data are materials to think with” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The interaction between data and the researcher is an on-going process from which ideas are generated and shaped. Initial stages require the researcher to know their data well and it is the reading through which generates concepts which makes sense of the corpus. The concepts used to analyse the interviews in the UK and in France followed the policy framework developed in chapter 1 and included the following headings:

Elements constituting the context of influence:

- Initial ideas concerning models
- Main stakeholders in early days / Policy community members
- Main channels of communication

Elements constituting the context of practice:

- Models opted for
- Successive consultations with key stakeholders
- Outsiders to policy community
- Evaluation – Means

Elements concerned with fate of initiatives:

- Stakeholders involved – their reactions
- Main channels of communication
- Post policy initiative decisions

These categories had to be such that comparability of themes was possible, something not always easy. Under these headings, extracts from interviews were copied and pasted.

3. Reflection on the Research Experience and Concluding Thoughts

This final section focuses on the extent to which the implementation of the research framework explained above has affected the data collected and analysed. In particular, it proposes a reflection on the difficulty arising from the stratified design opted for and the linguistic requirements that a cross-national research project like the present one imposes on the researcher.

The decision to adopt a ‘layered’ approach to data gathering necessarily implied a limitation. Theoretically, such a stratified approach could be seen as facilitating comparisons and, indeed, in some cases, it does, as Patton (1990) argued. However, in the context of a cross-national comparative study where the aim is to go beyond formal structures and provide a comparative *analysis* not mere juxtaposition (Cockrill *et al.*, 1999; Musselin, 2001), then, on both sides of the comparison, each stratum has to have a degree of comparability with its counter-part and achieving this raises the question of equivalence between countries. Can it be said, for example, that the DfES is the equivalent of the *Ministère de l’Education nationale*? Or that a university is comparable to *une université*? It is down to the researcher to make judicious and conscious choices when selecting their informants.

In the present case, this difficulty mainly arose from the fact that the structures of the two virtual universities were totally different. Therefore, in order to apply this stratified principle, I had to make some decisions from the early stages of approaching potential informants. The most significant decision I made was to decide that members of the UKeU Steering Group and *senior* members of staff of the CNED would be considered as being equivalent and, thus, would fill in a similar gap in the overall architecture of the research design.

Tables 3.1 and 3.3 above detail the different levels identified as having been involved one way or another in the decision-making process and/or the implementation stage of both policy initiatives. On the whole, interviews obtained cover this spectrum adequately. However, in some cases, some adjustments were required.

In the UK side, it became quickly apparent that the Chief Executive of the HEFCE at the time of the launch of UKeU, Sir Brian Fender, had played a central role in the initiative and, thus, interviewing him was a judicious choice. In January 2005, when I contacted the Council, he no longer had responsibility there but it was intimated to me that he would probably not want to be interviewed. Retrospectively, the timing might not have been optimal, as, in fact, that month, the House of Commons Select Education and Skills Committee were interviewing Sir Brian Fender in the context of their enquiry on the initiative. The transcript of his interview was made public shortly after and constituted a valuable source of evidence. Two members of the HEFCE accepted to be interviewed, one of them being the person who led the project from the HEFCE, Mrs Alice Frost (contacted in January 2005, interviewed in April 2005).

A similar series of events happened with the DfES. I originally identified Mrs Margaret Hodge as a key interviewee (Mrs Hodge held throughout her time as the Minister in charge of Higher Education, strong views as to what the objectives of the virtual university should be) but an interview was declined by her Parliamentary Assistant (in January 2006). Dr Kim Howells, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, DfES, was interviewed by the House of Commons Committee in November 2004 and the transcript also served as evidence for this research. I also met a civil servant from the Department, Mrs Lynne Wells, who had worked on the project (contacted in February 2005, interviewed in February 2006).

In both cases, the interview I was hoping to obtain did not take place and was replaced by transcripts published on the website of the House of Commons. The obvious question is whether it is right to assume that the transcripts of interviews with the Committee were suitable equivalents to the interviews originally planned. Two dimensions related to interview techniques were considered. Firstly, the fact that the formulation of the questions is designed in accordance with the research questions and, thus, seeks specific information, constitutes a significant point. In the present

context, the objectives of the House of Commons Select Education and Skills Committee differed from mine. Consequently, it cannot be said that the two constitute an exact equivalent. However, I took the view that there was sufficient overlap between their concerns and mine for the transcript from the House of Commons to constitute a suitable source of evidence. The second point concerns the central fact that the transcription of an interview constitutes an incomplete record of the experience of interviewing and, thus, leaves out data which can be as important as the words said and which are usually recorded through fieldwork notes (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Wengraf, 2001). Along the same lines, and to make matters worse, it is obvious that the transcripts produced by the House of Commons are ‘cleaned up’ versions of transcriptions (Wengraf, 2001) from which hesitations, gaps, inconsequentialities, etc. have been removed – thus adding a second basis for the removal of contextual clues. Fully aware of such shortcomings, I nevertheless opted to use these data because I considered that by their very nature, i.e. the formal and solemn context in which they had been produced, they were likely to contain valuable information.

French interviews took place a year before the rest of the interviews and, on the whole (apart from the two minor problems already mentioned), went according to plan. To conduct a cross-national-type of research project, the researcher needs to have a sound understanding of both the social and the political context of the situation. Cockrill *et al.* (1999) stress how essential this is when they claim:

“When dealing with data derived from two nations, this [problem]... is of considerable importance and presents a major difficulty: to be able to understand fully the social and political context in another country one would need ideally one or more researchers based in the countries involved, not only able to speak the language fluently but who are also immersed in the cultural and political context.” (p. 74)

In the present case, I am at an advantage as I am French and have been living in the UK for nineteen years (working in higher education for fifteen years). Thus, I was well placed to conduct fieldwork in these two countries. This does not mean however that all went smoothly nor that I was able to deal with all of the challenges such activity requires with equal ease on both sides of the Channel. The difficulty of having to efficiently function in two languages should not be underestimated. If, for

the sake of the analysis, the artificial distinction is made between the ability to express oneself in a language and the ability to comprehend this language, then the inevitable disparity appearing when using two languages can be better understood. As far as expression is concerned, i.e. how one expresses one's thoughts, some linguistic areas are better known and thus phrased with more ease than others (this is also true for mono-lingual people), and thus this generates unevenness in the expression which the researcher needs to be aware of in order to counter-balance this and reach an adequate level of fluency in both languages. The comprehension is important in the context of semi-structured interviews as the ability of the interviewer to ask questions as and when he/she feels they are necessary during the course of the interview forms the basis of this research method. Asking for clarification is something which can be done in various ways (and again this is not specific to bilingualism) and was generally well taken by interviewees. Obviously, the fact that interviews were recorded was also a safety net as small details which could have been missed, could later on be understood.

To end this section, one final point ought to be stressed. It is how much I enjoyed this phase of the research. Evidently, throughout the two periods spent organising and conducting interviews (i.e. first half of 2005 and first half of 2006), stress levels were high. Obtaining 29 interviews and arranging meeting and travel details represent a lot of work (in particular, it necessitates to keep track of many leads, be they email threats or telephone conversations). But the reward of discussing topics I had followed and analysed on my own for months/years before meeting such a variety of people made all this activity worthwhile.

Chapter 4

Comparing Policies on the Information Society

“On the one hand, education will serve the economy, competitiveness and employability, and on the other hand, citizenship and social cohesion. ... Education will play a more important role in the years to come, because of these two sides to the same coin; the coin that is our information society, the society of the 21st century.” (Reding, 2000)

This extract from a speech given by Mrs Viviane Reding, then European Commissioner responsible for Education and Culture, at the conference of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), in Luxembourg, the year of the launch of both initiatives, is a good example of the process of policy-making and policy dissemination across countries. A high profile member of the European Commission presents the European conception of the ‘information society’ to representatives of 45 countries from Europe and East Asia. Agencies such as ASEF play a central role in creating and supporting policy communities by providing opportunities for meetings and networking¹.

Having argued in chapter 1, how education, and higher education in particular, have progressively been called upon by states to support the competitiveness of national economies in the context of economic globalization, this chapter examines in more

¹ A database search on Nexis UK among ‘French language news’, set between 01/04/2000 and 01/06/2000 (i.e. the eight weeks surrounding the conference (which was held on 02/05/2000)), with search terms ‘Reding’ and ‘information’, found 26 articles, in other words nearly one article every two days. The same parameters, but this time with ‘All news, all languages’ activated, brought 117 articles (search conducted on 15/07/2005). It is during this period that the action plan *eEurope* was made public. This interaction between the field of policy-making and the field of journalism is encountered several times in this chapter.

detail the precise ‘translation’ of these somewhat abstract issues into precise, concrete higher education policies. Following the principles of research on cross-national policies identified above, the chapter starts at the European supra-national level before examining national levels in the UK and France.

Expansion of education and economic wealth are two policy areas which have converged at least in one domain: the establishment of information infrastructures. Consequently, national policies related to ICT and education have tended to constitute one of the elements of what forms the ‘national information infrastructure’ (NII) of a state. Although there is an apparent commonality of purpose, previous comparative research has shown important differences in the way states organise their NII, particularly their educational network initiatives (for example Selwyn and Brown, 2000).

Approaching two specific higher education policy initiatives from the angle of cross-national policy-making is a relatively recent idea. As far as the specific field of distance learning is concerned, research in the 1980s and early 1990s has, by and large, tended to focus on ways and means of introducing digital technology in learning and teaching, often with an underlying optimism (as noted in chapter 1). Few commentators, in the mid-1990s, concurred with Perraton (1995) who pointed out how this copious amount of literature had tended to “concern itself with means rather than ends”, or Selwyn (1997) who argued that underlying issues needed to be addressed if educational technology research was to continue into the next century as a serious academic tradition. It was the then burgeoning literature on sociology of education which brought depth to the field (for example, Ball, 1990; Green, 1992; Rumble, 1995; Dale *et al.*, 2004; Robertson, 2005; Selwyn, 2008).

At the outset of this reflection on ICT-related policies in higher education, a brief discussion of the term ‘policy’ is proposed in order to establish the way it is used in this research. As Jenkins (1997) pointed out, there are pages of competing definitions of the term. However, Ball’s (1990) work on educational policies related to the National Curriculum and the extent to which such policies were a vehicle for the values of Margaret Thatcher’s government, constituted a major step towards the idea that public policies could be seen as ‘operational statements of values’. This angle of approach

emphasises the idea that most public policies have a political dimension and as such, entertain a vision, an idea of what the world should be like. This begs the questions of whose values are validated (and whose are not) and who benefits from the outcomes of the policy and, therefore, who is involved in the process of policy-making. As Lingard and Ozga (2007) observe, the researcher has to widen their perspective and move beyond the local and national contexts towards international and supranational organisations. During the data collection phase of this research, the need to gather evidence of this scope was borne in mind and to achieve this, Ozga's (2000) understanding of policy text was adopted. For Ozga, policy texts refer to any "vehicle or medium for carrying and transmitting a policy message" (p.33). This explains the varied nature of the data collected which ranges from speeches from ministers of education, circular letters sent to universities, through to national and supranational reports, press releases, etc.

Following the layered approach already outlined, the structure of this chapter moves from major policy texts from the European Union of the mid-1980s to early 2000, to the UK and French key policy texts related to technology-based governmental interventions for the period 1997-2000 – the heyday of information society planning all over the world (Nivala, 2009). A comparison is then proposed between the two sets of policy texts (UK and France) which leads to some reflection on the place allotted to the virtual university in these texts.

1. Supra-national Policies

Early interest in developments related to the 'virtual university' at European level appears in policies of the mid-1980s. As Tait (1996) explains, before the more general notion of 'open and distance learning' (ODL), which appears in European policies in 1990, the attention was primarily on 'open universities'. In other words, the focus fell on a specific type of higher education institution as opposed to a specific type of provision. Interest was ignited by two resolutions tabled by some Members of the European Parliament, which tackled the issue from the angle of training and updating, and access to those traditionally excluded from higher education. From then on, considering the wider remit of virtual provision, this interest further developed the idea

that this type of provision was mostly suited to offer 'adaptability'. This was particularly so in relation to initial and recurrent occupational training (CEC, 1990) and the need for education and training to complement traditional activity in universities with a wider variety of 'more flexible' opportunities at the post-initial stage (CEC, 1991).

According to Tait (1996), the Memorandum on 'Open and Distance Higher Education in the European Community' (CEC, 1991) in which post compulsory education and training were amalgamated (in the early 1990s, policies talked about 'vocational education, higher education and continuing education'), gave rise to the notion that post-compulsory education should contribute in a direct way to economic success. On the status of 'non-conventional' modes of higher education delivery (here referred to as 'ODL') in existing higher education systems, Tait (1996) explains the position asserted in the report:

"The report is firm that ODL cannot replace conventional universities, for two main reasons. First, it is thought to be less appropriate for young people because of the difficulty for ODL to create the "social environment" held to be conducive to learning, thus mainly targeting adults who are not immediately continuing education from school as a more appropriate group. ... The second reason lies in the fact that ODL depends on large volumes to be cost-effective, because of the high capital costs in creating well-produced learning materials. The report concludes on the point that "market and policy will determine in each case whether traditional education or distance education offers comparative advantages" [(CEC, 1991:11)]." (p. 225)

This extract raises two issues. Firstly, the fact that the two approaches, 'conventional universities' and ODL, were considered as forming two distinct entities. The report saw each as having its own role in the future of European economies, which implied that existing higher education institutions were no longer adequate and needed to be complemented by 'newer' approaches to learning and teaching. Secondly, the conclusion quoted in this extract carries a very specific idea of what should determine these two types of provision: policy-making and market mechanisms. This is probably one of the early European texts containing the idea that the market should shape higher education.

The next policy milestone at the European level is undoubtedly the Treaty on European Union in 1992 (CEC, 1992) – the Maastricht Treaty – from which, as noted – member states agreed to exclude compulsory education. As far as post-compulsory education is concerned, cross-national programmes, such as those mentioned in chapter 2, originate from the Treaty.

Before moving closer to the end of the 1990s, there is one specific report which requires attention; it is the 1994 Bangemann Report: ‘Europe and the Global Information Society’ (Bangemann, 1994). This report, fundamentally shaped all aspects of society which can be related to ICT and, thus, education.

Europe and the Global Information Society (Bangemann, 1994)

This report, essentially, a European response to the American National Information Infrastructure led by the then US vice-president, Al Gore, was commissioned by the European Council in December 1993 and presented at the council held in Corfu in June 1994. It was prepared by the European commissioner from Germany, Martin Bangemann (briefly mentioned in chapter 1). From the outset, both the background of the commissioner and the membership of the group formed by Bangemann, reflected the perspective the Council wished to see adopted. Bangemann’s pre-1989 background was the industrial sector where he played a predominant role at an international level; he had been a key player in the drawing up of trade agreements between the EEC and Japan for the car industry; he worked on the restructuring of the steel industry as well as being involved in the evolution of European digital television. As for the working group formed to prepare this report (known as the ‘Bangemann Group’), its composition was *exclusively* made up of company directors from the IT sector² (nineteen in total), thus excluding areas such as education or culture. It is evident that, for the Council, the ‘global information society’ was above all an economic matter, the

² *Members of the Bangemann Group*: Enrico Cabral da Fonseca (Campanhia Comunicações nacionais), Peter Davis (Reed Elsevier), Carlo de Benedetti (Olivetti / ERT), Pehr Gyllenhammar (Volvo / ERT), Lothar Hunsel (T-Mobil), Pierre Lescure (Canal+), Pascual Maragall (mayor of Barcelona), Gaston Thorn (Cie. Luxembourgeoise de Telediffusion / CLT), Cándido Velázquez-Gastelu (Telefónica / ERT), Peter Bonfield (ICL), Etienne Davignon (Société Générale de Belgique / ERT), Jean-Marie Descarpentries (Bull), Brian Ennis (IMS), Hans-Olaf Henkel (IBM Europe), Anders Knutsen (Bang & Olufsen), Constantin Makropoulos (Hellenic Information Systems), Romano Prodi (IRI), Jan Timmer (Philips Electronics / ERT), Heinrich von Pierer (Siemens / ERT).

prime concern being European competitiveness in the face of the growing Northern American ICT industry. The report argued for a market-driven development of the information society in which the commitment of member states to open their national telecom markets and remove any legislative barriers to rapid progress were central. More specifically, the report can be summarised around the following three points. Firstly, the group believed that only market forces stimulated by private/public partnerships would move Europe towards a greater use of ICT:

“This report urges the European Union to put its faith in market mechanisms as the motive power to carry us into the Information Age. This means that actions must be taken at the European level and by Member States to strike down entrenched positions which put Europe at a competitive disadvantage:

- it means fostering an entrepreneurial mentality to enable the emergence of new dynamic sectors of the economy
- it means developing a common regulatory approach to bring forth a competitive, Europe-wide market for information services
- it does NOT mean more public money, financial assistance, subsidies, dirigisme, or protectionism (emphasis in original text).

In addition to its specific recommendations, the Group proposes an Action Plan of concrete initiatives based on a partnership between the private and public sectors to carry Europe forward into the information society.” (Bangemann, 1994:2)

Secondly, the report explained that if these market forces were a necessary condition, they were not sufficient in themselves:

“However, confident as we are of the necessity to liberate market forces, heightened competition will not by itself produce – or produce too slowly – the critical mass which has the power to drive investment in new networks and services.” (Bangemann, 1994: 21)

So the group also recommended that a number of initiatives organised at local and regional levels, throughout Europe, be developed to stimulate and promote awareness and use of new technologies to create a ‘critical mass’, i.e.:

“We can only create a virtuous circle of supply and demand if a significant number of market testing applications based on information networks and services can be launched across Europe to create critical mass.” (Bangemann, 1994:21)

Ten ‘applications’ were proposed: teleworking, distance learning, a network for universities and research centres, telematic services for SMEs, road traffic management, air traffic control, healthcare networks, electronic tendering, trans-European public administration network and city information highways (Bangemann, 1994:2).

Thirdly, Bangemann pleaded for renewed strength of political commitment at the European Union level as well as at the member states’ level; he believed that:

“The only question is whether this will be a strategic creation for the whole Union, or a more fragmented and much less effective amalgam of individual initiatives by Member States, with repercussions on every policy area.” (Bangemann, 1994:4)

Before seeing how the report was received, it is helpful to sum up its main characteristics. The Bangemann report is based on three ideas: a) the creation of a critical mass of ICT-related equipment and services being essential to the future of Europe, b) this has to be left to market mechanisms, and states should facilitate this by driving forward the opening of markets and partnerships with the private sector, and c) if these conditions are not met by member states, Europe will fail in its transition to the new era of the ‘information society’. With such logic, it is difficult to dissociate such argumentation from the fact that it primarily served the interests of the large European industrial groups which worked on this report. Having said that, the report did have some concern for the more social dimension of Europe and stressed the need to prevent “the creation of a two-tier society of haves and have nots”. The report suggests it is the role of education and training policies to achieve this, thus, shifting, as Field (1998) points out, issues of equal opportunity into education. This powerful logic, combined with the high profile of the members of the Bangemann Group, meant that this sort of discourse pervaded most supra-national and national policies in related areas, including higher education, for decades to come. This will become apparent in subsequent sections.

The reception received by the Bangemann report markedly differed in the UK and France. A search of UK broadsheets on Nexis UK brings up articles broadly welcoming

deregulation and a fear of the creation of an EU authority along the lines of the US Federal Communications Commission (for example, The Guardian, 1994; The Times, 1994). In France, if the report was seen to be both ‘very federalist and very liberal’ (Le Monde, 1994a), the idea of quickly liberalising the telecommunication sector was judged unrealistic, though the principle was not opposed (“The report goes too far and forgets the constraints of the national distribution of public services”³ (Le Monde, 1994b)). But the main criticism is summed up in the following extract from Le Monde:

« ... rien n’est dit [dans le rapport] sur le contenu, la nature des données que véhiculeront les « autoroutes de l’information » que l’on cherche maintenant à promouvoir. Les Français redoutent que l’information ainsi diffusée soit prioritairement d’origine américaine. Une préoccupation qui est évoquée dans les ‘conclusions’: « Le Conseil européen a également souligné l’importance des aspects linguistiques et culturels de la société de l’information. » » (Le Monde, 1994b)

“... nothing is said [in the report] on the content and the nature of the data which will circulate on the ‘information highways’ that we now try to promote. French people are concerned that the information disseminated be firstly of American origin. A concern which is mentioned in the ‘conclusions’: “The European council has also underlined the importance of the linguistic and cultural aspects of the information society.”

Apparently, this concern about the need to include in any discussion on ICT the specificity of the cultural dimension of Europe was raised at an early stage in the structuring of the Bangemann group when it was suggested that it should include a representative from the broadcasting industry. Bangemann rejected the idea, arguing that the political and technological dimension of ICT, and the cultural content of the information carried and generated by ICT, should be kept separate (Le Monde, 1994c). This concern about the content of what would be carried by these networks appears to be a very French concern. Its origins can be traced back to the Nora-Minc report presented below.

Before moving to the national layer of policy-making, it is significant to highlight the multiplication of policies and initiatives produced at the European level over the 5-6 years following Bangemann’s report. Table 4.1 recaps the main components of this campaign briefly outlining their aim.

³ « Le rapport va trop loin et fait abstraction des contraintes de service public et d’aménagement du territoire. »

Table 4.1: Main policies published by the European Union between 1995 and 2001

White Paper: 'Teaching and Learning: towards the Learning Society' (CEC, 1995)	→	The paper was about "building the learning society" and aimed to initiate a debate as a prelude to the 1996 European Year of Lifelong Learning.
Green Paper: 'Living and Working in the Information Society: People First' (CEC, 1996)	→	This consultation document was a response to the perceived threat to traditional employment posed by new technologies.
1996: European Year of Lifelong Learning.	→	The aim was "to foster better cooperation between education and training structures and the business community, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises".
1995-96: Creation of an Information Society Forum and a Task Force on Educational Multimedia Software	→	The task force was created by E. Cresson and M. Bangemann, and concerned European commercial suppliers of educational software.
'eEurope: an Information Society for All' (CEC, 1999)	→	The key objectives were "Bringing all Europeans, into the digital age and online. Creating a digitally literate Europe, supported by an entrepreneurial culture. Ensuring the process is socially inclusive and builds consumer trust." (CEC, 1999:2)
'Memorandum on Lifelong Learning' (CEC, 2000)	→	Detailed below.
'eEurope 2002 Action Plan' (CEC, 2001)	→	64 targets on internet and connectivity for 2002.
'eEurope 2002 Impacts and Priorities' (CEC, 2001a)	→	This was a review of progress.
'eLearning: Designing Tomorrow's Education' (CEC 2001b)	→	This was created in order to focus on school curricula "to fully exploit the potential of the internet for education and innovative pedagogical methods." (CEC, 2001b:13)

As this table shows, although the 1990s saw a gradual growth in understanding on the part of the European Union of the implications of the increasing use and development of ICT in society in

general, until the publication of the ‘Memorandum on Lifelong Learning’ (CEC, 2000), the foundations of this change were laid outside the higher education sector.

Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (CEC, 2000)

It could be argued that this document represents a turning-point for the position of the European Union on post-compulsory education though the premises of the themes going through the Memorandum can be found, as seen above, in previous policies. The following few lines sum up the core position of the Union:

“[L]ifelong learning must accompany a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society. Therefore, Europe’s education and training systems are at the heart of the coming changes. They too, must adapt.” (CEC, 2000:3)

The injunction to adapt and to ‘modernise’ echoes futurological neo-liberal politics. With the call for modernisation, usually comes the idea of ‘partnership’, and indeed, in the Memorandum, learning providers, universities in particular, were urged to change “not only internally, but also in their relation to other ‘learning systems’” (CEC, 2000:10).

The Memorandum had six key messages, two of them on ICT in teaching and learning which formed the framework of the public consultation to follow (key messages 3 and 6). The first of these focused on the use of: “Innovation in teaching and learning” with its objective to “...develop effective teaching and learning methods and contexts for the continuum of lifelong and lifewide learning” (CEC, 2000:13); the second advocated “Bringing learning closer to home” which entails “...provid[ing] lifelong learning opportunities as close to learners as possible, in their own communities and supported through ICT-based facilities wherever appropriate” (CEC, 2000:18). Lifelong learning is rendered possible by digital technology, portrayed as being the solution to access to learning:

“ ...‘round-the-clock’ and ‘on-the-move’ access to learning services – including on-line learning – [which] enables everyone to use their learning time to best advantage, wherever they may physically be at a given moment.” (CEC, 2000:19)

While the removal of physical boundaries is no doubt a potential attribute of ICT, this shows little regard for just about every other psychological, social and cultural variable involved in learning. Indeed the idea that, by and large, the provision of physical hardware is the only obstacle to be overcome and that computers and networks will solve problems related to access to learning, is recurrent in the entire document. Once again, this echoes some of the points examined in chapter 1 – in this case, Webster's (2006) definition of a spatial information society.

To conclude this section on European policies related to the information society, it might be helpful to re-visit the review conducted in chapter 1 in order to better understand the themes running through these policies.

This period corresponds to the emergence of an array of policies in support of the idea that our societies were increasingly driven by a knowledge-based economy and that consequently it was essential to 'modernise' all aspects of society in general and post-compulsory education in particular. Thus, the logic found in most of these policies fully embraces the argument according to which the solution is primarily a technological one whereby the expanding use of ICT in a wide range of domains would serve as a kind of panacea. The spatial dimension of the information society is also clearly a strong argument. Such rhetoric is routinely accompanied by a 'decline and fall' discourse primarily designed to reinforce time constraints, pressurise institutions and impose changes. As far as the role of the state is concerned, it is essentially to facilitate good functioning of market mechanisms and comply with their requirements as the core principle is that only global market forces would be capable of supporting the necessary far reaching changes.

The analysis now moves from the macro level of European policies to the meso level of national policies in order to compare themes found in both sets of texts and draw inferences from the findings.

2. National Policies in the UK

Contemporaneous to these European developments was the fact that throughout the 1980s successive Conservative governments essentially oversaw the deregulation of many sectors, developing a telecommunications infrastructure by being a 'referee in the marketplace' (Garfield and Watson, 1998). As Selwyn and Brown (2000) explain, it is from the 1997 elections that a more cogent sense of a NII strategy began to emerge with cable and digital broadcasting being developed as well as internet-based networks for local and central government, Post Offices and the National Health Service. However, this set of policies needs to be seen within the wider basic messages on public services of New Labour as the New Labour ICT agenda fell between two main lines of argument: the modernisation of the public sector and the enhancement of the UK's competitiveness (Selwyn, 2008).

New Labour's ICT Agenda

As Driver (2006) explains, the new administration won the election on the basis that it would not govern like Labour governments had done in the past, i.e. taxing and spending, and that public services would be 'modernised' not privatised. In other words, New Labour advocated a 'Third Way' between traditional forms of public and social administration and the reliance on market mechanisms (Driver, 2006: 274). Consequently, the centrality of all the policies and initiatives coming under the umbrella of the ICT agenda explains the magnitude of New Labour's political commitment to technology in education, both financially: over £5 billion of funding between 1997 and 2001 (Selwyn, 2008), and ideologically:

"The Information Age will transform education, at all levels and for all ages. Education in turn will equip people with the necessary skills to profit from the Information Age. We want to open up these opportunities to everyone." (COoI, 1998: 7)

The most developed element of this programme was the creation of an educational network: the £1 billion 'National Grid for Learning' initiative. The focus of this initiative was on ensuring the connection of all the country's 30,000 schools to the internet by 2002 and providing training to teachers with 75 per cent of teachers and pupils operating their own email addresses by 2002.

Other initiatives followed as part of a coherent lifelong education policy-agenda fundamentally based upon the use of ICT, the main ones being: the ‘University for Industry’, launched in April 1998 and whose role was to act as a broker and gateway to ICT-based learning opportunities (Hillman, 1996); the UKeU, studied here; or the NHSU, in the autumn of 2003. The sheer size of the programme and the funding associated led Laurillard (2008) to claim that the last decade had certainly seen the enhancement of “ the UK’s leading reputation for ICT in education” as well as reinforcing the “fact that it has better figures than most countries in terms of the technological infrastructure for education” (Laurillard, 2008: 34).

To complete this overview, perhaps it is the emblematic nature of these policy initiatives which needs to be better understood. As said above, this ICT agenda promised a technological ‘transformation’ of the UK education system, the aim of this transformation being the enhancement of the UK’s competitiveness on the world stage. Consequently, in this sense, as Selwyn (2008) argues:

“Much of the New Labour ICT policy agenda should only be seen as seeking to engineer educational change in an indirect and inspirational manner. In many ways then, the suite of ICT policies under New Labour drive should be seen as a series of tentative steps of releasing some ideas about technological change into the educational domain in the hope that they may stimulate or provoke change.” (p. 706)

Put strongly, these initiatives were primarily economically driven rather than pedagogically, and designed to suit the emerging knowledge-based economy, thus emphasising up-grading of skills through initiatives aimed at emerging cohorts of young people as well as the population of post-compulsory education age.

With regard to a national policy on higher education, it was the enquiry launched by the Conservative government in 1996, published a year later under the title of ‘Higher Education in the Learning Society’ (known as the Dearing Report (1997)) which formed the pivotal policy of the period and thus needs to be considered.

Higher Education in the Learning Society (NCIHE, 1997)

For some observers, the publication of the Dearing Report was a political strategy designed “to take higher education out of the general election campaign of 1997, and the introduction of tuition fees out of the political arena” (Trow, 1998). For others, the report reflected the phenomenal evolution of the entire sector over the past decade and “[m]any of the issues the Dearing Report deals with ... [stood] as key concerns in the passage from elite to mass higher education and beyond” (Neave, 1998).

Two main points are made in the Dearing report: higher education has become “a global market place in which [the UK should] compete” (Dearing, 1997:12), and the aim of British universities is now “... to sustain a learning society” (Dearing, 1997:13) in which students, institutions, the economy, employers and the state worked together interdependently. Responsibility for financing learning would see a shift in the burden of funding from government to student with the decision to introduce annual tuition fees, thus ending 50 years of free tuition (Smith, 2006).

With the Dearing report, the emphasis moved from teaching to learning and concepts of ‘learning to learn’, ‘transferable skills’ and ‘learning for life’ became priorities. To achieve this, the report placed ICT at the forefront of such change and went as far as claiming that the role of staff had changed as a result of the new technologies (‘Students and Learning’ (Chapter 8)). ICT in the report comprised the systems (administrative database and information resources), the equipment (hardware and software) and the computer-based learning materials. The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) which manages, on behalf of the three funding councils, the Joint Academic Network, JANET, was commended; targets were set for institutions to make necessary arrangements for all students to have access to networked computers by 2000/01 and to be able to connect to their own laptop by 2005/06: plans were laid to “...co-ordinate the national development, over the medium and long term, of computer-based learning materials, and manage initiatives to develop such materials” (Dearing, 1997:44). The Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILT) was created (becoming later the Higher Education Academy). Finally, the report stressed the need for each institution to have in place overarching communications and information strategies by 1999/2000.

The title of the report ('Higher Education in the Learning Society') underlines the new role of higher education in an economy where continuous innovation in products and processes is required and in which, such innovation, in turn, requires workforces which are highly skilled and able to adapt to changes in technology and the organisation of production. The notion of a 'learning society' came to take centre stage in education policies in the 1990s under the influence of the OECD and the European Commission. The argument was that all employees should be accomplished learners, able to renew and develop their skills not only by participating in formal and training provision, but also – and equally, if not more importantly – through interacting with colleagues and other non-formal and informal means (OECD, 1996a). The focus of concern here was the inability of conventional educational systems to respond effectively to what were seen to be the challenges of contemporary economic, social and technological change. The Dearing report constitutes, to some extent, an answer to these concerns. However, the notion has been heavily criticised. Without going into too much detail, amongst the commentators who have critically examined the notion of 'learning society'⁴, many pointed out the gap between policy texts and research findings (despite the fact that the link between investment in education and economic performance is not backed up by evidence, politicians have continued to base their central policy texts on this principle – as argued for example by Brown *et al.* (2001) ; Gorard *et al.* (1998); Coffield (1999); Brown and Keep (2000)).

In short, the Dearing report outlined a set of new priorities (and targets) for higher education which emphasised the need to increase enrolments, provide programmes relevant to the 'knowledge economy', and produce research in specific domains, reinforcing the trends brought by globalization. The role attributed to ICT to achieve these was central both because of the infrastructure they would provide and the changes they would introduce. The coherent approach to strategic planning of the higher education sector advocated in the report, constitutes, according to Scott (1998), one of the main characteristics of mass higher education systems. For Scott:

⁴ For example Eraut (1997), Gorard *et al.* (1998), Tight (1998), Field (2000) and Peters (2001). These commentators have approached it from different perspectives: Gorard *et al.* (1998) sought to identify some of the social determinants of adult participation – factors generally ignored by human capital based policies; Peters (2001) assessed the conceptual shortcomings of the policy discourses which tend to confuse 'knowledge' with 'information', and 'society' with 'economy'.

“It is good news ..., in theory at any rate, universities can be proactive rather than simply reactive. But it is bad news because the better managed university of today is also a more regulated institution. This may make it more difficult for bottom-up *ad hoc* initiatives to be taken in the arena of international exchanges and international education.” (p.115)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, on the whole, the report was not well received by the academic community – and this from different perspectives. It was criticised for its form, for being written by an outsider – a senior civil servant who “... [did] not show an intimate knowledge of the institutions” (Trow, 1998:93), and “... [made] recommendations for British higher education as if it were a single and homogeneous entity” (Trow 1998:97). The choice of vocabulary used in the report was also subject to comments that it promoted a process of assimilation, the university progressively being changed from being an institution *in* the society to being an institution *of* the society (Barnett, 1998), and terms such as ‘understanding’, ‘critique’, ‘interdisciplinarity’ and ‘wisdom’ have been replaced by ‘skills’, ‘vocationalism’, ‘competence’, ‘outcomes’, etc. (Barnett, 1997b). But the core problem with the report – as with most skills policies of the time – was its narrow conception of a ‘learning society’ and the vagueness of the concepts used. As Dunne *et al.* (2000) argue, skills policies resulting from the recommendations made in the Dearing report lacked clear definitions of central concepts such as ‘learning’ or ‘skills’:

“The discourse on generic skills, and all its variant, is confused, confusing, and under-conceptualised. Employers and policy makers alike have been seduced by the slogans, with scant consideration of their definition, characteristics, transferability or utility.” (Dunne *et al.* 2000:131)

The consequence of this lack of agreement on essential definitions is that “policy direction is unplanned, random or likely to end on the rocks” (Dunne *et al.* 2000:133).

To end this section, perhaps a word needs to be said about Europe in British politics. Through this analysis, the themes of European major texts appear clearly in UK policies. However, as Smith (2006) points out, although Britain has been characterised as an ‘awkward partner’ in the European Union, this was rarely because of the failure of its government structures to adapt to the demands of EU membership.

3. National Policies in France

The central policy text of the late 1990s in France is, undoubtedly, the 1997 *Programme d'Action Gouvernemental pour la Société de l'Information (PAGSI)*. The set of policies included in this document includes areas of public life the government considered as being essential for the development of the 'information society'. As such, it should be considered as the National Information Infrastructure policy for France. However, before examining this document, two steps are necessary. Firstly, there is one report, small in size, which dates from 1978 which merits consideration, as its lasting impact – on social scientists, politicians and journalists – has continued to shape subsequent policies (Miège, 2004). It is '*L'Informatisation de la Société*', better known in France as *le Rapport Nora-Minc* (1978). Then, in order to show the extent to which French national policies have progressively implemented the Bangemann recommendations, a review of annual conferences on media and ICT which were held between the summer 1994 and 2000 is offered ('*les universités d'été d'Hourtin*'). Finally, the report which outlines priorities for higher education, the '*Université du Troisième Millénaire*' is examined. As said earlier, since the intention is to compare these two sets of national policies, it is essential that, as far as possible, the texts selected be comparable, as, on the whole, is the case.

L'Informatisation de la Société (Nora and Minc, 1978)

This policy text is an administrative report which was commissioned by the French president of the time, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and prepared by Simon Nora, senior civil servant at the *Inspection Générale des Finances*. The scope of this report goes far beyond the average administrative report and is considered in France as a milestone. Its lasting impact – among social scientists, politicians and journalists – comes from the fact that it announced the broad political trends which were to come in France and echoed social expectations of the time (Moeglin and Tremblay, 1999).

Called 'The Computerization of Society', the report argues that the growing computerization of society leads to fundamental societal choices which could have either positive or negative effects depending on political decisions made – "Thus to

steer toward computerization is to opt for a model of society”⁵ (Nora and Minc, 1978:105). To emphasise the novelty of this phenomenon, they created a new word: ‘*télématique*’, the merger of the words ‘*informatique*’ and ‘*télécommunications*’, stressing the convergence of computers and communication. The report was bold in its forecasts and announced a massive social computerization flowing through society like electricity, and the advent of cheap computers and powerful global communications media (Rheingold, 1991). Nora and Minc compare the spread of networks to the electricity grid – a fairly commonly used metaphor – but stress the fact that “unlike electricity, [*télématique*] will not carry an inert current, but rather information, that is to say, power⁶” (Nora and Minc, 1978:11). The legacy of the report can be summed up in two main points: the predominant role attributed to the state in the establishment of favourable social, cultural and political consequences, and the strong sense that the state had a duty to counter-balance the American supremacy in the field of ICT (in the report, the company IBM epitomises this threat).

Hourtin Conferences on Communication

Every year, between 1979 and 2004, the *Centre Régional d’Education Permanente et d’Action Culturelle (CREPAC)* organised a conference, at the end of August, on the major issues of the year in the domain of communication, media and ICT. This was a high profile event where politicians were invited, including, in some years, the prime minister. Being regarded in France as an important event in the world of communication, it is pertinent to survey the years 1994 to 2000 to measure the impact of the policies and reports published. One point needs to be stressed, it is the fact that in 1994, 1995 and 1996 the Centre-Right was in power, whereas between 1997 and 2002, the Left-Green coalition was in government.

In 1994, a few weeks after the presentation of the Bangemann report, three ministers from Edouard Balladur’s government attended the conference and the most pressing matter of the time was the different levels of taxation applied to different media which

⁵ «Piloter l’informatisation, c’est donc choisir un modèle de société.»

⁶ «La ‘*télématique*’, à la différence de l’électricité ne véhiculera pas un courant inerte, mais de l’information, c’est-à-dire du pouvoir.»

were discussed with Nicolas Sarkozy, then finance minister, in charge of communication (Le Monde, 1994d). It is on the third day that a topic echoing European reactions to the Bangemann report was discussed (although no direct reference to the Bangemann report is to be found); Jacques Toubon, then minister of culture, centred his intervention on the idea that what was really at stake and problematic for Europe with the development of ICT, was the content of the information circulated (the 'cultural imperative' of contents) not 'the networks which were already in place' (Le Monde, 1994e).

Unsurprisingly, it is from 1995 onwards that ICT became the central topic of the conference and themes that year essentially developed all the main arguments presented in the Bangemann report, in particular, the "consequences that technological evolutions and their economic and financial transactions [would] have on employment, work and training, as well as politics of town planning, health and education" (Le Monde, 1995). The title of that conference reflects these questions: "The navigator, the port and the compass. To understand the information society"⁷ (Le Monde, 1995).

In 1996, the conference, with its theme 'Let's invent the digital City!'⁸ focussed the discussions on "... the influence multimedia tools, information highways and digital techniques would have on citizens and on the City"⁹. Prime Minister Alan Juppé launched that year's edition in which "[d]ebates, workshops, meetings and demonstrations on telemedicine, virtual money, publication and digitalisation, virtual advertising, on-line newspapers, etc"¹⁰ were on the agenda (Le Monde, 1996).

In 1997, as Le Monde explained: "For its week at Hourtin, CREPAC Aquitaine had to modify some of its political guest list as the government changed after the elaboration of the programme. The latter, however, was not modified; "questions raised by the

⁷ « Le navigateur, le port et la boussole. Comprendre la société de l'information. »

⁸ Inventons la Cité numérique ! (It might be relevant here to explain that the French word 'la Cité' with a capital 'c' has a different meaning from the word 'la cité' with a small 'c' (often used in plural to talk about housing estates in the French suburbs) and that it is usually used to refer to the Greek concept of 'polis', putting the emphasis on the idea of a place where inhabitants are involved in discussions which concern the way things are run in their 'City'; the English translation 'the city' might not reflect this meaning).

⁹ « (...) du multimédia, des autoroutes de l'information, des techniques du numérique, et de leur influence sur les citoyens et sur la Cité. »

¹⁰ « [d]ébats, ateliers, rencontres et démonstrations sur la télémédecine, l'argent virtuel, l'édition et le numérique, la publicité virtuelle, les journaux en ligne, etc. »

coming of the information society resist political changes”¹¹ (Le Monde, 1997a). The central theme was around the question “And the political dimension?”¹² and some of the key personalities of the new political majority attended the conference: the new Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin (key-note speaker), Catherine Trautmann, Minister of Culture and Communication and Laurent Fabius, president of the National Assembly. Consequently, that year’s conference had a larger press coverage than the previous years. Jospin presented his government’s programme of actions in favour of the new technologies. The following quote cited in Le Monde encapsulates the philosophy which underpinned everything Jospin’s government would do in this field:

« Nous sommes décidés à combler le retard français en matière de technologies de l’information, qui pourrait avoir de graves conséquences en termes de compétitivité et d’emploi. La France et la culture française doivent occuper toute leur place dans la société mondiale de l’information. Mais nous refuserons que le fossé séparant ceux de nos concitoyens qui maîtrisent ces nouveaux outils du reste de la population s’accroisse. » (Le Monde, 1997b)

“We have decided to make up for French lost time on information technologies as this could quickly have important consequences in terms of competitiveness and employment. France and French culture must hold their proper place in the world-wide information society. But we will refuse to see the gap widening between those of our fellow-countrymen who master these new tools and the rest of the population.”

The programme is examined later, but it is worth reformulating the three key ideas present in this announcement: there is the politically strategic argument against the Right accused of not having done enough in this domain and therefore potentially jeopardising the employment market; the idea that Jospin’s government defends and protects France’s international influence, and, thirdly, the governmental priority of widening participation and fair access to ICT.

That year, a polemic arose which, although not related to the present subject, is nevertheless relevant as it encapsulates French mentalities of the time. The polemic is

¹¹ « Pour sa semaine de réflexion d’Hourtin, le Crepac d’Aquitaine a dû modifier en partie la liste de ses invités politiques, le gouvernement ayant changé depuis l’élaboration du programme. Ce dernier, en revanche, n’a subi aucune modification ; les questions soulevées par l’avènement de la société de l’information sont résistantes aux alternances. »

¹² « Et le politique? »

about the Minitel¹³. Jospin dared to openly criticise the Minitel and argued that due to its technological limitations, France Telecom should start thinking of progressively transferring its services to the internet. As Le Monde (1997c) reported: “It [was] the first time a French political leader [spoke] so clearly on the subject. Up until now, any statement had to have the self satisfactory verse on the fifteen years of French telematics culture.”¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, Jospin’s claim was immediately followed by angry reactions from Minitel service providers. One of them, Roncin, argued back and expressed doubts about Jospin’s idea that the internet was a ‘social utility’. Roncin made a somewhat stereotypical distinction between web users and non web users in claiming:

« [La toile] est réservée à une élite disposant d’un niveau élevé de formation et de revenus et ne propose pas aujourd’hui de services à valeur ajoutée de masse ... [Internet est pour] ceux qui aiment la lecture, les introvertis, alors que les extravertis, comme les sportifs, qui préfèrent les contacts, ne passent pas dix heures devant un écran. » (Le Monde, 1997d)

“[The web] is for an elite with a high level education and income and does not offer, today, any mass services of added value ... [The internet is for] those who like reading, introverts, whereas extroverts, like sport-types, who prefer contacts, do not spend ten hours in front of a screen.”

The 1998 conference with its theme “A new world: Europe”¹⁵ bore a strong emphasis on market and competition. Launched by Claude Allègre, minister of National Education, Research and Technology, it was announced that the government had allocated 200 million francs to support the creation of multimedia educational programmes. Companies willing to spend three times the amount given by the government would be eligible (Le Monde, 1998). Allègre knew that this initiative would create discontent within the education sector and was quoted in Le Monde (1998) as saying:

¹³ Launched in 1982 in France by the national PTT (*Poste, Téléphone et Télécommunications*), the Minitel was an online service accessible through the telephone lines and considered as one of the world's most successful pre-worldwide web online services. Users could make online purchases, make train reservations, check stock prices, search the telephone directory, and chat in a similar way to that now made possible by the internet.

¹⁴ « C’est la première fois qu’un responsable politique français tient un discours aussi clair sur le sujet. Jusqu’à présent, pas une déclaration n’évitait le couplet d’autosatisfaction sur les quinze années de culture télématique française. »

¹⁵ « Un nouveau monde : l’Europe »

« [I]l fallait sortir du colbertisme étroit qui voudrait qu'on fabrique tout à l'Education Nationale. Pour éviter de devenir une marchandise et rester un service public, l'enseignement doit être à la pointe de l'innovation. (...) La mondialisation fait du secteur éducatif un marché. La France doit y être présente. » (Le Monde, 1998)

“[I]t was necessary to break from the narrow vision of education inherited from Colbert which dictated that everything had to be made within the *Education Nationale*. So that education does not become a commodity but remains a public service, education must be innovative (...) Globalisation has made education a market. France must be part of it.”

Allègre's words echo those of Bangemann in the sense that they share the conviction that education has become a world market and education systems must adapt, his views on education are strongly anchored in the public service tradition. This is all the more significant in that Allègre was in charge of the *Campus Numériques* initiative.

In 1999, the Prime Minister, Jospin, returned to Hourtin and gave a long speech about the work achieved since 1997 and his project of a legal framework for the internet and e-commerce (Le Monde, 1999c). In his intervention, he tried to demonstrate the central role his government had played in this field, and through his argumentation, one can see his political analysis of the role the state (“the modern state”):

« Ce sursaut n'allait pas de soi. Il s'appuie sur la politique volontariste déployée par le Gouvernement, politique dont j'ai ici même donné les grandes priorités il y a deux ans et qui s'est traduite par un ambitieux programme d'action lancé en janvier 1998. Des moyens très importants – près de six milliards de francs – lui ont été consacrés. L'impulsion ainsi donnée par le Gouvernement était indispensable. L'attentisme n'était plus de mise. S'en remettre à la seule spontanéité du marché aurait été dangereux. Il était de la responsabilité de l'Etat de donner le signal d'un vaste mouvement collectif. » (L. Jospin, 1999)

“This sudden burst was not obvious. It rests on a voluntarist political plan deployed by the government, I have here, two years ago, presented the priorities of this plan which translated into an ambitious programme of action launched in January 1998. Very important means – nearly six billion francs - were attached to it. The impetus given by the government was essential. The wait-and-see attitude wasn't on the cards anymore. To just leave it to the market's spontaneity would have been dangerous. It was the State's responsibility to signal a vast collective movement.”

We hear in this (in parallel with the Bangemann report), the same conviction that a strong political commitment of the member states is required. However, *Le Monde* (1999d) at the time argued that Jospin's intervention was mostly aimed at reassuring French people about new technologies, pushing the argument in favour of a 'regulated' internet.

In 2000, most of the debates were on the issue of television and radio channels: e.g. regional newspapers experimenting with broadcasting via the internet (*Le Monde*, 2000c). However, the declaration of the new Minister of Culture and Communication, Catherine Tasca, is worth noting. She argued that the preparation of the coming bill on the information society should not be left to the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry and that her ministry had an essential role to play. Using, as her predecessors had done, the point made by Nora and Minc in 1978, she said: "Contents circulating on the internet have, most of the time, a cultural dimension."¹⁶ (*Le Monde*, 2000d).

As this analysis of press articles published on this annual conference shows, ICT was a policy area which was, regardless of the political party of the government, considered as a major priority in which key political figures were getting involved. The strong impact of the work of the Bangemann Group is evident through the mostly unquestioned acceptance of its recommendations.

***Préparer l'Entrée de la France dans la Société de l'Information – Programme d'Action Gouvernemental*¹⁷ (Jospin, 1998)**

The launch of this programme (referred to in France as PAGSI¹⁸), as seen in the subsection on the 1997 Hourtin annual conference, was well orchestrated. Though orally presented by the recently nominated prime minister, Jospin, in August, details and modalities were finalised at the end of 1997 (Jospin, 1997:3) and the document eventually published in early 1998.

This programme was the major political programme on ICT of the Socialists when they came back to power in 1997 and six billion francs were allocated for its

¹⁶ « Les contenus véhiculés sur Internet ont le plus souvent une dimension culturelle. »

¹⁷ To prepare the entry of France in the information society – Governmental programme of action

¹⁸ *Programme d'Action Gouvernemental pour la Société de l'Information*

implementation. What immediately attracts any critically minded analyst about this document is its title which could be interpreted as follows: the country is on the threshold of the 'information society' and this 'governmental programme of action' will make sure France will have to access to it. The implications are: firstly that previous governments did not do enough with regard to this situation; secondly that the country is not yet ready, more work is required and it is the government which will take the lead; and thirdly that the 'information society' is an entity, somewhere out there, which functions without France but in which the French must take part. This strongly echoes the themes reviewed in chapter 1, in particular the arguments developed by Bell regarding the role states should play to support the move to the new type of society.

From the outset, the document associates the idea of a national policy on ICT with that of a choice of society, in-line with the influential Nora-Minc report. The introduction stated:

« L'entrée dans la société de l'information peut se traduire par une société plus solidaire, plus ouverte et plus démocratique. C'est pourquoi le gouvernement propose aux Français un projet et une vision politiques des technologies de l'information et de la communication fondés sur l'ambition d'une société de l'information solidaire. » (Jospin, 1998:8)

"Entry to the information society can translate into a more united, more open and more democratic society. This is why the government propose to French people a political project and vision of information and communication technologies based on the ambition of a fair information society."

The emphasis of the entire programme is on "building a fair information society" (sub-title of introduction) and the striking feature of the document is the way its tone and argumentation are distinctively different from the then dominant rhetoric on knowledge-based economy, investment in human capital and the central role played by the new technologies to support national competitiveness. Here, the argument developed explains that the national economy is at stake because ICT-related industry could contribute to economic growth and provide employment. Then the point is made

that changes brought by ICT go beyond the economy and engage the social and cultural aspects of the country¹⁹ (Jospin, 1998: 7).

The PAGSI identified six priorities:

- « 1) *Les nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication dans l'enseignement.*
- 2) *Une politique culturelle ambitieuse pour les nouveaux réseaux.*
- 3) *Les technologies de l'information au service de la modernisation des services publics.*
- 4) *Les technologies de l'information, un outil primordial pour les entreprises.*
- 5) *Relever le défi de l'innovation industrielle et technologique.*
- 6) *Favoriser l'émergence d'une régulation efficace et d'un cadre protecteur pour les nouveaux réseaux d'information.* » (Jospin, 1998:3)

- “1) The new information and communication technologies in education.
- 2) An ambitious cultural policy for the new networks.
- 3) The information technologies serving the modernisation of public services.
- 4) The information technologies, an essential tool for companies.
- 5) To take up the challenge of the industrial and technological innovation.
- 6) To encourage the emergence of an efficient control mechanism and a protective framework for the new information networks.”

The implementation would rest on a ‘coordinated action at national and international levels’ which, at national level, would require a commitment from each local governmental administration in order to obtain a fair expansion of these technologies across all the territory (Jospin, 1998:77-79). At international level, presenting a brief history of the past actions of the European Union in the field of ICT – starting with the Bangemann report, presented as constituting the basis of the reflection led by the Commission (Jospin, 1998:81) – the PAGSI advocated an active engagement of France in international developments. To concentrate on the first of the six priorities, education, the report explained that:

¹⁹ « Les bouleversements introduits par les technologies de l'information dépassent largement le seul enjeu économique : l'essor des nouveaux réseaux d'information et de communication offre des promesses sociales, culturelles et, en définitive, politiques. »

« ... l'Etat engagera des moyens importants pendant trois ans ... Cette contribution exceptionnelle concerne l'ensemble des enseignements, à tous les niveaux, et couvre la formation des enseignants, l'équipement et la mise en réseau des établissements d'enseignement ainsi que la production et la diffusion de contenus adaptés. » (Jospin, 1998:13)

“... the State will make important investments for three years ... This exceptional contribution is for all the sectors of education, at all levels, and includes teacher training, ICT hardware and networks in all education institutions as well as the production and the dissemination of especially designed contents.”

Jospin's approach was decentralised and appeared to be removed from the central National Education Ministry probably in order to distance this programme from any previous Socialist policy on ICT, the major one being 'IT plan for all', briefly presented above. This approach is extended to higher education institutions as the programme announced that, by the spring of 1998, institutions would have to provide an ICT plan focussing on how all students could have access to computers (Jospin, 1998:13). Finally, a brief allusion to distance learning in higher education is made – this is the embryo of the *campus numériques* – a point developed in the next chapter.

To complete this overview of the directions given by French policies at the time of the *campus numériques*, what could be considered as being the equivalent of the UK Dearing report needs to be examined.

Université du Troisième Millénaire (1998)

Claude Allègre, minister of National Education, Research and Technology presented this plan, '*Université du Troisième Millénaire*' (U3M), a few months after having opened the 1998 Hourtin conference claiming that, with globalization, education had become a market (Le Monde, 1998). Understanding U3M from this standpoint allows seeing the links made between globalization, higher education and ICT, as the emphasis of the new six-year plan for higher education was on ICT ("The big concept of U3M is the concept of network"²⁰(Allègre, 1998)). U3M was introduced as being in sharp contrast with the previous plan *Université 2000* (U2000), which covered the decade

²⁰ « Le grand concept de U3M est le concept de réseau. »

from 1989 to 1999²¹ (a discussion of the decidedly non-technologically focussed U2000 plan is to be found in chapter 2). Allègre's play on words with the *béton* and *matière grise* was widely quoted in the press of the time:

« Autrement dit, si je voulais résumer, Université 2000 a été un plan dans lequel le béton soutenait la matière grise. Donc, U3M c'est la matière grise qui devra soutenir le béton. » (Allègre, 1998)

"In other words, if I wanted to summarise, *Université 2000* was a plan in which concrete supported grey matter. So, with U3M it is the grey matter which will have to support the concrete."

When U3M was officially launched from the *Bibliothèque Nationale François Mitterrand* in December 1999, Allègre explained the main objective of his plan in the following words:

« Beaucoup de réalisations ont été accomplies et ne sont plus à faire. La démographie étudiante est stabilisée, voire en légère décroissance. La priorité absolue n'est pas l'accueil d'étudiants et la construction de mètres carrés supplémentaires; le plan U3M doit permettre à notre enseignement supérieur et à notre recherche de contribuer au développement économique et technologique de notre pays. ... Ce rôle de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche dans le développement économique justifie, au delà des querelles stériles, l'intervention des régions, compétentes, en vertu des lois de décentralisation, pour des actions intéressant ce développement économique. » (Allègre, 1999)

"A lot has been accomplished and so no longer remains to be done. Student numbers are stable and have even slightly decreased. The absolute priority is no longer the reception of students or building projects; the U3M plan must allow our higher education sector and our research to contribute to the economic and technological development of our country. ... This role of higher education and of research in economic development justifies, above sterile quarrels, the intervention of the regions, competent in the matter since the decentralisation Act, for actions favourable to this economic development."

As has been shown in chapter 2, towards the end of the 1990s the expansion of French higher education slowed down, mainly for demographic reasons and, thus, as Allègre says, the central priority was no longer to adapt to the influx of student numbers. Now the time had come to focus on what direction to take and the above quotation contains

²¹ It is ironic to note how skilful he was at pretending that there had been a political continuity between the two plans, as if the four years during which his party was in opposition had not existed (1993-97).

the two fundamental features of the sector at the time of the launch of the French virtual university: a) higher education should serve the knowledge-based economy for the years to come; and b) the financing of this activity can no longer rest on the state, each region (regions, in France, are administrative divisions of the territory) must support its own higher education institutions.

And thus, his approach to implementing the priorities was characterised by an arms-length type of steering with an emphasis on partnerships and consultation:

« Ce n'est pas du tout de l'administration centrale que viendra telle ou telle instruction ... [D]ans chaque académie, dans chaque région, réfléchissent, coordonnés par les recteurs et les préfets, les universitaires et les responsables concernés par U3M: ils doivent faire remonter les projets. » (Allègre, 1998)

"It is not at all from the central administration that such and such directive will come ... [I]n each local authority, in each region, in coordination with heads of local authorities and regions, academics and those involved in U3M are working on it: projects have to come from the bottom up."

As can be seen, the notion of partners was broad and included the wider context of the higher education sector. Projects proposed by this wider community were gathered by a steering committee:

« J'ai rédigé, avec mon équipe, un texte de cadrage général qui couvre en substance un certains nombres de points ... J'ai d'autre part mis en place, après en avoir déterminé la composition, avec beaucoup de soin, un comite national de pilotage, présidé par Guy Aubert, ancien directeur général du CNRS ... Le comité de pilotage comprend des universitaires, des urbanistes, des personnalités du monde économique, des personnalités du monde politique, le Plan, l'Aménagement du Territoire. Il doit réfléchir à la logique d'ensemble. » (Allègre, 1998)

"I have written, with my team, a general framework which essentially covers a few points ... Moreover, having very carefully decided its membership, I have set up a national steering committee, chaired by Guy Aubert, former head of the CNRS ... The steering committee includes academics, city planners, key people from the economic world, key people from the political world, the Plan, the Regional Planning Authority. Its task is to think about the overall logic of all the different components involved."

Guy Aubert, senior academic and special advisor to the ministry would be asked to play a significant role in the *campus numériques*, as will be seen later – a point worth bearing in mind as the policy community of the area of virtual learning in higher education was composed of a fairly small group of people. However, as far as this mode of delivery was concerned, no announcements or plans were made in the U3M report – a somewhat puzzling absence in a plan which placed so much emphasis on digital technology. This, however, fits with a pattern of no political commitment in this domain which can be traced back to the period 1990-1998 during which successive governments commissioned several reports²² – one of them to investigate the possibility of the creation of a French Open University (requested under the second mandate of François Mitterrand) – which all remained at the reflection stage (Thibault, 2007). The consequence of these recurrent hesitations is the scattered landscape of distance learning providers described in chapter 2. It is worth noting though that at the time of the presentation of the U3M plan, in December 1999, i.e. six months away from the public launch of the *campus numériques*, nothing was said about this initiative.

4. Comparison and Discussion

The literature review conducted in chapter 1 explained the origins of the rhetoric recurrently found in policies on virtual higher education, in particular, the ‘information society’.

In presuming that the country needs to urgently develop its overall level of ICT in order to reach the level of development of other, more advanced countries, these policies adopt both futurological and technological discourse. By and large, the above examination of European, UK and French policies on the subject shows some striking similarities. They place the reforms and changes to be introduced within the wider

²² 1990: *Pour une université ouverte*, Olivier Duhamel (commissioned by Lionel Jospin, *ministre de l'éducation nationale*) ; 1990: *L'enseignement à distance, pour une université de la connaissance*, Jean-Paul Lafrance, François Mellet (commissioned by the DATAR) ; 1992: *Rapport de mission sur l'université à distance*, Michel Serres (commissioned by Edith Cresson, prime minister) ; 1993: *Formations ouvertes et à distance. La situation française* (commissioned by the *Commission des Communautés Européennes*) ; 1997: *Enseignement à distance : réalités, enjeux et perspectives*, Jean-Claude Barbarant (commissioned by the *Conseil Economique et Social*) ; 1998 : *Le désir de France*, Patrick Bloche (commissioned by Lionel Jospin, prime minister).

historical context of the advancement of a new society or a new age, and their outlining what is required implies that they know what the future holds if the present is changed. Equally, the future of society essentially depends on the advancement of its technology which in turn determines the transition to a new form of society.

They also have in common the centrality given to education in their priorities. These technology-based interventions covered a wide spectrum of central and local public services, amongst others, health, welfare, social security, criminal justice and policing (Hudson, 2002). Yet, the attention placed on education in texts and in announcements dominates this societal change. Once again, reference to the literature review of chapter 1 on themes related to the notion of the knowledge-based economy illuminates the reasons for such emphasis. As has been shown, the establishment of a globally competitive economy primarily depends on the ability of education systems to adapt to the new needs identified as characteristics of the new era.

Evidence of some of the changes which have taken place in higher education over the last 20 years has been analysed in chapter 2, in particular the consequence of expansion in terms of flows of students across the different types of institutions and the progressive increase of short, vocationally-oriented programmes. Institutions are now more than ever expected to fully participate in the promotion and development of the 'learning society' and thus engage with local communities, political powers and businesses in order to support the development of the region and create conditions to facilitate equitable participation. New sectors and new types of institutions are created to respond to the expansion of the sector, and as they are absorbed into the national system, it is the entire shape and structure of higher education which is altered, universities tending to increasingly look alike (Scott 1995, Trow 2002). Moreover, the recurrent shortage of resources encourages domestic competition for funding and student recruitment, on the one hand, and for developing public and private partnerships, on the other. Finally, as stressed previously, the strength of the dominant rhetoric based on human capital means that there is a risk of seeing credentialism increase leading to some important social problems (for some, potentially leading to a credential inflation (Brown 2006, Stromquist 2006), a trap for most students from working class origins (Willis 2006)). Internationally, often seen as the flagship of their

country, institutions are expected to fully engage in competition with other countries in order to attract high-fee paying students (in some cases to compensate for the ‘brain drain’ towards the US), develop ‘soft power’ strategies (to support the development of economic links with rapidly developing countries in view of future business), and compete with other countries to develop and gain intellectual property rights. At the same time, as this ‘market war’ is developing, regional convergence is beginning to appear, for example within Europe.

Beside these parallel concerns with extending education and establishing information infrastructures, there are, however, some fundamental differences emerging from this comparative policy analysis. The first difference concerns the fact that, unlike France, the UK did not have an overarching framework of a NII policy. And thus, there is no ‘joined-up’ thinking to the UK based ICT-led initiatives mentioned above, one of them being the UKeU. By comparison, in France, the PACSI constituted a framework, which seemed to be well-known by higher education practitioners (at least those interviewed for the *Campus numériques* referred to the programme fairly knowledgeably). The document contains a clear reference to the Bangemann report, indicating a coherence with supra-national texts – something not seen in UK policies. The second difference is related to the first one and concerns the overall national approach to these matters. It would appear, at least from the analysis of these policies, that the UK adopted a solid, and at the time, aggressive, argument in favour of economic competitiveness, something which is not so apparent in French rhetoric. The Information Society Index (ISI) has grouped countries into four groups and, as explained in chapter 3, the UK fell under what they called the ‘Skaters’, stressing the fast pace at which successive initiatives were implemented. France was not in the same group and was considered as moving with a mixture of caution and conviction, the ‘Striders’. The above analysis seems to corroborate some of these characteristics. However, to analyse and ultimately compare policy initiatives, their implementation ought to be part of the analysis. This is what the next two chapters seek to do.

To end this discussion, and in order to prepare the transition to the next two final chapters, the intention is to further consider the relationship higher education / digital technology. The strong link between education and the knowledge-based economy has

diverse consequences for education provision, the main ones have been outlined above. Specifically in terms of virtual higher education provision, it has been shown how in the early texts, distance learning was essentially envisaged as a parallel activity to existing institutions to address emerging societal needs which ‘conventional universities’ could not address, expansion of student numbers and costs implied being the main issue. From this perspective, the prospects of virtual universities seem like a convenient solution for higher education policy-makers. In the early texts examined at the outset of this chapter, the model which inspired the argument is, doubtlessly, that of the UK Open University, created in 1969 as the ‘University of the Air’ and whose success can be seen in those who have followed its lead (China, India, Turkey, etc.). However, it has also been shown how the idea of separate entities providing this type of higher education programme progressively changed towards the idea that this could also be happening within existing ‘conventional’ universities. Therefore, during the period studied, two distinct models began to appear, each having its advocates. This is developed in the next two chapters in which data concerning the two models of virtual universities compared are presented.

Chapter 5

Comparing the ‘Context of Influence’ of the UK and French Virtual University

“If, for example, I had been a minister at the time I may well have been at an international conference and I probably would have seen, as inevitably there are at these international conferences, stands which show whiz technology that promise to capture the world, and I may well have gone back and said to the department, “Hey, we had better do something about this or these Americans are going to clean up”. I do not know if that conversation took place or such a conference ever took place, but I can imagine that is the sort of thing that might happen. Believe me, politics is not entirely a rational business.” (Howells, Select Committee on Education and Skills 2004a: ev 58)

This chapter and the next analyse and compare the detail of the two policy initiatives according to the framework of the policy cycle discussed in chapter 1. As was argued, the traditional stages associated with policy-making include the context, the texts and the consequences (Ball, 1994; Taylor et al., 1997; Ngo *et al.*, 2006). They are here organised around two sets of contexts: influence and practice. The context of influence is where policy is normally initiated and therefore this stage of the analysis should take account of the global and the national, be it via key texts and/or influential stakeholders. From these influences, each model of the virtual university clearly emerges. Then, as the cycle moves to the implementation stage, the context of practice becomes prominent. This is where the effects of local factors and national characteristics can better be observed and analysed. In the case of the two virtual universities studied here, this is done via the analysis of the way particular groups of

stakeholders interact with each other (central government, the higher education sector and other partners). The consequences of these practices logically lead to the outcome of the policy initiative.

1. Globalization in the Discourse of the Two Policy Initiatives

This section focuses on a small number of policies produced at the outset of both initiatives. The aim is to compare how both projects were portrayed and announced by their respective governments so that similarities and differences in terms of policy-intention and policy-announcement are identified. This will also show the extent to which the rhetoric on the effects of globalization on higher education was called upon and disseminated in each country. A few major documents published in 2000 have been carefully selected, the main selection criteria being, as far as possible, their functional equivalence.

Initially, it might be helpful to say something about the analytic perspective adopted in this comparison on discourse. As we have seen, globalization has a pervasive ability to generate itself (Thompson, 2000; Steger, 2003) and thus it is essential to be critical of discourse about globalization and look at it as essentially a carrier of specific values. Globalization has the capacity to lower national expectations – that is to say, arguments put forward by globalists imply that for individuals, institutions and states, resistance to these trends is limited. Consequently, and because of the high profile of the two initiatives studied here, studying the discourse which accompanied their launch from this perspective should reveal some valuable characteristics.

The analysis is based on two sets of documents, details of which are listed below in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Policy texts related to the launch of both policy initiatives

	UK	France
Written Text	HEFCE Circular letter and annex A (number 04/00, dated 14 February 2000).	<i>Appel à Projets pour la Constitution de Campus Numériques Français</i> (dated 15 June 2000).
Oral Text	Speech given by Education and Employment Secretary, David Blunkett, at the University of Greenwich, on 15 February 2000.	Speech given by the minister in charge of the <i>Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Recherche et de la Technologie</i> , Claude Allègre, on 13 January 2000.

These four texts have been selected for their comparability in terms of types of documents, purpose, origins and timing.

If the comparability of the written texts is first considered, the UK key document is the circular letter and its annex sent by the HEFCE to the “Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions, Heads of HEFCE-funded further education colleges, Heads of DFHETE-funded universities”. There is no direct French equivalent to a circular letter. However, as far as the purpose and the source of the cited documents are concerned, there is functional equivalence. Both UK and French texts are designed to inform higher education institutions of an approaching new development and of the modalities to follow to take part. Both texts come from the central public body responsible for overseeing the national higher education sector. The synchronicity of their publication also contributes to their comparability.

The same is true for the speeches (‘oral texts’), whose selection was based on the comparability of their speakers – two figures of equal rank, the Secretary of State and the *Ministre* – and the purpose of the speeches – both were presenting a set of new initiatives for the years to come. Their timing is slightly different in the sense that the French speech was designed to coincide with the traditional speeches given for New Year when key French politicians use this opportunity to attract wider media coverage, whilst the Greenwich speech was scheduled to coincide with the release of the circular letters to reinforce the high profile of the initiative.

In the UK

HEFCE Circular Letter Number 04/00 (HEFCE, 2000), dated 14 February 2000 and signed by HEFCE chief executive Sir Brian Fender, is 590 words long and contains seven numbered paragraphs. The first paragraph announced the project (referred to as being “a new project to develop internet-based higher education” (HEFCE, 2000) and cited David Blunkett’s up impending speech in which he would present the initiative. It is the second paragraph describing the background of the project that is the most interesting:

“We are all aware of the development in the United States and elsewhere of major virtual and corporate ‘universities’. The HEFCE is concerned that UK higher education should be able to capitalise on its considerable expertise in new technologies and its reputation for quality to secure a significant share in the markets accessed by the virtual/corporate providers, both overseas and in the UK. We, with other UK funding bodies, now wish to explore how we can catalyse a virtual learning initiative of a scale and quality that will challenge the best in the world, and the Government has signalled its strong support for this initiative.” (HEFCE, 2000)

Starting with the somewhat tenuous claim that “We are all aware of...” the paragraph implied that there was a bi-polarity, an ‘us’ and ‘them’ – ‘we’ emphasises the idea of a community, whilst ‘them’ imprecisely refers to “the US and elsewhere”, “these virtual/corporate providers”, “the best in the world”. The logic of the argument displayed in this paragraph is predominantly that of economic competition on an international scale for which investment in new technologies is essential and the world-class reputation of UK higher education a central element. The reference to international markets for universities, the potential international scale of the British project and the UK higher education international reputation for quality, all reflect the notion of the impact of global infrastructures on national systems of regulation and control of individual nations. In addition to this, there is, in this paragraph, a strong message about the decision, jointly taken by the funding councils and the government, to use their authority and power to “develop this internet-based higher education” which would represent Britain abroad. In other words, the claim is that in the midst of these global developments and this international competitiveness, national institutions supported and guided by a strong governmental drive would be able to resist ‘them’.

Given the relationship running between state/policy-making/globalization, such politically centred drive is understandable.

The annex of the letter (Annex A of Circular Letter Number 04/00 (HEFCE, 2000b)) is a lot longer (2,000 words). It is also numbered (1 to 27) and contains the following headings: aim, background and objectives, setting up the project, operation and resourcing, funding, intended benefits. The aim, “To establish a globally-competitive provider of higher education programmes through virtual distance learning” (HEFCE, 2000b), clearly refers to an existing global market of virtual universities and intense international competition. Under “Background and Objectives”, points 2, 3 and 6 are particularly relevant. The second point – very similar to the second point of the letter – reinforces the ‘we’ and ‘them’ dichotomy, ‘them’ being described here as having “a strong international brand image” and as “investing resources on a scale which no individual UK higher education institutions can match”:

“2. The project aims to address current issues about the long-term ability of UK higher education to compete against the major virtual and corporate “universities” developing in the United States and elsewhere. Those overseas universities focus on distance and web-based delivery, and have the funds to achieve global reach. Some of them have a strong international brand image, and are investing resources on a scale which no individual UK higher education institutions can match. A detailed survey of developments in other countries is being undertaken through a research project on “borderless education” being funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP).” (HEFCE, 2000b)

The third point indicates the nature of the programmes envisaged: income generating vocational courses. It is written to stress global intensification of flows which cross boundaries and spread outside national systems of regulation:

“3. These developments potentially pose a significant competitive risk to the ability of UK universities and colleges to recruit overseas students, and to the UK market for continuing professional and vocational qualifications. The markets being targeted by the virtual/corporate private HE providers are some of the most lucrative, including vocational programmes for high-income professionals, often in subject areas which do not require expensive facilities and equipment.” (HEFCE, 2000b)

As for point 6, in highlighting the international dimension of the English language and how this would constitute an advantage to the project, it reinforces the idea that an intensification of flows and increased interconnectedness would:

6. "... give the UK a world-class reservoir of experience and expertise to draw on in developing the project. We also have the major advantages that our HE continues to have a good reputation overseas, and that English is the preferred international medium of instruction in HE." (HEFCE, 2000b)

Under the heading "Setting up the Project" (points 8 to 18), point 14 defined how institutions based in countries where there could be an important number of students, could be "associated with the consortium". These countries, commonly designated as 'fast developing countries', were described as "potential gateways to huge overseas student markets":

"14. Bidders would be encouraged to identify potential overseas HEIs which they think could usefully be associated with the consortium. A number of leading UK HEIs already have close links with countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and China, which are potential gateways to huge overseas student markets. We would also want to use the links developed through HEFCE's international collaboration programme with target countries – including Argentina, China, India, Brazil and South Africa." (HEFCE, 2000b)

There is here the widespread idea that political decisions taken on one side of the world have a significant impact elsewhere. Moreover, the vocabulary used in these two documents (letter and its annex) demonstrate the prototypical allegiance to the dominant rhetoric on globalization. The HEFCE documents repeatedly drew from a typical (and somewhat aggressive) business vocabulary: 'market', 'challenge', 'global' (and 'globally', 'international', internationally', 'world-wide', 'world class') and 'competitive' (and 'to compete', 'competitor', 'competitiveness').

Extracts from David Blunkett's speech were widely quoted in the media at the time, especially the following few lines:

“The arrival of the knowledge economy has intensified the competitive pressures on higher education institutions. Learning has become a big business. So a new national initiative is needed to maximise Britain’s chances of success in this global environment. I can announce that the Higher Education Funding Council for England will bring forward proposals for a new collaborative virtual centre – a consortium of ‘e-universities’. We want to create a new partnership between universities and the private sector which will develop a novel means of distance learning and exploit the new information and communication technologies. It will concentrate resources from a number of partners on a scale which can compete with leading US providers.” (Blunkett, 2000)

The second sentence in particular was often quoted as encapsulating the philosophy adopted by the Blair government on education. The emphasis is on competition and survival, and the themes identified earlier on – pressures to change in order to survive, global environment, partnership, centrality of ICT – are all present. The indication that the initiative would consist of a single institution is also briefly mentioned (‘a new collaborative virtual centre’).

To sum up, the discourse used for launching the UK virtual initiative reflected the dominant rhetoric of the effects of globalization on national public institutions. What was described as being at stake was the ability of the higher education sector to be on an equal footing with distance learning providers from other countries (the US in particular). The solution was thought to be in the strong commitment of the government via its funding councils, a partnership with the private sector and the exploitation of the high degree of existing expertise in the field of distance learning in the sector.

In France

In order to respect the chronological order in which the two texts were released, the French analysis starts with the speech.

The running theme of Claude Allègre New Year speech is the modernization of education and the first priority is higher education. The centre of his proposition can be found in this extract:

« Quelle politique de recherche et d'éducation faut-il mener pour nous placer au premier rang dans la société du savoir ? La stratégie est simple, après avoir répondu aux défis quantitatifs nous devons répondre aux défis qualitatifs. L'excellence doit être recherchée partout et pour tous. La France doit être présente au grand rendez-vous du siècle. Or l'excellence n'est possible que si elle s'accompagne de la diversité. A partir de là, la politique que nous menons est fondée sur la modernité et l'ouverture d'une part, sur la justice et la solidarité de l'autre. Comment ne pas faire de la modernité la priorité première d'un ministère qui est celui de la création et de la diffusion du savoir à un moment où les nouvelles technologies révolutionnent la manière d'enseigner ou de chercher et où les nouveaux savoirs nous obligent à une remise en cause des disciplines, de leurs priorités, de leurs contenus d'enseignement ? »
(Allègre, 2000)

“What type of polity in research and education is necessary to place us at the forefront of the knowledge society? The strategy is simple. Having dealt with challenges brought by expansion, we must respond to qualitative challenges. Excellence should be sought everywhere and for everyone. France must be present at the turn of the century. However, excellence is only possible if it is accompanied by diversity. From there, our polity is founded on modernity and openness on one side, and on justice and solidarity, on the other. How could it be different? Modernity has to be the priority in a ministry concerned with creation and dissemination of knowledge and at a time when new technologies have transformed teaching and researching, and where new knowledge imposes a questioning of subject areas, their priorities and the content of their teaching.”

From the outset, Allègre focuses on the needs of the knowledge-based economy and the necessity for the French higher education sector to re-visit all its activity. Referring to the difficulty generated by the recent influx of students, Allègre argues that it is now the quality of the learning experience which should be the main concern. As seen in the previous chapter, this is a clear reference to the priorities set up in his *U3M* report. Two core values are stressed as priorities: excellence and diversity. For him, it is a profound re-thinking of higher education as a whole which is required if France is to play a central role in the information society of tomorrow. Thus, for Allègre, clearly higher education is fundamentally inadequate and in need of thorough modernization in which the place of ICT is central. More specifically regarding new technologies and higher education, he explains that:

« Nous avons des structures de qualité mais éparses (CNED, CNDP, CNAM, Ecoles-Universités). Nous allons les rassembler en un GIP¹ et à partir de là développer un système de télé-enseignement modernisé dont les premières applications seront : la création d'une université senior; l'organisation d'une formation continue d'abord pour les enseignants puis pour toutes les formations universitaires professionnelles; les classes relais pour les élèves à scolarisation difficile. » (Allègre, 2000)

“We have quality entities but they are scattered (CNED, CNDP, CNAM, Schools). We are going to create a large partnership and with it, develop a modernised system of distance learning. Its first objectives will be the creation of a university of the third age, the organisation of continuing education, primarily for teachers, then for all university level vocational training, and supplementary tuition for pupils needing support.”

This fragmented scenery of French distance learning providers has already been considered, in particular the way it resulted from organic development over decades of absence of real political interest in this field. This idea of merging existing institutions that provide distance learning is central to the background of the *campus numériques* and will be further examined in the next section on stakeholders. At this stage, what is important to note is the fact that Allègre does not announce the initiative. Instead he announces a somewhat shapeless amalgamation of very different types of programmes. Considering that the launch of the *campus numériques* initiative was only a few month away, he appeared to miss a crucial opportunity for national press coverage. The significance of this point was discussed with some of the interviewees and is explained later on.

The document sent to all higher education institutions took the form of a call for a project named: *Appel à Projets pour la Constitution de Campus Numériques Français* (MEN, 2000a). It is four pages long and composed of an introduction and six sections with the following headings: objectives, activities developed within the *campus numériques* framework, financial plans, membership and partnership, legal status, preferred subject areas. Overall, the document contains 950 words. The thrust of the argumentation concerns the role of digital technology in modernising higher education provision. The introductory paragraph is reproduced and translated below.

¹ A GIP is a *Groupeement d'Intérêt Public*, a recognised partnership between public institutions which share a same objective for a definite period of time.

« Dans le contexte international actuel d'évolution accélérée de l'enseignement supérieur à distance, le développement de ce secteur d'activité constitue un enjeu fort pour l'ensemble des établissements d'enseignement supérieur français comme pour le Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance. Initialement pensé pour répondre aux besoins de publics spécifiques, l'enseignement à distance, lié dorénavant aux nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication, peut apporter une réponse aux besoins sociaux actuels en éducation et en formation. Facteur important de la modernisation des systèmes éducatifs et de la promotion des pratiques pédagogiques innovantes, les nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication permettent tout à la fois de diversifier les services offerts aux publics résidant en France inscrits en formation initiale ou en formation professionnelle continuée et d'élargir l'offre vers des publics étrangers. » (MEN, 2000a)

“In the present international context of the rapid evolution of distance learning in higher education, the development of this sector of activity is essential for all the French higher education institutions as well as for the Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance. Initially thought to answer the needs of specific populations, distance learning, linked from now on to the new information and communication technologies, can respond to present social needs in education and training. The important factor of modernisation of education systems and of the offer of innovative pedagogical practices – the new information and communication technologies – enable both diversification of services offered to the public based in France enrolled on initial and professional development courses and widen the offer to overseas audiences.”

As can be seen, direct references to globalization are kept to a minimum with only one mention of the ‘international context’ of distance learning in higher education. The vocabulary used tends to be restrained: ‘international context’ (no mention of anything ‘global’), ‘development of this sector of activity’ (no mention of a ‘market’ for example), ‘to widen the offer’, ‘towards overseas public’ (no mention of ‘market shares’ or related notions). Rather, three strong points are made in this introduction. The first one concerns the entire sector of higher education and how important it is that institutions understand that the development of distance learning is an essential element of their own development. The second point is that this document spells out the need for universities to closely work with the CNED on this new initiative. This constitutes, in itself, a fundamental shift in the way the sector operates. This, together with the fact that the initiative was not mentioned by Allègre, was spotted very early in the research and is considered again below. The third element contained in this extract is the emphasis placed on ICT and how it will alter the nature of distance learning provision. In particular, the contrast with ‘conventional’ distance learning (that is paper-based correspondence courses) with the extended possibilities provided

by the use of ICT – moving from a fairly narrow group of learners to being able to respond to new social needs.

The document develops what these *campus numériques* should offer:

« Cette offre dépasse les possibilités d'un seul établissement. Elle nécessite des collaborations et des financements importants, non seulement pour la réalisation des contenus de formation mais aussi pour la qualité et la pertinence de leur mode de diffusion, pour la mise en place des services d'accueil et de tutorat à distance et pour les facilités nécessaires au regroupement des publics en mode présentiel pendant de courtes périodes. » (MEN, 2000a)

“This provision is above the capacities of a single institution. It necessitates important collaboration and funding, not just to create the contents of the provision but also for the quality and pertinence of its mode of dissemination, for the set up of support centres, the distance tutoring, and facilities necessary for short periods of face-to-face sessions.”

The rapid outline of what the ministry expects universities to include in their bid corresponds to a comprehensive spectrum of distance learning provision and includes learning material as well as a combination of distance and face-to-face tutoring. In stressing these points, the ministry gives its definition of *Formation Ouverte et à Distance*² (FOAD) (literally open and distance learning) and indirectly stresses the fact that the initiative was not about providing on-line learning material. The other emphasis the document draws out concerns the need for higher education institutions to enter into partnerships and form consortia to share resources and costs.

To sum up, the discourse surrounding the launch of the French virtual initiative was entirely constructed on the idea of the risk of obsolescence of higher education and its inability to play a full role in the knowledge society. This is articulated differently in the two documents. The minister's speech reflects Allègre's well known 'bullying' personality and presents arguments strongly emphasizing a technologic determinism, whilst the text of the call is characterized by a rather realistic approach, a sign that it might have been written by people who were closely involved with the realities of the terrain.

² A discussion on terms associated in French with this activity is proposed later in this chapter.

Comparison

These two sets of documents carry the priorities and values of the two states compared and have in common that they both carry the intention of their respective governments to strongly lead the projects, both in terms of overall planning and the provision of funding made available. Apart from this similarity, how do their arguments compare?

In the British discourse, globalization is presented as constituting a potential threat and a possible driving force. The emphasis is strong on international competitiveness and its intensification due to the momentum gained by globalization. Calling on the high quality of UK higher education, the argument stresses the role the UK's higher education could/should take on the international sphere. The conditions of success lie in a better use of digital technology and closer links with the private sector.

The French discourse focuses on the modernisation of higher education on which the country's knowledge economy depends. Such modernisation will require a fundamental review of what is taught in universities and how it is taught, and a re-thinking of the landscape of distance learning providers at higher education level. And distance learning is presented as a means to enable universities to complement their 'conventional provision' in order to better match the social needs of French society.

In terms of similarities, it can be said that the same idea of the inadequacy of higher education is present in both discourses. In the UK, it is the inability of the sector to compete with other providers and the economic risk this represents for the UK. In France, universities are seen as offering altogether the wrong provision and run the risk of becoming obsolete. In both cases, the new technologies are presented as a solution.

Finally, as far as the choice of tone and register is concerned, there is a clear contrast between the two countries with discourse on the UK side strongly favouring a business-like type of vocabulary, at times aggressive. This is not present in the French discourse.

What does this mean? Going back to the discussion on globalization, it seems that the theoretical underpinning of both sets of arguments was strongly marked by arguments in favour of a conception of global changes involving a significant transformation of the organising principles of social life and world order (Held and McGrew, 2002). Such a position typically stresses the need for an urgent response to these global forces in order to survive. The myth of ‘almighty globalization’ (Hirst and Thompson, 2002) was doubtlessly stressed more heavily in the discourse on the UK side. The business-sounding terminology with scattered sound bites (“Education has become a big business”) could have been designed to shake up the sector. The remaining analysis of the UKeU will, amongst other things, show how the sector responded to such injunctions, bearing in mind the high level of independence which characterises the UK higher education sector.

The threat of globalization is also present in the French documents but rather in a diluted way. The dominant theme in France was the role that higher education, once modernised, would play for the economy. And thus, the core of the French position is the notion of ‘modernisation’ and what it involves. Previous discussion on ‘modernisation’ (in chapter 1) has argued that it corresponded to a new approach to governing public services which arose because of new sets of influences spreading across national and political boundaries. The forms taken by this progressive transformation of the way the state runs the country usually involve different public bodies working together in the policy-making process and/or the involvement of the private sector. As was shown, such changes tend to bring a greater opening up of public services to market mechanisms and business solutions to social and public problems. The analysis of the French texts conducted above showed that the intention was to thoroughly re-think the activity and the actors involved in virtual higher education provision. The next stages of the analysis of the *campus numériques* should shed some light on the question of the meaning of the modernisation of the sector.

2. Emergence of the Stakeholders of the Policy Initiative

Continuing the examination of empirical evidence in order to assess the context of influence of the two initiatives, this time the intention is to identify the main parties

involved at the early stages of both policy initiatives in order to better understand how each project came to be shaped.

In the UK

Chapter 2 presented a snapshot of some of the main developments in the area of the virtual university, outside state run higher education, in the UK and abroad. One of these UK-based providers is particularly relevant, British Aerospace. In 1998, the company launched its 'Virtual University' which comprised a Faculty of Learning, an International Business School, a Faculty of Engineering and Manufacturing Technology, a Benchmarking and Best Practice Centre, and a research centre, spread over 33 locations (Kenney-Wallace, 2000). Its Managing Director, Dr Geraldine Kenney-Wallace, who was also the Vice-Chancellor of the British Aerospace Virtual University was interviewed (by the author) in her capacity as member of the Steering Group of UKeU. She stressed the role played by the fact that senior members of government and higher education had followed these developments closely, via informal discussions, conferences and events such as the launch of the British Aerospace Virtual University. She explained:

“Then in April '98 – April 28th I think it was to be exact, British Aerospace – we had formal launch in London, where we invited vice-chancellors, Government, other businesses, university partners and we announced our first partnership of the Open University on a Certificate in Management that would eventually go into a Diploma. And we also invited someone from Ufi, the advisory group, to be there.” (G. Kenney-Wallace)

According to Dr Geraldine Kenney-Wallace, it was clear that senior members of government believed this private venture was showing the way to public higher education. She explained that, on one occasion, the fact that they were using terms such as 'university' and 'Vice-Chancellor' was brought up – both terms reserved for state higher education institutions because of their power to award their own degrees. Dr Kenney-Wallace said:

“But I think the Virtual University caused a lot of national debate. When we launched it, we launched it with Tessa Blackstone, who was the Minister for Higher Education. And that was the sign. She came to launch it. Yes, the Virtual University. She launched it. And, well, that was the Government sign. This was a very good initiative. That was the simplest thing for me to do. And when she and I were on a platform at a conference in Spring, in about March I think it was, March 1998, and the subject was: The use of the word, university – among other things. And somebody said, “Well, don’t you think it’s wrong for British Aerospace to use the phrase ‘university’?” – ‘virtual university’ and she said – well, she didn’t see what the problem was. But she thought doing that we were further ahead than the Government and she would encourage everyone to catch up. And that settled the whole thing.” (G. Kenney-Wallace)

The way around this question was to stress the word ‘virtual’ playing on its multi-meanings: ‘digital’ but also ‘unreal’, amongst others. However, the whole issue of degree granting power is indeed fundamental, especially at a time when new commercial providers were beginning to appear³.

The above quote also provides a glimpse of the closeness between the private and the public sectors (for example, the presence of senior civil servants and senior members of universities at such an event), and it indicates too the concerns of government about the speed of developments in this area.

Indeed there was rising interest in the subject at the time and this led to the commissioning of a report in early 1999. To get as comprehensive a picture as possible of this fast changing area, the HEFCE and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP, renamed UniversitiesUK in December 2000) commissioned a detailed survey “... to look at the growth of virtual and corporate universities internationally, and to consider the impact these developments will have on UK higher education” (UniversitiesUK, 2000a). Published in March 2000, this study, “The Business of Borderless Education: UK Perspectives”, was led by Professor Robin Middlehurst of the University of Surrey and was undertaken in the period March to December 1999. Building on an Australian study published in 1997 by a team of researchers led by Professor Stuart Cunningham at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane (New Media and Borderless Education: A

³ Incidentally, it is somewhat ironic to note that private universities were desperate to borrow features inherited from centuries of history, whilst state higher education was considered as lagging behind for lack of managerial skills.

Review of the Convergence between Global Media Networks and Higher Education Provision, Cunningham, 1997), the study which surveyed current developments was carried out in collaboration with the Australian team. The expression 'borderless higher education' was first coined by the Australian researchers⁴; the UK report explained that the term was used "... to indicate developments which cross (or have the potential to cross) the traditional borders of higher education, whether geographical or conceptual. The phrase therefore encompasses both activities which are likely to be adopted in the UK higher education market ... and also new export opportunities for universities" (CVCP, 2000b:7). As the authors pointed out in the introduction of this three-volume report (summary, main report and case studies):

"At one stage in our work ... we were tempted to present this report in the form of a 'wake-up call' to the higher education sector. It had seemed to us that there was too little awareness of the potential threats and opportunities and that, as a result, UK institutions would be poorly positioned in competitive terms. However, numerous articles have recently been published, particularly about so-called 'virtual' provision and about the possibilities provided by new forms of communication and information technologies for different forms of teaching and learning. Thus, awareness of the challenge is no longer an issue." (CVCP, 2000b:7)

The objectives of the report responded to these emerging needs of institutions and particularly focussed on policy implications for higher education institutions and advice on actions institutions might want to take in light of the developments (CVCP, 2000b:8). In its section 5, the summary presented a somewhat ambivalent picture of the "Current Institutional Thinking"; higher education institutions were surveyed and asked what their thoughts were concerning the implications of borderless higher education. The report commented:

"The response rate to the letter of enquiry was rather disappointing: fifty-one per cent. The reasons for this are not clear – there are two contradictory hypotheses: the possibility that a significant proportion of institutions had not considered the issue and therefore had nothing to report; or that institutions had their own strategic assumptions, but regarded them as confidential, and so had no wish to share them." (CVCP, 2000b:18)

⁴ Though the phrase 'borderless world' is ideologically very loaded as, as seen in chapter 1, it was coined by the Japanese business consultant Kenichi Ohmae to refer to the loss of bond between territory and national political power, and advocates a strong set of arguments in favour of globalization.

Indeed, from this contrasted picture and correlated findings (one of the case studies presented is the British Aerospace Virtual University), when the report identified key policy issues facing the sector (section 12), the first on the list in the eventuality that virtual provision was to be developed in the existing undergraduate market, was the need for “[an] exceptionally strong central decision-making, [which would] give enough impetus to drive change within the existing sector” (CVCP, 2000b:32). The summary ended with a call for energy and dynamism and said:

“We conclude that ‘doing nothing’ is not an option for higher education. Courage and creativity will be essential if the UK is to rise to the challenges of borderless education.” (CVCP, 2000b:39)

This conclusion, calling for a stronger involvement of the higher education sector, confirmed what had become, behind the formal scenes, a growing conviction: virtual higher education provision had become big business, to paraphrase Blunkett’s famous cry. And the rising awareness amongst senior higher education and government staff of current developments in the area of distance learning in the UK and abroad, in both the public and private sectors, was accompanied by a sense of urgency.

The government’s project came as a response to this report as Baroness Diana Warwick, newly appointed CVCP Chief Executive, stressed in her welcome speech to the conference where the report was presented: “The e-Universities venture is an early response by government, HEFCE and universities to our report” (UniversitiesUK, 2000b).

A few points emerge from this analysis. Perceptions of growing competition from developments of virtual universities in the private sector have certainly played a part in the conception and timing of the UK initiative. Whether evidence came from the private sector itself, via networking opportunities, or from research, via the Middlehurst report, it is clear that this growing competition was gaining momentum. Therefore, it can be said that, at the early stages of the UK initiative, senior people from the private sector engaged in virtual university developments, the DfEE, the HEFCE and the senior level of higher education institutions (via the CVCP) were supportive and influential stakeholders. The sector itself, which obviously is one of

the central stakeholders, is more difficult to assess though the response level obtained for the Borderless report does not indicate unified and unanimous support – something which, in view of the diversity of institutions which compose the UK sector, is not surprising.

In France

As was said above, in his 2000 New Year's speech, Claude Allègre set priorities on both 'modernising' universities and integrating technological progress in the area of teaching and learning, and announced a partnership between the different providers of distance learning in view of offering a "system of modernized *télé-enseignement*". Therefore, as seen with the analysis of discourses surrounding the initiative, two sets of objectives dominated the background of the *campus numériques*: on the one hand, the intention to develop a better organised and structured distance learning provision; on the other, the role this provision would play in contributing to the transformation of university provision as a whole. However, *where* this organised and structured distance learning provision would take place was the subject of disagreement between Claude Allègre and the universities (via the *Conférence des Présidents d'Université* (CPU) – the equivalent of the CVCP).

From the foregoing analysis of major supra-national and national policies, it clearly appeared that two dominant conceptions of higher education distance learning contributed to shaping this sector of activity: either the creation of a 'mega institution' or a university-based provision (Rumble, 1997; Burt, 1997). Distance learning provision centralised on one institution was Allègre's preferred scenario, whilst the CPU, and the division in charge of ICT in Higher Education at the ministry, the *Sous-Direction des Technologies Educatives et des Technologies d'Information et de Communication* (SDTETIC), based in the *Direction de la Technologie*, favoured an integration of this activity in universities. So there were, from the outset, between the core stakeholders – that is between senior level at the Department, the staff working at the Department-based division overseeing this area of activity for the sector, and senior level in French universities – conflicting views on the way to proceed. This is a

very interesting case of policy-making which exemplifies the importance of the relationship between stakeholders and government.

To understand where this conflict originates, it is necessary to go back a few years. Several interviewees explained that a report, commissioned in 1993 by the *Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche* and published in July 1994, had strongly influenced university staff, the Quéré report entitled *Vers un Enseignement Supérieur Sur Mesure* (Quéré, 1994). Prior the *campus numériques* initiative, this report constituted the most comprehensive policy on the subject to date (Grevet, 2005). The report was widely distributed to all universities with the injunction from the ministry to use its analysis and recommendations on ICT in teaching and learning when writing up the new four-year strategic plans. However, the Quéré report, as it came to be called, is remembered primarily for its recommendations. Chiefly, for the development of an ensemble of university-based services available via different media (radio, television, and digital technology) but also for its analysis of the overall landscape of post-compulsory distance learning providers in France. Before seeing in more detail its main argument, a word needs to be said about its title and, more generally, the choice of phrases available in French to talk about 'distance learning'.

'*Enseignement Supérieur Sur Mesure*' (literally tailor-made higher education) was coined as an antinomy to 'prêt-à-porter' (ready-to-wear) type of provision to emphasise a more student-centred approach which included self-study in different places (home, workplace, library) and face-to-face tutorials (Quéré, 1994; Vivet and Gouarderès, 1995). But these were not the most commonly used phrases. There seems to be four groups of phrases. Ordered according to their chronological appearance, they are: *Enseignement par correspondance / Télé-enseignement* and *Télé-formation / Formation Ouverte et à Distance (FOAD)*; *Enseignement à Distance (EAD)* and *Formation à Distance (FAD)* / e-learning (not translated into French). Before briefly analysing each of these groups, it must be stressed that although these appeared successively, their coming and going into fashion is, often, less clear and, depending on who employs them, they can be used as having the same meaning. Just as with their equivalents in the English language, these changes in designations reflect hesitations, difficulties and conflicts between different priorities and different emphases.

The first phrase dates from the end of the 19th century and refers to an exchange of paper-based learning material between the student and the tutor. Until the mid-1980s it was used in public services and newspapers like *Le Monde* (Thibault, 2007). *Télé-enseignement* and *Télé-formation* started to be used in the *Ministère de l'Education nationale* in the late 1950s. This is when the now called CNED was renamed from *Centre National d'Enseignement par Correspondance* to *Centre National de Télé-enseignement*. At the end of the 1960s, university-based centres providing distance learning programmes became known as the *Centres de Télé-enseignement Universitaires*. As Thibault (2007) notes, the name of these centres has not changed since their creation even though the term '*télé-enseignement*' has progressively been disused. She attributes this to the weight of French universities bureaucratic routine and the gradual fading of these centres.

Formation Ouverte et à Distance (FOAD) is widely used in France, mainly because of its English equivalent, Open and Distance Learning, used in the policies of the European Commission since the 1990s. '*Formation*', rather than '*enseignement*'; this requires some explanation. There is, at least amongst educationalists, a difference between the two words (journalists and politicians seem to be using the two terms synonymously). '*Formation*', based on the verb '*former*', started to be used in the mid 1970s in Quebec before spreading to France and, according to Glikman (2002), this was in order to contrast with the notion of '*enseigner*' traditionally associated with an emphasis on content of what is taught rather than ways of learning. Behind this change of words, educationalists tend to see a new approach to teaching which places the emphasis on the student.

Finally, 'e-learning', Chaptal (2002) argues, originates from the US and the Clinton era where it designated all uses of new technologies in learning, be it face-to-face or distance. The phrase is not translated (*le e-learning*) into French unlike previous phrases. It quickly moved to Europe with the European Commission adopting it in its policies.

According to Thibault (2007), the French mostly limit the use of the phrase 'e-learning' to the context of continuing education (in contrast with first entrants after secondary school or equivalent) to place the emphasis on the incorporation of ICT in

learning rather than on the distance learning side of it. Practitioners and researchers engaged in distance learning within continuing education tend to privilege the phrase *Formation Ouverte et à Distance (FOAD)*. And, in the context of schemes for first entrants after secondary school or equivalent, traditionally under-graduates, the French tend to prefer the use of *TICE* (pronounced ‘tees’) – *Technologies de l’Information et de la Communication pour l’Education*.

Going back to the Quéré report, it was clear for its author that the implementation of this ‘*Enseignement Supérieur Sur Mesure*’ would not magically take place. Quéré argues that:

« Inscrire l’enseignement sur mesure "dans l’activité ordinaire des universités et des universitaires" constitue une petite révolution culturelle qui nécessitera du temps, et qui ne pourra réussir sans un minimum de concertation, de rationalisation, d’industrialisation par recours à des partenaires extérieurs qu’il est nécessaire d’identifier. »
(Quéré, 1994:4)

“Make ‘*enseignement sur mesure*’ an ‘ordinary activity for universities and university staff’ constitutes a small cultural revolution which will require time and which won’t succeed without a minimum of consultation, rationalisation, industrialisation with recourse to external partners who remain to be identified.”

The model developed by Quéré is based on the idea that students should be able to choose what proportion of face-to-face and distance learning they need. The hypothesis is that there would be a large demand for the latter and that consequently the duplication of resources would serve for a range of needs. Centrally, Quéré explains the consequences this model could have if pushed to its limits, she argues that:

« Un usage plus radical peut être envisagé, qui supprime complètement l'enseignant. La connaissance est disponible au travers de réseaux de médiathèques. Le principal travail de l'étudiant est la recherche des informations, leur acquisition, et une activité de synthèse qui se traduit par une production (devoir, exposé, projet...). L'enseignant se borne alors à son rôle de vérificateur. Ce genre d'usage, peu répandu, est à prendre en considération compte tenu de l'avènement de ce qu'on appelle le multimédia. » (Quéré, 1994:10)

"A more radical use could be envisaged which would completely remove the lecturer. Knowledge would be available through networks of resource centres. The main task for the student would be to find information, digest it, synthesise it with some sort of production (an essay, an oral presentation, a project...). The role of the lecturer would then be that of checking. This type of activity, still rare, needs to be taken into consideration because of the arrival of what is called the multimedia."

As can be seen, this model of '*enseignement sur mesure*' essentially proposes a re-thinking of what goes on in university teaching with all of the attendant implications. The report argues that such an approach to teaching would suit both initial and continuing education, face-to-face and distance learning. Having pointed out the complexity of the task, Quéré proposes as a solution better coordination amongst the providers cited above. She explains:

« Au plan national, il semble indispensable qu'une organisation à vocation plus large et plus "solide" se substitue à l'actuelle Fédération Inter-universitaire de l'Enseignement à Distance (FIED), associant les établissements d'enseignement supérieurs, le CNED et éventuellement d'autres partenaires. Une structure de GIP pourrait être appropriée. Cette organisation aurait notamment vocation à contribuer à l'élaboration d'une carte des enseignements à distance, l'objectif étant de s'assurer qu'il y a équilibre entre l'offre et la demande, et à assurer la représentation internationale. Dans cette attente, le ministère et la CPU doivent encourager la FIED, le RUCA⁵ et les associations qui oeuvrent pour le développement de l'enseignement sur mesure. » (Quéré, 1994:30)

"At national level, it seems essential that a more 'solid' institution with a wider remit replaced the present *Fédération Inter-universitaire de l'Enseignement à Distance (FIED)*, to which higher education institutions, the *CNED* and possibly other partners would join in. A *GIP* structure could be suitable. Such institution would notably aim to contribute to the creation of a map of different distance learning programmes with the objective of respecting a balance between supply and demand, and maintaining an international representation. With this in mind, the ministry and the *CPU* should encourage the *FIED*, the *RUCA* and agencies involved in the development of 'tailor-made provision'."

⁵ RUCA: Réseau Universitaire des Centres d'Autoformation

Three points are made. Firstly, the existing university-based provider, the *FIED*, has not got the shape and solidity required and should be replaced by an agency made of different institutions. Secondly, it is suggested that a *GIP* (*'Groupement d'Intérêt Public'*) be created between these providers and that some form of strategy be developed to enable readability of provision and a presence at the international level. Finally, Quéré argues for a lead from senior level, i.e. from the ministry and from the *Présidents d'université*.

Two characteristics emerge from this analysis of the early days of the French policy initiative on the virtual university. Firstly, the difficulties arising from the fact that there were several stakeholders involved in the field should not be under-estimated. Grouping them under one umbrella, which is what the creation of a *GIP* would do, was certainly a helpful decision. Having said this, in view of the fact that these institutions had been working in parallel with each other for thirty or forty years, it is realistic to think that harmonising the role of these shareholders would not be an easy task. Besides this central feature of the context of the initiative, the coalition between two other stakeholders, the senior level of higher education management (the *Présidents d'université*) and the team working at the ministry on these issues, constitutes without doubt another powerful feature.

Comparison

From the comparison of the above analyses of the main stakeholders emerging at the outset of the projects, it clearly appears that the main influence which contributed to shaping the UK project was coming from outside the UK whilst, in France, the shaping agents were internal.

In other words, the analysis shows that the dominant reason for the initiative was to respond to what was perceived as pressures coming from developments happening outside the UK. This is coherent with previous findings obtained by the analysis of the discourse which surrounded the UK initiative. Indeed, Blunkett's arguments did feel like the 'wake-up call' the conclusions of the Borderless Education advocated (though the report was published a few months after the speech). Along the same

lines, arguments presented in the circular letter were in-line with the injunction found at the end of the report that ‘doing nothing was not an option’. The same sense of urgency, the same sense of external threat.

On the French side, the context of influence comes from within. The un-assembled jigsaw puzzle which constitutes the French landscape of distance learning agencies was a source of concern for the politicians (as seen with the analysis of Allègre’s speech) and for senior members of universities (as seen with the position adopted by the *CPU* and the team based at the ministry). It was also a cause for major disagreement between the main stakeholders who did not seem able to decide what the shape of the virtual university should be. Should the state support the creation of a central unit in which the existing dominant providers play a central role, or should this activity be based in universities and be supported by external agencies, public and private?

However, this early stage of the development of both initiatives presents some striking similarities. In both cases, central authorities commissioned some academic research to back up their decision. In both cases, it was significant that the actual higher education sector (senior level of Vice-Chancellors and *Présidents d’Université* excluded) was not a supportive, active stakeholder (or, at least, there was little evidence of this). Analysing evidence of the existence of policy networks will take this final point further. This is done in the next section.

3. The Core of the Policy Network

Finding out what went on behind the formal processes in place is obviously not an easy matter. As mentioned in chapter 1, policy-making is, for the most part, composed of informal toing and froing, what some authors have designated as the ‘messiness’ of policy-making (Jenkins, 1997; Minogue, 1997; John, 1998). Yet, trying to get at least a feel of what happened and who was really involved is essential because the core of a policy network tends to retain discretion and determine rules (Rhodes, 2006).

In the UK

In terms of the procedure, as shown in chapter 2, there is an annual Grant Letter, sent by the Department to the funding council, which outlines priorities for the coming year. The formal side of the application was explained by Alice Frost, the HEFCE main coordinator of the venture, in the following words:

“In the spending review submission we submitted into government, which had been kind of prepared initially by my then boss Steven Marston, who was Director for Institutions. The submission to government obviously, you know set out what the basic idea of the e-university was, as a basis for seeking funds and it obviously linked it to government objectives as a basis obviously for making a case for the spending review and one of the things it linked it to was the Prime Minister’s initiative⁶.”(A. Frost)

Tackling the question of origins from another angle, the House of Commons enquiry on the UKeU called Sir Brian Fender to give evidence (Q594 to Q652). When, on 12 January 2005, Fender was asked where the initiative was coming from by the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Skills by, he explained:

I came to the view, and discussed it, of course, with my senior team in the Funding Council, that we needed at that time (1999) to send out a strong message about the importance of e-Learning to the higher education community, and we formulated ways in which that might happen. ... What we did was put in a bid in the spending round, and we said this was important, we thought it was an initiative. After all, there are several initiatives that you put forward before any spending review, and we said this was an important one. It was one of several, I might say. ... The process was dealt with by my colleagues in the Funding Council and civil servants and, in the end, the Department did decide to put it on its agenda and the Secretary of State, as you well know, in February 2000 made a statement saying that he personally thought this was a project worth support. ... What we did was to make a submission, as I said, to the Spending Review which outlined the arguments and the advantages of pursuing the e-Learning initiative, and then, of course, there was the toing and froing which takes place between my colleagues in the Funding Council and the civil servants. Certain questions came from ministers which were discussed, because they did their proper job of challenging certain proposals.”(B. Fender, Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2005: Ev 90-93)

⁶ The theme of the Prime Minister’s initiative announced in a speech in June 1999 was ‘Attracting more International Students’ and set a recruitment target of “25 per cent of the global market share of higher education students ... by 2005.” (Blair, 1999)

The above quotation is made up of three extracts from answers given by Fender to three repeated questions posed by members of the Committee (Q595, Q596, Q609). As can be seen, in each of his replies, Fender stayed at the formal level of the process, merely describing the procedure of applying for funding. However, the question of the origin of the initiative was central to the parliamentary enquiry as the role of the Select Committee on Education and Skills was to investigate on what basis and how tax-payers' money had been allocated to this venture and who had overall responsibility. For these reasons, the first third of the session with Sir Brian Fender was aiming to clarify the relationship between the funding council and the government and, for this reason, moving away from the simple description of the procedure was essential. Questions were short and direct: for example Q595 "Did you persuade the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, to go with this?"; Q596 "Can I take you back to the question. Did you persuade the then Secretary of State?"; Q597 "Did you talk to David about it?"; Q609 "How big a role did you play? Did you talk to ministers, if not to David Blunkett?" Eight times the question was asked until the following reply was given by the former Chief Executive of the HEFCE:

"Why I am taking a good measure of responsibility for this is that I was influenced. I went with my Head of Policy⁷ to Aspen Colorado, where they have regular meetings of largely but not exclusively private universities in the States, well known universities in the States, and there was a rather good debate around the strategic changes that higher education faced, and included in that was the role that e-Learning would play. I came away from that, a three/four day conference, and I talked direct with the Director of Policy and others of my colleagues and was rather resolved at that time. I think it had to be said that we needed to raise the profile of e-Learning; we needed to make sure that universities were fully aware of the changes which we now accept as happening all the time. What you cannot predict in a period of rapid change is exactly how it is going to happen and at exactly what rate, but everybody knows the digital invasion, if you like, of practice is taking place very rapidly and I just wanted to make sure that higher education was not caught flat-footed." (B. Fender, Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2005: Ev 94)

The network metaphor provides a way to make sense of these channels of information dissemination across organizational boundaries and the above quotation is a perfect

⁷ The Director of Policy mentioned was Bahram Bekhradnia who was in the Steering group of the UKeU.

example of how national policies come to be shaped by what goes on outside national boundaries and the role played by conferences and the like. Meetings like the one described by Fender gather actors and policy-makers from differing backgrounds around a specific theme – in the present case, the timely theme of this international conference was on northern American public and private universities.

In explaining the circumstances in which the idea took shape and, consequently, saying that he was at the origin of the idea, Fender confirmed what all interviewees had explained about the central role he played in the first year or so of the initiative – something which, in the press of the time, was expressed in the alliteration ‘Fender’s folly’ to designate the initiative and which led to doubts about the future of the venture after his retirement as head of the HEFCE in September 2001 (THES, 2001).

There is enough evidence to be able to claim that Sir Brian Fender was a ‘policy activist’ or ‘policy entrepreneur’ (Page, 2006), i.e. someone who is able to identify and exploit opportunities for a policy and has enough power to influence agenda setting. Indeed this was clearly pointed out by the Chairman of the parliamentary enquiry, Barry Sheerman, at the outset of Sir Fender’s evidence:

“You have the reputation of making things happen, and one of the things that you seem to have made happen from most people’s point of view is that you were the inspiration for the UK e-University. ... Sir Brian, you are a brilliant net-worker.” (B. Sheerman, Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2005: Ev 90-91)

The notion of policy network is also helpful when the question of accountability is posed, as was the case with the Select Committee. Where does responsibility lay when several agencies are involved in a policy initiative? Before Fender was interviewed by the Committee, Dr Kim Howells, Minister of the State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education at the DfES in 2004, appeared as a witness at the Parliamentary enquiry (Q347 to Q479), representing the Department (though he was not working in this role in 2000). He too was asked whether the idea came from

the DfEE or the HEFCE (Q399). His somewhat ironic answer sums up this aspect of policy-making. He said:

“If, for example, I had been a minister at the time, I may well have been at an international conference and I probably would have seen, as inevitably there are at these international conferences, stands which show whiz technology that promise to capture the world, and I may well have gone back and said to the department, “Hey, we had better do something about this or these Americans are going to clean up”. I do not know if that conversation took place or if such a conference ever took place, but I can imagine that that is the sort of thing that might happen. Believe me, politics is not entirely a rational business.” (K. Howells, Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2004a: Ev 58)

Shortly after this answer, he is asked once again where he thought the responsibility lay and this time his answer was:

“I have got something here which might interest you. It says, in wonderful handwriting, “The idea came from discussions between HEFCE and senior officials based on emerging research, not least the report *The Business of Borderless Education*, funded jointly between HEFCE and UUK”, and its says in brackets “CVCP then”.” (K. Howells, Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2004a: Ev 58)

Policy networks are made of groups situated more or less closely to the core of the network. Relationships between these groups vary from one policy sector to another (as explained in chapter 1). As said above, groups identified as being involved in the context of *influence* of the UK policy initiative are senior members of the HEFCE, senior members of the DfEE, senior members of higher education institutions represented by the CVCP, and a section of the private sector.

The notion of policy community and the networking going on between members of this fairly closed group are helpful to understand what goes on at the various stages of the policy process. In the case of the UK virtual university, after some investigation to prepare for the selection of potential interviewees, it became rapidly obvious that, at senior levels, there existed a closely knit community. For instance, to go back to Dr

Kenney-Wallace, prior being formally asked to be on the Steering Group of UKeU⁸, was heading the British Aerospace Virtual University but was also a member of the HEFCE Teaching and Learning Committee. She also was one of the members of the Project Advisory Group of the report mentioned above. Other members of this policy community are to be found in the above report which was commissioned by the President of the CVCP, Professor Howard Newby, and the Chief Executive of the HEFCE, Sir Brian Fender (the former succeeded Fender at the head of the HEFCE in October 2001). Four of the eight members of its Steering Committee got involved, in one capacity or another, at some stage, in the UKeU. For example, Professor Sir John Daniel, then Vice-Chancellor of the Open University, was not a member of the UKeU Steering Group *per se* but was ‘special advisor’ (something which will be re-visited later on). Professor Robin Mason, Open University, later worked on one of the pilot courses offered by the UKeU and published several academic papers on the subject. Professor Tim O’Shea, then at Birkbeck College, University of London, was a member of the UKeU Steering Group. Finally, Alice Frost, based at the HEFCE, was the project-manager of the UKeU at the funding council’s end. Other instances of close personal connections like these will be highlighted later on.

To end this UK analysis, and recap the main findings, the key stakeholders are once again closely examined but this time from the perspective of their relationship with each other. Public policy theory has it that in order to achieve a policy goal with a minimum of conflict, the assistance of the key actors in the implementation of the policy initiative is central.

⁸ The membership of the Steering Group was made public at the same time as the Circular Letter studied above. Members were (listed in the same order as in Annex B of the Circular Letter dated 14 February 2000):

Prof R. Cooke, V-C of University of York and HEFCE Board member;
 Mr B. Bekhradnia, HEFCE Director of Policy;
 Mrs S. Burslem, V-C of Manchester Metropolitan University;
 Sir B. Fender, HEFCE Chief Executive;
 Dr G. Kenney-Wallace, MD and V-C of British Aerospace PLC Virtual University;
 Mr S. Marston, HEFCE;
 Prof H. Newby, V-C of University of Southampton;
 Prof T. O’Shea, Master of Birkbeck College;
 Prof J. Slater, PV-C of University of Kent at Canterbury;
 Prof Sir S. Sutherland, V-C of University of Edinburgh;
 Dr M. Gaskell, Principal of University College Northampton;
 Mrs A. Frost, HEFCE; Mr D. James, HEFCE.
 Sir J. Daniel, V-C of Open University, was acting as Special Advisor to the Steering Group.

In the present case, in 2000, the HEFCE, the DfEE and the CVCP formed the core of the policy network, their senior members belonging to a closely knit community. The relationship between the first two institutions was explained in chapter 2 and is essentially one of dependency as the executive agencies (be they based in London, Edinburgh or Cardiff) have the final say in priorities and funding (although as has just been demonstrated there is room for suggestions and negotiations). Between funding councils and the CVCP, it is likely that there is a close relationship at senior level (chief executives are often former university Vice-Chancellors), probably with mutual respect for each other's independence. Having said that, from the above evidence, it is fair to say that the core of the policy community was, at least in 2000, the HEFCE. At this stage of this analysis, suffice to say that, in a country where devolution is central to political, economic and cultural life – particularly with higher education – the centrality of the funding council for England might carry the risk of future problems.

In France

Intense discussions around the two dominant models of distance learning provision took place during the second half of 1999, right up until March 2000, i.e. two months before the launch of the initiative. This explains why no announcement was made by Allègre when he gave his New Year speech.

Meetings and seminars between potential stakeholder institutions and the *SDTETIC* preceded this public announcement of January 2000. Between April and June 1999, representatives from the CPU, the CNED, the CNAM but also the *Conférence des Directeurs des Ecoles Françaises d'Ingénieurs* (CDEFI) and the *Conférence des Directeurs des Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres* (CDIUFM), as well as the *Direction de l'Enseignement Supérieur* (DES) and the *Direction des Affaires Financières du MEN* (DAF) met and, eventually, produced a document outlining an agenda of action for Allègre. It contained three objectives: to improve access to distance learning provision and its visibility across the sector, to integrate this activity in the missions of universities, and to develop a provision better adapted to the market. Between June and November, no response was given despite the CPU asking for some feedback on the proposal. As seen, in November 1999, Allègre announced a

partnership between the CNED and the CNAM to create a single national provider – a decision which explained why he had nominated the same person at senior level of the CNED and the CNAM twelve months before. As one of the interviewees, who joined the CNED in 2000 as a senior manager, explained:

« Allègre souhaitait faire fusionner le CNED et le CNAM, ce qui était pas... sur une partie, ça pouvait se comprendre parce que l'enseignement à distance, promotion sociale, le CNAM développait énormément de choses, et l'administratrice du CNAM était la présidente du Conseil d'Administration du CNED (...). Il y avait un joli coup politique. » (J.L. Billoet)

“Allègre wanted to merge the CNED and the CNAM which wasn't... you could partly understand why, distance learning, social promotion, the CNAM was developing a lot of things, and the manager of the CNAM was also the chair of the Board of the CNED (...). There was a nice political coup there.”

In response to this announcement, in December 1999, the CPU agreed a set of objectives aligned to those proposed in June arguing for an integration of distance learning provision within the missions of universities and against the idea of delegating distance learning to a specialised institution. Shortly after that, Allègre gave the New Year speech in which he compromises to a point as he announced the creation of a *GIP* between the main four public providers of distance learning: the CNED, the CNAM, the FIED and the CNDP in order “to develop a system of modernized *télé-enseignement*” (*« développer un système de télé-enseignement »*) (Allègre, 1999). However, he kept his idea of a mega-provider and explained, as seen above, how the mission of this *GIP* was to create a university of the third age, to provide training for all teaching and university based staff, and to develop extra courses for school pupils in need of supplementary tuition. This wide spectrum of learners and objectives, which simply refers to the different constituencies of the different institutions amalgamated in the new group, was not what the CPU had proposed to do.

The appointment of the new head at the CNED was a significant measure taken by the ministry to strengthen this institution. The CNED is led by a *recteur* (a chief education officer), a senior figure chosen among senior members of university staff and nominated by the Prime Minister at the weekly *Conseil des Ministres*. In January

2000, Guy Aubert was appointed new *recteur*. Aubert was a well known academic well connected in political circles: after 1997, he became special advisor to the *Ministère de l'Education nationale* and led the committee which prepared the plan U3M. He had been director of the *CNRS (Centre National de Recherche Scientifique)* (1994-97), director of the *Lyon Ecole Normale Supérieure* (1986-94) and before, Pro-vice Chancellor for research in Grenoble (Le Monde, 2000d). To add to the importance of this appointment, Aubert was given a *lettre de mission*, a rare and symbolic gesture from the ministry of Education, only given when nominees are asked to play a specific role during their appointment. The emphasis of the letter was on the role he should play in developing the CNED's distance learning provision via new technologies and supporting the modernization of higher education:

« Les nouvelles technologies d'information et de communication vont rapidement transformer les modes de transmission du savoir. L'enseignement à distance, traditionnellement considéré comme un enseignement par défaut, va devenir l'un des principaux modes d'apprentissage. Je souhaite que le CNED soit un acteur majeur de cette mutation. » (CNED, 2007)

"The new information and communication technologies will rapidly transform modes of dissemination of knowledge. Distance learning, traditionally considered as teaching by default, is going to become one of the main modes of learning. I would like the *CNED* to be a major actor in this mutation."

It is obvious that the ministry wanted someone to lead the *CNED* who a) would be on an equal footing with heads of higher education institutions; b) was well connected to the political intelligentsia. Aubert was replaced in March 2003 by a lower profile academic, Olivier Dugrip.

The New Year ministerial announcement did not hamper the *CPU*'s decision to press for distance learning within their universities and in February 2000 they asked for funding of 3.8 million euros to support this priority. Finally, in March, following back and forth consultations between *Présidents d'université* and Claude Allègre, the latter gives his agreement to the launch of the call for projects by the *SDTETIC* (Thibault, 2007).

Parallel to these senior level negotiations, and well before they happened, the team based at the *SDTETIC* played a central role in stimulating interest in university distance learning across the sector, regularly organising training sessions and networking events. The wide distribution of the Quéré report was also part of this strategy. Dr Françoise Thibault, who was the lead person based at the *SDTETIC* for the first two calls for projects explains how, well before the first call, she was involved in a dialogue with institutions:

« Nous on était très, très en contact avec le terrain, puisque nous, on faisait depuis 95, 97 un travail de terrain, on réunissait les responsables des nouvelles technologies régulièrement pour leur faire des journées sur des thématiques précises, on essayait, on avait vraiment... enfin quand je vous dis que c'est un travail collectif, c'est un travail de l'équipe du ministère mais c'est vraiment, c'est ce que Musselin appelle, et c'est parfait, c'est vraiment un travail de la 'configuration universitaire', c'est-à-dire qu'il y avait des gens au ministère, il y avait des gens à la tête des établissements et puis il y avait des gens sur le terrain qui faisaient les dispositifs. Et on travaillait vraiment ensemble. »
(F. Thibault)

"We were very, very close to the ground, because since '95, '97 we were involved in ground work, we used to regularly draw people in charge of technologies together and have training days on specific themes, we were trying, we were really having... Well when I tell you it was a collective work, it was a job from the team at the ministry but it really was – as Musselin calls it, and it's perfect – a job of the 'higher education configuration' ('*configuration universitaire*'), there were people from the ministry, heads of institutions and there were people on the ground who were working on the projects. And we really worked together."

This '*configuration universitaire*' is part of the higher education policy community of the French initiative and the fact that this community had strong links with the *SDTETIC* at the ministry is a key element of the initiative. Compared to this, the grouping of institutions announced by Allègre, the *GIP*, though a formalised agreement, is likely to be essentially symbolic rather than translate into a real community.

This close involvement of the team based at the ministry with ground work level prior the first call was also confirmed by the person who set up the *campus numérique CANEGE*, Dr Michel Armatte, who explained how support from the team carried on after the official launch:

« Moi je pense qu'on est très redevable à l'équipe qui a mis en place les... d'ailleurs, ça s'est mis en place sur deux équipes, hein, il y a eu, avant Françoise Thibault il y avait quelqu'un d'autre qui était plutôt de la majorité de droite d'ailleurs, puis après il y a eu Françoise Thibault donc qui ont lancé ces campus numériques.(...) j'ai eu l'impression qu'on nous prenait plus par la main, il y avait : 'On y va tous ensemble'. On nous explique pourquoi, on va faire ci, on va faire ça, bon, Françoise a passé son temps par exemple avec son bâton de maréchal à aller visiter tous les gens qui lançaient des campus, à faire des séminaires etc. » (M. Armatte)

"I think that we owe a lot to the team who set up the... In fact the set up took place with two successive teams. Before Françoise Thibault, there was someone else who, by the way, was politically more on the right, then there was Françoise Thibault who launched these campus numériques. (...) I felt that we were more supported, there was a 'let's all work together' approach. It was explained to us why such and such thing should be done and not another, Françoise spent her time going around everybody who set up a *campus numérique*, she would organize seminars, etc."

Another academic who led the *campus numérique* FORSE, Dr Jacques Wallet, also mentioned the central role played by Dr Thibault, referring to her as "*le personnage central, incontestablement*" (the main character, indisputably).

This analysis of the political and strategic context of the *campus numériques* would be incomplete without a word about the change of minister in charge of the ministry. Allègre's political career abruptly came to an end in April 2000 after seeing his popularity amongst teachers and lecturers regularly decreasing, with a growing general discontent reaching a peak in March 2000 when numerous demonstrations throughout France demanded his resignation. In fact, he ended his time at the ministry in more or less the same unpopular way he started it. As Menendez Weidman (2001) stressed in her brief overview of his time at the *Ministère de l'Education nationale*, he had faced similar "mass protests demanding his resignation" at the beginning of his tenure. On 6 April, he was replaced by a popular figure of the French Socialist Party, Jack Lang, whose main objective was clearly to appease the climate in view of the 2002 presidential elections.

This French analysis ends on a similar way to that of the UK's with an examination of the relationship between the main stakeholders and the role this is likely to have on

the implementation of the French initiative. Two significant political moves are likely to have helped to consolidate this fragmented French landscape. The nomination of Aubert at the *CNED* and the departure of Allègre. The former because he was above all the produce of the conventional academic sector where, during his career, he acquired a national, if not international, reputation as a senior figure of the sector. Thus, in heading the *CNED*, not only did he bring with him his knowledge of the sector, but also his connections. As for the latter's resignation, the nomination of Lang is likely to have been welcome by the higher education sector (though how much the personality of a minister (Secretary of State) actually impacts on the public sector they lead should not be over-estimated). Finally, evidence shows that if the relationship between senior levels at the ministry and the team based at the ministry tended to disagree on key issues, the relationship between the team based at the ministry and universities, both with senior level (with the *CPU*) and with academic staff, was of quality, likely to be based on mutual respect and trust. This obviously constitutes a fundamental element of the context of influence of the *campus numériques* initiative.

Comparison

The comparison of the data analysed in relation to the emergence of a core policy network in both set-ups shows that there are some significant similarities. In both cases, a central person led the path towards the implementation of the initiatives – Sir Brian Fender and Dr Thibault. They both were considered by other members of their policy community as having played an essential role in the advancement of the first stages. The similarity however ends here mostly because they had a different level of seniority in their respective institution. Another similarity concerns the two communities. Evidence shows that on both sides of the Channel, there were communities of experts in the field of distance learning who had known each other for a long time. Besides these similarities, the analysis of the configuration of each policy context has, so far, reached different deductions which, by and large, reflect national specificities. For the UK, it is the potential impact of the political devolution, for France, the fact that within the ministry tensions were evident. The next section

moves further into the chronology of the initiatives and examines the form each virtual university eventually took.

4. Models of the Virtual University

In the UK

Shortly after the launch of the new venture and the announcement that a consortium of a small number of higher education institutions would partner with the private sector, a Steering group, chaired by Professor Ron Cooke, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of York and member of the HEFCE Board, was formed. Speculation as to who would be the possible contenders for this new university included the 'White Rose' partners (Leeds, Sheffield and York) plus Southampton, and University College London and its partners Imperial College, the LSE and the London Business School (THES, 2000a). Given the way the UK higher education sector is set up in particular, as explained in chapter 2, i.e. the existing competition between universities, it is easy to understand that the whole idea of selecting a handful of universities touched on a delicate dimension of the sector.

In July 2000, a survey of UK wide higher education institutions asking them for their opinion on the initiative was conducted, such a practice of direct consultation being rare, according to Alice Frost. The survey obtained a level of response comparable to that obtained for the research conducted for the report on Borderless Education, i.e. about 50 per cent of all institutions (exactly from 85 institutions). For the funding council, this constituted a good level of response. The main message from the sector was the need for the initiative "... [to] be inclusive, and [to] complement, rather than compete with other existing UK provision" (HEFCE, 2000c). This response from the sector can be interpreted in two ways. The inclusivity issue was raised because the sector wanted to stress the risk of duplication and thus of potential threat to their existing provision in this field. For this reason, they favoured a model which involved all institutions as opposed to a selected few. Another interpretation, developed by Prof John Slater when interviewed, stresses the financial aspect and how universities

primarily saw a chance to get extra resources from their funding council. He explained:

“At the very start – the original idea – was a consortium of a small number of universities. And because universities in the consultation thought that this would be easy money and they wanted to be on it. This was rapidly watered down to a model where anyone could bid. ... As you gather from that, I think moving to a more open core system did – certainly delayed us a year or so. And it meant that institutions wanted to give us the course that they wanted to do.” (J. Slater)

His latter point touches on the implication of opting for one model instead of the other in terms of the degree of commitment this implied for individual institutions – a point which will be examined later on. The gist of Slater’s point is that the change of model suggested by the consulted sector was founded on a self centred approach to the issue of a virtual university rather than on a consideration of what was needed to get this project to work (another interviewee captured this spirit in talking of “UK universities’ parochial perspectives”).

Alice Frost explained this original HEFCE model and how after a business consultant’s report, the model was abandoned in favour of a totally different idea:

“The original HEFCE model was to appoint a consortium of HEIs, so the first step in the process had we gone with the original HEFCE model, would have been basically to go through some kind of selection process whereby we choose a consortium of existing universities and then all the other aspects of the business would have been done through them. So we would have selected in a sense some sort of managing consortium of universities and then they would have led on getting in private sector partners. So we would have related to the consortium and the consortium would have related to other partners. And that was the model we proposed as... basically the first punt and then we brought in PricewaterhouseCoopers and then PricewaterhouseCoopers worked on that model and looked at others and then came up with the October business model.” (A. Frost)

PricewaterhouseCoopers was commissioned to produce a business analysis of the venture and their report was published in October 2000 (HEFCE, 2000d). Immediately after this, the HEFCE announced that the virtual university was re-launched in a different form:

“Comments received from universities and colleges showed that we needed to produce a business model that was inclusive, enabling a wide range of higher education institutions and other partners to contribute.” (HEFCE, 2000e)

The reactions of some universities were reported in the press making headlines such as “Elite logs out of e-university” (THES, 2000b). The Head of the Research and Project Development Division at the London School of Economics, Neil Gregory, voicing what other similar institutions thought, was quoted as saying:

“An inclusive model flies in the face of what, in our view, is necessary for success. There are few institutions with which the LSE would want to be involved.” (THES, 2000b)

The preface of the 50-page report from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), from the outset, pointed to the risk involved in the initiative: “The e-world does not wait for tried and tested solutions, nor must the e-university” (HEFCE, 2000d:3). This point is well developed in the Background sub-section of the Aims & Objectives:

“1. The application of e-technology is having a major impact across many sectors of the economy. ... [I]t has often led - and is leading - to significant changes in the ways in which things are done, in which goods are made and in which services are delivered. It is often not simply (or even) a matter of doing things more efficiently, it is a change in the mould.

2. This can be threatening to the traditional ways of doing things, but lessons from other sectors are clear: if traditional providers do not respond quickly and imaginatively, someone else will and traditional markets evaporate.

3. Higher education is no exception: already there are changes stimulated by the internet and by other enabling technologies which have reduced geographical and time boundaries. The pedagogy of on-line learning is still in its infancy, but it is already a powerful tool and, used well, can increase the range and excitement of learning.” (HEFCE, 2000d:6)

The message is clear, there will be two groups of institutions: on the one hand, ‘traditional’ universities, and on the other, e-business type of universities able to adapt rapidly and innovatively (“traditional providers do not respond quickly and imaginatively”). This theme rings all the globalist bells which have previously been analysed and points to a ‘traditional’ type of higher education provision as in risk of becoming rapidly obsolete.

In addition to the planned expansion of the overseas student market and to continuing professional development, increasing participation from students with “certain forms of disability” was added (HEFCE, 2000d:8). And under Section B11 (Initial Markets), the report clearly states:

“One of the objectives for the e-U is to widen HE participation of under-represented groups at undergraduate level. Those who are currently excluded from higher education for social or financial reasons are also least likely to have access to the appropriate information and communications technology (ICT), but students with disabilities could be a good initial target group. Initial target numbers should be low. If assessed purely on commercial criteria, this group would not be a focus for the e-U, but its wider social objectives indicate that it should try to use new technology to reach such groups.” (HEFCE, 2000d:15)

As far as the financing of the project was concerned, in November 2000, the Department for Education and Employment announced that it would provide £62 million to the project over three years: £14 million in 2001-02, £21 million in 2002-03 and £27 million in 2003-04 (DfEE, 2000).

This analysis shows that, once the public announcement and its paraphernalia of media coverage were passed, clear tensions within the higher education sector began to appear. Having conducted the analysis of the sector (chapter 2), this is not surprising and can be explained by the fact that the UK sector is extremely diverse and competitive. Thus, the idea that all universities would participate together in what was, essentially, a commercial venture, was not likely to gain consensus. In other words, the fact that universities such as LSE publicly explained why they would not take part in an inclusive model is understandable.

In France

After the agreement from Claude Allègre, the choice of phrase to designate the initiative caused further discussions between the ministry and the team at the SDTETIC. The original title of the document sent to universities was “*Appel à Projets pour la création de consortiums de formation à distance*”. Thibault (2007b) explained how Allègre was opposed to the word ‘consortium’ for its marked

economic connotation whilst she was not keen on '*université virtuelle*' for its marked northern American tone (p. 120). Behind these apparently trivial battles of words, it is the whole conception of what the initiative ought to be that was at stake – the earlier review of the different terminology demonstrated the power of these different appellations. Eventually, the document was titled "*Appel à Projets pour la Constitution de Campus Numériques Français*". The phrase '*campus numérique*' translates in English as 'digital campus' and differs from the widely used phrases at the time. This issue was raised with Dr Thibault who explained that:

« J'étais très opposée à beaucoup de discours qui disaient tout de suite que ça y est l'université allait se transformer. J'étais très opposée à ça et c'est à cause de cela que j'ai choisi le mot 'campus numérique', et ça j'ai écrit un papier que je vais pouvoir vous donner. Pourquoi j'ai choisi 'campus numérique' et pas 'université virtuelle'? Je l'ai choisi en relation à l'université virtuelle. C'est construit pareil sauf que un campus pour moi, c'était dur donc ça a une existence et le numérique, et en Français, l'ambiguïté du virtuel c'est que le virtuel c'est ce qui n'existe pas, donc moi j'avais besoin... Et quand vous regardez les textes tels qu'on les a écrits, nos textes sont ancrés sur des choses, il y a énormément de choses très concrètes où on prend des adverbes du type 'réellement', 'véritablement', des choses comme ça. » (F. Thibault)

"I was strongly opposed to many discourses claiming that universities were about to be transformed. I was very opposed to this and this is why I chose the words '*campus numérique*' and I wrote an article which I will give you. Why did I choose '*campus numérique*' and not '*université virtuelle*'? I chose it in relation to the virtual university. It's constructed the same way except that a campus for me, it's solid so it exists and in French, the ambiguity of '*virtuel*' is that something virtual doesn't exist, so I needed... and when you look at the texts that we wrote, our texts are anchored on things, they're very concrete, we chose adverbs such as 'really', 'effectively', words like this."

This article (Thibault, 2002), written six months after the second call, gives further insight into the objectives of the SDTETIC and their intention to set up an initiative which would differ from the contemporary projects of virtual universities. The article explains that the phrase '*campus numérique*' was first coined in 1999 by University of Lille 3 to refer to on-line teaching material available from campus and that its choice reflected the intention of the ministry to strongly rely on institutions to develop their own distance learning provision. Its sub-heading – "*The campus numériques, counter-type of the virtual university*" – clearly indicates the theoretical positioning implied by

this choice of wording. However, the article also points to some important common features between ‘virtual universities’ and *campus numériques*, in particular the format of the modular, accredited provision accessible on-line and supported by tutoring, and the structure in consortia of institutions between public and the private sectors. This latter point is re-visited below.

This intention to strongly involve universities and what this actually meant was discussed during interviews and one of the interviewees was keen to emphasize the idea of “a logic of impulsion” (to stimulate response). The person who replaced Dr Thibault after the second call for project, Philippe Perrey, explained:

« C'est parce que la logique des appels d'offres était une logique d'impulsion, la responsabilité des formations des projets de formation revient aux universités, donc ce que le ministère a souhaité faire, c'est inciter les universités à se lancer dans ce genre de dispositif et à les accompagner pendant la période de lancement et on a dit une période de lancement, c'est trois ans, ça aurait pu être que deux ans, ça aurait pu être qu'une seule année. » (P. Perrey)

“It is because the logic of calls for projects was to stimulate response, the responsibility for the development of the new programmes lies with universities, so what the ministry wanted to do was to encourage universities to venture into this type of operation and support them during the setting up period and it was decided that the setting up period would be three years, it could have been two years, it could have been only one year.”

In total, 18 million euros over three years were allocated to the initiative *campus numériques* – 2.7 million euros the first year and 7.5 million euros the following years. Different agencies contributed towards this fund: the *Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité*, the *Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie* (AUF) and the *Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action régionale* (DATAR). Table 5.2 shows the breakdown of the three annual budgets.

Table 5.2 : Breakdown of annual budgets for the calls for projects, per contributor, in million euros

	Ministère de l'Education nationale	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité	DATAR	AUF	Total
2000	2.7		0	0	2.7
2001	3.6	2.4	1.3	0.2	7.5
2002	3.6	2.4	1.3	0.2	7.5

Source: Ministère de l'Education nationale

The first and second calls had very similar aims. The first one stated:

« L'enseignement à distance, lié dorénavant aux nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication, peut apporter une réponse aux besoins sociaux actuels en éducation et en formation. » (Ministère de l'Education nationale et Ministère de la Recherche, 2000)

“Distance learning, henceforth via the new information and communication technologies, is able to provide an answer to current social needs in education and training.”

And the following two objectives specified what the proposals should offer:

*«- Elaborer une offre de formation post-baccalauréat, diplômante ou créditant, ouverte et à distance, utilisant les TIC dans des domaines et pour des publics clairement identifiés,
- Porter cette offre de formation aux niveaux national et international, ce qui devrait impliquer de proposer une offre multilingue. » (Ministère de l'Education nationale et Ministère de la Recherche, 2000).*

“- To develop a post-A level provision, either leading to a qualification or accredited, in the mode of open and distance learning, using ICT, in clearly identified areas and for clearly identified groups of students,
- To offer this provision at both national and international levels, which should imply a multilingual provision.”

By offering higher education distance learning courses leading to professional qualifications (subject areas given priority were medicine, computing, economics and management, and law), the *campus numériques* initiative was meant to solve social

problems such as youth unemployment. To constitute a *campus*, universities had to form a consortium with other universities (the option of working with the private sector was only mentioned as a possibility) and working with the CNED was strongly encouraged. Two kinds of funding were available: either universities applied for a feasibility study for a new project (called *Niveau 1*) or they were already working on an existing project and needed support for further development and applied for a *Niveau 2* funding to get 50 per cent of the costs as long as matched funding was agreed.

The second objective, concerning multilingual provision, requires clarification as this is in itself an extremely complex task which sat uncomfortably with the rest of the project. Research in the field of translation shows that meaning is conveyed by both text and cultural context of the document (in this case, the course); therefore simply translating a course, say from French into Spanish for Latin American students, would not work as the context of the course would remain the French culture and would therefore 'not speak' to these students (Whorf, 1973; Bell, 1991; Newmark, 1991). When asked about this, Dr Thibault explained that, in reality, this had never been the intention. She explained that:

« Quand on lance des appels de ce type-là, ça résulte de négociations, et c'est vrai que on a utilisé cette espèce d'euphorie des politiques pour l'Internet, pour dire : on va pouvoir se faire un soutien d'enseignement à distance universitaire. Ça faisait des années qu'il n'y avait pas eu de soutien spécifique, et donc en fait ça c'était pour nous... c'était pas essentiel l'offre multilingue, on l'a vraiment pris... on l'a notée pour faire plaisir aux politiques, c'est clair (rire). Donc... j'avais même pas fait attention à ce point-là, mais que ça ait disparu, c'est pas étonnant, c'est le signe que on ne croyait pas vraiment à... c'était pas le problème pour nous que les Français fassent une offre à l'international. C'était pas le problème. » (F. Thibault)

"When you launch calls like these, they're the result of negotiations and it is true to say that we've used this sort of internet euphoria of the politicians to say that we were going to support distance learning at higher education level. For years there hadn't been any specific support, so, in fact for us, the multilingual offer was not essential, we only took it... we included it to please the politics, that's clear (laughs). So... I didn't even notice this point; but that it had disappeared [from the subsequent calls] is not surprising, it's the sign that we didn't really believe that... well, it wasn't our problem that France should have an international provision. This wasn't the issue."

This is another example of a divergence between the policy, the official document circulated, and what happened in practice. In this particular case, the element of the policy related to multilingual provision was no more than a symbolic feature whose role was to appease decision makers who provided the budget.

A clear change of orientation is seen through the objectives of the third call – which was led by a different person. This third call, in 2002, did not follow the pattern of the first two calls and was designed to end the initiative. Overseen by a different person, the emphasis was on consolidation of the existing *campus* (referred to as *Volet 1*) and on supporting the development of virtual portals to facilitate access to resources (referred to as *Volet 2*). This decision to split the call into two very different areas was discussed with Philippe Perrey who managed this third call; his colleague, present at the interview, explained the choice they were faced with:

« Je crois que la question était, est-ce qu'on fait un nouvel appel d'offres ou est-ce qu'on soutient certains campus pour des raisons diverses et variées. Parce que l'objectif, c'était quand même... on peut pas soutenir, enfin le rôle du ministère c'est jamais de soutenir comme ça. Donc ils devaient trouver leur place, les campus devaient trouver leur place dans le fonctionnement normal de l'université, donc rentrés dans les structures. » (E. Brodin)

“I think the question was, do we have a new call for projects or do we decide to support specific campuses for various reasons. Because all the same the objective was... you can't just carry on providing support, it's never the role of the ministry to support like that. Therefore they had to find their own place, the *campus* had to find their place within the normal run of universities and get into existing structures.”

To sum up the question of the ‘shape’ the French *campus numériques* were to, eventually, take, this analysis shows that they extensively depended on what higher education institutions would propose through each call for projects. The basis of the initiative was very much a bottom-up type of approach whereby groups of universities would develop a proposal of courses destined to be partly delivered with digital technology. Thus, it can be said that the foundation of the architecture of the *campus numériques* lay with the universities. Consequently, it is worth bearing in mind findings obtained with the analysis of the massification of French higher education, in particular the fact that during two decades of increasing student numbers, universities

had suffered from a long term inadequate level of funding, partly responsible for their growing reputation of second-rate institutions to the advantage of other institutions such as the *grandes écoles* or the private *écoles de commerce*. Because the model of virtual university chosen by the French places individual higher education institutions at the heart of the design, this is a fact that is worth bearing in mind.

Conclusions

Some of the similarities between the two contexts of influence have already been pointed out. Evidence shows that, in the UK and in France, in 2000, arguments about the power of the influence of globalization on the respective economies were prominent in the texts of the early days of both projects. On the whole, the argument, in both cases, was that the country's future was under threat because national economies were increasingly unable to respond to the new conditions brought by globalization. A major source of this inadequacy was the higher education system which was failing to adapt to the new needs of the knowledge-based economy.

The nature of these threats differed between the two countries. For the UK, it was the more competitive economies and their successful virtual and corporate universities. For France, the root of the threat was the growing obsolescence of universities. A clear contrast thus emerges between the two contexts of influences. In the UK, the policy rhetoric argues that despite the fact that higher education is, on the whole, of high quality, international competitors constitute a danger to the economic future of the country. In France, the policy rhetoric argues that the entire higher education sector is the root of the problem because it is disorganised and out of touch with today's realities. On both sides of the Channel, it was thus clearly argued that higher education needed a good shake up and that the state would provide leadership and financial support to address the situation.

Evidence also shows that the UK theme of an external threat was expressed in different contexts: government, academic circles and networking at a senior level of both government and higher education. However, comparable analysis shows that, in France, there was no such unity. On the contrary, evidence shows that there existed

deep differences of views on the question of the shape that the state initiative should take.

Moving to the comparison of the early stages of both initiatives, the analysis shows that, in both contexts, the question of the model of a virtual university was problematic. In both cases, this was also a source of conflicts between the main stakeholders. Aspects of the disagreements reflect national specificities. In the UK, findings point to the intense internal competition which characterises the higher education sector. In France, evidence shows that the legacy of decades of the absence of a national strategy left the landscape of distance learning provision disorganised and fragmented.

Thus it can be argued that the analysis of the context of influence of both virtual universities shows that, although both policy initiatives had some consequent similarities during their initial stages, at least in its early stages, the implementation process showed a strong influence of national characteristics. The core of both initiatives was digital technology seen as the solution to national problems and able to supplement existing higher education provision. The crux of the argument is that though the rationales behind these policy initiatives diverged (to counter-act northern American competitors; to modernise higher education), though budgets were not comparable (£62 million; 18 million euros), both set ups met difficulties in constructing the model of their respective virtual university. Why? To answer this question requires further empirical analysis, in particular the ways stakeholders responded to these centrally designed policy initiatives and how these latter developed. This is addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Comparing the 'Context of Practice' of the UK and French Virtual University

« Mais comment voulez-vous maintenir ces projets dans la misère de l'enseignement supérieur français ? Il faut connaître nos budgets... Quand vous voulez avoir une dynamique de e-learning, quand vous voulez faciliter du cross-link, des échanges, des discussions, les gens se déplacent, etc. Tout ceci a un coût et les dotations qui étaient attribuées n'étaient absolument pas à la hauteur des enjeux. Si vous faites une analyse comparative des moyens injectés dans ces problèmes de e-learning et de nouvelles technologies dans les grands pays économiques, regardez par exemple le Canada, vous prenez l'Allemagne, les Pays-Bas, aucune commune mesure en termes de fonds injectés. » (J.L. Billoet¹)

“But how can you support such projects with the state of impoverishment of French higher education? You should see our budgets... When you want to develop a dynamic of e-learning, when you want to facilitate networking, exchanges, discussions, people travelling, etc. All this has a cost and the funding allocated was totally inadequate to what was at stake. If you do a comparative analysis of the amounts injected for issues of e-learning and new technologies in large economy countries, take for example Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, there's no comparison whatsoever in terms of funds allocated.”

¹ Jean-Louis Billoet was interviewed on July 2005. At the time of the *campus numériques*, he was director of studies at the *CNED* and oversaw all the *campus numériques* in which the *CNED* was a partner.

This chapter, in conjunction with the previous chapter, forms a coherent analysis of the life of a policy cycle. Having identified the key policy actors and stakeholders who were involved in the formulation of initial policy-making, the analysis now turns to a comparison of the ways the policy initiatives were received by these stakeholders.

- 1. Engagement of Stakeholders – the Higher Education Sector

In the UK

In order to evaluate the stake the sector was considering taking in this venture and how this was manifested, three direct consultations with the sector will be considered:

- Consultation regarding the new business model (October 2000);
- Invitation to become shareholders of the holding company (April 2001);
- Invitation ‘to express interest in pilots to develop e-learning programmes’ (March 2001).

Documents used to back up this analysis were issued by the HEFCE and addressed to HEFCE-funded higher education institutions (i.e. universities in England and Northern Ireland). Key consultation documents bore the legend: “A parallel document is being sent to HEIs in Scotland and Wales by the respective funding councils” (HEFCE, 2000d). On two occasions, all UK institutions were surveyed by the HEFCE: first, following the announcement made by David Blunkett, in February 2000, and then, after the revision of the model, in October 2000. Table 6.1 recaps the main documents used for consultation with the sector.

Table 6.1: HEFCE documents related to the consultation with the UK higher education sector

<i>Date of consultation</i>	<i>Type of document (deadline to reply) [Bibliographical reference]</i>	<i>Date of publication of summary of responses [Bibliographical reference]</i>
February 2000	Circular letter 04/00 & Annex A (April 2000) [HEFCE, 2000a & HEFCE, 2000b]	June 2000 [HEFCE, 2000c]
February 2000	"Invitation to tender to deliver a business model for an "e-University"" (April 2000)	
October 2000	Consultation on Business Model 00/43 (November 2000) [HEFCE, 2000d]	February 2001 [HEFCE, 2001a]
October 2000	Announcement of Business Model 00/44 [HEFCE, 2000e]	
January 2001	Circular letter 02/01 "Invitation to nominate directors and committee members" (February 2001) [HEFCE, 2001b]	March 2001 (announcement made by David Blunkett) [DfES, 2001]
March 2001	Circular letter 06/01 "Invitation to express interest in pilots to develop e-learning programmes" (May 2001) [HEFCE, 2001d]	October 2001
April 2001	Circular letter 07/01 "Invitation to HEIs to become members of the holding company" (May 2001) [HEFCE, 2001e]	July 2001

The 'business model', a term derived from reference to the previous model (referred to as 'original HEFCE model' in internal documents), was based on the idea that all higher education institutions in the UK were members of the holding company:

“HE sector ownership would be secured through the holding company. This company would be wholly owned by the sector either by the representative bodies of the HE sector (CVCP, SCOP etc) or by individual HEIs being members. ... In terms of legal structure, the holding company could either be a company limited by shares or a company limited by guarantee. Either of these limits the liability of the members or shareholders, in the former up to the nominal value of the shares, in the latter up to the level of the guarantee – usually £1 per member.” (HEFCE, 2000e:28)

Legally speaking, through the holding company, the sector nominated representatives to form the Board of Directors which decides on the terms of the licence given to the operating company and the membership of the Board of Directors thereof. This licence gave the operating company the right to operate and deliver UKeU and thus the responsibility for areas such as strategic direction, marketing, technology infrastructure and platform. This operating company was formed through a joint venture between the holding company and private sector partners and had the following three-phase development schedule:

- Consultation between October and December 2000;
- Development between January and April 2001;
- Implementation between April and December 2001 and first courses running in 2002 (HEFCE, 2000e:50).

What follows does not reflect the chronological ordering of events. Although such ordering would be easier to apply, it would not produce a sufficiently revealing analysis of the relationship between the two core stakeholders which are the HEFCE and the higher education institutions. However, for a better understanding of how events unfolded, a rapid overview of the major chronological events of 2001 is proposed below. This will also give an idea of what was going on during the three consultations examined.

During the first term of 2001, and in accordance with the calendar mentioned above, the project moved to its ‘development’ phase with documents (consultations and press releases) from the HEFCE being published every month.

In January 2001, nominations for three groups of posts were invited: the directors of the holding company (nine posts, all drawn from UK higher education institutions), the directors of the operating company (the number of posts to be filled from the higher education sector depended on applicants from the private sector and was not yet determined), and the members of the Committee for Academic Quality (a committee of the operating company, not of the holding company, as its role was closely linked to work done by the operating team) (HEFCE, 2001b).

In February 2001, the HEFCE and Universities UK (former CVCP) appointed an interim management team for the operating company with:

- Nick Winton as interim Chief Executive Officer (“Nick Winton is an independent business consultant who has previously been a Board Chair and Managing Director of Internet-based businesses and has extensive experience of start-ups. He also has experience of working in higher education as a Director of Marketing” HEFCE, 2001c);
- Professor John Slater as interim Learning Programmes and Technology director (“He is on secondment from his post as Head of the Technologies Centre at the Institute for Learning and Teaching. Professor Slater was formerly a Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Kent” HEFCE, 2001c);
- Dr Keith Palmer as interim part-time commercial director (“He is Vice-Chairman of NM Rothschild & Sons Ltd and part-time Professor at the University of Dundee” HEFCE, 2001c).

In March 2001, the HEFCE invited higher education institutions “to express interest in pilots for possible e-learning programmes”, the idea being to formally commission institutions to provide courses. At the time, the HEFCE stipulated that “[t]his role may be most suited to institutions that envisage global e-learning programmes as a significant part of their offerings in the future, and hence are prepared to put in the commitment as early adopters” (HEFCE, 2001d), subsequently adding: “There will be subsequent and regular opportunities for all institutions to participate in the e-University’s commissioning and delivery activities” (HEFCE, 2001d). The letter also specified that no

more than five learning programmes would be selected for the pilot phase and that “[these] e-University’s programmes will be primarily at postgraduate level. But we want the e-University to develop over time a full, balanced portfolio of higher education programmes. So we will also consider pilot proposals for undergraduate programmes” (HEFCE, 2001d). Five subject areas were earmarked: management information systems and technology, business, health, education, English language (HEFCE, 2001d).

At the end of March 2001, the Department for Education and Skills announced the appointments for directors of the holding company (12 appointments² (DfES, 2001), although originally only 9 posts were to be filled). The HEFCE Chief Executive, Sir Brian Fender was appointed Chair of the Board. Members of the committee for Academic Quality were also announced (11 appointments³ (DfES, 2001), as opposed to 10 previously announced). It is worth noting that members of those two groups were academic members of staff working in the three types of institutions previously identified

² *Members of the Board of the holding company:*

- Prof Bob Boucher (Vice-Chancellor, University of Sheffield);
- Sandra Burslem (Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University);
- Prof Sir Colin Campbell (Vice-Chancellor, University of Nottingham);
- Prof Ron Cooke (Vice-Chancellor, University of York);
- Gary Crossley (Principal, Central School of Speech and Drama);
- Prof Sir Brian Fender (Chief Executive, HEFCE);
- Walter Greaves (Chair of Council, Brunel University);
- Prof Gerry McKenna (Vice-Chancellor, University of Ulster);
- Alfred Morris (Vice-Chancellor, University of the West of England);
- Prof Tim O'Shea (Master, Birkbeck College, London);
- Prof Sir Gareth Roberts (President, Wolfson College, Oxford and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sheffield);
- Dorma Urwin (Principal, University College Worcester).

³ *Members of the committee for Academic Quality:*

- Dr Madeleine Atkins (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle);
- Prof Colin Bell (Vice-Chancellor, University of Bradford and Vice-Chancellor designate, University of Stirling);
- Prof Anthony Cryer (Head of Academic Registry, University of Wales, Cardiff);
- Prof Sir Brian Fender (Chief Executive, HEFCE);
- Prof Kel Fidler (Professor of Electronics, University of York);
- Prof Philip Jones (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Sheffield);
- Dr Helen O'Sullivan (Head of Quality Assurance, Liverpool Hope);
- Prof John Slater ('e-Universities' Interim Director, Technology and Learning Programmes; and former Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Kent);
- Prof Rick Trainor (Vice-Chancellor, University of Greenwich);
- Prof David Unwin (Pro-Vice-Master, Birkbeck College, London);
- Dr Tristram Wyatt (Director of Distance and Online Learning, University of Oxford).

(Russell Group, 'old universities' and ex-polytechnics) though with a slight over-representation of universities belonging to the first group. Finally, as far as the membership of the operating company is concerned, the HEFCE said that names would be announced in the summer, "[s]ubject to successful completion of the current negotiations" (DfES, 2001).

In April 2001, funding councils invited higher education institutions to become shareholders of the holding company, stipulating that any higher education institutions funded by the UK funding bodies would be entitled to become a member of the company (HEFCE, 2001e).

The chronology of the initiative can be paused here as, after the spring 2001, the attention turned to another stakeholder: the private sector. Thus the analysis returns to the consultations with the sector.

○ **Consultation regarding the new business model (October 2000)**

With the new business model, all higher education institutions had the option of becoming shareholders of the holding company – an inclusivity which had been asked for by universities in the consultation conducted in spring 2000. How was this model received by universities? Following the publication of the business model of the virtual university, in autumn 2000, a second UK-wide consultation was conducted. Two elements of the feedback are worth unwrapping. The first one concerns the objectives of the initiative, the second, regional variations across the UK.

The HEFCE document reporting on the consultation stated:

"The e-University project and the PwC Business Model attracted considerable support: 74 per cent of HEIs expressed their general support and commended the main aspects of the model. ... A number of detailed issues were raised that would need to be resolved before firm commitments were made, but the vast majority of HEIs responding expressed considerable enthusiasm for participating in the project in future." (HEFCE, 2001a)

In absolute numbers, 77 responses were received, which, out of the 168 higher education institutions (2000), represents 46 per cent. Therefore it can only be assumed that the 74 per cent given by the HEFCE refers to the proportion of positive comments amongst these 77 responses. Respondents were mainly concerned with issues related to learning and teaching and many were reported to disagree with the proposed targeted markets:

“Many HEIs argued that the e-University should focus more on domestic lifelong learners and on widening access, and hence argued that more individually tailored support would be needed. Others were more firmly focused on overseas and professional markets and hence had different expectations about appropriate levels of support.” (HEFCE, 2001a)

Two points arise from this. Firstly, despite changes made to the original aims of the e-university following the first consultation, i.e. not to develop courses exclusively for overseas students, the sector was still not satisfied and judged the dependence on external markets still too high. In other words, the objectives of the model proposed by the HEFCE in-line with the outcome of the PwC analysis, i.e. a model designed with business-type of priorities, were not the objectives universities saw as being the right ones for this new venture. Secondly, these responses give a good idea of what the sector saw virtual university provision bringing to higher education. At the time, universities saw digital technology primarily as a means to reach students who, otherwise, would remain inaccessible, for geographical and/or social reasons (and essentially non-traditional students and students engaged in other activities rather than students abroad). This point was raised with the then director of the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, Svava Bjarnasson, who, through her expertise on the subject, had a broad understanding of virtual higher education provision in the UK and abroad. She explained:

“I don’t think many of the institutions in the UK were necessarily seeing the use of IT as opening up markets, external to the UK. It was more about enhancing on-campus learning. So it was driven by pedagogy rather than opening new markets.” (S. Bjarnasson)

To sum up on this point, evidence points to the fact that, from the early stages of the implementation of the policy initiative, there was a disagreement among the core

stakeholders (the HEFCE and universities) about what the venture should be about. However, as seen earlier, the funding for the project was linked to the Prime Minister's 1999 Initiative which was exclusively concerned with increasing overseas student enrolments. For this reason, and because the dominant coalition in a network policy is the one which has greater resources (Rhodes, 2006), it would have been unwise to believe that the funding council would have/could have altered the objectives.

As far as regional variations are concerned, as pointed out previously, one of the central characteristics of the initiative was the fact that it was financed by the DfES with responsibility for the funding of the operation falling on the English funding council (Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2004b: Ev 11), and was designed for the UK-wide higher education sector. However, as the analysis of the UK higher education sector has previously shown, the notion of 'sector' and its implicit reference to a unified entity does not actually do justice to the diverse nature of institutions constituting this section of post-compulsory education, nor does it reflect the fact that higher education in the UK is a composite of institutions based in *three* different nations. Thus it is essential to closely examine these variations across the UK. The breakdown reported by the HEFCE was as follows:

"A total of 77 responses to the consultation were received:

- 42 from higher education institutions (HEIs) in England
- 8 from HEIs in Scotland
- 6 from HEIs in Wales
- 1 from an HEI in Northern Ireland
- 20 from others (Universities UK - formerly the CVCP); Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP); Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC); Learning and Teaching Support Network; HE consortia - Universitas 21, Worldwide Universities Network, University of London; SCONUL; Association for Learning Technology; University of Highlands and Islands; Royal College of Nursing; British and Irish Legal Education Technology Association; plus 8 from individuals)." (HEFCE, 2001a)

According to the number of institutions per region in 2000, these proportions respectively represent 32 per cent of English institutions, 40 per cent of Scottish institutions and 41

per cent of the Welsh and Irish institutions. In terms of the support these responses indicated, the HEFCE explained:

“The picture was different between the individual nations of the UK: 78 per cent were in favour among English HEIs (with 12 per cent against and 10 per cent reserving their position); 75 per cent were against the model among Scottish HEIs; and 100 per cent were in favour among Welsh and Northern Ireland HEIs.”(HEFCE, 2001a)

Depending on which set of figures is considered, the picture obtained is significantly different. For obvious reasons, the HEFCE opted for the breakdown which gives higher numbers. In actual fact, across the UK, only a third of all institutions responded.

Moreover, the differences between England, Scotland and Wales are also significant. The position of Scotland in particular is revealing: 40 per cent of Scottish institutions replied (8 institutions out of 20) and, of them, three quarters rejected the model – a very clear nearly unanimous position across Scotland. The HEFCE document explained this by reference to the fact that Scotland already had a national vehicle for e-learning with Scottish Knowledge and did not think a UK approach would be better (HEFCE, 2001a). For David Beards, responsible for Learning and Teaching at the Scottish Funding Council, the reason was essentially political. He explained:

“I mean this was very much an English agenda – it came from David Blunkett when he was Education Minister. And I think there’s perhaps more of a feeling about the way that the English education system is managed. There is much more direct involvement from ministers and quite often they will have an idea, they’ll make some public statements. And before you know it – Cor, you know, everybody is charging off with something. And it doesn’t always mean that there will be a similar activity in Scotland, because we have different ministers and different processes, so quite often we found – it’s like you’re being hijacked or bounced into things. “Here’s this England agenda. Would you like to join?” And, you know, “Well, wait – we need to think about this, you know.” So that happens quite a lot. And so this wasn’t an agenda which had come up in Scottish politics – it wasn’t high in the kind of public mind. And I suppose that it was something that came up from England and – They were saying, “Who’s interested?” So there’s always going to be a little bit of caution.” (D. Beards)

For him, the rationale behind the Scottish refusal to take part was primarily based on diverging political agendas together with the firm intention not to have their priorities dictated by London. This point was also expressed by another Scotland-based institution, the University of St Andrews, in an interview with Prof Ronald Piper, Vice-Principal Learning & Teaching. The reason for selecting this university for an interview originates from the fact that it was the only university in the UK which had decided to not become a shareholder in the holding company (details below) and, thus, take a public position against the initiative. His answer is two fold and first concerns reasons specific to his institution before explaining the wider position of Scotland. He said:

“One is that for a place like ourselves we think that the kind of education, the face to face element is very important and so the idea of a virtual university is so counter to our ethos that it’s not a threat but it’s also not seen as desirable. For other institutions that have already expanded into worldwide markets through distance learning, it could be seen as a threat, as a competitor or a potential competitor. And as far as Scotland is concerned, of course if the initiative is taken in England and indeed a lot of money put into it in England that itself would be something that would begin to raise some barriers in Scotland, that’s my impression as a non Scot. In a sense, we’ve gone our own way on lots of fronts, including quality assurance and unless there were equivalent funding that was going to be made available for a Scottish version, it would probably not be accepted.” (R. Piper)

If the political dimension of the venture appeared obvious to the Scots – a fact which did not appear to be a problem in Wales where 6 of the 13 higher education institutions supported the revised model – there were other reasons for their decision not to go with it and, thus, not to release extra funding for Scottish institutions: their own field of virtual higher education provision was well developed and well established. As Beards explained:

“And we’ve had quite active policies in terms of ICT learning – teaching, going back to, well, when the Funding Council was set up in ’92. Programmes like TLTP – CTI [Computers and Teaching Initiative] and so on. So it’s been quite a long tradition of that in Scotland.” (D. Beards)

This might explain why Welsh institutions and the HEFCW decided to join in with the UKeU as such nationally organised activity does not exist in Wales and thus it made economic sense to work with England. Data would be needed to back up this supposition and unfortunately the small group of lecturers based in Glamorgan University who worked for a short while with UKeU were no longer there when interviews were conducted.

- **Invitation to become shareholders of the holding company (April 2001)**

Moving forward in time to July 2001, the date when the HEFCE announced the outcome of the invitation to become members of the holding company (i.e. shareholders), brings us to the issue of the positioning of the sector vis a vis this policy initiative. This time the focus is not about its aims but about the degree of involvement of higher education institutions.

As has been seen, from the outset, the sector rejected the idea of running the UKeU with a group made up of a few selected universities and strongly argued in favour of an inclusive model of participation. In July 2001, over a year after the launch of the project, the HEFCE announced that all but 4 higher education institutions had applied and that the Board of Directors had admitted all institutions that had applied (HEFCE, 2001f). Out of the four institutions which opted out, only one was multi faculty, the University of St Andrews, a point which is re-visited later, the others being music and agricultural type of colleges. Does this signify a high commitment from the sector? Not for Barry Sheerman, Chair of the Select Committee on Education and Skills, who pointed out when he interviewed Sir Howard Newby (Q1 to Q138) that it only cost universities £1 to become shareholders in the holding company (the holding company was a company limited by guarantee) (Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2004b: Ev 9). Newby preferred to emphasise the symbolic aspect of their agreement and said:

“It was on the basis of them agreeing that there was a real opportunity here that the UK should grasp, and a broad consensus that it should be something that should, as far as possible, involve the whole sector, not just one or two institutions in it.” (B. Sheerman, Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2004b: Ev 18)

So to answer this question, this stage of applying to be part of the holding company was essentially a formal procedure, for which no significant financial commitment was asked from institutions. It is likely therefore that this high level of positive response does not signify that universities actively wished to take part, but it nevertheless shows some degree of motivation. Responses obtained to the invitation ‘to express interest in pilots to develop e-learning programmes’ will probably be more revealing of this aspect as it no longer concerns a purely formal consideration.

○ **Invitation ‘to express interest in pilots to develop e-learning programmes’ (March 2001)**

The March 2001 circular letter started the process of seeking courses for UKeU, stipulating postgraduate level in the areas of management information systems and technology, business, health, education, English language – areas earmarked as being likely to attract the most students.

This was the beginning of the second year of the initiative and some central elements were not in place yet. For instance, the operating company was not set up and thus what they would consider as being marketable had not been decided; the technological support for this virtual provision (the on-line platform through which courses would be running) was not known either. Until these three components were locked together (existing demand, chosen medium for delivery and course material), the only possible action to take was to constitute a pool of possible courses and this is what the March 2001 call was aiming for. In total, 61 institutions or consortia responded and proposed a total of 84 programmes. The interim management team of the operating company sifted through the courses and identified 12 possible runners. Prof Tim O’Shea recalled, during his interview, his impression when he looked at these suggestions for courses – though he was not formally involved in the selection. He said:

“I think, for me, the most convincing demonstration of support was the bids to be in the first phase to do pilot projects. At that stage, there were a very large number... I can’t remember the exact number now, it was less than 100 but it wasn’t very much less than 100, of really good... I looked through all of them because I was very interested to see and obviously there was an issue of focusing but I think a good demonstration of sector interest and sector support was the large volume of high quality bids. And that’s very clear.” (T. O’Shea)

What O’Shea was commenting on was the interest of the sector in virtual learning and teaching, and how well developed this side of their activity was at the time. Prof John Slater was a member of the Steering Group before becoming one of the members of the interim management team of the operating company, and eventually getting the post of Director of Learning Programmes and Technology (he later resigned in September 2002). Concerning the motivation of universities in suggesting particular virtual programmes, Slater had quite strong views on the subject. Comparing the offers with what they would have been like, had the original model been kept, he said:

“So if you’d formed a consortium of three people – four universities – and said run with this, they’d have been sharing risk at quite a high level. So they’d have had their own money and the courses that they chose to offer would have been the ones they thought would have made money, whereas I think there’s some evidence that those 76 offerings were trying to sell us courses not that they thought would make money, but the ones where they’d like a bit of help in order to make it break even. ... They were looking for Government – they were thinking of it as a Government grant. ... You can clearly, as a Government, spend large sums of money giving people grants to develop things and that’s a game that universities understand.” (J. Slater)

For Slater, it is clear that the universities’ prime interest was to obtain financial support for their existing virtual provision. One could argue that, in view of the context of the invitation, i.e. too soon, too vague, they could not do anything else.

He explained how the process of sifting through these 84 programmes was conducted:

“We had – we divided everything into, I think it was, five groups. And got expert opinions, it may only be four in the end. One was sort of educational and language. ... One was IT, one was Business and we used the London Business School there, I think – I can’t remember the name. One was Humanities and one was Social Sciences – I think. No! Sciences – sorry. Humanities is included in the one we’ve already had – Social Sciences and Sciences. So a very traditional academic taxonomy. It tended to be two experts coming down to one specially chosen expert who actually – I talked through with.” (J. Slater)

There were then, four or five sets of academic subject areas which, interestingly, covered more areas than the ones suggested by HEFCE (management information systems and technology, business, health, education, English language) – so it is likely that the proposed programmes were of a wider range than originally wished for (though we do not have any evidence to back up this supposition as the disclosure of the list of these proposals was considered legally not possible to preserve the identity of institutions (A. Frost)).

For the first round of selection (announced in October 2001), three programmes were selected: all at postgraduate level and in the areas of education, management and IT. The first one, developed in partnership between the Open University and the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry was a “masters module in Learning in the Connected Economy” (HEFCE, 2001f). The second one, from Sheffield Hallam University was an MSc in IT and Management. And the third selected programme came from The University of York, in partnership with the Worldwide Universities Network (a network of eleven British and American universities), and offered an MA in Public Policy and Management. These three courses were planned to start in September 2002. Why three? This was one of the questions posed to Slater. He replied:

“Three was what I needed to develop the part – to develop the platform. I wanted three people – three groups – who wouldn’t mind working with a fairly flaky platform as it developed – and whom we were close to and who’d give us honest feedback and everything else.” (J. Slater)

Whilst justifying the small number of courses selected, the informant also gave away the rationale for selecting those particular courses and not others. The information given, i.e.

that the main selection criterion was that the lecturer responsible for the course should belong to the community of colleagues of the team working on the development of the platform, has the merit of being, at least, honest. A totally different answer was obtained from HEFCE regarding the selection criteria on which the sifting had been done:

“I’m trying to look at the criteria they set up... I think when they were choosing the initial ones, they were looking at plausibility in lots of terms, was there an outline business proposition? Was there an academic probity? Was there expertise...? So, when they were looking initially I think they were looking for plausibility across the range.” (A. Frost)

It is clear that this was the official stance delivered by a professional civil servant whilst Slater’s answer was marked by the freedom of speech proper to academics. In other words, this contradiction is not highly surprising and can simply be explained by the fact that the two informants were from totally different professional spheres (though both belonged to the same policy community identified earlier).

In fact, the first course listed above – from the OU and Cambridge – started in March 2003, the second one from Sheffield Hallam University, started in May 2003 and the third one was due to start in September 2003. Each course cost about £1 million to put online revealed the THES “ (...) whilst students fees were: £9,000 for a York masters in public policy, £9,250 for a Sheffield Hallam MSc in information management and £2,600 for a joint Cambridge-Open University e-learning certificate” (THES, 2003). The THES added that student take-up had not been revealed. A second batch of agreements was announced in January 2003 with the UK Healthcare Education Partnership, which comprises the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), City University, the University of Leicester and the University of Ulster (THES, 2003). Finally, it was announced that the University of Ulster had decided to shift five existing courses from its WebCT virtual-learning environment to the UKeU’s platform by January 2004 (five courses in biomedical sciences and environmental management).

It would not make sense omit from this analysis of the engagement of the sector, the voice of the academics who worked on these programmes. Prof Robin Mason, based at

the Open University, worked with the UKeU on one of first three pilot programmes. She explained how the choice for this particular course arose. She explained:

“Well, call it – I don’t know who – who – for whom it was a ‘pilot’. For the UKeU it was a pilot. For us it was not a pilot, because we had an ongoing Master’s degree of which this was the course. What we thought we were going to get from the UKeU was increased student numbers, because although we had a Master’s – we *have* a Master’s running here, it’s the same Master’s – we were increasingly having fewer and fewer students every year on it and we thought with the big guns of the UKeU, and global marketing, which we’d never done – we’d done UK certain marketing, that that would really pick up our numbers. And we also designed the course to appeal not just to higher education professionals, of which the rest of the course was primarily aimed at, we thought we were going to pick up on a sort of a training market, through the superior marketing of the UKeU. So that was – it was basically for student numbers. It was also a chance for us to try out a new platform in learning objects, which was – so for us, in that sense, it was experimental, or, you know, it was an opportunity for us to try something new. And, I think, there was a feeling in the OU that we should be part of this.” (R. Mason)

Mason explained that beside this need to increase recruitment, the shape of the programme, divided into ‘learning objects’, constituted the experimental side of this venture. As she explained, it might have been different for other universities but being the OU, the distance learning dimension was not the problem. Learning objects are short blocks which, in theory, can be re-used, and /or re-cycled for other programmes. They differed, as Mason explained, from the Open University’s concept of distance teaching which has always been imbued with a strong teaching narrative and thus very contrary to the notion of learning objects. She argued:

“So there are many ways in which it has been very pioneering for us. I mean, the whole learning object approach was – carries on being used. ‘Cause many of the – the new Master’s courses we’re developing for the same online Master’s, were using the same approach – the same sort of learning object approach. So, it – you know, there have been benefits for us in that. And, of course, we did re-use a lot of the content from that course, on other OU courses.” (R. Mason)

Dr Linda See, based at Leeds University, re-designed an existing post-graduate programme on Geographic Information Science, in partnership with Southampton University. She explained the difficulties she encountered when working with the UKeU:

“We did migrate our modules from our Bodington platform to theirs. I worked with the UKeU over one summer, with their learning technologists. It was not a very pleasant experience actually because they couldn’t tell us what they wanted. So I had to keep trying something new. So we had to take existing modules, I mean we had our materials generally as pdf documents, students download them, they work through the materials, there are little exercises as you work your way through, there are on-line discussion rooms where they can come and ask questions, we have on-line MCQ, multiple choice questions for on-line testing; so we had that. But they wanted something else. They wanted some little learning objects. So I had to try to convert material into those learning objects but there was no instruction on how to do it. ... So there really wasn’t a lot of expertise I would say that came from the UKeU. ...Oh yes and there’s the platform. Their platform was a disaster. But you either have heard this already or you will hear it over and over again! It didn’t function very well, so it crashed quite a lot, and I think the things that it was supposed to do, it just didn’t do very well. ...It was terrible... So their platform was very bad. And even, just setting up the materials was so difficult, it really was not user friendly.” (L. See)

This analysis of data was seeking to assess the degree to which the higher education sector engaged in this policy initiative. Firstly, it appears that, from the outset, there was a problem with the aims of the new project. On one hand a business consultant firm identifies overseas market as having a potential commercial future, on the other, the majority of institutions would rather this investment was made to support their own virtual provision mostly for the domestic market. This conflict of views can mainly be explained by the problems of lack of funding which characterise the late 1990s, early 2000s (see the Dearing report). This is not a minor disagreement which could be set aside. Secondly, the examination of the regional breakdown of responses highlights a political characteristic of the United Kingdom and shows how an England-driven initiative can be problematic for some regions. Thirdly and final point, the high number and the quality of the programmes institutions proposed for the virtual university reflect the wealth and dynamism of this field of activity across higher education. Comparing these findings with the French analysis should reveal some significant traits of both higher education and the role of virtual universities within both sectors.

In France

This section aims to mirror the one above and therefore intends to find out to what extent French universities engaged with this ministerial initiative and what this signifies. To do so, three aspects of the successive calls have been identified as being likely to reveal this central aspect of the *campus numériques* initiative: the responses obtained to the calls, the selection process in place and the consortia between institutions.

The *Ministère de la Recherche* and the *Ministère de l'Education nationale* jointly published three successive annual calls for projects (*Appel à Projets pour la Constitution de Campus Numériques Français*) in 2000, 2001 and 2002. The first two were overseen by the same person (Dr Françoise Thibault) who was based at the *Direction de la Technologie* within the MEN. The third call was organised Philippe Perrey as Thibault left her functions in 2001 shortly after the second call. Each year the text was re-written and changes were made on the characteristics of the projects sought. Table 6.2 recaps details of these key documents.

Table 6.2: Documents from the *Ministère de l'Education nationale (MEN)* related to the consultation with the French higher education sector

Date of consultation	Title of document [bibliographical reference]	Origins
06/2000	<i>Appel à Projets pour la Constitution de Campus Numériques Français</i> [MEN, 2000a]	MEN and Ministère de la Recherche
10/2000	<i>Résultats du 1er appel</i>	MEN
12/04/2001	« <i>Campus numériques français</i> » <i>Appel à Projets 2001</i> [MEN, 2001a]	MEN and Ministère de la Recherche
18/07/2001	<i>Résultats du 2ème appel</i>	MEN
21/03/2002	<i>Campus numériques : Un nouvel appel à projets lancé par les ministères de l'Education nationale et de la Recherche</i> [MJENR, 2002]	Ministère de la Jeunesse, de l'Education Nationale et de la Recherche (MJENR)

○ **Responses obtained to the calls**

As seen previously, for the first two calls there were two types of support available: the *niveau 1* for projects which needed help in their early stages and *niveau 2* for projects which were not new and needed financial support to develop further.

It is in the context of an international conference on e-learning organised under the auspices of the French presidency of the European Union, that the *ministère*, in October 2000, announced the results of the first call. Table 6.3 recaps the statistics for the three years.

Table 6.3: Breakdown of received proposals at the different stages of selection

Years	Number of proposals received	Number of proposals considered	Number of proposals funded	Number of proposals funded at <i>Niveau 1</i>	Number of proposals funded at <i>Niveau 2</i>
2000	86	49	27	16	11
2001	117	---	66	27	39
2002	82	82	36	0	32
Total	285	---	129	43	82

Before analysing this in detail, one aspect of the calls needs clarification. On paper, neither of the first two calls bore any reference to the next one (no reference to the 'first call' and/or the possibility of applying the following year) as if the succession of calls had not been initially planned. What was the message given to the sector about the duration of the initiative? This was raised with Dr Thibault and she explained that:

« Il y a des raisons techniques qui peuvent quelquefois toucher les comportements politiques, c'est-à-dire qu'en fait nous ne disposions pas de budget pluriannuel. On n'a que des budgets annuels et on ne savait pas d'une année sur l'autre de quel type de budget nous allions disposer. Donc, ça c'est la raison technique qui fait qu'on ne pouvait pas annoncer un programme sur trois ans. Par contre nous, on avait conçu, et dans quelques textes ça se voit, on avait pensé déjà un programme au moins sur trois ans, au moins, hein. Avec l'idée que ce qu'on voulait faire de toutes façons, on pourrait commencer à voir émerger quelque chose au bout de trois ans, mais pas avant. Donc on avait ça en tête mais sans avoir aucune assurance qu'on aurait les budgets. » (F. Thibault)

“There are some technical reasons which sometimes are linked to political circumstances; in fact we didn't have a long term budget. We only have annual budgets and we didn't know from one year to another, what type of budget we would have. So, this is the technical reason which explains why we could not announce a three-year programme. But us, we did design a programme for at least three years and in a few documents you can see this. The idea being that with what we wanted to do, we would only begin to see projects emerging in three years time, a minimum of three years. So we had this in mind but without any assurance that we would have the budget for it.”

The distinction made between the two levels of a policy, the formal side which tends to depend on technicalities and bureaucracy, and the conceptual aspects of a policy which tend to carry the intentions of the policy-makers helps understand the difficulty encountered for the implementation of a three-year initiative. However, from the above quotation it seems that, at least verbally, the information that this would last for at least three years was known.

Going back to the details of the calls, a few general points arise from the figures. The staggering number of proposals received (a total of 285 in the three years) reveals the level of interest of higher education institutions. However, it can also be explained by the criteria set for the calls. When asked about the openness of the definition and the number of applications obtained, Thibault explained:

« On avait fait un texte très, très ouvert parce que, ce qu'on voulait c'était... vraiment on était dans cette démarche innovation dont je vous parlais et donc ce qu'on voulait, c'était faire remonter du terrain plus les idées, donc c'était vraiment un texte pas très... (rire), enfin cadré, mais très, très flou. » (F. Thibault)

“We had written a very, very open text, because what we wanted was... we really were in this innovative approach I was telling you about and therefore, what we wanted was to get ideas from the field back up, so it wasn't very... (laugh), well it was framed but very, very loosely.”

Once again, this principle of setting up the necessary conditions to allow emergence of project and ideas was emphasised. This was further discussed at the *ministère* with Elisabeth Brodin who had worked with Philippe Perrey on the third call. For her this large number of applications was a sign of success. She explained:

« Il y avait une définition mais qui était une définition très, très ouverte dans le premier appel d'offres, moi elle me va bien par rapport au fait qu'on initie une innovation et que si on canalise trop vite on peut effectivement casser le mouvement, la dimension vraiment innovante et là, retomber dans les errements, c'est-à-dire, est-ce que je fais en fait de la distance comme d'habitude, simplement avec un nouvel objet, et que je fonctionne avec la connaissance que j'ai du domaine ? Ou alors est-ce que je me dis que c'est peut-être l'occasion de faire des choses qui sont différentes de ce que je peux faire jusqu'à maintenant ? » (E. Brodin)

“There was a definition, but it was a very, very loose one for the first call. I don't have any problems with this in the sense that we were trying to initiate innovation. If you channel too early, you take the risk of interrupting the movement, the really innovative dimension and fall back to wandering. So the question was, do I carry on with distance learning as I'm used to and simply with a new objective and I carry on with the existing knowledge I have? Or, shall I see this as a way to do things differently from what I have been doing so far?”

This confirms the strong emphasis on a bottom-up initiative. However, for some, this presented some difficulty. As amendments of the objectives were made, Perrey explained towards what type of activity, according to him, this initiative was moving. He argued:

« Quel était l'objectif visé ? Et on voit manifestement, qu'il y avait probablement deux objectifs visés, qui étaient premièrement rénover la pédagogie dans l'enseignement présentiel en mettant un petit peu de distance ou de suivi non présentiel, et il y avait un deuxième objectif qui était de développer l'enseignement à distance, c'est pour cela quand même ces deux objectifs étaient présents dans le premier appel d'offres et que ensuite dans les deuxième et troisième appels d'offres ça s'est resserré sur l'objectif enseignement à distance ; en tous les cas, moi, c'est ce que j'ai essayé de faire, de resserrer sur l'objectif enseignement à distance. » » (P. Perrey)

“What was the objective? It is obvious that there were probably two objectives. Firstly, to modernise the pedagogy of face-to-face teaching with adding a distance element. And there was a second objective which was to develop distance learning. These two objectives were present in the first call. Then for the second and third ones, this was narrowed down to the distance learning objective, at least that's what I tried to do, to narrow down to the distance learning objective.”

Loose objectives or confusing objectives, opinions differed. For Jean-Louis Billoet, then director of studies at the CNED, and responsible for all the *campus numériques* in which the CNED was involved, the model opted for did allow the emergence of a new type of activity within the universities. He argued:

« Et il s'est passé quelque chose d'extrêmement important. Si vous faites une analyse des dépôts de dossiers, sur les trois appels à projets, peu de projets ont été soutenus par des membres de la FIED. On a vu apparaître et ça je crois que c'est extrêmement important, la génération presque spontanée de nouveaux acteurs de l'enseignement à distance. Il y avait les acteurs historiques, FIED, CNED, les deux reposant sur une pédagogie de la correspondance qui a ses avantages. ... Mais avec le boum des technologies, on a vu apparaître un troisième groupe et ce troisième groupe n'était pas ni dans la FIED, ni dans le CNED ; ça c'est extrêmement important. » » (JL Billoet)

“Something extremely important happened. When you analyse the applications, out of the three calls for projects, very few were from members of the FIED. We saw emerging, and I think this is extremely important, the almost spontaneous generation of new actors of distance learning. There were the traditional actors, the FIED, the CNED, both functioning on the basis of correspondence courses and this has its advantages. ... But with the expansion of technologies, a third group appeared and this third group was not from the FIED or the CNED. This is extremely important.”

A closer examination of the projects received gives a better idea of the types of campuses which were envisaged. In the first year, amongst the 11 proposals accepted at *Niveau 2* (i.e. already formed consortia), subject areas proposed included: medicine (2 projects), technology (3 projects), economy and management (3 projects), and law (2 projects). Qualifications were at a wide range of levels (from a two-year diploma to post-graduate level). As far as their geographical spread was concerned, 3 out of the 11 main applicants were based in Paris, the other 9 being from Rouen, Compiègne, Rennes, Nantes, Lille (all in the North-West quarter of France), and Lyon, St Etienne and Nice – in the South-East quarter. However, the list of partner institutions compensates for this geographical concentration as the entire French territory seems involved. Out of the 11 main applicants, 8 were universities, 1 an engineering school and 2 from ‘technological universities’. Two of the 11 had partners in French speaking countries (higher education institutions based in Canada, Switzerland, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Morocco), both offering courses in law. Finally, out of all the projects funded, 10 had a partnership with the CNED (MEN, 2000b).

The following year, with funding three and a half times the size of the previous year, the *ministère* received 117 proposals and accepted 66. Most consortia falling into this accepted group were in teaching related to ICT⁴ (this was in direct response to the selection criteria attached to this second call which specified that distance learning provision for teaching staff at all levels would be particularly supported) and medicine. As in the previous year, qualifications were at all levels, from Diploma to MPhil, including CPD for teachers and medical staff. Only 8 out of the 39 consortia at *Niveau 2* were from a Paris based institution, the others being from various parts of France. Out of these 39 main applicants, 5 were engineering schools, 2 from the IUFM (universities specializing in teacher training), the others were universities. The document publishing the results (MEN, 2001a) stated that 35 partnerships with institutions based abroad had been signed.

⁴ The French phrase used was: *Ingénierie éducative et TIC* (MEN, 2001a)

An analysis of actual proposals, in particular of the 11 projects which had applied for a feasibility study the first time round and applied for a *Niveau 2* funding the following year, reveals that two went through the feasibility study without any major alterations⁵, six altered the qualifications they offered, mainly narrowing their target groups⁶, two projects amended their title, both opting for a more accurate and descriptive wording⁷, and finally, in two cases, the main applicant changed: a partner institution became the main applicant⁸. Lastly, 4 projects benefited from *Niveau 2* funding for two consecutive years (2000 and 2001)⁹. In other words, it looks as if one of the roles of the feasibility stage (*Niveau 1*) was to advise on narrowing and targeting the project proposed to make it viable. Over the three years, 43 proposals obtained funding for this stage, unfortunately, we do not have data concerning their progression to *Niveau 2*.

The third and last call, in 2002, received 82 proposals and 36 were deemed acceptable. 32 of them fell under the *Volet 1* (i.e. proposals similar to the previous two years) and 4 were selected for the virtual working environments¹⁰. Out of the 32 projects at *Volet 1*, once again, areas offering courses in ICT and technology in teaching and learning¹¹ were in the majority (20 campus out of 32) (MEN, 2002a).

⁵ *E-m@ths* from Pole Universitaire Toulousain and '*Economie Sociale et Solidaire*' from Université Valenciennes.

⁶ These were: *Formation à distance des maîtres et des tuteurs dans le domaine de la maintenance des véhicules*, from the IUFM Midi-pyrénées ; *MECAD*, from the CNAM ; *Campus numérique en gynécologie obstétrique* from Université Clermont 1 ; *International e-miage*, from Université Toulouse 3 ; *Microbiologie médicale* from Université Paris 5 ; *Urgences on line*, from Paris 5.

⁷ *Formation des professeurs de Lycée Professionnel en maintenance de véhicules automobiles* became : '*Formation à distance des maîtres et des tuteurs dans le domaine de la maintenance des véhicules*' ; '*Formation à l'ingénierie pédagogique médicale en ligne*' became '*Ecole nationale de formation des enseignants en médecine à l'ingénierie pédagogique en ligne de l'UVMF (Université Médicale Virtuelle Francophone)*'.

⁸ *HERMES-IUP* with Université Clermont 2 instead of Université Montpellier 1 and *Urgences on line* with Université Paris 5 instead of Université Marne-la-Vallée.

⁹ *CANEGE*, *C@mpusSciences* from Paris 6 offering a two-year diploma and professional development, *Mec@web* from INSA Rouen (engineering school) offering an engineering diploma, and *INSECTE* from Université Technologique de Compiègne, offering a multidisciplinary postgraduate qualification and professional development.

¹⁰ The 4 virtual working environments financed under *Volet 2* were: E-Sup Portail (access the services for students and staff, Alain Mayeux), ENCORA (from Rhône-Alps, Maurice Vincent), EPPUN (learning material, Pascal Aimé) and Monte-Cristo (access to services for students and staff, Raphael Papi) (MJENR, 2003:2 and MJENR, 2003a).

¹¹ In this document, the French phrase used was slightly different from the one used before and quoted before; it was: "*Ingénierie de Formation et SIC (info-comm)*". "*SIC*" usually stands for "*Sciences de*

To briefly recap, most of the 82 proposals which obtained funding to support their development (i.e. at *Niveau 2*) were in the areas of professional development. And those which were at the feasibility stage were given support to develop some form of business plan.

- **Selection process**

Though 285 proposals were received, 55 per cent of them were rejected. The rejection rate was raised with one of the members of the selection committee, Prof Pierre Moeglin, who explained how many proposals did not fit with the criteria required:

« Mais des plateformes d'enseignement ont été présentées comme des campus numériques ! Des sessions de formation à distance en visioconférence ou par d'autres systèmes synchrones ont été tout d'un coup baptisés 'campus numériques'. ... L'idée de consortium était très importante, c'était sans doute un des critères les plus importants mais aussi que ça touchait réellement des institutions et pas seulement deux profs qui s'entendant bien faisaient des cours ensemble à distance. Il y a beaucoup de ces activités-là dans l'université, moi-même j'en ai et il ne me serait jamais venu à l'idée d'appeler cela, ou il ne me viendrait pas à l'idée d'appeler cela 'campus numérique'. Mais un certain nombre de collègues l'ont fait. » (P. Moeglin)

“But virtual learning environments were proposed as *campus numériques*! Videoconferencing sessions for distance learning or other synchronic systems were all of a sudden named ‘*campus numériques*’. ... The idea of consortium was very important, it was perhaps one of the most important criteria but also the idea that it should involve two institutions and not just two lecturers who got on well together and who ran a distance learning course. There are lots of these types of activity in universities; myself, I have one course like this and it would never have crossed my mind, or it will never cross my mind, to call this a ‘*campus numérique*’. But some colleagues did.”

Such a large number of potential projects is perhaps one of the consequences of the approach opted for which places the emphasis on innovative projects. These figures beg the question of how the selection process was conducted and how the sifting was done between calls. Applications from the first call were considered by a selection committee

l'Information et de la Communication” and could be seen as an equivalent to Media Studies; it is therefore likely that this was a typing error and that it should be read *TIC* (in English, ICT).

composed of 7 members: 5 senior academics and 2 training specialists representing the public and the private sectors¹². The committee for the second call had 13 members¹³, 5 of them were in the first committee; they were divided into three sub-groups organised around the following areas: sciences and techniques, ICT and education, and medicine, law, economics and management. Their role was to select projects but also to provide support when necessary as they developed. Moeglin, who was in both panels, explained how groups had been carefully composed:

« Je pense qu'il y a un certains nombres de grands équilibres qui ont été respectés, par exemple, si vous prenez la liste des experts 2001, vous voyez qu'il y a des gens qui sont plutôt, si on prend des experts, hein, il y a par exemple Frédéric Haeuw, qui est chargé de mission à Algora, qui est un spécialiste des campus numériques mais plutôt du côté de la formation professionnelle. Geneviève Jacquinet est une représentante des sciences de l'éducation, c'est quelqu'un qui a compté beaucoup dans les technologies éducatives. Moi je suis spécialiste pour partie de ces aspects-là mais du point de vue communicationnel et dans une perspective tout à fait différente. Perriault relève des sciences de l'information et de la communication mais dans une perspective scientifique et théorique complètement différente de la mienne, nous sommes complémentaires. Donc, vous voyez, il y a une espèce de dosage qui a été fait de manière à représenter des sensibilités scientifiques différentes ou bien au sein des sciences de l'information et de la communication entre disons, Perriault et moi, et plus généralement sciences de l'éducation et sciences de la communication. Plus des économistes, plus des responsables de formation continue. Plus les représentants de l'institution qui ont joué un rôle qui à mon avis, pour autant que je puisse m'en souvenir n'a pas été extrêmement important au moment des choix mais qui a été un rôle très important parce qu'ils ont ajouté par leurs organismes du financement à la somme qui a été allouée. » (P. Moeglin)

¹² Pierre Moeglin, professeur en Sciences de la Communication, Directeur d'UFR à l'université Paris XIII ; Thierry Chevallier, chercheur à l'IREDU/CNRS, Université de Bourgogne ; Bernard Cornu, professeur de mathématiques à l'IUFM de Grenoble ; Geneviève Jacquinet, professeur en Sciences de l'Education à l'université Paris 8, Groupe de Recherche sur l'Apprentissage et les Médias (GRAME) ; Julio Feroso Gracia, professeur au service de neurologie de l'Hôpital universitaire de Salamanque, Espagne ; Amid Bendoura, chargé de mission à la DG formation professionnelle au ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité ; Claude Lepineux, responsable de DEMOS Interactive Training (MEN, 2000b).

¹³ Pierre Moeglin, Thierry Chevallier, Bernard Cornu, Geneviève Jacquinet, Claude Lepineux were members of the selection committee in 2000 and in 2001, they were joined by Guy Casteignau, Professeur d'Université, Conseiller du Recteur de Limoges pour les TIC, Jean-Michel Chabot, Maître de Conférence, praticien hospitalier, Hôpital européen Georges Pompidou, Yves epelbouin, professeur de physique, Université Pierre et Marie Curie, Frédéric Haeuw, chargé de mission, ALGORA, Jacques Perriault, Professeur à l'Université Paris X-Nanterre, Claude Puech, Professeur d'Informatique à l'Université Joseph-Fourier de Grenoble, expert à la Direction de la Recherche, Marc de Quercize de Bernard Juilhet Interactive et Gaetan Tremblay, UQAM, Montréal, Québec (document given by Prof. Pierre Moeglin).

“I think that a good parity had been respected, for instance, if you take the list of experts for 2001, you can see that there are people that are... if we take experts, there is for instance Frédéric Haeuw, who works at Algora and who is a real specialist of the *campus numériques* but more on the professional development side. Geneviève Jacquinet represents educational research and has worked a lot on technological learning. Me, I am specialist in these areas but from a communications point of view and in a different perspective. Perriault works in information and communication sciences but from a completely different scientific and theoretical perspective than mine; we’re complementary. So, as you can see, a sort of controlled equilibrium had been achieved to get a representation of different scientific approaches between information and communication sciences, between Perriault and me, and more generally between education and communication. Add to this, economists and people in charge of professional development. And some representatives from institutions who, from memory, didn’t play a very important role in the selection but who played a very important role in the sense that their institutions added financial support to the initiative.”

The selection for the third call was done in a completely different way – unsurprisingly, since the call was administered by a different team – and was strongly institutionally based, gathering main representative bodies of higher education as well as the regions and central finance¹⁴. No ‘experts’ in the way they were described above, were consulted.

○ Consortia between higher education institutions

In order to go behind statistics and try to get a feel of what it was actually like to work on a *campus numérique* with other institutions, a few key lecturers were interviewed. On paper, according to the first evaluation conducted in 2002 (details of which are produced in the next section) *all* the French universities were some way or other involved in a consortium – except 6 which were not in any consortia (MEN, 2002:5). The lecturer responsible for the *campus CANEGE*¹⁵, Dr Michel Armatte, was asked about his own experience as he applied three consecutive times. He said:

¹⁴ Ministère de la Recherche – direction de la technologie, Ministère de l’Education Nationale – direction de l’enseignement supérieur, DATAR, Délégation à l’Emploi et la Formation Professionnelle, AUF, CPU, Conférence des Ecoles de Formations d’ingénieurs, Conférence des Directeurs d’Ecoles et de Formations d’ingénieurs, Conférence des Grandes Ecoles, Conférence des Directeurs des IUFM, Associations des Régions de France, CNED, Caisse des dépôts et consignations (MEN, 2002:3).

¹⁵ CANEGE (*Campus Numérique en Economie et GEstion* – in economy and management) was funded for the three consecutive years and offered, in 2003, 24 modules at under-graduate level and 50 at post-graduate level. It claimed to have 59 students in 2001-02. The lead institution for this *campus* was Paris-Dauphine, a well regarded university in the field of economy and management. This *campus* benefited from a lot of press coverage (CNED, 2003).

« L'été 2000, on a eu l'appel d'offres, on s'est mis au travail et on a constitué le groupe et on a rédigé le projet et on a commencé à travailler ensemble très régulièrement. Il fallait constituer un groupe parce qu'on était prêts à trois universités, et puis finalement on a été six et puis on a contacté le CNED. ... Trois fois on a représenté une demande de subvention.... On a commencé à travailler ensemble très régulièrement et d'une manière forte, c'est-à-dire en se voyant deux ou trois jours par mois et faisant que ça. ... et on continue, on fait comme ça depuis cinq ans. Donc depuis 2000, on a un groupe qui est bien constitué, c'est ça qui fait je pense que ça marche. ... Mais ce qui fait la force, c'est un groupe constitué, solide, dans lequel on a environ trois personnes par université pour six universités, donc on est une vingtaine à tirer le projet. Je ne suis pas tout seul, il y a vingt personnes, et c'est presque les mêmes depuis cinq ans » (M. Armatte)

"In the summer of 2000, when the first call was published, we started working, we constituted a group, designed the project and started to work together regularly. We had to constitute a group because we were ready with three universities and finally there were six of us and we've contacted the CNED. ... Three times, we applied for financial support. ... We started to work together very regularly and strongly, two to three days a month, only doing this. (...) and we still do, we have been doing so for five years. So since 2000, we are a well constituted group and that's why it works well I think. (...) but what gives us strength is this group, solidly made of about three people per university for six universities, so there's about twenty of us pulling the project. I'm not on my own, there are twenty of us and it's mainly the same people since then."

Another applicant, Dr Jacques Wallet, based at Rouen University, who developed the *campus* FORSE¹⁶, explained in detail how his *campus numérique* functioned with colleagues based in other institutions, not necessarily part of the consortium:

¹⁶ FORSE (*Formations et Ressources en Sciences de l'Education* – in education) was funded in 2001 and 2002. Its first distance learning modules were developed in 1997. With the *campus numérique* initiative, the provision was re-designed and moved on the internet. 49 modules at post-graduate level were offered. It claimed to have 900 students in 2002-03. The lead institution is Rouen. This *campus*, unlike CANEGE, was not in the news (according to Dr Wallet, this is down to the nature of the subjects, management versus education) (CNED, 2003). FORSE was the subject of a thorough analysis conducted in 2005 (Deceuninck, 2005).

«Les cours ont toujours plusieurs auteurs et ça c'est un acquis très importants de l'enseignement à distance, qui a été relativement bien vécu par tout le monde mais par exemple, moi mon cours en licence, il y a une collègue de Lyon II, une collègue belge et chaque fois on a joué un rôle de partenariat. ... En revanche on va chercher des gens d'autres universités en particulier comme auteur ou comme directeur de mémoire au niveau des masters. Alors s'ils le veulent ça peut donner lieu à des conventionnements, mais il n'y a rien d'obligatoire parce que par exemple les universitaires nord-américains leurs facs aiment pas trop qu'ils aillent dans ce type de dispositif et donc ils sont là à titre personnel. J'ose pas dire en tant que passagers clandestins mais il y a un peu de ça. » (J. Wallet)

“Courses have always several authors and this is something very positive we gained from distance learning and which has been relatively well accepted by everyone; so for example, for my third year module, there is a colleague based in Lyon II, a colleague from Belgium and each time we work as partners. ... But we go and get people from other institutions particularly as authors or supervisors for the MA course. And if they so desire, this can lead to a formal agreement, but there is nothing mandatory because, for instance, Northern American universities don't like their staff to do this kind of thing so they're there as private individuals. I don't want to say as clandestine but it's almost that.”

Wallet touches here on another aspect of the delivery of the *campus numériques* which, in view of the relatively large number of students enrolled on FORSE (900 per year, in early 2000s) was justified: tutoring needs were not covered by the small number of universities forming the consortium and thus, the notion of partnership had to be extended to individuals based in third party institutions.

Mirroring the previous section on the UK, this data analysis set out to assess the extent to which French universities engaged with the initiative. The first point which clearly emerges concerns the aim of the initiative, to be more precise, the aim of the first two calls. Indeed evidence shows a clear rupture between the second and third call (different format, different team, and different selection process). Within relatively prescribed objectives, the aim remained fairly loose in order to enable the emergence of different projects. As a consequence, and this is the second point, a large number of projects received funding (129 over three years), a situation which, in view of the overall budget allocated, proved problematic. Finally, informants working on well developed campuses

stressed the labour intensive work this represented, an aspect which could be problematic on the longer term.

2. Engagement of Stakeholders – Other partners

This chapter has considered the different dimensions of the context of practice of the two policy initiatives. This is done in three stages and having considered the way the respective higher education sectors responded to both government-led projects, the analysis now turns to other stakeholders, namely the private sector for the UK and the CNED for France.

In the UK

It could be argued that supporting the development of public-private partnerships was one of the central characteristics of New Labour (Newman, 2001). In this particular respect, the UK virtual university was well suited to the prevailing political climate. The basis of the initiative was a joint venture between the higher education sector and the private sector through an operating company, UKeU. Alice Frost reflected in her interview on the numerous applications received from the private sector following the invitation for expressions of interest sent out in November 2000 (for which 91 applications were received (HEFCE, 2001c)). She pointed out the difficulty arising from the difference of culture of the public-private worlds and explained:

“A big issue in the joint venture negotiations was that to begin with, loads and loads of private sector companies were getting interested but a lot of them were inexperienced themselves because it was a time of great expansion. For instance, a lot of publishing houses were very interested in getting into e-learning, Pierson, the big one FT Knowledge, so there was loads and loads of private sector media, the Daily Mail I think contacted us... anyway, media houses, publishers, not because they were necessarily very experienced at running... but they were all looking for opportunities in the internet so it was quite difficult, the joint venture negotiations were quite complicated because there were so many different kinds of offerings and there was so much variety in a way and so much expertise... What was more difficult I think was finding compatibility with the content, people like publishers and media who had a very fixed view of how learning should be delivered from their experience of communications and entertainment and that I think was more difficult to marry up with HEIs because, because you know they’re just different cultures and different approaches.” (A. Frost)

This abundance of applications, as Frost argues, reflects the economic climate and the excesses of the international dotcom period. Following the bursting of the dotcom bubble, industry actors have tended to remain far more cautious, at times hostile, to involvement with the public sector (Selwyn, 2008). The dimension of internal cultures and the necessity of a minimum of compatibility is developed below with the company which worked on the platform.

In October 2001, three months behind schedule, the HEFCE issued a press release (HEFCE, 2001f) announcing developments in this area, mainly the fact that northern American owned company Sun Microsystems would provide the technology platform and would form an alliance with the higher education sector to create the e-university’s operating company. The debates which must have taken place prior to the selection of the company were not made public, nor was the choice of applicants. For Frost, the selection of Sun made sense because of the closeness of the company to higher education (‘Sun’ stands for Stanford University Networks as the company is a spin off from Stanford). The whole issue of the compatibility between partners is central here: compatibility of culture and compatibility of objectives (Tremblay, 2003).

Prof John Slater was involved in the initiative from its very early days and, as Mr Beagle, the account manager of Sun Microsystems explained to the Education and Skills

Committee (Ev 79), Slater was the main interlocutor with Sun. Slater explained the reasons behind the increasing difficulties encountered with the development of the digital platform which formed the central piece of the virtual university. His version of events is as follows:

“The original proposal from Sun was to do just that – was to actually, at no charge – to provide a big platform. So the original model was fine – you know, had the dot bomb not happened – Sun would have had an interest in providing what would then turn out to be ‘their’ platform. And Sun is a big organisation – a big player and some of the others we looked at had similar plans, you know. So Sun would have met – given us a platform and at the same time developed one for their own use. And that would have represented a major injection of capital into the firm which would balance public monies. So it would – it would help with the public private balance. It only became untenable. As I said, Sun successively found it more and more difficult to deliver that bespoke platform within their envelope of resources, and eventually they decided that they could no longer afford a move into this market, so that it became for them a chore just to do one off, rather than something that was going to be a major deployed product. ... So, we started with a very grandiose 2001 – or 2000, sorry, type scheme before the dot bomb, when everything seemed – And if there is a criticism, it is that we maybe, as is often the case with government, didn’t react quickly enough to changing circumstances, you know, that we should have realized earlier what was actually going on and that we should have taken account of that. But I mean, I think government is very bad at changing direction. You know – [laughs] and academics are about as bad!” (J. Slater)

Other reasons were, according to several witnesses (Cleaver, Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2004c; Stretch, Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2005b) the fact that the relationship between UKeU and SunMicrosystems progressively moved from being a partnership to becoming that of a provider.

In France

The proposed structure of the *campus numériques* – referred to as a consortium – was a partnership between one or more higher education institutions, one or more private higher education institutions and/or private businesses, and links with institutions based abroad and/or the CNED were presented as being favourably received by the selection committee. The first call clearly stipulated that:

« Cette offre dépasse les possibilités d'un seul établissement. Elle nécessite des collaborations et des financements importants, non seulement pour la réalisation des contenus de formation mais aussi pour la qualité et la pertinence de leur mode de diffusion, pour la mise en place des services d'accueil et de tutorat à distance et pour les facilités nécessaires au regroupement des publics en mode présentiel pendant de courtes périodes. » (Ministère de l'Education nationale, 2000a)

“The offer exceeds the resources of a single institution. It requires collaboration and significant finances, not only to produce the contents but also for the quality and appropriateness of their mode of delivery, for the set up of support and distance tutorials and for the required facilities for the face-to-face gathering of students for short periods of time.”

According to an annual report produced by the CNED in 2003, at the time of the first call for projects, the CNED and higher education institutions had already 50 partnerships together. The role of the CNED then was diverse, from logistical support (enrolments, etc.) to joint-writing of programmes. However, the same report concluded that on the whole the CNED had not been considered as an obvious partner for the majority of applicants following the first call (almost two thirds of applications did not have the CNED as a partner). Possible reasons given for this were the fact that the CNED was still associated with paper-based distance learning and a problem due to the different cultures of the two entities in terms of financial management (the CNED having stronger mechanisms in place than university departments) (CNED, 2003: 24).

The main applicant of the *campus numérique* CANEGE, Dr Michel Armatte, explained the partnership he set up between his university, Paris Dauphine, and five other institutions, plus the CNED:

« On a commencé à travailler ensemble très régulièrement et d'une manière forte, c'est-à-dire en se voyant deux ou trois jours par mois et faisant que ça. ... et on continue, on fait comme ça depuis cinq ans. Donc depuis 2000, on a un groupe qui est bien constitué, c'est ça qui fait je pense que ça marche. ... Mais ce qui fait la force, c'est un groupe constitué, solide, dans lequel on a environ trois personnes par université pour six universités, donc on est une vingtaine à tirer le projet. Je ne suis pas tout seul, il y a vingt personnes, et c'est presque les mêmes depuis cinq ans. » (M. Armatte)

“We started to work together very regularly and strongly, two to three days a month, only doing this. ... and we still do, we have been doing so for five years. So since 2000, we are a well constituted group and that's why it works well I think. ... but what gives us strength is this group, solidly made of about three people per university for six universities, so there's about twenty of us pulling the project. I'm not on my own, there are twenty of us and it's mainly the same people since then.”

Dr Jacques Wallet, who developed the *campus* FORSE, explained in detail how his project evolved after one of his two partner universities dropped out from the start and how, outside the founding consortium, colleagues based in other institutions work on the courses:

« Nous, on était trois au départ et la troisième université, quinze jours avant la signature a refusé parce qu'ils ne voulaient pas un partenariat avec le CNED. Et puis aussi parce qu'ils avaient leurs propres outils numériques et ils voulaient nous les imposer et nous on était plus pragmatiques. ... Et c'est vrai aussi au niveau du master où on a un partenariat à l'international qui dépasse de loin ces deux universités. Mais le partenariat, on va dire, consubstantiel, c'est les deux universités. » (J. Wallet)

“There were three of us to begin with, and the third university, two weeks before signing left because they didn't want to have a partnership with the CNED. And also because they had their own digital facilities which they wanted to impose on us and we were more pragmatic. ... It is also true for the masters where we have an international partnership which exceeds by far these two universities. But the partnership, shall we say the founding partnership, is the two universities.”

As can be seen from these quotations, working in partnership was not without its problems though it would appear that it was easier between universities than between universities and the CNED. Culture clashes together with memories of past conflicts seem to be responsible for most of the difficulties between these two institutions.

Another stakeholder played a significant role, though mainly in the form of financial support, it was the French regions. Prof Moeglin, who had worked on these issues, explained in a rather dramatic manner why the role of the regions was likely to become increasingly important:

« Et puis il y a un autre élément qui est très important, même fondamental, c'est que, ça, c'est le chant du cygne du rôle de l'état. Après c'est les régions. Aujourd'hui, c'est les régions. L'argent ne vient plus de l'état, l'état n'a plus d'argent ! Ça, c'est la dernière fois où l'état met de l'argent. Mais vous savez les chants mortuaires sont les plus beaux, hein ! (...) Le rôle de Françoise Thibault (...) était sans commune mesure avec le rôle de [la personne en place maintenant], qui est un gestionnaire des contrats que l'état passe avec l'université. On n'est plus dans une politique active, volontariste – qui avait ses défauts mais aussi ses qualités. Ça, c'est le gros changement. » (P. Moeglin)

“Then there is another element which is very important, even fundamental, they were [the *campus numériques*] the swansong of the role of the state. After, it is the regions. Today it's the regions. Money no longer comes from the state; the state has no more money! This was the last time the state put money in anything. But you know funeral laments can be the most beautiful songs! (...) Françoise Thibault's role (...) had no comparison with the role of [the person now in post] who merely manages contracts between the state and universities. It's no longer a pro-active, determined approach – which had its shortcomings but also its qualities. This is a big change.”

This is a direct reference to the *politique de decentralization* which began in the early 1980s and progressively moved political decision making to regional entities, gradually leaving central government weaker in both political and financial terms.

3. Evaluation and Outcome

In the UK

Formal evaluation took place in December 2004 with the review conducted by PA Consulting. Their report concluded that the operating company was in breach of grant conditions which stipulated that at least 50 per cent of the budget should come from private companies. This led to the restructuring of UKeU in February 2004, cessation of activity and a parliamentary enquiry.

In France

Evaluating an initiative such as the *campus numériques* is complex and this is not the purpose of this section. Rather, the idea is to analyse how this was conducted at the time of the initiative as part of the life cycle of a policy. Three documents could be considered as evaluations, or at least as providing a snapshot of the state of affairs at a particular time:

- “*Campus numériques, Etats des lieux en janvier 2002*” (MEN, 2002)
- “*Campus Numériques, Enjeux et Perspectives pour la Formation Ouverte et à Distance*” (Averous and Touzot, 2002)
- “*Evaluation des Campus numériques*” (Ernst and Young, 2003)

The first document was published between the second and the third calls, and was an inventory of the *campus numériques* rather than a proper evaluation. As such, it is relatively uninteresting. A few points are, however, relevant. In measuring the degree of involvement of French higher education institutions in the *campus numériques*, the result of this analysis was very positive: *all* the French universities were some way or other involved in a consortium – all except 6. It also revealed that the 3 ‘*Instituts Nationaux Polytechniques*’ (INP), the 4 *Instituts Nationaux de Sciences Appliquées* (INSA) and all the IUFMs were involved (MEN, 2002:5). The document noted that as far as geographical spread was concerned, there seemed to be a larger number of *campus numériques* crossing France in a vertical line from the North-East to the South-East (with the inclusion of Toulouse), going from Strasbourg and Nancy, through to Lyon and Grenoble, to Nice and Aix-Marseille. It also noted that the Lille region was also well represented and finally that there was an uneven representation in the Paris region (MEN, 2002:2). Finally, student enrolments were given for the *Niveau 2 Campus numériques* for the first year (2000-1) and the second year (2001-2) (respectively 2,119 and 6,185) specifying that courses were extremely varied in terms of contact hours and qualification obtained. Finally an estimation of 23,333 enrolments for 2002-3 was given (MEN, 2002:8).

The second report, called the Averous and Touzot report¹⁷ was also commissioned by the MEN, the *Ministère de la Recherche* and the DATAR. The points the authors were asked to investigate were far reaching (for example, to explore the latest developments in open and distance learning in higher education institutions in other countries or to identify the necessary conditions for a good deployment of the *campus numériques*). In reality, the time constraints imposed did not allow Averous and Touzot to cover these points and consequently they presented the report as an interim report, which as far as we know was never produced. The report indicated that out of all the operational *Campus numériques*, 60 per cent offered a mixture of distance and face-to-face learning, 33 per cent distance learning only, and 7 per cent face-to-face only (Averous & Touzot, 2002:66). Examining the results obtained after the two calls, the following elements were pointed out as having had, by and large, a very positive impact on the sector:

« La coopération entre les établissements comme l'ouverture de l'enseignement vers les autres secteurs de la société s'accompagnent d'autres avancées : essor sans précédent d'une dynamique interuniversitaire, décloisonnement des formations initiales et continues, accentuation du caractère professionnalisant de ces formations, adaptation des dispositifs à des situations d'apprentissage centrées sur l'apprenant. » (Averous & Touzot, 2002:14)

"Together with a better cooperation between institutions and the opening of education to other sectors of society, other progress has been made: an unprecedented exchange between universities, more permeability between initial education and continuing education, better job-orientated syllabus, a move towards a more learner centred approach"

However, as far as the permanence of the *campus numériques* was concerned, the authors claimed that whether at national or international level, the necessary conditions to ensure their permanence were not yet in place (Averous & Touzot, 2002:19). The mode of financing and structure of the higher education sector were pointed out as being major barriers; as the report explained, French higher education is characterised by an almost free initial education and a fee-based continuing education, with the frontier between these two types of provision becoming more and more difficult to establish (Averous &

¹⁷ Members of the committee were : M. Averous from Université de Montpellier II, G. Touzot from Rouen INSA and A. Azema, DATAR, J.L. Billoet, CNED, B. Cassette, DATAR, G. Gautherin, Cdéfi, J.F. Hémidy, CDIUFM, P. Houque, Université de Lille III, J. C. Jacquenod, MEN, P. Perrey, Min. de la Recherche, A. Priou, Université Paris X (Averous & Touzot, 2002:39).

Touzot, 2002:25). More specifically, the following five areas were identified as needing to be looked at in order to improve the permanence of the *campus numériques*:

- The status of staff needed to adapt to the new needs arising from the involvement in the *campus numériques* to alleviate present problems.
- Recruitment and training also needed to adapt in order to get a better recognition of the various jobs involved in distance learning provision.
- Technical developments in terms of adequate level of equipment in institutions and compatibility between systems were also underscored.
- National provision needed to be better organised in order to have a more coherent and accessible range of courses.
- Present mode of financing was described as insufficient to allow existing *campus numériques* to develop and function efficiently and for new ones to be organised. The fact that the then mode of financing was not adapted to present expenditure was also pointed out (Averous & Touzot, 2002:20).

The third evaluation is of little academic value. It took the form of market research and was made public without any analysis of the findings. As Prof Daniel Richard, who was overseeing the transition from the *campus numériques* to the next scheme, explained when asked if he had been involved in the commissioning:

« Non, je n'ai vu que le rapport, j'ai pas vu la commande et je pense que ça aurait mérité de faire un travail un peu en amont avant d'avoir ce rapport qui va pas très loin. Il n'y a même pas d'analyse du quantitatif quoi je veux dire... qu'on fasse du quantitatif c'est très bien il faut en faire, si on veut analyser quelque chose il faut qu'on ait des données scientifiques fiables. Donc il faut quantifier quelque part sauf que derrière, il faut analyser cette quantification or ça a pas été analysé du tout. » (D. Richard)

“No, I didn’t see the report, I didn’t see the order and I think it would have benefited from more preparatory work before having this report done which doesn’t go very far. I mean there’s no analysis of the quantitative data... Quantitative research is fine, if you want to analyse something you need some scientifically sound data. So it’s necessary to quantify except that, after that it’s got to be analysed and it wasn’t analysed at all.”

As can be seen the form and value of these evaluations vary. To complete the life cycle of the *campus numériques*, as said before, the third call actually started the process of strengthening those campuses which appeared to be viable. The following year, the *ministère's* directives were to merge these consortia around specific subject areas (all with a strong link to professional development) and re-named the campuses, *Universités Numériques Thématiques* (UNT). As Grevet (2005) points out, the transition between the policy initiative of the *campus numériques* and that of the UNT has not been the subject of any research (unlike the *campus numériques* for which a small amount of funding had been allocated for research, the UNT did not have this dimension).

To conclude this short analysis, as far as the *campus numériques* are concerned, from discussions with the informants and the few academic articles written on the subject (Deceuninck, 2005; Grevet, 2005; Rey, 2005), the dominant idea is that the initiative was successful in more than one aspect but that, for political reasons, the initiative was interrupted too early. Billoet captured this when he argued:

« Donc le ministère, ce qu'a du vous expliquer Madame Thibault, sa stratégie était d'abord, initier un processus innovant, pour moi, réussi, globalement quand même réussi. Une dynamique s'est mise en place, incomplète, insuffisante mais il y a eu un début d'appropriation. Défaut : peu d'argent, dilution des moyens, trop d'établissements primés. ... Mais ce sont des projets d'une telle envergure qu'il vous est quasiment impossible en deux ans de concevoir, d'abord de construire le projet, de le fabriquer, de le mettre en place parce que c'était des développements, c'était des communautés qui devaient apprendre à travailler ensemble avec des nouveaux projets, des nouveaux produits, des nouvelles technologies. Donc rares ont été les projets qui ont pu atteindre leur niveau de maturité dans les délais imposés et beaucoup de projets ont été critiqués mais c'était normal. » (J.L. Billoet)

“Madame Thibault has probably told you that, from the ministry’s point of view, the strategy was first and foremost to initiate an innovative process. As far as I am concerned, this was achieved, overall this was achieved. A dynamic has taken form, perhaps incomplete, insufficient but there was a beginning of appropriation. Problems: not enough funding, dilution of resources, too many institutions awarded the label *campus numériques*. ... But these are large projects and in two years this is quasi impossible to conceive, first to design the project, to build it, to set it up. Because these were developments, they were communities who needed to learn how to work together on new projects, with new products, new technologies. So rare are the projects which have reached maturity with the time constraints imposed and many projects have been criticised, but that’s normal.”

Conclusions

What can be learnt from the comparison of the contexts of practice of the two policy initiatives? To start with the level of engagement of the higher education sector, it seems fair to say that, on the whole, dissimilarities between the two countries dominate this dimension of the comparison.

Evidence shows that, overall, a relatively small number of UK universities did engage with the initiative. Despite their initial strong rejection of a model based on a small number of universities, and regardless of their symbolic adherence to the holding company, in actual fact, very few considered the initiative as being a good use of public resources. Their prime concern was the enhancement of their existing provision. As said before, the fact that the aims of the UK virtual university did not get the support of institutions was a significant element in the failure of the policy.

In France, on the contrary, evidence suggests that the higher education sector, in its majority, did respond to the calls for projects. The close relation which, since the mid 1990s, progressively developed between the team working on these issues at the *ministère* and institutions is probably one reason for this coherence. Another reason is, without doubt, the formal commitment of the *Présidents d'Université* to the initiative. Finally, the prospect of extra funding in a sector where resources are scarce cannot be under-estimated.

Consequently, it can be argued that as far as the coalition of the core stakeholders (the central government and the sector) is concerned, the two set ups were starkly contrasting. In the UK, on the whole, universities did not think this concerned them. In France, there is strong evidence to the contrary.

Beside this aspect, other dissimilarities emerge from this analysis which reflect national specificities. The strong sense of political regional identity in the UK is one of them – an aspect which also contributed to the weakening of the coalition of these stakeholders. The

fact that the French model of the virtual university was seeking to essentially stimulate reflection and practice on this dimension of higher education provision is also a reflection of the role of national characteristics on policy implementation.

However, in term of the processes in place to facilitate the implementation, there seems to be a convergence of practice. On both sides, committees of experts were created to sift through proposals. On both sides, the same academic areas were targeted. On both sides, consortia of institutions were recommended.

Moving to the comparison of the involvement of other stakeholders (mainly the private sector), the key similarities concern the consequences the conflicting cultures of these two worlds generated. In the UK, this was mainly felt through interactions with the operating company whose Board was predominantly composed of directors from the business world. If the delays and problems generated by the design of the platform did not help the success of UKeU, the fact that hardly anyone in the higher education sector shared the views on its centrality did not contribute to a positive outcome either.

To further develop the analysis of the role of the operating company, there is evidence that the fact that UKeU was constituted by two separate entities, the holding company and the operating company, diminished the power of the dominant coalition. The rationale behind such a set up originates from the PricewaterhouseCoopers report and was based on the idea that to attract private funding, a private company ought to lead the project. There is no doubt that this too contributed to a weakening of the coalition.

This latter point brings us back to the question of the *model* of the respective virtual universities and the difficulties this dimension of both policy initiatives generated. Before drawing the overall conclusions of this research, it is central to try to address this issue.

The position asserted here is that the question of which model a virtual university should adopt goes well beyond the consideration of whether or not its architecture should be formed of two companies, or whether or not a bottom-up dynamic is the best approach.

And consequently, the fact that both initiatives encountered significant problems on this point is not surprising.

The underlying issue is no less than that of what higher education should be about. Each model reflected an idea of a university: the design of the UK virtual university reflected the determinism prevalent found in, for example, Blunkett's speech. The *campus numériques* served a specific political agenda focusing on the 'modernisation' of French universities. Seeing the problems met in both the context and practice of the UK and French policy initiatives from this perspective places the present comparison in an altogether different light.

Conclusions

The aim of this final chapter is two-fold: to propose a synthesis of the preceding theoretical and empirical findings in order to address the specific research questions identified at the outset of the thesis; and to identify the implications that these findings may have for policy-makers and future research. Before this, however, some reflection on the originality of this work, its strengths and weaknesses, is presented.

As the table of contents shows, each sub-section of each chapter appears twice, once for each policy initiative. This hopefully presents and discusses findings in a way that enhances and clarifies the comparative thrust of the study, while (also hopefully) guiding the reader to the sub-sections dedicated to comparison. In other words, the strict comparative framework adopted throughout this thesis has shaped both the presentation

and the analysis of the data. The decision taken to adhere to this structure as rigorously as possible (in order to maximise the process of comparison) has resulted in a systematic evaluation of the similarities and dissimilarities of the different elements seen as being essential to the issues addressed here.

As stated previously (in chapter 3), in the field of higher education policies, there are very few cross-national comparative research studies of this kind. The bulk of this type of research is based on a large number of cases and consequently can only remain at the surface of the realities compared. In contrast, fine-grained analyses (such as the present one) ground policies in their political, economic and cultural contexts. Anchoring educational policy-making processes in their respective national characteristics (in subjecting them to the discipline of a detailed empirical analysis) allows the researcher to draw informed conclusions which (hopefully) feed back into the policy-making cycle.

There is no doubt that the 'bi-culturalism' of the researcher is one of the strengths of this research. As explained in the introduction, her personal experience of both higher education sectors and the fact that she has lived in both countries for long periods of time meant that she was able to decode and encode information from these two cultures without any intermediary. For the same reason, on the practical side, the planning, preparation and travelling involved in the successive field trips were neither more nor less difficult on either side of the Channel. This undoubtedly enriched the critical narratives and deconstruction of the two initiatives.

On the one hand, therefore, the present research responded to the need to thoroughly investigate a small number of initiatives, but, on the other, the focus on *two* virtual universities can render generalisations problematic. Careful selection of the cases mitigated this problem of generalisation. Chapter 3 explains the importance of finding *comparable* policy initiatives and how the identification of the selection criteria was conducted. The bare fact that the initiatives needed to be contemporaneous to each other and driven by the state drastically limited the number of possibilities (not to mention the limited resources that the framework of a PhD imposes, by definition, on the researcher).

To return to the research questions and seek to provide answers, it is essential to encompass the different layers of analysis that have contributed to shaping the arguments developed throughout this work. Each set of questions is now revisited.

- How were policies on virtual universities planned and implemented in the UK and in France? What policy actors and stakeholders were involved in the formulation of initial policy-making? How were policies received by the respective higher education sectors?

The model of the policy network has shaped the analysis of the planning and implementation of the policy initiatives compared. This has allowed the strict juxtapositioning of comparable sequences which formed these two stages of policy-making. The analysis of the context of the initiatives has taken a large place in this research because of its crucial role in a cross-national comparison. Through this analysis, notions key to this research, such as, for example, 'UK higher education sector' or '*Ministère*', have had their meaning explored in depth and have, consequently, strongly anchored the empirical data in their national context. Each higher education sector has its history which has shaped its different facets and explains the forces at work in the composition of the 'sector'. In each country, therefore, higher education has developed within a specific political and economic context.

The key policy actors of the two initiatives were, in the UK, the Department (DfEE, then DfES), the funding councils (with a lead from the HEFCE), the higher education sector and the private sector. In France, they were the *Ministère*, the division based at the *Ministère* which had responsibility for overseeing all activity related to ICT in higher education, the sector and the CNED. As has been shown, the analysis of the engagement of the universities in the projects has led to the conclusion that the way these two policies were received by their respective sector was strongly shaped by national identities and national histories. Furthermore, it is quite clear that the planning and implementation of

both initiatives have emerged from the to-ing and fro-ing between the core stakeholders and that the role of the distinctive policy communities was central in both initiatives.

On the whole, data gathered point to the fact that UK universities were primarily concerned with their own development and thus chose to take part (or not, as was the case for Scottish institutions and a large proportion of other universities), depending on their own needs and priorities. Programmes and courses proposed were, for the large majority, existing programmes and courses, and universities were primarily attracted by the possibility of getting supplementary funding and publicity in running them through UKeU. If the response of French universities could, at first glance, be read as corresponding to a strong enthusiasm for virtual higher education provision, as the evidence has shown, the combination of a fairly loose set of selection criteria and the endemic and long term lack of funding are the main reasons of the high number of projects presented by institutions.

Regardless of how much national characteristics shape these rather prosaic traits of higher education – whether it is universities bidding for pre-existing programmes or being in the right circle of people – the point is that respective higher education sectors have responded in a rather predictable way, in which the persistence of the power of micro-politics dominates.

- What similarities and differences were apparent in the policy-making processes between the UK and France? How does the development of ‘virtual’ higher education provision relate to this? What were the consequences for subsequent cycles of policy-making?

The comparison of the two policy-making processes has shown that there were a number of similarities. In both cases, the initiation of the process was backed up by findings from academic research. In both cases, the lead from the state was strongly emphasised. In both cases, one person was clearly identified as having been central to the policy-making process. In both cases, a closely linked community of ‘experts’ was identified. Equally,

however, there are some significant differences. The fact that the UK initiative was overseen by the English Funding Council led to consequences specific to the UK. The difficulty encountered with the fragmented landscape of distance learning providers was equally unique to France. In terms of subsequent cycles of policy-making, as was shown, as far as the UKeU and the *campus numériques* were concerned, the former ceased to exist in 2004, the latter was re-shaped according to different principles (that of an internal regional logic). Shortly after the fall of the UK initiative, the DfES published a policy entitled 'Harnessing Technology' (DfES, 2005) but it was not until October 2008, with Prof Sir Ron Cooke's (2008) 'On-line Innovation in Higher Education' that the cycle re-started. In June 2009, David Lammy (Higher Education Minister) announced a new taskforce (Open Learning Innovation Fund) which would involve the British Library, the Open University, Microsoft, Apple and the BBC (BIS, 2009) and for which £20m in match funding was given by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2010). On the French side, a new National Information Infrastructure was launched in the autumn of 2009, twelve years after the PAGSI. To finance this programme, the government has launched a national loan of which 11 billion euros have been allocated to the 'modernisation' of higher education) (Le Monde, 2009).

It can thus be said that, in terms of similarities and differences, if the initial stages of policy-making shared some common grounds, the implementation of these policies was strongly shaped by national characteristics. With the two new sets of policies mentioned above, it is also clear that the policy cycle has now re-started. Once again, the state, in both countries, is leading the initiative. Interestingly, on the UK side, it is the Open University which is at the core of the new virtual university – the exact opposite of what was done with the UKeU. The French project has not yet been announced but it is significant to note that it will, as with the *campus numériques*, be part of a national strategy on information.

- What can 'virtual university' policy-making tell us about the relationship between the higher education sector and the state? How can the similarities and dissimilarities between the two countries' virtual universities be explained?

In terms of the relationship between the sector and the state, one of the main findings emerging from the comparison is the central role played by national characteristics. To take the issue of the cohesion between higher education institutions as an illustration, traditionally, French institutions have shared the number of applicants with each other at regional level and thus among a small pool of institutions, whereas universities in the UK openly compete with each other to attract students. In other words, the French sector has, over the years, developed processes relying on a horizontal type of network which strongly relies on local partners (such as applicants and thus secondary schools, employers, etc.), whereas the expansion of the UK sector has been achieved through the reinforcement of strategies close to that of the business world. These features impact on the relationship with the state and certainly came into play during the life cycle of both initiatives.

Furthermore, the French higher education sector is very diverse and functions through layers of often contradicting policies (the 'geological style of metaphor' prescribed by Robins and Webster (2002) is useful in this context). For instance, key functions such as validation of schemes leading to national qualifications or staff appointments and careers were still the domain of the Ministry. Furthermore, policies on political and economic decentralisation, issued by another administration from the early 1980s onwards, also contributed to the re-shaping of the French higher education sector. The progressive displacement of some of the governmental responsibility from national to regional level resulted in the 26 administrative regions composing France gradually developing their political and economic power, their identity and to, a certain degree, their autonomy from central government. For higher education institutions, this translated into their respective region playing a greater role in policy making and funding.

In the UK, the striking factor characterising the relationship between the state and the sector is, undoubtedly, the independence of higher education institutions and their strong

capacity to steer their own affairs primarily according to their own priorities. In such a competitive context, it seems that the basis on which the UKeU was formed – i.e. to offer learning programmes designed by universities from across the entire sector – seemed flawed from the start.

Once again, these features of national contexts in policy-making point to the importance of understanding the characteristics of the main stakeholders in order to try to foresee how they will interact with each other and what the outcomes are likely to be.

- In what ways have higher education policies in the UK and France been affected by ideas about globalisation, the 'knowledge-based economy', etc.? How does this relate to the virtual university?

This last research question opens up the discussion to the wider concepts which form the background of the reflection of this research. As such, it seems appropriate to provide a more developed set of answers than for previous questions in this conclusion.

The conclusion of the last chapter alluded to a central dimension of the whole issue of the virtual university. To paraphrase Tait (2008), the question is 'What are virtual universities for?' The place given to digital technology in policies on virtual higher education provision has several consequences which have been previously developed but there are at least three aspects which merit further attention: the fact that the policy initiatives studied emphasised the use of ICT as an essential criterion for their development; the role of the discourses surrounding these policies; and what these two points mean for the future development of the virtual university.

The literature review has demonstrated how, for some theorists, forms of society were determined by technology and thus how society can be seen as evolving from one era to the next as technological changes bring radical change to society. However, as some of the critics mentioned in chapter 1 have pointed out, the idea that societies would move from one era to another in a linear fashion is not without its problem.

Castells's analysis has been the object of particular focus mainly because of the place given to networks in his work. The views of Castells (2000) on the consequences of the expansion of digital networks across the globe are particularly interesting for the present object of research. To recap the gist of his thinking on this point, users of digital networks, be they countries, companies, public services or individuals, should see the unique benefits these networks bring when they get connected with each other in real time, wherever they are. This 'empowerment', to use his term, takes society to the 'informational society' in which, as its name indicates, production and circulation of information becomes the foundation of this new era.

As the large number of policy texts analysed for this research have shown, this sort of arguments can be found in the thinking of politicians and policy-makers involved in the two projects of virtual university (it could be speculated that the fact that all the programmes offered by UKeU were to be entirely and exclusively run on-line originated from this idea, though as this was not a point discussed with interviewees, there is no evidence to back this argument up. This would, however, fit with the research conducted for Information Society Index in 2000 (chapter 3)). However, there are some aspects of this logic which remain to be understood if one wants to answer the above questions on the interaction between higher education policies, globalization and the knowledge-based economy.

Castells (2000) warns that using digital networks implies some form of pressure on the user originating from the need to fit with the requirements of the network (its language and logic). This aspect of Castells's networks is thrown into relief when one looks back at the difficulties, delays and frustration that the digital platform commissioned for UKeU generated (details in chapter 6). Its points of entry and entire structure imposed a strict framework which dictated how learning materials should be designed and presented to students. Along similar lines, this time on the French side, learning programmes offered by the *campus numériques* had to take the form of small modules, which students would accumulate as they progress. Again, there is this shaping imposed on universities by the requirement of the technology which, as Castells (2000) argues, comes with the expansion of networks and their imposing a strong logic of standardisation. This

‘conditioning’, some would say ‘packaging’ of higher education provision is not without any consequences or significance as it touches on the very relationship between learners and knowledge. This observation raises questions which go beyond the scope of this thesis so this issue will only to be mentioned here.

Besides this dimension, it has been shown how digital technology has been used by governments as a vehicle of ‘modernisation’. Policies designed to support this ‘modernisation’ have been characterised by a continuous common-sensical recourse to vague notions of ‘effectiveness’ and ‘impact’. It can be argued that one of the key dimensions of the discourses surrounding initiatives such as the two virtual universities was actually not primarily about virtual higher education provision, but rather concerned purely political and economic agendas. For example, Blunkett’s (2000) speech, in which he announced the initiative, was a confident set of arguments about the UK leading the world, about the excellence of UK universities; essential rhetoric when one’s government has just ended 50 years of free higher education. Chapter 4 has amply discussed and compared the central policy documents which have, one way or another, contributed to the emergence of the two initiatives. This chapter, hopefully, proceeds from and adds weight to the theoretical discussion which precedes it (putting flesh on what is represented in the inverted pyramids diagram in chapter 2 symbolising the interaction between micro and macro levels of analysis).

As said previously, what makes policies policies is the fact that they are vehicles for particular values and thus, when questioning the role of the discourses which surrounded the two virtual universities, it is pertinent to ask for whom they were written. To go back to the example above of Blunkett’s speech in February 2000, there is little doubt that one of his targeted audiences was the future undergraduate students and their parents who would soon have to pay fees to enter higher education. Similarly, one should ‘read’ the concern of the French authorities for a modernised post-compulsory education sector as being a concern for solutions to the endemic problem of youth unemployment and the social problems it generates. These are some of the elements which show how the apparent focus on digital learning in higher education serves in fact the (expedient) politics of governments.

What do these two points – the ‘tyranny’ of digital technology and the role of rhetoric in policies – tell us about the relationship between higher education policy-making and globalization? Before suggesting some answers to this crucial question, it is helpful to briefly recap the position asserted in chapter 1 about globalization. Despite being widely used to argue in favour of an increasingly homogeneous world in which nations, states and individuals are progressively losing control over their own affairs, it has been demonstrated that defining the concept remains problematic, as it is the subject of heated debate amongst social scientists. One point was asserted: the fact that globalization is not unmediated, in other words, the fact that globalization is managed by governments, agencies, people – a significant point to make in the context of the present research as a large part of its data is constituted by public pronouncements.

Consequently, going back to Castells’s notion of an imposing new technology which would progressively alter all sectors of society as they connect to the ‘Network Society’, although some of the evidence gathered for this research has confirmed the trend discussed by Castells (2000) – as explained above – it would appear that national characteristics, by and large, have heavily marked both the context of influence and the context of practice of the two virtual universities. Indeed, on numerous occasions, on both sides of the Channel, data pointed to some rather prosaic reactions from universities and, more generally, the sector. Some examples of this would be the way some institutions reacted to the original model of UKeU or the latent conflict between French universities and the CNED (chapter 5). These show how stakeholders were, in fact, closely concerned with the practicalities involved in the projects – as opposed to some worldwide aspect relating to an emerging global knowledge economy as policy makers would have us believe. Similarly, as has been shown, the major policy texts seem to have had some rather inward looking concern mainly to do with domestic affairs.

This final point brings the discussion centred on the research questions to its final stage: what can be learnt from these findings? The main outcome of this cross-national comparative research has strongly demonstrated the importance of the contexts in which policies develop – the context of influence and the context of practice. It has been shown how central stakeholders are in a policy-making process: their emergence, their position

in relation to the policy network and how they engage in the process. In view of this, the answer to this question resides in the position given to all the core stakeholders of a policy network in the different stages of the policy-making process. In the particular case of the development of virtual higher education provision, higher education institutions need to be, as closely and as early as possible, involved in the policy initiative from its inception, i.e. to use the terminology of policy cycles, from its context of influence. Equally importantly, the final phase of the cycle, the evaluation of the policy initiative, needs to be conducted in such a way that lessons are learnt for the next round of policy formation – something which was not adequately done for either initiative (chapter 6).

The point raised earlier about the type of provision these virtual universities provide and what this means in terms of the relationship between learners and knowledge, could form the basis of a possible new direction for future research. However, if one wanted to keep to the principle of cross-national comparison of policy cycles and aim to extend the knowledge of higher education policy-making at international level, the goal could be to deepen the understanding of the relationship between the main stakeholders of the policy initiative. One possible way forward could be to investigate what came after UKeU and the *campus numériques* in the respective countries: how has policy-making in this area evolved since the mid 2000s? What part does globalization play in the (new) discourse on virtual universities which accompany the new UK based Open Learning Innovation Fund and the new French National Information Infrastructure?

It is tempting to end this thesis with a French phrase that needs no translation: *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*

However, how strictly true this is, is a matter for my next research project!

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Date	Title	Source
09/09/1998	Rolls-Royce and British aerospace launch university technology partnership with three UK universities	Technology Education
30/06/1999	The 1999 Pitcom conference and exhibition: the politics of the e-economy	Eurim
15/02/2000	Universities told to catch the e-wave	BBC
15/02/2000	Universities' US link boosts global education alliance	Financial Times
15/02/2000	Major project launched to develop higher education on the internet	HEFCE
14/03/2000	Hero embarks on epic voyage	HEFCE
23/03/2000	The facts about web-universities to be revealed	Universities UK
23/03/2000	Borderless education study to reveal all	CVCP
28/03/2000	Universities urged to face virtual threat	Financial Times
26/03/2000	Who'll enrol at e(litist)-university?	The Times Higher Education Supplement
16/06/2000	Big brands key to e-university	The Times Higher Education Supplement
10/07/2000	Summary of responses from the higher education sector to the Council's circular letter 4/00	HEFCE
06/10/2000	Elite logs out of e-university	The Times Higher Education Supplement
13/10/2000	Blueprint for new online university	BBC
26/10/2000	The e-university: will it go the way of the Dome?	The Independent
10/11/2000	E-university will not appeal to investors	The Times Higher Education Supplement
27/11/2000	E-university joint venture partners	HEFCE
05/01/2001	Taking over the world by degrees: As global demand for higher education rises, universities are offering tuition via the internet.	Financial Times
23/02/2001	Budding e-university appoints interim team	The Times Higher Education Supplement
21/03/2001	E-university: invitation to express interest in pilots to develop e-learning programmes	HEFCE
29/03/2001	New Directors will get e-universities off to a flying start	DfES
12/04/2001	E-university: invitation to higher education institutions to become members of the holding company	HEFCE
12/04/2001	Issues raised by the HE sector about the e-university	HEFCE


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12/07/2001	E-university: Incorporation of holding company	HEFCE
14/06/2002	Institutions line up to join e-university	The Times Higher Education Supplement
01/11/2002	E-university strikes multimillion-pound deal	The Times Higher Education Supplement
12/12/2002	The great e-university challenge At the start of 2000, David Blunkett announced that the age of the e-university was dawning.	The Independent
03/01/2003	E-university takes technology to market	The Times Higher Education Supplement
03/02/2003	Lancement des premiers Mastères en ligne au Royaume-Uni	Bulletins-electroniques.com
07/02/2003	Perfect platform for progress	The Times Higher Education Supplement
03/03/2003	Lancement d'un mastère de bioinformatique pour l'e-université	Bulletins-electroniques.com
22/03/2003	Success still in the distance	The Guardian
28/07/2003	Consultation of HEFCE e-learning strategy	HEFCE
29/08/2003	Online bonus, e-ventually	The Times Higher
02/09/2003	E-learning research centre launched	Worldwide Universities Network
10/10/2003	UKeU et les premiers diplômes en ligne	Bulletins-electroniques.com
15/10/2003	UK eUniversities Worldwide (UKeU) et ses premiers cours en ligne	Thot
17/10/2003	Universities launch online degree for servicemen	Guardian Unlimited
27/10/2003	Les formations supérieures en ligne s'amplifient au RU	Bulletins-electroniques.com
31/10/2003	E-learning launch	The Times Higher Education Supplement
17/11/2003	E-university attracts 900 students	Guardian Unlimited
23/11/2003	UK's global internet college a £30m flop	The Observer
25/01/2004	Tous à vos claviers pour étudier sur Internet	L'express.mu
26/01/2004	Rencontre avec Nigel Banister de UKe universités	MauritiusToday.com
27/02/2004	Problems at e-learning university	BBC
04/03/2004	HEFCE pulls the plug on UK e-university	The Guardian
05/03/2004	Relaunch as e-flagship flounders in stormy seas	The Times Higher Education Supplement
09/03/2004	Online disaster	The Guardian Education Supplement
10/03/2004	Review could change UKeU elearning framework	Computing.co.uk
21/03/2004	A little e-learning is a dangerous thing	Observer
25/03/2004	Blunkett's web 'fiasco'	The Independent
13/04/2004	The online revolution, mark II	The Guardian

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23/04/2004	UK eU waits to hear its fate	The Times Higher Education Supplement
23/04/2004	It's early days for e-volution	The Times Higher Education Supplement
23/04/2004	UKeU waits to hear its fate	The Times Higher Education Supplement
27/04/2004	E-university set to be dismantles	The Guardian
30/04/2004	Plug is pulled on e-university	The Times Higher Education Supplement
06/05/2004	British officials pull the plug on struggling virtual university	The Chronicle Of Higher Education
26/05/2004	E-universities 'lacked strategy for success'	The Guardian
03/06/2004	MP calls for inquiry into UKeU failure	Computing.co.uk
08/06/2004	E is for error	The Guardian Unlimited
08/06/2004	Commons committee to look into e-university crash	The Guardian
09/06/2004	'Shameful waste' on e-university	BBC
10/06/2004	Online university 'disaster' costs taxpayers £62m	Daily Mail
11/06/2004	MPs to probe e-uni collapse	The Times Higher Education Supplement
23/06/2004	£50m bill for failed e-university	The Guardian
23/06/2004	MPs attack e-university bonus payments	The Guardian
25/06/2004	Newby on rack over 'scandalous' bonuses for online university staff	The Times Higher
21/07/2004	E-university bosses defend bonus payments	The Guardian
23/07/2004	UKeU chief hits back	The Times Higher Education Supplement
26/07/2004	UK universities owed £2.8m in e-uni debacle	Guardian Unlimited
29/07/2004	Technologie de l'information et de la communication: L'UKeU en difficultés	Bulletins-electroniques.com
02/08/2004	E-university creditors make net loss	Guardian Unlimited
06/08/2004	UKeU creditors settle	The Times Higher
01/10/2004	L'UKeU en difficulté	Vigie Technologies de L'information
09/11/2004	E-university recruiting 'abysmal'	BBC
16/01/2005	New programmes from the LSE	The University of London External Programme
03/03/2005	MPs condemn e-university's disgraceful waste of public money	Financial Times website
03/03/2005	Internet degrees a disgraceful waste, says MPs	Guardian Unlimited

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01/11/2005	Breaking with convention	Guardian
		Logo of UKeU

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06/12/1999	Projet de loi de finances pour 2000	Sénat
16/12/1999	Enseignement à distance	AMUE
13/01/2000	Claude Allègre présente ses vœux à la presse	MENRT
25/02/2000	François Peccoud : « J'ai fait un rêve »	Journal de l'Université de Technologie de Compiègne
04/2000	CNED Canal Education – La revue du CNED No 18 « L'Enseignement à distance à l'aube du troisième millénaire »	CNED
06/2000	Appel à Projets pour la Constitution de Campus Numériques Français	MEN and Ministère de la Recherche
07/2000	Rapport d'activité - 1999	MEN - CNED
09/10/2000	Internet : les Français rattrapent les Anglo- saxons	Ipsos
10/2000	Résultats de l'appel à projets	MJENR
11/10/2000	Protocole de collaboration visant à développer l'offre de formations supérieures à distance	AMUE
19/10/2000	Conférence de presse « Les grands défis des universités »	AMUE
27/10/2000	Campus numériques : résultats de l'appel à projets	AMUE
22/11/2000	« e-éducation » : Les entretiens de l'éducation	MEN
22/10/2000	Discours de Jack Lang : Colloque e-éducation – Salon de l'éducation	MEN
06/12/2000	Budget de l'enseignement supérieur pour 2001	Sénat
23/01/2001	Les rencontres de l'Agence, « Le campus du futur »	AMUE
12/04/2001	« Campus numériques français » Appel à Projets 2001	MEN and Ministère de la Recherche
05/2001	CNED Canal Education – La revue du CNED No 20 « Les campus numériques français : une initiative du service public »	CNED
05/07/2001	Motion concernant l'Agence de Modernisation des Universités	AMUE
18/07/2001	Les résultats du nouvel appel à projets : « Campus numériques français »	MEN
07/2001	Rapport d'activité - 2000	MEN - CNED
09/ 2001	Campus numériques 2001	MJENR
11/2001	Le Bulletin du CIP – Le journal d'information du Centre d'Ingénierie Pédagogique – No 9	Université Paris IX Dauphine
11/2001	Dépliant : Campus numériques – Une autre façon de répondre aux besoins de formation	MJENR - SDTICE
06/12/2001	Budget de l'enseignement supérieur pour 2002	Sénat
21/03/2002	Campus numériques : Un nouvel appel à projets lancé par les ministères de l'Education nationale et de la Recherche	MJENR

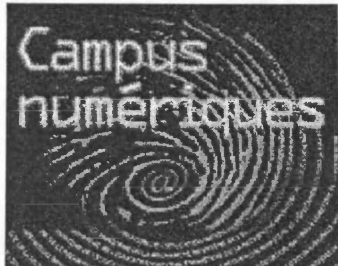
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28/03/2002	3 ^{ème} appel à projets réunion d'information (PowerPoint presentation)	MJENR - SDTICE
03/2002	L'utilisation pédagogique des technologies de l'information et de la communication 1997-2002	MJENR - SDTICE
04/2002	Campus numériques : Enjeux et Perspectives pour la Formation Ouverte et à Distance (Rapport de mission)	Averous M., Touzot G.
06/05/2002	Bilan et perspectives de la collaboration des établissements d'enseignement supérieur et du CNED dans le cadres des campus numériques	CNED
17/05/2002	L'étudiant dans l'université du 21 ^{ème} siècle	AMUE
From 30/05/2002 to 08/09/2003	Email list of TechnoCampus run by the MJENR – SDTICE (total 32 emails)	MJENR - SDTICE
04/06/2002	Note interne de la Direction des Formations (photocopiée avec autorisation de P Mahou)	CNED
06/2002	Appel à projets Campus numériques 2002	MJENR - SDTICE
07/2002	Rapport d'activité – 2001	MEN - CNED
05/09/2002	Email Campus numériques : le montant du financement des 36 projets retenus pour 2002 n'est pas encore connu (photocopié avec autorisation de P Mahou)	CNED
09/2002	Campus numériques 2002	MJENR - SDTICE
04/10/2002	Présentation des actions de la Conférence en 2001-2002 et des projets 2003	AMUE
07/10/2002	De nouvelles perspectives pour l'enseignement supérieur	MJENR
10/2002	CNED Canal Education – La revue du CNED Special issue « Le CNED ou les distances effacées »	CNED
13/12/2002	Appel à projets « Universités numériques en région »	MJENR
19/12/2002	Renouvellement des instances de la CPU	AMUE
03/2003	Bilan des actions campus numériques – slides from JLB (photocopiées avec autorisation de P Mahou)	CNED
03/2003	Introduction aux démarches qualité	MJENR - SDTICE
19/03/2003	Les campus numériques français et les besoins de normalisation	MEJR, Direction de la technologie
21/04/2003	Email : dépliant Campus numériques, version anglaise (photocopié avec autorisation de P Mahou)	CNED
04/2003	La qualité dans les formations utilisant les TIC	MJENR - SDTICE
04/2003	Evaluation de l'opération « Campus numériques »	MJENR - SDTICE

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04/2003	Les Campus numériques français	MJENR – SDTICE
04/2003	Etudes MEN, Bureau B3 : les couts de la FOAD (45 pages)	MJENR - SDTICE
04/2003	L'enseignement supérieur et les TIC	MJENR – SDTICE
05/06/2003	Le Télé-enseignement, de l'artisanat à l'industrialisation – Séminaire Aristote – P. Perrey	MJENR – SDTICE
06/2003	Appel à projets « Universités numériques en région » (note de cadrage)	MJENR – SDTICE
01/07/2003	Mission TIC : Stratégie, actions et moyens de avril à décembre 2003	AMUE
07/2003	Evaluation des campus numériques (PowerPoint presentation, 210 slides)	IPSOS
07/2003	Rapport d'activité - 2002	MEN - CNED
07/2003	Rapport interne d'étape Campus numériques Appels d'offre Direction de la technologie 2000-2001-2002 (confidential document) (77 pages)	CNED
09/2003	Rapport de stage effectué sous la direction de Philippe Perrey – P. Henri	MJENR – SDTICE
01/10/2003	Colloque Campus numériques & Universités numériques en région - Montpellier	MENESR
02/10/2003	Discours de Claudie Haigneré. Ministre chargée de la Recherche et des Nouvelles Technologies	Ministere Recherche
25/11/2003	Technologies pour l'apprentissage et l'éducation : entre recherche et usages pédagogiques – Colloque Paris	CNRS, DT Département Nouvelles technologies pour la société
26/01/2004	Récapitulatif des dépenses campus numériques sur budget 2003 – communication commerciale (photocopié avec autorisation de P Mahou)	CNED
03/2004	Le Bulletin du CIP – Le journal d'information du Centre d'Ingénierie Pédagogique – No 10	Université Paris IX Dauphine
04/2004	Les campus numériques français - Historique	MENESR - SDTICE
07/2004	Rapport d'activité - 2003	MEN - CNED
11/2004	Internet for Everyone – ICT at school and in society	MENESR - SDTICE
25/01/2005	Récapitulatif des dépenses campus numériques sur budget 2004 – communication commerciale (photocopié avec autorisation de P Mahou)	CNED
07/04/2005	Rapport d'activité - 2004	MENESR – Direction de la Technologie – Sous-direction des TICE

07/2005	Rapport d'activité - 2004	MEN – CNED
		Logo of the <i>campus numériques</i>

Examples of Thematic Analysis of Interview Transcripts

THEMES	TEXT
Old vs New courses	<p>Yes, I mean how far they were total courses and how far they were modules, I don't know. So basically what happened was... we got all those and they were then assessed by this interim management team and they identified about 12 I think who were possible runners and...</p> <p><i>p.13</i></p> <p>I mean they were a combination, there's two sides of it, there's the academic design of the course which takes quite a long time anyway and then there's the technological design and I think it's quite complicated to see that the problem is we didn't know what the platform would be like so you can't... there's actually a technical problem on how you stick the thing on the platform and how far the platform is going to be a... because the platform could be a very simple portal or it could be quite a complicated learning environment in which the courses are actually fitted into...</p> <p><i>p.14</i></p>
Demand - Supply	<p>Yes we did, when we asked for the holding company and operating company nominees in March '01 we also asked HEIs if they had any learning programmes. The problem we had was, we knew it would take a while to sort out the joint venture partners and we knew that the learning programmes that the company had would need to be very market focused and you can't preempt essentially what wants the market but we were a bit concerned that it would take a long time for the HEIs to produce the learning programmes so to get the interest going we advertised, when we advertised for members we asked is there anyone with learning programmes who's interested in them, in participating.</p> <p><i>p. 13</i></p> <p>The trouble is that there is a tendency to kind of overdue... you've got to have all the bits locked in, you've got to something when somebody actually say, look we actually have an idea of somebody buying this and we've got the academic credibility to do it and the expertise and we've got the technical competence to do it, so in choosing those subject areas they looked at those. What they... the trouble was that what they couldn't do in terms of the launch programmes is obviously design them within an overall sale and marketing vision. That was always going to be a weakness because they eventually were developing something as a kind of a technical prototype without a real idea of whether they could sell it. But I mean to be fair to them, they had to do that because to design a platform you have to have something running around it.</p> <p><i>p. 14</i></p>

Platform	<p>I mean they were a combination, there's two sides of it, there's the academic design of the course which takes quite a long time anyway and then there's the technological design and I think it's quite complicated to see that the problem is we didn't know what the platform would be like so you can't... there's actually a technical problem on how you stick the thing on the platform and how far the platform is going to be a... because the platform could be a very simple portal or it could be quite a complicated learning environment in which the courses are actually fitted into...</p> <p><i>p.14</i></p>
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Annex 3

Thematic Analysis of Interview Transcripts

CC: You weren't in contact with institutions as such?

AF: Yes we did, when we asked for the holding company and operating company nominees in March '01 we also asked HEIs if they had any learning programmes. The problem we had was, we knew it would take a while to sort out the joint venture partners and we knew that the learning programmes that the company had would need to be very market focused and you can't preempt essentially what wants the market but we were a bit concerned that it would take a long time for the HEIs to produce the learning programmes so to get the interest going we advertised, when we advertised for members we asked is there anyone with learning programmes who's interested in them, in participating and we got... the trouble is I can't give you this because it's got all names of the institutions on so I don't know if I'm legally allowed to but we received proposals from 61 institutions or consortia for 84 programmes in total.

CC: Sorry, when you say programmes you mean courses, on-line courses.

AF: Yes, I mean how far they were total courses and how far they were modules, I don't know. So basically what happened was... we got all those and they were then assessed by this interim management team and they identified about 12 I think who were possible runners and...

CC: Sorry, we're going too fast... what are we talking about now? The holding company was set up, the operating company set up and then HEIs were contacted...

AF: No, no earlier than that. (Turn tape) In April 2001, we said to the HEIs, it's actually March I've got here, anyway, we asked the HEIs at the same time, are you interested, would you be interested in running programmes through this venture, are you interested in parting with programmes, courses.

CC: But you already had asked them whether they were interested or not, a long time ago...

AF: Yes but not specifically, that was just are you interested in the venture? This was specifically, have you got anything to sell?

CC: Now this is very interesting.

AF: OK, that's what we said to them. The problem we had was because the companies hadn't been set up at that point we couldn't do, basically do a deal because it would be the company that would have to decide and the company would have to decide what target markets it would have so when it came in and it set up and it said our biggest market is going to be Asia there might be different courses it would need then if it was America, so we couldn't... effectively it was a bit difficult because we couldn't sort of say we'll do a deal with you but what we were saying was when this thing set up is there anybody who's got anything to sell so we were trying to get a kind of pool of basically programmes, courses that they might be interested in. And that's why I said that we got 61 institutions and consortia who replied and they put forward 84 courses to sell.

CC: I don't have any record of this, anywhere, is this public knowledge?

AF: I don't know, I don't think it was hidden or anything.

CC: Then we are in March 2001.

AF: And that kind of pool of programmes then as I said would run through and actually the ones that come out in March 2003 are already identified I think. York's there, Sheffield Hallam's there, what was the other one? OU, Cambridge ... Yes, so largely the courses that came out which actually started to be launched in 2003 were identified in 2001.

CC: Yes, I actually have this paragraph here about this. And there was a press release: (quotes press release). Excellent. Now, those 80 proposals were existing courses or modules or whatever...

Move
from
demand
focus to
supply
focus

Confidentiality of some documents.

New vs. old words

Implemented
phs -

AF: I don't [know...

CC: [What I am trying to assess here is to what extent did the money help existing programmes to actually develop and get bigger and...

AF: I mean they were a combination, there's two sides of it, there's the academic design of the course which takes quite a long time anyway and then there's the technological design and I think it's quite complicated to see that the problem is we didn't know what the platform would be like so you can't... there's actually a technical problem on how you stick the thing on the platform and how far the platform is going to be a... because the platform could be a very simple portal or it could be quite a complicated learning environment in which the courses are actually fitted into...

ICT Platform

CC: Like BlackBoard...

AF: Yes, quite... so I think the thing you've got to remember is while it all seems to take such a long time, in fact the marketing and the courses and the platform really have to lock in together, you actually can't... I mean the point of doing this was to try and raise interest and obviously be aware of who was in the.... But you actually cannot deliver until you've locked everything together because as I said you can't really... until you've decided what are the target markets, it's all very well having a wonderful course in public policy but if it doesn't sell in America; because all these things, the marketing and the technology are very expensive, so you need a lock in of... yes, we think there is a market in America, this is the kind of courses that Americans buy, this is the kind of platform now we are developing, so... it was highly experimental because then once they got the pilots, they began to try and design the pilots, you see if you design the platform you need some programmes to run on it so part of the launch programmes was actually this... Sun worked very interactively with the HEIs which is trying design what the learning environment should look around these specific courses. So some of the courses that the e-university sold they did marketing for some courses which were already existing and were running on other platforms, but the launch ones, like the York one were actually fitted and developed around this platform.

New vs. old.

CC: OK (16 sec silence). OK. My question here 'How were areas for courses decided?'

AF: Well these ones you see were done more on a basis of... I'm trying to look at the criteria they set up... (15 sec) I think when they were choosing the initial ones they were looking at plausibility in lots of terms, was there an outline business proposition? Was there an academic probity? Was there expertise... So, when they were looking initially I think they were looking for plausibility across the range because they got some.... The trouble is that there is a tendency to kind of overdue... you've got to have all the bits locked in, you've got to something when somebody actually say, look we actually have an idea of somebody buying this and we've got the academic credibility to do it and the expertise and we've got the technical competence to do it, so in choosing those subject areas they looked at those. What they... the trouble was that what they couldn't do in terms of the launch programmes is obviously design them within an overall sale and marketing vision. That was always going to be a weakness because they eventually were developing something as a kind of a technical prototype without a real idea of whether they could sell it. But I mean to be fair to them, they had to do that because to design a platform you have to have something running around it.

Application process -

Supply / Demand.

