QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: STORIES OF ENGLISH AND CZECH ACADEMICS AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS

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Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of the candidate's knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the work. Ethics approval for this research has been received from the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research on Humans, approval number: 2006/135LIR (Appendix II).

Signed: …….. Date:……./..……/……..……

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Abstract

The subject of quality has been a pervasive issue on the agenda in higher education around the world for more than a decade. A greater focus on quality in higher education resulted from a range of competing factors, among the most prominent were: political control over higher education (exerted particularly by national governments), the growth in the number of students in higher education (including general changes in the student population and their expectations) and financial control on the part of national governments (frequently related to the previous two factors).

Quality monitoring has become a mechanism for governments worldwide to tackle these competing factors. However, at the same time, it can be argued that it was frequently employed to disguise the dominant focus on accountability in higher education rather than on enhancement. Many of the quality assurance models and systems applied to higher education originated in the business and manufacturing sectors. They have often been found unsuitable or only partially suitable for the higher education sector, because they largely disregarded the nature of higher education and its employees, in particular the academics.

It may be argued that the quality movement has driven higher education more towards greater uniformity, which may be detrimental to what was understood as the “real” quality in higher education. For instance, innovation was regarded as an important aspect of academic work. Nevertheless, the present quality development drive seems to be working against the nature of academic work.

Given this background, it is alarming that the academic voice seems to have had little impact to date on the development of quality systems in higher education. Therefore, the present thesis attempted to investigate the academic voice concerning higher education quality.

Overall, this thesis had two main objectives. First, based on the analysis of stories of academics and higher education leaders, the thesis endeavoured to construct a framework of significant quality issues for the potential use in future policy development in higher education in the two countries investigated in this research (the Czech Republic and England), and prospectively in other higher education systems around the world. In particular, it aimed to introduce more human-centred measures into the area of higher education quality. Second, in terms of developing a methodology, the thesis attempted to illustrate the way in which a critical event narrative inquiry study of heterogeneous and complex environments, such as higher education, could be undertaken.

Employing such a critical event narrative inquiry approach, the researcher endeavoured to highlight important aspects of higher education quality, which have been largely overlooked in the area, and thus assist the improvement of the practice of quality development in higher education. The study utilised face-to-face interviews with academics and higher education leaders concerning their perceptions of the issue of higher education quality.

The researcher anticipated that eliciting of “critical events” through interviews with individuals involved in the area of quality in higher education (academics and higher

education leaders) would uncover some important aspects in higher education quality which would not be revealed using other more traditional empirical methods of inquiry, particularly quantitative research methods.

To investigate the area of higher education quality, the researcher elected to look into the English and Czech higher education systems. The choice of the English higher education system was influenced by the knowledge that England, and more generally the UK, was among the first countries in the world, and certainly the first in Europe, to introduce a formal quality assurance system into higher education. Australia followed this trend soon after it was introduced in the UK. The researcher elected the Czech higher education system, as a culturally different educational system, distinctive from the Anglo-Saxon educational tradition, and which is uniquely placed on the divide between Western and Eastern Europe. In this respect, the critical event narrative inquiry method was proposed as a suitable method for the investigation of significant aspects of cultural difference.

Employing the critical event narrative inquiry method, the researcher uncovered a number of significant issues. Some of these issues were identified by English and Czech academics and higher education leaders as not featuring strongly in their countries' current higher education quality enhancement practices, and yet they were regarded as important by the academics. Some of the issues uncovered in this research, on the other hand, were highlighted as impacting negatively on the quality enhancement processes in their respective higher education systems. There were a number of issues which were identified as common to both the English and Czech higher education systems. These issues might have been an indication of potential

wider relevance of such trends among a broader range of higher education systems worldwide.

This thesis proposed a framework for a human-centred approach to quality enhancement in higher education based on issues which were common to both English and Czech higher education systems. This framework featured:

- Regard for the academic voice in higher education quality policy development;
- Attention to human-centred aspects of higher education quality;
- Need for a collegial approach and reflection on the purposes of quality evaluation processes;
- Equal value afforded to teaching and research; and
- Focus on innovation and change.

There were also some culture-specific issues uncovered, particularly in relation to the Czech higher education system. These culture-specific issues may be relevant to certain common trends and features in other higher education systems in Central and Eastern European regions. In this respect, the thesis proposed a framework for a human-centred approach to quality enhancement with regard to culture-specific issues. The framework focused specifically on Czech higher education and may be of potential relevance to other Central and Eastern European higher education systems. This framework included:

- The significance of transparency in educational processes;
- The need for a fundamental change in the style of pedagogy in higher education institutions; to focus more on thinking processes and reasoning;

- The need for a more systematic move towards a student-centred approach across the whole higher education system;
- The need to address the factor of pressure on Czech academics to publish mainly in English in order to receive international recognition; and
- The need for education of Czech academic staff to enable a broader and better understanding of the concept of higher education quality in the context of the Czech higher education system.

Investigation of the academic voice in English higher education did not reveal any culture-specific issues. In other words, the English academics and higher education leaders did not identify any issues in higher education quality that were distinctively different from the general issues highlighted also by Czech academics and higher education leaders. Some of the issues pointed out in the English context occurred on a more advanced level due to the different historical, political and socio-economic context of the UK higher education.

It appears that quality in higher education is here to stay. As such, it is essential for the future of higher education that quality enhancement be based on education-focused approaches. Overall, this thesis proposed a human-centred approach to quality enhancement as one way of attaining educational focus.

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PART I: CONTEXT

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

This thesis is concerned with the area of quality development in higher education. Quality development in higher education has gained attention particularly over the last decade. Among higher education institutions worldwide, there have been various responses to this trend, ranging from implementing direct quality measurement scales to self-audit processes. Increasingly, the rationale for quality development has been driven by funding mechanisms, accreditation tests, keeping pace with international practice, national audits and other trends, such as, massive growth in higher education, and influences of information technology (Barnett, 1992; Harvey, Green, 1993; Morley, 1997; Lomas, 2000; Harvey, 2004, 2005).

It can be argued that a lot of the trends in higher education quality have been management-driven, underpinned by a desire to develop a range of mechanisms of control (Lomas, 2000; Jones, 2003). However, it can be equally argued that the "human factor" involved in quality development is as important, if not more important than mechanisms of control and accountability. Therefore, this study attempts to capture the experiences of the individuals involved in the process of quality development (higher education leaders and academics). This study addresses a gap in research of higher education where there has been a lack of studies concentrating on the academic voice in higher education quality, with the exception of, for example, Lomas (2007a), Newton (2001), and Cartwright (2007).

This study concentrates on the perspectives of academics and senior higher education leaders, rather than examining the views of a wider range of stakeholders (such as students, employers and others), to allow a more in-depth investigation. The study draws attention to the human-centred approach to quality, as it is argued that in any activity involving humans, there is a need to account for human values and attitudes, including issues of cultural difference.

1.2 IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This study stems from a realisation that the current approaches to higher education quality, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world (represented by countries such as the UK or Australia), have been largely management-driven and thus they have been significantly reliant on a range of management systems. The need to bring more human-centred measures into higher education quality policy development has been largely ignored (Lomas, 2000; Lomas, 2007a; Cartwright, 2007).

Quality has been regarded as a "contested" and a complex issue (Newton, 2002; Westerheijden et al, 1994). The recent focus on quality in higher education has resulted from a range of competing factors, including:

- political control over higher education (exerted particularly by national governments),
- growth in the number of students in higher education (including general changes in the student population and their expectations),

- financial control on the part of national governments; frequently related to the previous two factors (Stoddart, 2004; Harvey, 1998; Brown, 2004; Green, 1994).

Quality monitoring became a mechanism for governments worldwide to tackle these competing factors, and frequently also to disguise the dominant focus on accountability rather than enhancement (Harvey, 2005).

Many quality monitoring models and systems applied to higher education originated in the manufacturing and business sectors. These models and systems were frequently found unsuitable or only partially suitable for the higher education sector, as they largely disregarded the nature of higher education and its employees, in particular the academics (Birnbaum, 2000; Green, 1994).

Indeed the academic voice seemed to have had little impact to date on the development of quality systems in higher education (Kogan et al, 2000; Blythman, 2001; Newton, 2001; Lomas, 2007a; Cartwright, 2007). Therefore, this thesis attempts to further explore and develop the area of higher education quality through an investigation of the academic voice, with the view of introducing more human-centred measures into the area of quality.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The study focuses on the area of higher education quality in England and the Czech Republic, in particular, on the perspectives of academics and higher education leaders within the two higher education systems. The researcher elected to investigate the English higher education system, because England, and more broadly the UK, was one of the first countries in the world, and certainly the first in Europe (Westerheijden at al, 1994), to introduce formal quality assurance systems into higher education.

The researcher has chosen to investigate the higher education system of the Czech Republic as a culturally different educational system, distinctive from the English higher education system, and more broadly from the Anglo-Saxon higher education tradition. In particular, it can be argued that it is the unique position of the Czech Republic on the boundary between the Western and Eastern Europe, and thus its unique political and social history, that would have impacted on the specific development of the Czech higher education system and the Czech educational system overall. This is the main reason why the researcher maintains that this system is worth investigating. The individual aspects of the difference will be explained in detail in Chapter 3.

The study originally aimed to examine the UK, Australian and Czech higher education systems, but due to the complexities and difficulties of the scale of this research would require (which will be explained in more detail in Chapter 5), it focused on the English and Czech higher education systems.

To keep the research more focused, the investigator elected to examine higher education quality within the areas of humanities and social sciences. This was aligned with the researcher's interest, experience and tertiary background. Further studies may investigate the application of narrative to other disciplines and cross-disciplinary practices in higher education.

1.4 NEED FOR THE RESEARCH

In reviewing the available literature on quality in English and Czech higher education systems, and reviewing the English and Czech higher education systems in general, in terms of more extensive studies, this thesis identified three PhD theses broadly on the subject of higher education quality (two existing PhD theses and one was still in progress in May 2008). All the three theses concerned the English higher education system. As far as the researcher was able to establish, in May 2008, there was no existing PhD thesis concerning the topic of Czech higher education quality.

The first thesis entitled *Senior Staff Member Perception of Organisational Culture and Quality in Higher Education Institutions in England* was by Lomas (2000). It examined the issue of accounting for organisational cultures when employing quality management models (which originated in the business and industry sectors) in English higher education, and how balanced were the "process and people-oriented foci" (p. 135) of quality management approaches in English higher education institutions. The thesis investigated the perceptions of senior higher education staff in

several English higher education institutions. It employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The thesis identified the imbalance of process and people-oriented foci in higher education quality management of English higher education institutions, and highlighted the need for further investigation of the issue.

The second PhD thesis entitled *The Development of Quality Assurance Policy in Higher Education: A Comparative Analysis of England, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland* was by Perellon (2001). The thesis investigated quality assurance in higher education in England, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland as a public policy domain. It also specifically consulted the views of the key stakeholders who were involved in the process of policy formation in the four countries. The thesis predominantly employed qualitative research methods. It largely concentrated on quality assurance in the process of policy making.

The third PhD thesis was still in progress or in final stages in May 2008, judging by the fact that it was not possible to locate the thesis on the library catalogue of the institution through which the respective PhD study was undertaken. Through previous contact with the thesis author, the researcher established that the thesis investigated the issue of higher education quality as a philosophical concept. To the current researcher's knowledge, the thesis employed predominantly qualitative research methods.

Overall, despite the fact that the researcher identified three PhD theses on the general topic of quality in English higher education, it can be argued that the methodological

and also specific thematic focus of these three theses was different from the approach the researcher's current thesis employed. In particular, the second and third PhD theses took different conceptual approaches to the area of English higher education quality - quality from the perspective of political science in the case of the second thesis and quality as a philosophical concept in the third thesis.

The first PhD thesis was closest to the current researcher's thesis in its conceptual approach, given that it investigated the imbalance of the process and people-oriented foci in higher education management through senior higher education staff perceptions. However, the current study also investigates the issue of quality within the Czech higher education system. Furthermore, the present study employs a critical event narrative inquiry method to investigate the area of higher education quality, which differs from the method employed by Lomas (2000).

Apart from the three PhD theses on the subject of quality in higher education, the researcher further identified several academic papers situated in English higher education which drew on qualitative studies of academic perspectives. These papers have highlighted the lack of academic voice in the area of higher education quality, and also the mismatch between the official rhetoric (taken by national quality bodies, such the Quality Assurance Agency in England) and experiences of academics on the ground.

The article by Blythman (2001) was based on a study of academic perspectives surrounding a subject quality review in an English university college (undertaken

within a period of four years between late 1990s and early 2000s) employing a grounded theory qualitative method.

Newton's (2001) article reported on a longitudinal study, which began in early 1990s, concerning the impacts of the Quality Assurance Agency quality systems on staff in an English university college. The research was based on a systematic reflective practice taking in the form of ongoing conversations with academics (using surveys, focus groups and interviews).

The paper by Cartwright (2007) reported on a research study into staff perceptions of the quality rhetoric taken by national bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). This qualitative research study was undertaken in a form of interviews with several academics in two "new" universities (universities which gained a university title in 1992, further explained in Chapter 3).

The article by Lomas (2007a) sought to deepen understanding of the perceptions of quality by academics. The study described in the article consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews of random 20 lecturers in a range of UK universities, both traditional and "new" institutions, and was carried out using a constant comparative method.

All the articles acknowledged their limitations in terms of extent of the studies they reported on, and underlined the need for further more extensive in-depth research into the academic voice concerning higher education quality in England.

This research, therefore, aims to fill in this gap by undertaking an in-depth investigation of the academic voice in higher education quality in England and the Czech Republic using a critical event narrative inquiry method.

1.5 NARRATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH

Over the last two decades, narrative inquiry has gained momentum as both a phenomenon and a method across a wide range of disciplines (from philosophy, education and psychology to economics, medicine and environmental science). Narrative inquiry is set in human stories of experience. It provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories (Riessman, 1993; Herman et al, 2005; Elliot, 2005).

Narrative has depicted human experience and endeavours from ancient times. It records human experience through the construction and reconstruction of personal stories. It is well-suited to address issues of complexity, and cultural and human centredness because of its capacity to record and retell events that have been of most influence on us (Geelan, 2003; Clandinin, Connelly, 2000; Gough, 1994; Bruner, 2002). This research refers to these influential events as “critical events”, because it is argued that they are the events that shape human understanding and ultimately influence the directions and decisions that are made. Such issues play a significant role in many areas of human activity, including in higher education.

People make sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them. Stories are constantly being restructured in the light of new events, because they do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives. Narrative allows researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness. It illustrates the temporal notion of experience, recognising that one's understanding of people and events changes (Bruner, 2002; Amsterdam, Bruner, 2000).

Narrative inquiry is human-centred because it captures and analyses life stories. It has the ability to document critical life events in an illuminating detail, and yet also reveal holistic views. Stories reflect the fact that experience changes, and that understandings are continually developed, reshaped and retold, often informally. Powerful insights offered by stories have often been ignored, possibly because of the traditional predominance in research of the more scientific, empiricist views. Yet the prominence of stories in many cultures surrounds humans in every facet of their life, and much of their learning and understanding is oral-based. Most people enjoy a story. Narrative offers research a way to highlight those understandings often not revealed by traditional modes of inquiry (Bruner, 2002; Amsterdam, Bruner, 2000; Gough, 1998).

Narrative inquiry is not a completely new method; it has existed in various forms in a range of fields for more than two decades. However, the various narrative inquiry approaches have been quite "disjointed", embedded in the particular disciplines where they have been applied. Webster and Mertova (2007) have attempted to bring together

the “disjointed” approaches to narrative inquiry in outlining a critical event narrative inquiry methodology, which, they argued, may be utilised in a wide range of disciplines. Therefore, a further aim of this study is to refine this methodology, and apply and adopt it to the area of quality development in higher education. When applying the narrative inquiry method, this study is asking the question: Is narrative inquiry method suitable for investigation of the complex issues of higher education quality?

1.6 OBJECTIVE OF THE THESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Employing the critical event narrative inquiry method, the researcher aimed to highlight important aspects of higher education quality, which, it is argued, reside in a more human-centred focus in higher education quality. Thus, this research intended to assist in the improvement of quality development practice in higher education.

The study utilised face-to-face interviews with academics and higher education leaders concerning their perceptions of the issue of higher education quality. Therefore, this study emphasised the significance of the human voice (of academics and higher education leaders) which, with a few exceptions (such as, Newton, 2001; Lomas, 2007a; Cartwright, 2007), has been virtually absent from research on higher education quality.

This research sought to elicit “critical events” through interviews with individuals involved in the area of quality in higher education (academics and higher education leaders) to uncover some important aspects of quality development which cannot be

revealed using the more traditional empirical methods of inquiry, particularly quantitative research methods.

The interview technique were supported by surveys of the interview participants, reviews of documentation concerning quality approaches of the institutions where the interviewees were based and reviews of other documentation of national and international organisations with direct or indirect impact on the quality development policies of the English and Czech higher education systems.

Therefore, overall, this study addressed the following questions:

Question 1. Does the academic voice have a part to play in the formation of higher education policies in the area of quality?

2. Is a critical event narrative inquiry approach an appropriate method to investigate the domain of higher education, and in particular the area of quality in higher education?

3. Is the critical event narrative inquiry a suitable methodology to uncover important aspects in the area of quality in higher education, which would not be otherwise uncovered by other qualitative and also quantitative research methods?

4. Can critical event narrative inquiry method reveal some different or similar aspects of higher education quality in two different cultural settings?

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis consists of ten chapters divided into four main parts. This is shown in the flowchart in Figure 1.1 below.

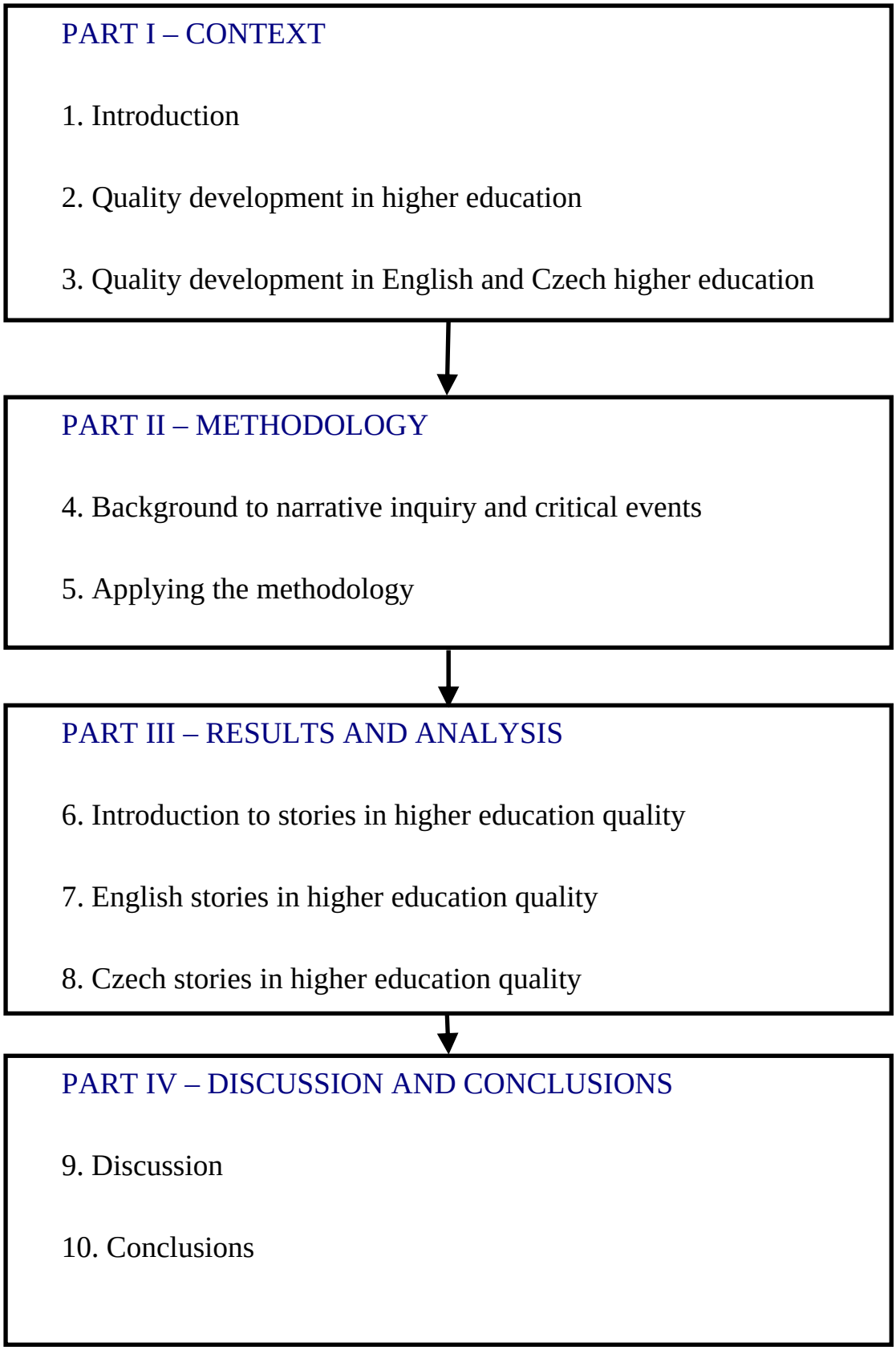

Figure 1.1: Thesis contents – Flowchart

Chapter 1 describes the overall aims of the study; it sets the main research questions, and outlines the context and scope of the study. Chapter 2 outlines the general origins of the area of quality development; it also explains how and why quality development was introduced into higher education. The chapter also describes the concept of quality and how it was perceived. Finally, the chapter summarises the debates which have been led over the concept of quality since the time it was introduced into higher education more than a decade ago. Chapter 3 describes the general differences between the English and Czech higher education systems. It further outlines the differences in the current approaches to higher education quality in the two countries.

Turning to the methodology, Chapter 4 explains the background, philosophical underpinnings and origins of narrative, and also the importance of the narrative inquiry methodology elected to employ in the current study. Chapter 5 describes the way in which the whole study was prepared, how it developed, and the way in which the narrative inquiry methodology was applied in the area of higher education quality, including the constraints of the study.

Regarding results, Chapter 6 provides a short introduction and background to the stories in higher education quality. Chapter 7 analyses the stories in English higher education quality, focusing on identification of “critical events”. The chapter presents results of the study in English higher education. Chapter 8 contains analysis of the stories in Czech higher education quality. Similarly to Chapter 7, it identifies “critical events” and presents results of the study in Czech higher education.

The final part of the thesis is concerned with the implications of the work. Chapter 9 discusses the findings of the research. The chapter provides recommendations to be considered in a review of the current quality assurance frameworks utilised in English and Czech higher education systems. It proposes a more human-centred framework with a potentially wider application in higher education systems other than English and Czech. It also proposes a human-centred framework with a particular focus on culture-specific features in the Czech higher education system, which may have a potential application in other higher education systems of the Central and Eastern European regions. Chapter 9 outlines the limitations of the current study and provides suggestions for further research in the area of higher education quality.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis by providing an overall outline of what was achieved in this research study of higher education quality in England and the Czech Republic.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has set the context of the study. It has outlined the importance of the research, and explained the purpose and need for such a study. The chapter further explained the objectives of the research and outlined research questions. It also described the scope and limitations of the study. And finally, it delineated the structure of the present thesis.

The following chapter will describe the origins of the quality development movement. It will explain the reasons why and how the concept of quality was introduced into higher education. It will clarify the concept of quality. Finally, the chapter will outline the critiques of the current higher education quality models.

Chapter 2: Quality development in higher education

This chapter puts the research into context by addressing the following questions:

- *Where did quality development come from?,*
- *What is quality development?,*
- *How was the concept introduced into higher education,?*
- *What is its application to higher education?,* and
- *How is the concept perceived by academics and researchers involved with the area of higher education quality?*

2.1 WHERE DID QUALITY DEVELOPMENT COME FROM?

Quality control as a practice has been around in some form since at least the Middle Ages, when individual guilds took up the responsibility for overseeing the quality of products. However, in the beginning of the twentieth century an increase in mass production brought with it the concept of quality in relation to inspection, measurement and testing. Therefore, systematic quality management was originally developed in the manufacturing sector. It began in 1900 with a rapid growth of standardisation. Until 1915, Great Britain was the only country in the world with some type of national standardisation movement. The number of standardisation organisations throughout the world increased dramatically, particularly between 1916 and 1932. The movement spread from one country to about twenty five within that period. The United States joined the movement around 1917 (Voehl, 1994).

The second major factor impacting on the development of quality control was a radical shift in "philosophy" which occurred around 1900. This was a tendency to move away from the notion of exactness of science (applied in a wide range of aspects of human life) to the notion of probability and statistical concepts.
The third factor which has played a part in the development of quality control was the evolution of division of labour in the factory systems and development of the first assembly lines in the early twentieth century (Voehl, 1994).

At the turn of the century, England was the most advanced nation in the world in terms of quality standards. However, the lead in quality was soon taken over by the USA. This started, for example, with Taylor who pioneered his vision of a super-efficient management system applied to American factories to increase productivity. Taylor was followed by a number of others who have endeavoured to improve mechanisms to enhance quality, such as Deming, Juran, Feigenbaum, and Ishikawa (Voehl, 1994; Largrosen et al, 2004).

After Second World War, the efficiency/quality movement was carried over to Japan. In 1946, US General MacArthur was assigned to oversee the re-building of Japan, particularly through creating quality control tools and techniques to improve efficiency of Japanese industries. General MacArthur invited Deming and Juran, two key individuals involved in the development of modern quality concepts in the USA at that time. Deming and Juran promoted collaborative quality concepts to Japanese businesses. Within twenty years after that, quality had become a worldwide movement. Beginning with Deming and Juran in late 1940s/early 1950s, the movement was eventually brought back to the United States by Feigenbaum in the

1960s. Feigenbaum introduced and coined the concept of Total Quality Control (TQC). In the 1970s, Crosby established the concept of Zero Defects in management. Ishikawa and his associates at the Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers (JUSE) kept the movement alive in Japan beyond the 1960s (Voehl, 1994).

In the 1980s, Britain took the lead in the quality movement with the introduction of BS 5750 as an international quality standard. Britain first introduced it as a quality standard for the European Commission, and later it was accepted as an international standard known as ISO 9000 (Voehl, 1994).

The concept of quality has undergone a number of changes in focus. Quality control dominated manufacturing and engineering from the 1940s to the 1980s. The 1990s saw the emergence of quality as a profession with a focus on quality systems. In the 1990s, in Britain but also in many Western European countries, quality spread from the industry and business into the public sector, including the healthcare and higher education (Westerheijden et al, 1994; Woodhouse, 2004). Table 2.1 below outlines the developments in the quality movement since its introduction into British manufacturing industry in 1900.

Table 2.1 Timeline of the developments in the quality movement

Dates	**Developments in the quality movement**
1900	Standardisation introduced into British manufacturing industry.
Until 1915	Rapid growth of standardisation in Britain; Britain the only country in the world involved in standardisation.
1916 – 1932	Growth in standardisation around the world.
1917	USA joined the quality movement; soon they took lead in the movement.
1945	USA “transported” the quality movement to Japan.
1960s	Quality movement brought back to the USA. Quality in the USA was introduced into business, public sector and higher education.
Early 1980s	Britain introduced quality standard BS 5750, which was later adopted as an international standard ISO 9000; Britain took lead in the quality movement.
1990s	Quality in Britain spread from manufacturing to business and public sector, including higher education. Other Western European countries followed Britain.

2.2 ORIGINS OF QUALITY DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The origins of accreditation systems in the US higher education (as a form of quality assurance) date back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Woodhouse, 2004). The British system of external examiners assuring standards in universities can be traced back to mid-19th Century (DETYA, 2000). A form of official quality assurance was introduced into a part of the British higher education sector (former polytechnics) in the mid-1960s. However, external quality assurance, as "*a world-wide phenomenon*", began only in the 1980s and particularly in the 1990s (Woodhouse, 2004).

It should be noted that the Czech higher education was virtually unaffected by the quality phenomenon in Western Europe in the 1980s. This was due to the Communist rule in the then Czechoslovakia. Quality of higher education was claimed by the Communist State, however it was rarely examined. Quality monitoring in the form of state-controlled accreditation of higher education was introduced in the Czech Republic in 1990, shortly after the end of communism (CHES, 2001; Van der Wende and Westerheijden, 2003).

In the 1990s, a range of quality management systems was introduced into Western European higher education from the business sector. Western European higher education institutions, particularly in Britain, started adopting these quality management systems in the hope of increasing efficiency and effectiveness of the higher education sector (Lomas, 2000).

Management systems in some form were first introduced into higher education in the USA in the early 1960s (Birnbaum, 2000). Birnbaum (2000) argued that management systems ("management fads") were usually introduced first into the business or government sectors and subsequently they were adopted by higher education, and their common feature was the fairly quick succession: attention to one technique was generally soon replaced by another. Birnbaum gave an example of the Planning Programming Budgeting System (PPBS) as one of the first management system which was initially introduced to the US Defence Department and then into the higher education sector. As the most recent management systems he referred to Business Process Reengineering (BPR) and Benchmarking.

Among the better known management techniques in the wider context of higher education Birnbaum pointed out Benchmarking and Total Quality Management (TQM)/Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).

Benchmarking was introduced to higher education in the USA in the 1980s. It required "*an institution to study the processes of others and then use these understandings to set future goals or benchmarks for itself*" (Birnbaum, 2000, p. 81). Performance indicators form a part of the process of benchmarking. Birnbaum pointed out that, as it proved difficult to measure productivity in the service sector in general (and in higher education in particular), the most problematic aspect of benchmarking and performance indicators has been that they were, to a large extent, based on the assumption that only what is measurable is worthwhile.

TQM was introduced by Deming who developed statistical control and sampling processes for a telephone company in the USA in the late 1940s. TQM was

introduced into the US higher education in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1990s TQM in the US higher education context was renamed CQI (Birnbaum, 2000). As Birnbaum (2000) noted, "*TQM/CQI was perhaps the first management fad in higher education that provoked a serious discussion not only of its technical merits, but also of its educational and social implications*." (p. 107).

On the account of management techniques, Birnbaum highlighted that there could not be any management technique that would perfectly suit all requirements of a higher education institution, so that it was operating "*effectively and efficiently*". He argued that: "*Different systems serve different purposes*.", and that there are always political as well as technical aspects involved when choosing a management technique.

Birnbaum perceived a number of negative but also some positive aspects in management fads for higher education institutions. He observed that frequently management fads were connected to quantification; and that aspects which could not be quantified would often be viewed as having little or no value. He could see that these techniques often oversimplified and made matters more complex at the same time. Further, such techniques led to centralisation of bureaucracy and weakening the role of education.

In terms of positive aspects, Birnbaum pointed out that management techniques/fads may play a crucial part in an organisation's renewal. They might emphasise alternative values or introduce variety in an otherwise conservative organisation. Finally, Birnbaum highlighted an aspect concerning management fads that he perceived to be most indicative of the latest developments in higher education. He

believed that the succession of a range of different management techniques in higher education was symptomatic of the wider social forces which have resulted in "*overreliance on decision rationality and devotion to efficiency*" (p. 241).

2.3 WHAT IS QUALITY?

According to Newton (2002), quality is a "contested" issue. There are a number of interpretations of quality which sometimes complement and sometimes contradict one another.

For instance, Lomas (2004) argued that there are two major approaches to quality improvement: "*quality assurance and quality enhancement*". In his view, quality assurance is oriented mainly towards the product or service being of good standard. It is a "*preventative*" measure, which is "*regarded as a means of improving overall quality*" and it relates to the notion of "*fitness for purpose*".

Quality enhancement, on the other hand, is "*directly concerned with adding value, improving quality…and implementing transformational change*". In relation to an individual academic, this concept is "*based on the premise that they want their students to do well*" (p. 158).

Adding to Lomas's argument, Jones (2003) outlined several dichotomies when approaching higher education quality:

> *One views quality improvement at the macro or university level, another focuses at the micro or educational-delivery level. One sees quality assessment as an administrative "check-off", the other sees quality as a*

> *continuous improvement in educational delivery. One values quantitative measures to demonstrate quality, the other values qualitative measures.*
>
> (p. 223)

Jones argued that there is a need for integration of these dichotomies, so that quality improvements at the educational-delivery level would complement and be reflected at the university level.

Kogan and Hanney (2000) referred to quality as "*the most potent of the change agents* [in higher education]" (p. 240). In that context, Watty (2003) investigated change as a result of quality initiatives. She revealed "*two schools of thought*": one relating to context and the other relating to stakeholders. "*The first attaches quality to a context and as a consequence quality becomes meaningful…For example,* [this might be] *references to the quality of assessment, student intake, academic programmes, teaching and learning…*" (p. 213). From the second perspective, quality acquires "*a stakeholder-specific meaning*" (p. 213). Quality is considered in relation to a variety of stakeholders with an interest in higher education, and each of these stakeholders may potentially perceive quality differently.

Westerheijden et al (1994) argued that quality is multi-dimensional. Westerheijden et al referred to Brennan et al (1992) who suggested that: "*there are (at least) as many definitions of quality in higher education as there are categories of stakeholders*…times *the number of purposes, or dimensions, these stakeholders distinguish*" (p.17).

Looking at the British higher education, Harvey (2005) outlined the range of quality monitoring mechanisms which have been historically employed in the UK:

> *The UK has had several processes for monitoring the quality of higher education. These include the external examiner system, professional accreditation of programmes, inspection of provision, quality audit of institutional processes, assessment of programmes, and research assessment. The first three predate the relatively recent concern with quality assessment and assurance…*
>
> *[However] the long-running external examiner system has been the mainstay of standards in the ever-expanding university system in the UK.*
>
> (p. 263)

Since the 1980s there has been a gradual emergence of what Westerheijden et al (1994) referred to as "*new*" approaches to quality assessment "*as a result of the expansion of higher education systems in combination with limited budgets, of internationalisation of higher education and of economic competition, of more openness of governments in general and…of ideologies of neo-liberalism and deregulation…*" (p. 19).

Scott (1994) further developed Westerheijden et al's argument concerning the multiplicity of factors which impacted on quality, pointing out that the very factors that made quality a key political concern in higher education, have also made it almost impossible to agree on a common definition. Scott outlined the following five concepts of quality:

Quality as "Excellence"

This is a perspective of quality through a relatively fixed hierarchy of academic merits. According to Scott, this perspective is the most common in higher education. Scott highlighted a number of drawbacks that this perspective has. Firstly, it regards the definition of quality as unproblematic, and this "*assumption* [is] *difficult to sustain in a mass system"* (p. 64). Secondly, "*its delivery mechanism, peer review, assumes a professional collegiality as well as shared intellectual values,* [however] *neither of* [them]…*can be taken for granted in an increasingly competitive and market-oriented system.*" (p. 64).

Quality as "Audit"

This approach to quality focuses on "*the procedures used by universities to safeguard and maintain quality*" (p. 64). But the approach is modelled on the "*closed*" analytical style employed in the corporate world, and it "*has proved to be difficult to reconcile with the open interpretative ethos of universities.*" (p. 65).

Quality as "Outcomes"

Scott pointed out that this approach fails to relate outputs to inputs, and thus it "*neglects issues of 'value added'*, [which are] *an important measure of higher education's effectiveness*" (p. 65). According to Scott, what is also important to consider is that some outcomes, particularly in the case of higher education, "*only become clear long after graduates have left higher education, which undermines the usefulness of this approach in policy and managerial terms.*" (p. 65).

Quality as "Mission"

This interpretation of quality emphasises the need to judge quality in the context of mission. For example, "*A small college should not be judged by the same standards as a large comprehensive university or a research university*" (p. 65). This approach to quality has been referred to as "*fitness for purpose*", and it was first employed around the mid-1980s, to discourage "*policy makers from judging the former polytechnics by inappropriate criteria designed with traditional universities in mind.*" (pp. 65-66).

Quality as "Culture"

Another approach to quality emphasizes "*the need to build a 'quality culture' that permeates the whole institution rather than devising discrete standards to judge the quality of each individual operation.*" (p. 66).

Scott further suggested that there are a number of other different models of quality, and that these other concepts of quality can be described in terms of a series of spectra – between:

> *…informal and formal modes…professionally-oriented (top-down) and those that are market driven (bottom-up), between systems designed to monitor process and those that measure substantial outcomes, between threshold setting (or benchmarking) and ranking, between holistic systems that assess entire institutions and reductionist systems that examine operating units within them.*
>
> (p. 67)

He also highlighted that these various models are not "*mutually exclusive*" and that they can be "*mixed-and-matched*".

Looking at the British higher education, Green (1994) also referred to the fact that concern for quality and standards was not new in the British higher education context. The debate has become more "visible" since the 1980s, because it became more externalised and has grown in intensity (Green, 1994). Green also highlighted the multi-dimensionality of quality. She further suggested that quality is an elusive term, and that: "*We all have an instinctive understanding of what it means but it is difficult to articulate.*" (p. 12). She also argued that quality is "*a value-laden term: it is subjectively associated with what is good and worthwhile.*" (p. 12).

Further on defining the concept of quality, Harvey, Green and Burrows (1993) indicated that there are a number of ways of viewing quality. They outlined six different notions of quality. The first notion relates to what they called the *traditional* concept of quality. The concept associates quality with an idea of exceptionally high standards. The second notion perceives quality in terms of *consistency*. "*It focuses on process and sets specification that it aims to meet.*" (p. 144). It relates to the concept of *zero defects*. Their third approach to quality is that of *fitness for purpose*, where quality is judged "*in terms of the extent to which a product or service meets its stated purpose.*" (p. 144). The fourth concept of quality is that of *value for money*, and thus concerns accountability. It relates to the increasing pressures in the British public service, including education, to be accountable to the public, funders and others. They acknowledged that this trend is spreading all over Europe. The fifth notion of quality

perceives it as a *transformative process*, an ongoing transformation of the participants. Another concept of quality is a *pragmatic* approach, where it is defined in terms of a range of qualities. This concept recognises the fact that an institution may be of high quality in relation to one factor but of low quality in relation to another aspect.

Harvey, Green and Burrows (1993) further highlighted that quality is "*stakeholder*" relative, and the best that can be achieved in that sense "*is to define, as clearly as possible, the criteria used by each interest group when judging quality*…" (p. 144).

To sum up, the number of diverse definitions of quality point to the fact that, particularly in the field of higher education, quality has been a "*contested*" concept and issue. This has been largely due to its multi-dimensionality and thus complexity.

2.4 CRITIQUE OF CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY MODELS

Stoddart (2004) argued that, like in other spheres that demand a significant amount of public funding, in recent decades, there has been a shift in emphasis from a focus on the individual, and the traditional form of peer review, "*to the systematic application of external judgements that aim to satisfy the need for accountability.*" (in Brown, 2004, p. x). He explained that the criteria for judgement changed from internal, tacit and informal to broader ones, accounting for wider socio-economic parameters, because "*higher education institutions have grown more complex and managerially more sophisticated.*" (in Brown, 2004, p. x).

The critics of many current higher education quality models realise that the socio-economic changes in higher education around the world, in the last nearly two decades, had to bring with them changes to the traditional perspectives on quality. However, one of these changes, it can be argued, was perceived as rather negative. In particular, this was a change in focus to the predominantly quantitative, objective and measurable aspects of higher education quality. The aspects of quality that really matter to academics on a more individual, personal level have increasingly been judged as unimportant. For instance, Jones (2003) pointed out that:

> *In an age in which more attention is being placed on developing objective measurements of quality in educational delivery, it is both surprising and alarming that the very purpose of a university, that of educating students, should be apparently overshadowed by concern about administrative measurement issues…*
>
> *Numerous measures by which to judge quality of educational delivery are being developed, with a particular focus on objectives measured by central administration, and statistical comparison. What is receiving less attention, and stands to be eclipsed as a means of measuring quality, are traditional quality assurance measures, administered by academics at the micro (delivery) level [to assist continuous improvement]…*
>
> (pp. 223-224)

Jones also highlighted that administering student surveys centrally with focus on quantitative measures has the potential of giving a very inaccurate picture, and thus it

is important to link the centrally collected quantitative data with the collection of qualitative student and teacher feedback to help to create a more holistic picture.

Concerning the balance in focus on improvement as oppose to accountability, Harvey (1998) emphasized that: "*Despite good intentions, quality monitoring has become over-bureaucratic and the potential for significant change has been hampered by a focus on accountability rather than improvement…By focusing on accountability, the transformative potential of quality monitoring is not fulfilled…*"(p.237).

Harvey (1998) further pointed out that quality has become associated with control and that the term "*quality*" at present is too often used "*as a shorthand for the bureaucratic procedures than for the concept of quality itself…*" (p. 246). He further pointed out that this should not come as a surprise,

> *…as behind nearly all external quality monitoring is a political motive designed to ensure two basic things: that higher education is still delivering despite the cut in resources and increase in student numbers; and that higher education is accountable for public money.*
>
> (pp. 246-247)

Brown (2004) emphasized that the focus on auditing (advocated through the neo-liberal policies of efficiency and accountability in Britain and other countries) is particularly dangerous for higher education, and that, ironically, such an approach in fact threatens real quality in the educational process.

Focusing on the British higher education system, Watson (1995) outlined the main arguments against the current approaches to higher education quality. These were the following:

- *excessive demands on institutions;*
- *violation of academic autonomy and freedom, linked to the fostering of a "compliance culture";*
- *creation of "hard managerialism" and managerial intrusion in academic matters;*
- *damage to Britain's hard-won reputation for quality.*

(in Brown, 2004, p. 80)

Harvey (2005) was rather sceptical about the current quality monitoring processes in UK higher education. He perceived quality monitoring as being "*beset by overlapping and burdensome processes, competing notions of quality, a failure to engage learning and transformation, and a focus on accountability and compliance.*" (p. 271). According to him, it is unfortunate that instead of undertaking a more holistic review of quality issues enabling a reflection, the process was taken over by the Government and its agencies which "*piled one initiative on another to create the 'British quality juggernaut', as it is referred to in parts of Europe.*" (p. 271).

Harvey further argued that: "*Quality evaluations involve game playing to cast the evaluated programme or institution in the best possible light.*" (p. 272). Thus he believed that quality evaluations are more aimed at compliance, and there is little space for any "*constructive dialogue to aid real improvement.*" (p. 272).

He pointed out that real quality improvement of the student experience happens mostly as a result of internal review and monitoring processes, and that these rely on "*student feedback, examiners reports, and internal improvement audits*" which are far more effective than external reviews, "*which do little more than result in a flurry of centrally-controlled and produced documentation and evoke a performance and game-playing culture.*" (pp. 273-274).

Reflecting on the decade or more of external quality assessment (with particular focus on the UK), Harvey (2005) highlighted that despite the fact that academic staff complied with external quality monitoring requirements and learnt to "*play the game*", most of them did not perceive that these external quality monitoring processes would result in any "*significant and long-lasting changes in the student experience*" (p. 274). He also remarked on some more cynical views which argued that the external quality monitoring mechanisms were devised to hide "*a worsening academic base*". (p. 274).

Harvey was of the view that evaluations which rely on "*fitness for purpose*" generally tend to be reductionist and result in fragmenting the concept of quality rather than assisting in further exploring the complex interrelated aspects of quality.

His concern was that the "*bureaucratic and burdensome paraphernalia of quality*" would even increase with the process of internationalisation, and that in such circumstances it is unlikely that the real quality of the student experience would improve.

Further to the concerns expressed by Harvey, Mathias (2004) pointed out that quality assurance favours formal, bureaucratic procedures which are totally disconnected

from real teaching issues. According to him, quality enhancement (QE) has become "*a missing 'E' in the quality movement*". (p. 1). He also underlined the fact that quality assurance (QA) seemed to have brought on "*worrying trends towards teaching staff disengagement*". (p. 1). Mathias (2004) explained that the reasons for this were related to the fact that there is hardly any recognition or reward for quality enhancement, and that personal engagement and satisfaction are overshadowed by excessive demands of quality assurance.

Mathias emphasised that there were, for instance, departmental or institutional rewards (in the form of favourable ratings in league tables) connected to compliance with quality assurance. However, to him, the rewards or drivers towards quality enhancement were "*difficult to locate*" (p. 1). Mathias believed that that there were some personal gains of professional satisfaction related to QE, nevertheless there were "*few career and status rewards*" (p. 1) connected to it. This, to Mathias, reflected the reality that institutional learning and teaching policies were increasingly prepared by professional administrators without consulting academic practitioners.

Mathias further argued that: "*In the politicised environment in which universities now operate, the rhetoric of goals, targets and strategies often gives way to the quick fix.*" (p. 2). He went on to say that this was understandable, given the changing external demands. However, this, according to him, significantly undermined reflection which is essential in the educational process.

Brown (2004) summarised the key assumptions for an effective quality assurance system as the following:

- *The underlying purpose must be improvement, not accountability.*
- *The regime must focus on what is necessary for quality improvement.*
- *The regime must bolster, not undermine, self-regulation.*
- *The arrangements must be meaningful to, and engage, all those involved.*
- *The arrangements must promote diversity and innovation.*
- *There must be adequate quality control (of the regime).*
- *There must be clear accountability (of the agency).*
- *There must be proper coordination with other regulators or would be regulators.*

(p. 162)

Considering the UK higher education example, Brown argued that, despite an enormous amount of effort invested into the UK higher education quality assurance, particularly after 1992, the procedures told very little about the actual quality of the UK higher education. According to Brown, this was because the effort has "*been focused on the wrong targets (comparative judgements of performance) when…*[it should have been targeted] *at what it is that assists quality improvement*." (p. 163).

Brown expressed a concern that there was a "*danger that institutions will come to see periodic external regulation as all the regulation that is needed, and/or that their internal procedures will simply mimic those of the external agency.*" (p. 163). He emphasized that rather than inventing new quality systems, there was a need to map the quality systems onto the existing academic structures and that activities ought to be better coordinated to prevent duplication.

Brown also expressed a concern that quality assurance may actually be detrimental to quality.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The concept of quality originates from the British manufacturing industry, where there was a need for standardisation from the beginning of the 1900s. Until 1915, Britain was the only country in the world to have a national standardisation system. Between 1916 and 1932, the number of standardisation organisations worldwide grew dramatically. Around 1917 the USA joined in and took the lead in the area of quality monitoring. After Second World War, as a part of an American effort to re-build Japan, quality movement was carried over to Japan, however in the 1960s it was brought back to the USA. In the early 1960s, quality was introduced to the government sector and to higher education in the USA.

In the 1980s, Britain became the leader in the quality movement again. It first introduced the British Standard BS 5750, which later became the international standard ISO 9000. In the early 1990s, quality in Britain spread from the industry and business into the public sector, such as the healthcare and higher education. Many particularly Western European countries soon followed the British example. In the Czech Republic, quality assurance in the form of a state-monitored system of accreditation of higher education was introduced in 1990.

Further, it was argued that quality is a complex, multi-dimensional issue and that its meaning is often difficult to articulate. Quality was defined in terms of: "*value for money*", "*fitness for purpose*", "*zero defects*", "*consistency*", "*transformative process*"

and other concepts. The approaches to higher education quality mandated through political agendas of governments have been critiqued as being one-dimensional, schematic and simplistic, and thus overlooking the issues of complexity, multi-dimensionality and also personal views of academics on quality. A majority of critiques of higher education quality were written by British authors, thus examples frequently involved British higher education.

The following chapter will focus more specifically on the developments of approaches to higher education quality in Britain (with particular focus on England) and the Czech Republic.

Chapter 3: Quality development in English and Czech higher education

Chapter 2 outlined the origins of quality monitoring in the British manufacturing industry. It further delineated the origins of quality assurance specifically in higher education, and also summarised the perspectives on and purposes of higher education quality assurance, including the critiques. Chapter 3 more specifically focuses on quality in British and Czech higher education systems.

3.1 QUALITY IN BRITISH HIGHER EDUCATION

Quality in British higher education has developed from a marginal issue to being of central concern in higher education.

Britain and many other countries worldwide started focusing on quality in higher education with an assumption that:

> *…for various reasons, the quality of higher education needs monitoring. At root, governments around the world [we]re looking for higher education to be more responsive, including:*
>
> - *making higher education more relevant to social and economic needs;*
> - *widening access to higher education;*
> - *expanding numbers, usually in the face of decreasing unit cost;*
> - *ensuring comparability of provision and procedures, within and between institutions…*
>
> *Quality has been used as a tool to ensure some compliance with these concerns.*
>
> (Harvey, 1998, p. 237)

Van der Wende and Westerheijden (2003) confirmed this by arguing that spontaneous involvement of higher education institutions in quality assurance without governmental "incentives" was rare.

Harvey (1998) pointed out that even though the funding, organisation, and degree of government control of higher education systems between countries vary, sometimes significantly, ,"*the rapid changes taking place in higher education are tending to lead to a convergence towards a dominant model for quality. This model is one of delegated accountability. Central to this process is the emphasis placed on quality as a vehicle for delivering policy requirements within available resources*" (p. 238).

According to Westerheijden et al (1994), Britain was the first European country to make quality an explicit issue on their political agenda, followed by France and the Netherlands. What was specific about the British model was that it built on their previous policies.

The development of the quality movement in British higher education, followed the introduction of the British quality standard (BS 5750) originally devised for British industries.

It needs to be noted that the British universities have been concerned about quality and standards since their very beginnings. However, until the 1980s, these concerns have been only subject to internal university debates (Green, 1994). Until the 1980s, the British government did not directly get involved in monitoring the activities of universities. The only sector of higher education under scrutiny on their objectives

and outcomes by evaluative bodies were the polytechnics and colleges of further education. These bodies were scrutinized by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) established in 1964, which was chartered by the British government to validate and award degrees and maintain national quality assurance standards, and this was also accompanied by an inspection from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI).

Westerheijden et al (1994) noted that in Britain "*more than anywhere, the explicitly political nature of the quality debate can be witnessed.*" (p. 23). Westerheijden et al also highlighted the instability of the British system which they assumed to be a result of "*continuous changes and adaptations to assessment methodologies*" (p. 23). Partly this might have been due to the growing differences between the English, Welsh and Scottish higher education systems.

According to Alderman (1996), the British government introduced quality on the agenda as a powerful political "*weapon*" to firstly,

> *bring about fundamental changes in the character of British higher education, replacing an elitist view of higher education (internalised accountability, knowledge for its own sake) with one oriented towards serving very practical and…utterly legitimate national ends – primarily the education of a skilled workforce.*
>
> (Alderman, 1996, p. 184)

The second reason was, as Alderman pointed out, to reassure the general public that standards of higher education were not slipping in an era of a massification of higher education, whilst spending per unit or per student has fallen.

Green (1994) further developed Alderman's view by summarising the key political reasons for quality becoming a concern for the British government, such as:

> *1. Rapid expansion of student numbers against a back cloth of public expenditure worries. [In the late 1980s and early 1990s participation in higher education more than doubled to 33 per cent, currently it is 40 per cent and it is targeted at 50 per cent by 2010 (Telford, Masson, 2005).]*
> *2. The general quest for better public services.*
> *3. Increasing competition within the educational "market" for resources and students.*
> *4. The tension between efficiency and quality…*
>
> (Green, p. 5)

Green (1994) further pointed out that the British government's quest to improve efficiency and quality in higher education was a part of the general attempt to improve public services. "*Institutions should not only be more efficient, they should also be more responsive to the needs of their customers, and accountable to the taxpayer.*" (p. 5).

Green explained that such a quest was particularly complicated for the reason that: "*The search for economy, efficiency and value for money assumes a degree of*

management totally foreign to the traditional democratic and collegiate culture of the universities." (p. 5).

Based on interviews with UK academics, Kogan et al (2000) summarised some of the concerns and general trends within the UK higher education in relation to the UK government's enhanced focus on quality. Kogan et al noted an increasing bureaucratisation of academic work and of quality in particular. Kogan et al reported that UK academics tended to perceive quality assessment as largely bureaucratic tasks predominantly focusing on form rather than substance. Such feelings were expressed particularly strongly in relation to the assessment of teaching, known as the teaching quality assessment (TQA). As a result, academics perceived these bureaucratic tasks as "*a diversion from real work*". (p. 179). Some indicated a greater efficiency in teaching, but noted a shift from the traditional British "*liberal education ideal*". (p. 180).

Kogan et al further observed that, from the very beginnings of the British government's increased focus on quality, there were well-developed systems for research evaluation within the British higher education system, but there was virtually no such equivalent for teaching, and that research remained to be the dominant focus in relation to quality assessment. Kogan et al also found that the fact that the research and teaching quality assessments were separated added even more tension to the demands put on academics regarding these two activities.

3.1.1 Key political steps introducing quality assurance into British higher education (with particular focus on England)

Table 3.1 below summarises the key UK government legislation introducing quality assurance into British higher education. Explanation of the key legislative steps will follow the table.

Table 3.1 Summary of the timeline of the key UK government steps introducing quality assurance into English higher education

Dates	**Names of documents**
1985	Jarratt Report
1985	Green Paper: *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*
1987	White Paper: *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*
1991	White Paper: *Higher Education: A New Framework*
1992	*Further and Higher Education Act*
1993	*Assessment of the Quality of Education*
1995	*Developing Quality Assurance in Partnership with the Institutions of Higher Education*
1996	Dearing Report: *Higher Education in the Learning Society*

The first clear efficiency statement related to higher education in Britain appeared in the 1985 Jarratt Report (CVCP, 1985). The report recommended that universities needed to achieve value for money, work towards clear objectives and develop performance indicators.

The UK government responded to the Jarratt Report by publishing the Green Paper of 1985 (DES, 1985), *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, which indicated that higher education should contribute more effectively to the improvement of the performance of the economy. In terms of accountability, the Paper suggested

that the universities needed to develop more transparent systems for monitoring and controlling quality. At that time, the UK government remained reluctant to get directly involved in the universities' affairs, as universities, unlike the polytechnics (being under local authority control), were highly autonomous.

The White Paper of 1987 (DES, 1987), *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, emphasised that higher education should play a greater role in educating more highly qualified workers and proposed to increase the participation rate of the 18-25 years of age cohort to 18 per cent. It suggested that academic standards and the quality of teaching in higher education ought to be judged primarily on the basis of students' achievements. Further, the Paper proposed performance indicators to measure efficiency and reconfirmed that the funding of research would be selective (Harvey, 2005).

In 1991, the White Paper (DES, 1991), *Higher Education: A New Framework*, proposed the end of what was referred to as the binary line (division of the UK higher education sector into universities, and polytechnics and colleges of further education), and the establishment of new funding councils for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It proposed that quality audit would be the responsibility of the institutions and quality assessment would be done by the funding councils (Kogan and Hanney, 2000).

Following from that, the funding councils introduced universal teaching inspection at the subject level. This was originally known as the teaching quality assessment (TQA), and in 1995 in England it was replaced by the subject review.

The White Paper of 1991 predicted that by the year 2000, one in three of all 18-19-year-olds would be in higher education.

Subsequently, the *Further and Higher Education Act and Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act* of 1992 established new funding councils for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Funding Councils were required to set up Quality Assessment Committees to assess quality in higher education. As a result, the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) was to be abolished. Polytechnics and some colleges of further education were granted degree awarding authority, and thus polytechnics (and some colleges of further education) and universities assumed equal university status and were brought under a single funding mechanism operated by the Higher Education Funding Councils [in the case of England, it was the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)].

Up until the present time, to distinguish between individual higher education institutions within the British higher education system, the tertiary institutions which were awarded a university title before 1992 are frequently referred to as the "*old*" universities, and institutions which gained a university title with the 1992 Act are referred to as the "*new*" universities or "*post-1992*" universities.

The 1992 Act "*introduced a 'dual' regime of (a) the assessment of the quality of the education provided by institutions*, [undertaken] *by the Funding Councils and (b) the audit of institutions' quality assurance arrangements,* [carried out] *by a body owned by and answerable to the institutions – (HEQC* [Higher Education Quality Council]*)*" (Brown, 2000, pp. 323-4).

The 1993 Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Circular 3/93, *Assessment of the Quality of Education*, outlined the purposes and methods of the teaching quality assessment (TQA) organised by its Quality Assessment Committee. It highlighted the significance of improvements in quality and that these would inform funding and rewards of excellence.

The 1995 HEFCE publication, *Developing Quality Assurance in Partnership with the Institutions of Higher Education*, responded to the UK Secretary of State's request for proposals to bring audit and assessment together. It proposed a formation of a single Quality Assurance Agency. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was established in 1997.

In 1996, in the run-up to the general elections, the Government commissioned an inquiry into higher education to "*depoliticise*" higher education issues. Among the key recommendations of the so-called *Dearing Report* (report resulting from the inquiry; chaired by Lord Dearing), titled *Higher Education in the Learning Society*, was further expansion of higher education and some radical changes in institutional and student funding (Kogan and Hanney, 2000).

3.1.2 Latest developments in quality assessment practices in England

Externally, quality of higher education institutions in England is "monitored" by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was established in 1997, as a result of the 1995 HEFCE publication, *Developing Quality*

Assurance in Partnership with the Institutions of Higher Education. From 1997 to 2001 the QAA inspected higher education institutions through subject-level reviews. According to Brown (2004), the universities perceived the subject reviews as a lack of trust on the part of the government, and they also, in many cases, viewed them as rather damaging to particular institutions. In 2001, universities joined in a successful call for a suspension of the QAA subject reviews (Brown, 2004). Subsequently, the QAA introduced an approach based on an institutional audit (Saarinen, 2005), which remains the current practice of the QAA. At present, the QAA is involved in a series of projects resulting in a number of publications aimed to assist higher education institutions in quality enhancement, and to provide them with more information concerning individual aspects of quality enhancement (QAA, 2007).

To further assist UK higher education institutions in quality enhancement, in 2004, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) was established as a joint initiative of the UK higher education sector, the funding bodies and the government. The HEA endeavours are targeted at the improvement of overall student experience, including through professional development of lecturers (HEA, 2008). The recent QAA projects and the establishment of the HEA signal a gradual move in focus towards quality enhancement in the UK higher education teaching.

The other major external quality "monitoring" aspect in the UK higher education is the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which, in England, is conducted by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) approximately every five years. It was originally introduced as a cost-cutting measure to oversee university spending on research. The RAE was created by the Chairman of the then University

Grants Committee (UGC), Sir Swinnerton-Dyer, who devised a mathematical formula to redistribute funding from the less research-active universities to the more research-active ones. This was initially intended as a short-term mechanism. However, the Government has immediately taken this over as a key element of the national policy. Since 1985, the RAE has become a re-current mechanism for the funding distribution and differentiation among the UK and English higher education institutions (Shattock, 2006). The rating scales have changed slightly since the first RAE in 1986. The next RAE is scheduled for 2008, and would appear to be an ongoing part of the UK higher education system.

Recently, another factor has featured on the agenda of the British government and of some higher education institutions – it was the so-called Bologna Process of the EU and its impacts on the British higher education and its quality (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2007 a, b). The main attributes of the Bologna Process will be explained in the last section of this chapter, Quality in Czech higher education. Despite the fact that the Bologna Process was regarded as important to the future development of British higher education, overall, many British higher education institutions remain sceptical about certain aspects of the Process (EUA, 2003; Shepherd, 2007; Lipsett, 2007).

In summary, this section has outlined some of the key political "manoeuvres" which led to the expansion of British higher education from an elite system to a mass system, and subsequently also to the focus on quality in higher education. The focus on quality in British higher education has continuously grown in significance in political terms since the mid-1980s. Further, the section has summarised the main

reasons for introducing quality assurance into the English higher education system. Finally, the section has reviewed the latest developments in the quality enhancement practices in the English higher education. The following section outlines the distinctions between the different university models found across Europe and the implications for quality in higher education.

3.2 QUALITY AND DIFFERENT UNIVERSITY CONCEPTS IN EUROPE

Following from the arguments concerning British higher education quality, Scott (1994) attempted to explain why quality has developed into such a significant issue in British higher education. He borrowed Gellert's model (Gellert, 1993) distinguishing "*three main university models within the European tradition – the 'research' model typified by the Humboldtian university in Germany, the 'professional' model found in France…*[and] *the 'personality' model characteristic of British – or…English – higher education.*" (Scott, 1994, p. 54).

Scott (1994) pointed out that:

> *Most European universities contain elements of all three, although in very different proportions. In the first of these models the emphasis is on the production of knowledge and so on training scientists; in the second it is on the formation of the professional cadres; and in the third on the development of personal attitudes and skills.*
>
> (p. 54)

And thus, he argued that:

> *the "personality" model is the most sensitive to cost reductions, because it depends for its effectiveness on close human interaction within a learning environment that transcends lectures and seminars and cannot easily be replaced by new teaching technologies. It demands more generous staff-student ratios than the other two models.*
>
> (p. 54)

This factor, according to Scott, explains why in the British higher education system quality has emerged as such a strong issue; as the British (or English) traditionally "*people-intensive*" learning environment is expensive to maintain.

The present Czech higher education system is closer to the so-called Humboldtian, German model of university. Cerych (1990) pointed out the fact that the Humboldtian notion of unity of teaching and research was influential in most Central and Eastern European countries, including the Czech Republic, before the Communist era. During the Communist era, the Czech university system followed the Soviet model of teaching (concentrated in universities) and research (carried out largely in separate institutions). After the fall of Communism, the Czech higher education system returned to the Humboldtian model of university (Cerych, 1990). Unlike the Anglo-American tradition of liberal education and focus on student development, the German (and later the Soviet) model emphasised received knowledge in the academic

discipline. The Czech higher education system followed the German and Soviet models at different times (Bateson and Taylor, 2004).

The following section explains the changes in the Czech higher education system in the transformation process after the political change-over in the then Czechoslovakia at the end of 1980s, with implications for higher education quality. Further, it outlines the method of quality evaluation and the reasons for introducing quality monitoring in Czech higher education. The section finally describes the recent trends in Czech higher education quality instigated by the so-called Bologna Process impacting on higher education systems all over Europe and beyond.

3.3 QUALITY IN CZECH HIGHER EDUCATION

The introduction of quality assurance mechanisms in the Czech Republic in the early 1990s was related to quite a different political and socio-economic situation from that of the United Kingdom and Western Europe in general. According to Van der Wende and Westerheijden (2003), among the main purposes of introducing quality assurance policies in Central and Eastern Europe [the Czech Republic being part of that region] were:

- Transformation of higher education curricula to rid them of the Marxist-Leninist ideology;
- Rapid expansion of higher education systems to accommodate the high surplus in demand for higher education (as a result of the past communist policies, but also related to the economic and other pressures of the current times);

- Much freer entry to the higher education market, including private higher education institutions;
- Retreat of the State from its former practice of strict central control, and thus higher education systems becoming highly decentralised (Van der Wende and Westerheijden, 2003).

Looking specifically at the Czech tertiary education system, the Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES) [a government-funded Czech institute focusing on research in higher education, established in 1991] in collaboration with the OECD summarised in their 2006 Report that the system:

> *has experienced a number of deep, dynamic changes and extensive development in the last fifteen years. From a strictly uniform, highly centralised and ideologically-bound system under the communist regime, it has changed into a much more diversified and decentralised system, with full academic freedom and self-governing bodies…*
>
> (CHES/OECD, 2006, p. 87)

Van der Wende and Westerheijden (2003) pointed out that the difference between the Western and Central/Eastern European quality assurance systems at the beginning of the 1990s was that the Western European countries have already transformed from elite into mass systems with some support from the State. Therefore, the issue of quality assurance was related more to improving efficiency of the systems. Whereas the Central and Eastern European countries were dealing with the issues of minimum quality at that time. Thus, a majority of Central and Eastern European countries

introduced state-controlled accreditation of all institutions and programmes by accreditation agencies.

There is another significant difference worth mentioning in relation to the issues of quality, and that is the fact that the Western European higher education systems went through a gradual transformation from elite to mass systems, whereas this transformation was rather more abrupt in the Central/Eastern European systems (File and Goedegebuure, 2003). According to File and Goedegebuure (2003), the Czech Republic has undergone the most rapid process of transformation among the Central/Eastern European countries. File and Goedegebuure (2003) further pointed out that the expansion of the Czech higher education sector was mostly accommodated by the public higher education institutions, but some of the growth was also absorbed by the so-called non-university higher education institutions and tertiary professional schools. (Note: The Czech higher education system is divided into university and non-university sectors.)

Despite the fact that the quality movement in Western Europe has been developing on the national level/s since at least the early 1990s, the significance of quality assurance, on the European (EU) level, was first officially encouraged in the Bologna Declaration through stating the significance of the "*promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance with a view to develop comparable criteria and methodologies*" (Bologna, 1999). The Prague Communique took this attempt even further in urging national quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions "*to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice*" (Prague Communique, 2001) in quality assurance (Rozsnyai, 2003). As

a result of the Bologna Declaration and the Prague Communique, prior to the Czech Republic joining the EU, the Czech Accreditation Commission [agency dealing with quality assurance issues in the Czech Republic] has broadened its quality assurance responsibilities. This indicated an increased attention paid to quality assurance issues.

The Czech Republic, alongside most other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, introduced a system of higher education evaluation in the form of accreditation. The Czech quality assurance system is partially based on the system of accreditation in the United States of America and partly on the evaluation approaches employed in Western Europe (Brennan at al, 1998).

Brennan et al (1998) highlighted that the Czech evaluation system was mandated through legislation, particularly by legislation granting tertiary institutions' autonomy and also legislation allowing the establishment of private universities. Brennan et al (1998) found that, as a result of over forty years of a political system that was providing methodological guidelines in all spheres of public life in a top-down manner, there was a resistance among Czech academics against introducing any control mechanisms, such as quality assurance, including the mechanism of self-evaluation.

Temple and Billing (2003) found the Czech quality assurance system (and also other Central and Eastern European quality assurance systems) not to be "robust" enough. They argued that the quality assurance agencies in this region (including the Czech Accreditation Commission) were initially introduced due to a concern about control rather than quality enhancement.

3.3.1 Establishment of the Czech Accreditation Agency and the process of accreditation in Czech higher education

The Czech Republic was the first of the Central and Eastern European countries to introduce quality evaluation through the 1990 Higher Education Act (Rozsnyai, 2003). The Czech Accreditation Commission was established by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in 1990 to carry out the regulatory and allocation roles on behalf of the Czech government in relation to all higher education institutions. It plays a formal advisory role to the Czech Government, however, it does not have any decision-making powers. The Czech Accreditation Commission was originally established largely due to an increased autonomy granted to higher education institutions, to maintain quality of the Czech higher education system. The Accreditation Commission evaluates/accredits all higher education institutions (including the private ones); it evaluates/accredits all study programmes (including doctoral programmes). It is responsible for the promotion of academic staff, and also evaluates research and other activities of all higher education institutions (Temple and Billing, 2003).

The requirements for individual accreditations are set out by the Accreditation Commission. The supporting materials for accreditation are sent by individual institutions to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports which then passes them to the Accreditation Commission. It is very rare that the Accreditation Commission would visit institutions for accreditation purposes. This happens only when any significant problems are found with a particular programme or an institution. It is also

very rare that tertiary programmes would not be accredited. Bachelors' and Masters' programmes are generally accredited for twice the standard length of the individual programme, and doctoral programmes can be accredited for a maximum of 10 years (Sebkova, 2007).

The Accreditation Commission is a member of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), it is also a member of the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and cooperates with similar bodies at the regional level (Stastna, 2001).

3.3.2 Key political steps introducing quality assurance into Czech higher education

The key Czech national policies and programmes which were aimed at monitoring and improving quality of Czech tertiary education are summarised in Table 3.2 below. Explanation of the key legislative steps will follow the table.

Table 3.2 Summary of the timeline of the key Czech government steps introducing quality assurance into Czech higher education (adapted from CHES/OECD, 2006)

Dates	Names of documents
1990	Act No 172/1990 on Higher Education Institutions (the Act of 1990)
1998	Act No 111/1998 on Higher Education Institutions (the New Act)
2000	Development Strategy of Tertiary Education 2000 – 2005
2000	Long-term Plan of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for 2000 – 2005
2000	Long-term Plans of Higher Education Institutions for 2000 – 2005
2001	Amendment No 147/2001 to the Act on Higher Education Institutions (2001 Amendment to the Act)
2001	White Paper: *National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic*
2002	Act No 130/2002 on the Support of Research and Development from Public Funds
2004 (updated in 2005)	Higher Education Reform Policy
May 2004 (ongoing in May 2008)	Evaluation of Quality in Higher Education Institutions; an ongoing project by the Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES)
2006	Long-term Plan of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for 2006 – 2010
2006	Long-term Plans of Higher Education Institutions for 2006 – 2010

The Higher Education Act of 1990 (referred to as *the Act*; came into effect 1 July 1990) restored academic rights, freedoms and extensive autonomy of Czech higher education institutions, following the political change-over in Czechoslovakia of 1989. Democratic internal mechanisms (including student participation in the decision-making processes), and institutional self-governance were re-established. An amendment on personnel policy was passed in 1993.

Since 1990, the state funding allocation to individual higher education institutions is arranged through an agreement between the Council of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is responsible for allocation of funding to higher education institutions. The latest practice is that the funding to individual higher education institutions is allocated according to an output formula (number of students times cost of study) (CHES, 2001).

The Act on Higher Education Institutions of 1998 (so-called *New Act*) enabled several key changes, such as:

- Significant institutional and programme diversification;
- Possibility of establishing private higher education institutions;
- Obligatory accreditation of all study programmes and the granting of new competencies to the Accreditation Commission (CHES/OECD, 2006).

The Higher Education Act of 1998 endorsed the Accreditation Commission in its current form but it also broadened its role. In 2005, the Accreditation Commission for

Tertiary Professional Schools was established. The 1998 Act dealt with the question of teaching capacities, and further modernisation of the structures and strategies of higher education institutions.

Another important change related to higher education studies was the introduction of the short-cycle study programmes (Bachelor's programmes). This meant the first step to diversification of higher education. *The Amendment of the Act of 2001* made diversification into three cycles of Czech higher education study (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral) obligatory. There is currently an ongoing debate concerning certain fields of study (such as medicine, teacher training and law) where breaking up the long-cycle Master's programmes has proven to be more complicated (CHES, 2001; CHES/OECD, 2006).

Further diversification of higher education institutions was enabled through introducing the opportunity of establishing private higher education institutions. The majority of state higher education institutions were transformed into public institutions. There are two remaining state higher education institutions (Military Academy and the Police Academy) run by the Ministries of Defence and Interior (CHES, 2001).

The New Act (of 1998) reflected the rapid developments in Czech higher education, changes in economic conditions, overall changes in the society, and the new demands on the harmonisation of higher education within the EU (despite the fact that the Czech Republic was not yet a member of the EU in 1998). The New Act came into effect on 1 January 1999 (CHES, 2001).

The 1998 Act introduced a requirement for all higher education institutions to carry out regular internal evaluations and to make the results public. However, as CHES (2001) pointed out, the framework provided by the Accreditation Commission on how to conduct internal evaluations and how to use the results was very loose. Thus, according to CHES (2001), the internal evaluations of different institutions vary widely in terms of quality.

CHES (2001) highlighted the fact that quality assurance and evaluations were still relatively new attributes of the Czech higher education. They also underlined the fact that, until 1990, quality was not evaluated, nor was it discussed, nevertheless high quality of higher education during the Communist era was professed.

The general goals of Czech education policy were outlined in *the National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic (White Paper) of 2001*. In response to the White Paper 2001, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports published a document called the *Development Strategy of Tertiary Education 2000 – 2005*, which summarised the goals for the Czech higher education until 2005 (CHES/OECD, 2006).

3.3.3 Latest developments in the area of higher education quality in the Czech Republic

According to Bastova et al (2004), in the last decade, a fairly significant and rapid increase in the number of higher education students in the Czech higher education

system was made possible through a corresponding increase in the number of higher education institutions and faculties, and enlargement of existing institutions. Bastova et al (2004) pointed out that the number of students had more than doubled between the academic years 2002/03 and 1989/90. However, they added that the demand still significantly outnumbered the supply.

The CHES and OECD (2006) Report stated that:

> *In order to comply with the legal obligations concerning quality assurance, higher education institutions are obliged to perform internal evaluation, though according to their own preferred guidelines and criteria, and [they are further obliged] to make the results public…*
>
> (CHES/OECD, 2006, p. 76)

However, the CHES and OECD (2006) Report highlighted that the developments in the internal evaluation among Czech higher education institutions have overall been rather unsatisfactory: ranging from cases of "*well-organised systems*" (such as implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model, ISO 9000 standards and well-prepared student surveys covering a wide range of issues) to only "*formally applied procedures of a non-systemic and short-lived nature*" (p. 76).

CHES/OECD (2006) further pointed out that students were considered an important stakeholder in quality assessment of Czech higher education. According to CHES/OECD, most Czech higher education institutions distribute evaluation surveys, where students can express their opinions on academic staff, quality of lectures and

other issues. However, CHES/OECD found that such student feedback was frequently not interconnected at the institutional level, and thus such surveys might not have had much impact on the institutional level. The CHES/OECD study findings were confirmed by a research study concerning the effectiveness of student quality evaluations surveys in Czech higher education institutions undertaken by the Czech Academic Centre for Student Activities (ACSA, 2007).

Overall, the CHES/OECD (2006) Report concluded that: "…*Czech higher education lacks a sophisticated internal evaluation system*" (p. 76).

File et al (2006) indicated that the Czech system of quality assurance in higher education through accreditation has a number of important strengths:

> *It is a mature system with widespread participation among Czech academics. The Accreditation Commission for Higher Education is able to undertake a regular and recurring review of programmes…*
>
> (p. 59)

Similarly to CHES/OECD (2006), File et al (2006) suggested that the Czech higher education institutions were beginning to develop a capacity for internal assessment, even though this development was very preliminary. At the same time, File et al (2006) highlighted a "*prevailing mistrust*" of quality assurance among many Czech higher education institutions, and that often institutions tended to adopt a purely declarative approach to complying with the requirement of internal evaluation. According to File et al, internal evaluation was often perceived as a burden by

institutions and academics, rather than an asset or a tool that ought to be embedded within the institutional practices.

Similarly to CHES/OECD (2006) and ACSA (2007), File et al (2006) also found that student evaluations of teaching were the primary instrument for internal quality evaluation in Czech higher education institutions, however the feedback mechanisms were frequently weak; thus the impact of these evaluations was often minimal.

CHES/OECD (2006), File et al (2006) and ACSA (2007) studies supported previous findings by Vasutova (2002). Vasutova stated that, even though the significance of the improvement of quality in Czech higher education was declared at the government and institutional levels (long-term strategies of higher education institutions and speeches of higher education leaders), higher education institutions were taking very limited practical steps towards quality improvement.

Apart from legislating accreditation and quality evaluation practices in higher education, the Czech government has also funded a quality enhancement project focusing on Czech higher education which is run by the Czech Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES). This is a three-stage project called *Evaluation of Quality in Higher Education Institutions*, which commenced in 2004. The overall aim of this project was to utilise knowledge and information on quality assurance in order to develop a methodology which would be applicable to the Czech higher education system, and to assist and guide Czech higher education institutions in the processes of quality evaluation and improvement (CHES, 2007). The project, to date, involved reviews of overseas literature on higher education quality and several pilot quality

evaluation studies of Czech higher education institutions. It was still in progress in May 2008 (CHES, 2007; Sebkova, 2007).

In 2002, the Czech Academic Centre for Student Activities (ACSA) was established to strengthen the role of the student in Czech higher education. The Centre was established at a Czech Technical University and is largely funded by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. In comparison to the endeavours of the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) aimed at enhancing student experience (as noted above), the ACSA activities are explicitly emancipationist, targeting the empowerment of Czech tertiary students. In 2006/2007, for instance, the ACSA carried out a study concerning the impact of student evaluation surveys in Czech higher education institutions. The aim of this study was to improve the effectiveness of utilization of student surveys in Czech higher education institutions. The ACSA also participates in the quality enhancement project run by the Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES) described above (ACSA, 2008).

In summary, the Czech Republic was the first of the Central and Eastern European countries to introduce the system of accreditation of higher education institutions in 1990. At present, accreditation remains the principal form of systematic evaluation of Czech tertiary institutions. The intensity and standard of internal quality enhancement among Czech tertiary institutions currently varies widely. Some Czech tertiary institutions conduct student surveys, nonetheless, the feedback loop mechanisms within these institutions was found to be weak in the majority of inspected higher education institutions (CHES/OECD, 2006; ACSA, 2007). To assist Czech higher education institutions in this matter, the Centre for Higher Education Studies in

cooperation with the Academic Centre for Student Activities are currently involved in a project aimed at providing the higher education institutions with information and guidance in quality evaluation and improvement.

3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Quality developed from a marginal to a central issue in higher education over the past decade or more. Britain was the first European country to make quality an explicit issue on the political agenda of higher education. Since the early 1990s, British higher education has undergone a number of changes in the quality monitoring regimes with perceived dominant focus on quality assurance.

In the Czech Republic, quality assurance (in the form of accreditation) was introduced in the early 1990s. In the early 1990s, similarly to other Central and Eastern European countries, the Czech tertiary system went through an extensive process of transformation from a system dominated by a Marxist-Leninist ideology to a much freer and autonomous system. This transformation was accompanied by a rapid process of growth of the tertiary system. The most significant concern in Czech higher education was related to safeguarding minimal standards of quality, compared to the focus on increasing efficiency of the system (as was the case in the UK and other Western European countries). The process of accreditation in Czech higher education is regarded as well-developed, however the quality enhancement efforts among Czech higher education institutions remain piecemeal.

Another instigating factor for an increased focus on quality assurance in Czech higher education was the Bologna Declaration of 1998, which placed quality of higher education among the key aims of the European Union. Despite the fact that the Bologna Process is increasingly regarded as important to the future development of British higher education, many British higher education institutions remain sceptical about particular aspects of the Process.

Arguably, a dominant focus on quality monitoring in both the English and Czech higher education systems prevails. It is maintained that there is a lack of academic voice in the current approaches to quality in English and Czech higher education. Investigating the experiences of individual academics in higher education quality, this thesis aims to highlight the significance of the issues of complexity, transformation and also the value of the academic voice in approaches to higher education quality.

The following chapter will outline the background and theoretical underpinnings of the narrative inquiry method employed in this research. It will explain the way in which narrative may be utilized as a research tool. The chapter will further focus on critical events as a special feature of the narrative inquiry method utilized in this study.

PART II: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 4: Narrative inquiry and critical events

This chapter provides a background to, and theoretical underpinnings of, narrative inquiry as a research method. It explains the way in which narrative can be employed as a research method. Further, the chapter clarifies the special features presented by the critical event narrative inquiry method, which is proposed as research method for this study of the area of higher education quality.

4.1 NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Over the last two decades, narrative has gained momentum as both a phenomenon and a method across a wide range of disciplines (from philosophy, education, theology and psychology to economics, medicine, biology and environmental science). Narrative inquiry is set in human stories of experience. It provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways in which humans experience the world depicted through their stories.

Narrative has depicted human experience and endeavours from ancient times. It records human experience through the construction and reconstruction of personal stories. It is well-suited to address issues of complexity and cultural and human centredness because of its capacity to record and retell events that have been of most influence on us. Such issues play a significant role in many areas of human activity, including higher education.

People make sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them. Stories are constantly being restructured in the light of new events, because stories do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives. Narrative allows researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness. It illustrates the temporal notion of experience, recognising that one's understanding of people and events changes.

Narrative inquiry is human-centred because it captures and analyses life stories. In doing this, it has the ability to document critical life events in an illuminating detail, and yet also reveal holistic views, which holds valuable potential for research. Stories reflect the fact that experience changes, and that understandings are continually developed, reshaped and retold, often informally. Powerful insights offered by stories have often been ignored, most likely because of the traditional predominance in research of the more scientific views. Yet the prominence of stories in our culture surrounds us in every facet of life, and much of our learning and understanding is oral-based. Narrative offers research a way to highlight those understandings often not revealed by traditional modes of inquiry (Herman, 1999, 2005; Riessman, 1993; Conle, 2000).

4.2 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Stories are one of the first forms of learning that a child encounters in life. Throughout life, stories shape and characterise the ways in which we interact with

people, society, and information. Stories form the "substance" of generations, history and culture. They reflect our individual journeys through life.

In spite of the fact that stories have depicted experience and endeavours of humans from ancient times, they only came to the fore of theoretical analyses in the 20th Century. The theoretical study of narrative originates in the field of literary theory. Throughout the 20th Century, there have been a number of schools of literary and linguistic theory in which narrative has been a major focus. However, the most influential of them were the Russian formalists (such as Skhlovskij, Propp, Tomasevskij, and Eichenbaum) in the 1920s, followed by the French structuralists (such as Todorov, Barthes, Bremond, and Genette) in the 1960s. At that time the theory of narrative, otherwise termed narratology, was becoming "fashionable", and was acknowledged as one of the standard disciplines of literary theory (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983; Sarbin, 1986; Herman, 2005).

The use of narrative inquiry has gradually gained momentum in recent decades. The "narrative turn", as it is sometimes referred to, was given an impulse by and has drawn particularly from the French structuralist theories of the 1960s. Since the early 1980s, narratology has become more enriched by adopting a wide range of theoretical perspectives, such as feminist, deconstructive, or psychoanalytical. From the early 1980s the narrative approach started becoming popular in a broadening range of disciplines, such as:

- history (White, 1981; Carr, 1986),
- psychology (Polkinghorne, 1988; Josselson, 1996),
- psychology, education and law (Bruner, 1986, 1987, 1990, 2000, 2002),

- education (Schon, 1983; Bell,1997; and Jalongo and Isenberg, 1995).

Connelly and Clandinin (1987, 1988, 1990, 2000) have been prominent in adapting narrative inquiry for educational purposes. Their work offers an introduction to the field to teachers and teacher educators. It can be argued that Connelly and Clandinin have pioneered narrative inquiry as a research method, and it appears that they have coined the term "*narrative inquiry*".

Even though the original methodological resources for narrative inquiry were provided by literary theory, there is currently no single narrative inquiry method, but rather a number of methods dispersed into individual disciplines. It is most likely because the individual narrative inquiry approaches have been impacted on by other theoretical underpinnings of the particular disciplines. Thus, it can be argued that, at present, there is no "readily" available unifying narrative inquiry methodological approach that would assist researchers attempting to employ a narrative inquiry approach across disciplines. Webster and Mertova (2007) have attempted to bridge this gap by outlining a critical event narrative inquiry approach, which they argued would be applicable in a wide range of disciplinal settings.

4.3 NARRATIVE AS A RESEARCH TOOL

Narrative inquiry is a human-centred research method, because it captures and analyses life stories. In doing so, it has the ability to document significant life events in an illuminating detail, and yet also reveal holistic views. There are qualities in which stories hold valuable potential for research. Powerful insights offered by stories have often been ignored, most likely because of the predominantly traditional

empirical focus in research. Yet the prominence of stories in many cultures appears in every facet of human lives, as much of our learning and understanding is oral-based. Most people enjoy a story. Therefore, narrative offers research a way to highlight understandings and issues often not revealed by traditional modes of inquiry (Henson, 1992; Webster, 1998; Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Narrative inquiry allows researchers to get an understanding of human experience, whereas quantitative research is typically looking for outcomes and frequently overlooks the impact of experience. Further, narrative inquiry attempts to capture the "whole story", whereas other (more traditional empirical) methods tend to communicate understandings of studied subjects or phenomena at certain points, but frequently omit the important "intervening" stages. Narrative inquiry studies problems as forms of story-telling involving characters in both personal and social stories. It requires going beyond the use of narrative as a rhetorical structure, to an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates.

A key contribution of narrative to research resides in the manner in which it frames the study of human experience. According to Jonassen (1997), research may be viewed (in narrative terms) as a constant construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories. Narrative can tap the social context or culture in which this construction takes place. Narrative is able to explore complex problems, through revealing the complexities of characters, relationships and settings.

Furthermore, in the context of research, what makes narratives noteworthy is their educational value. Unlike many of the stories occurring in other contexts, the stories that are read and heard in the teaching and learning context are usually intended to

assist in learning—either directly about the subject matter of instruction or alternatively, about the strengths or shortcomings of the teaching process itself. This fundamental link of narrative with teaching and learning as human activities directly points to its value as an educational research tool. However, the value of narrative is not only restricted to research on teaching and learning—it can be valuable to research in a wide range of other areas, such as medicine, science, economics, politics and law (Gough, 1994, 1995; Amsterdam and Bruner, 2000; Bruner, 2002).

Compared to traditional empirical methods, narrative research does not endeavour to produce any conclusions of certainty, but aims for its findings to be "*well-grounded*" and "*supportable*", focusing on the linguistic reality of human experience. Narrative research does not claim to represent the exact "*truth*", but rather aims for "*verisimilitude*" (appearance of truth or reality). As Karl Popper proposed, humans can at best demonstrate falsity of statements not their truth. Thus, conclusions of narrative research tend to be open-ended (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Polkinghorne (1988) pointed out the insufficiency of using statistical methods in seeking logical certainty of findings in social science research. He proposed that social sciences should aim at producing results which are "*believable*" and "*verisimilar*". He emphasised the fact that people often interpret statistical results to mean that the findings are important without considering "*the limited idea that the finding probably resulted from the chance drawing of sample elements from the population. In narrative research … a finding is significant if it is important.*" (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 176).

Polkinghorne further argued that in quantitative research "*reliability*" refers to the consistency and stability of the measuring instruments, whereas in narrative research, it usually refers to the strength of the data analysis, in which attention is directed to the "*trustworthiness*" of field notes and transcriptions of interviews. The goal of narrative analysis is to "*uncover the common themes or plots in the data. Analysis is carried out using hermeneutic techniques for noting underlying patterns across examples of stories.*" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 177).

Past research approaches to understanding the concept of practice have tended to follow a natural science model. This model separates theory and practice and risks misconception of the interrelationship between human action and practice by imposing external explanation and interpretation on the practitioner.

The recent increase in the use of narrative inquiry across disciplines stems from the realisation that the traditional empirical research methods cannot sufficiently address issues, such as, complexity, multiplicity of perspectives and human centredness. These issues can be more adequately addressed by narrative inquiry.

Yoder-Wise and Kowalski (2003), who drew on the field of nursing education, listed the key reasons for creating stories, such as:

- Looking for recurring themes,
- Looking for consequences,
- Looking for lessons,
- Looking for what worked,
- Looking for vulnerability,

- Building for future experiences, and
- Exploring other resources.

On the issue of the value of narrative in a broadening range of disciplines, Riessman (1993) highlighted that narrative does not sit neatly within the boundaries of any single scholarly field, but that it is inherently interdisciplinary. Riessman also pointed to the situatedness and interconnectedness of narratives. Individuals' narratives are situated not only within particular interactions but also within social, cultural and institutional discourses, which should not be omitted in their interpretations (Riessman, 1993).

Adler (1997), and Greenhalgh and Hurwitz (1999) underlined the value of narrative approaches as an enhanced form of medical history taking. They argued that narrative approaches can assist the physician in formulating more appropriate diagnoses and treatment options, as well as improving doctor–patient relationships. Hellman (2005) also acknowledged recent increases in illness narratives. Her explanation for this pointed to the humane side of the use of narrative approaches in medicine, but she also hinted at the issue of complexity.

> *…with patients, this [the increase in illness narrative] may be because they need to reclaim their illness from our increasingly complex, technological and hospital-based health systems, which consider all illness within a biomedical model.*
>
> (Hellman, 2005, p. 4)

Greenhalgh and Hurwitz (1999) further highlighted the holistic nature of the narrative method:

> *Understanding the narrative context of illness provides a framework for approaching a patient's problems holistically, as well as revealing diagnostic and therapeutic options.*
>
> (Greenhalgh and Hurwitz, 1999, p. 2)

Similarly, Amsterdam and Bruner (2000) drew attention to the significance of narrative in law.

> *Law lives on narrative …For one, the law is awash in storytelling. Clients tell stories to lawyers …As clients and lawyers talk, the client's story gets recast into plights and prospects …judges and jurors retell the stories to themselves or to each other in the form of instructions, deliberations, a verdict, a set of findings, or an opinion …This endless telling, casting and recasting is essential to the conduct of the law…*
>
> (Amsterdam and Bruner, 2000, p. 110)

Amsterdam and Bruner pointed out the key features of narrative as the following:

> *…narrative and its forms do not sit quietly for the theorist bent on portraying them in the abstract. They are too value-laden, too multipurpose, too mutable and sensitive to context … narratives do pose interesting questions even if they are unable to yield answers…*
>
> (Amsterdam and Bruner, 2000, p. 115)

Amsterdam and Bruner further argued that narrative is an essential part of human life in general.

> *It seems almost as if humankind is unable to get on without stories. Knowing how to tell them and to comprehend them may be a part of the human survival kit… there appears to be something surreptitiously value-laden or value-promoting about storytelling … Their [people's] stories give comfort, inspire, provide insight; they forewarn, betray, reveal, legitimize, convince…*
>
> (Amsterdam and Bruner, 2000, p. 114)

4.4 FEATURES OF NARRATIVE AS A RESEARCH METHOD

The feature common to all stories is their narrative structure. It gives them their capacity for illuminating real life situations. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) perceived *emplotment, character, scene, place, time* and *point of view* as the central components of narrative.

Narrative inquiry is concerned with exploring complexity from a human-centred perspective—the perspective of students, teachers, instructors, patients, employees or others involved in such a study. Data-gathering techniques which inform the narrative sketches (or critical events) may include surveys, observations, interviews, documentation and conversations that can enhance the time, scene and plot structures of the critical events. A narrative framework then provides a means of organising the plethora of data gathered through these techniques. The findings of such studies are

presented through the narrative in the forms of scene, plot, character and event sketches (Webster, 1998).

It is not the mere material connection of happenings to one individual, but the connected unfolding (which is referred to as the *plot*) that is important. *Plot* can be identified as a connection among elements, which is neither one of logical consequence nor of direct immediacy. The connection seems rather designed to move an understanding of a situation forward by developing or unfolding it. Thus, narrative is not required to be explanatory in the sense in which a scientific theory must show necessary connections between appearances. What can be demanded of a narrative is to display the way in which occurrences represent actions. The association to action is vital in the learning environment (Polkinghorne, 1988; Webster, 1998).

Further, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlighted major aspects around which narrative inquiry differs from the more traditional empirical research methods. These were: *temporality, context, people, action and certainty*. In narrative inquiry *temporality* is a central feature, therefore events or studied phenomena are not regarded as timeless. *Context* is ever present in narrative inquiry. It includes notions such as the temporal context, spatial context and the context of other people.

In narrative inquiry, any studied aspect or phenomenon necessarily reflects the *people* involved in it—researchers or research participants and others; whereas traditional empirical research methods frequently create an essentially "*people-free*" notion. Narrative inquiry interprets *actions* as expressions of research participants' narrative

histories. There is a sense of tentativeness in the narrative approach—the sense of doing "*one's best*" under the circumstances, bearing in mind that there may be other possible interpretations. There is no sense of *certainty* in narrative inquiry, as is the case in more empirical methods (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Traditional methods are significantly based on theory, whereas narrative research forms a seamless link between the theory and practice embodied in the inquiry, and literature is used to enable conversation between the theory and practice. Finally, narrative approach attempts to capture the "*multiplicity of voices*" involved in creating the plotlines of stories, as oppose to mainly one dominant voice employed by the more traditional approaches (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

4.5 CRITICAL EVENT APPROACH TO NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Critical event narrative inquiry perceives narrative as an event-driven tool of research. Identification of key events and the details surrounding these events are viewed as valuable in describing the matter under research. Specific events are key determinants in how life experiences are recalled. Human memory of past significant events may lead them to adopt strategies and processes to apply to new situations. Events are crucial parts of people's lives, and thus they may serve as a valuable and insightful tool for getting to the core of what the particular research focuses on. An event-driven approach to narrative research may also be a mechanism for dealing with large amounts of data (Webster, 1998).

Narrative inquiry approaches to human experience and the construction and reconstruction of personal stories blend in such a way that they highlight issues of complexity and human centredness that are of concern to many researchers. These may be recalled in the form of significant events that are instrumental in changing or influencing understanding (Webster, 1998; Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Stories often feature what may be called “critical events” and the “critical events” are the “means” by which the most important episodes are “transmitted” to listeners. In this way, critical events would have been communicated across generations and centuries. People distilled those events that were most important to them. This human distillation of the most important events in any story is essential to the use of critical events in a method of analysis of narratives.

As humans recall experiences, they unfold the story of those experiences. The story, in turn, is associated with a significant event. That event may carry with it a development of new understanding as a consequence of the particular experience. The use of a critical event approach to research does not exclude the use of other methods of analysis through narrative inquiry. The basis of these approaches is the use of a storyboard to structure the analysis of narratives (Webster, 1998; Webster and Mertova, 2007).

4.5.1 The concept of critical event

The notion of "critical events" originates in the field of aviation psychology. Critical events or incidents were first referred to by John Flanagan. During WWII, there was a high rate of pilot failure in training, which led Flanagan to develop an analytical method called "*critical incident technique*" (CIT). This was a technique where incidents of success and failure were retrospectively analysed to identify specific behaviours, which caused positive or negative outcomes. The first publication where Flanagan referred to the CIT was the *Psychological Bulletin* in 1954. He explained the CIT as a "*set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behaviour … to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles*" (Flanagan, 1954; cited in Fountain, 1999, p. 10).

"Critical incidents", as Flanagan perceived them, typically included three features: a description of the situation, an account of the actions or behaviour of the key player or players in the incident; and the outcome (Fountain, 1999). Flanagan further identified five steps involved in the CIT:

1. Determining the general aim of the study (i.e. statement of the topic under study);
2. Planning and specification of how the actual incidents will be collected;
3. Data collection (may be via interviews or observer reports);
4. Data analysis (via textual analysis or identification of themes); and
5. Interpreting and reporting of the requirements of the incident being studied (Byrne, 2001).

The technique has most frequently been used in organisational psychology, management (particularly human resources management), healthcare and related instruction.

The concept of "critical event" has been further utilised, for instance, by Woods (1993a, b) in relation to the teaching profession. According to Woods (1993a), an event becomes critical when it has the "*right mix of ingredients at the right time and in the right context*" (p. 102). A critical event told in a story reveals a change of understanding or worldview by the storyteller. An event may be regarded as critical if it has, for instance, impacted on the performance of the storyteller in a professional or work-related role, or if it has had a traumatic impact on the storyteller (either personally or professionally). However, it ought to be pointed out that there are degrees of criticality in relation to the impact of such a critical event, in terms of its severity, and also whether the impact may be perceived on a more individual or "collective" scale, and thus some of the above characteristics may be missing or appear only in a moderation with some critical events (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

To a large extent, what makes a critical event "critical" is the impact it has on the storyteller (Bohl, 1995). It almost always represents a change experience, and it can only be identified retrospectively. Thus, it is impossible to predict or plan to observe a critical event as might be the case in other research methods. It ought to be noted that an event that is less than critical can still have an impact on a person's performance and functioning (Wesbter, 1998).

A critical event cannot be planned or predicted. It is only in retrospect that an event can be perceived as critical for the storyteller. The longer the time that passes between the event and recall of the event, the more profound the impact of the event is suggested by the recall (Webster, 1998).

Such events can be characterised by a number of aspects, such as time, challenge and change. Over time, the mind refines and "disposes" of unnecessary details and retains those elements that have been of most changing and lasting value. The critical event will have challenged the storyteller's understanding or worldview. The event is likely to have changed their experience and understanding, informing future behaviour and understandings. Critical events may not necessarily be positive. Some critical events can be negative in impact (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Measor (1985) identified three kinds of critical events: *extrinsic*, *intrinsic* and *personal*. She related them to the teaching profession; however, they can also be associated with other professions. According to Measor:

- "*Extrinsic*" critical events can be caused by historical and political events.
- "*Intrinsic*" critical events occur within the natural progression of a career. For instance, in a teaching career she highlighted several critical periods, such as:
    1. entering the teaching profession
    2. first teaching practice

3. first 18 months
4. 3 years after taking the first job
5. mid-career moves and promotion
6. pre-retirement period.

- "*Personal*" critical events can be family events, illness, and similar (Measor, 1985).

Critical events are "critical" because of their impact and profound effect on whoever experiences them. Critical events almost always represent a change experience. They often bring about a radical change in the person, who has experienced them. This change experience can come about as a storyteller encounters some difficulty in integrating their idealised worldview with the reality of their experience. These events are unplanned, unanticipated and uncontrolled. To a researcher, the opportunity to experience such profound effects holistically is an avenue to making sense of complex and human-centred information (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Similar to Measor (1985), Woods (1993a) also viewed critical events in relation to teaching and learning. Woods maintained that they promote understanding in uncommonly accelerated ways and that they are critical for change. To Woods, critical events played an important preservation and confirmatory role.

Related to learning and teaching, Woods (1993a) considered critical events to be critical in four ways:

- *They may promote student learning in accelerated ways*—e.g. through students' attitudes towards learning, understanding of the self, relationships with others, acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. This learning involves a holistic change.
- *They may be critical for teacher development*—e.g. through pride in their work, and realisation of the self.
- *They may restore ideals and commitment in teachers*—critical events maintain a particular definition of reality and identity against the pressure of contrary forces. Critical events permit teachers to retain their ideals despite the assaults that might customarily be made on them. In a sense, they may act as a coping strategy.
- *They may boost teacher morale*—which can be critical for the profession as a whole.

Woods (1993a) maintained that critical events have a neat and logical kind of symmetry, and that there is a distinctive underlying pattern in them, even though, on the surface, this might not be apparent. To go beyond surface appearance requires a methodology that is sensitive to the complexities of human understanding and learning. Discovery of deeper issues requires a more holistic approach that can interface with the chaotic and fuzzy realities of human existence (Woods, 1993a).

Critical events are typically identified through the impact on the storyteller. The level of criticality becomes evident as the story is told. Critical events related to a particular professional practice have the following qualities:

- Occur in a particular context of professional practice (within particular organisational structure);
- Impact on people involved;
- Have frequently life-changing consequence;
- Are unplanned and unanticipated;
- May reveal patterns of well-defined stages;
- Are only identified after the event;
- May be intensely personal with strong emotional involvement (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

4.5.2 Critical, like and other events

According to the degree of significance and unique characteristics, "critical events" can be identified as *critical, like* and *other* events. Stories that are collected through narrative inquiry interviews are then analysed and identified as *critical*, *like* and *other* events (Webster, 1998).

A *critical* event is an event which has been selected because of its unique, illustrative and confirmatory nature in relation to the studied phenomenon. An event which has a similar level of significance as a *critical* event, however, is not as unique as the critical event, and which further illustrates, confirms and/or repeats the experience of

the critical event is referred to as a *like* event. A review of the like events is useful in confirming and/or broadening issues arising from the critical event (Webster, 1998).

Further, confirmatory event/s that may or may not take place at the same time as the *critical* and/or *like* events are referred to as *other* event/s. Typically, such events relate to other background information which may reveal the same or related issues. These *other* events are interwoven in the analysis of the *critical* and *like* events (Webster, 1998). *Critical*, *like* and *other* events may occur within the narrative of a single interview, but more often would occur across a number of different interviews.

Distinguishing *critical*, *like* and *other* events provides a way of approaching the complexity and extent of data that might be collected using a qualitative research method. A common question in qualitative research is how to manage the amount of collected data. The identification and distinguishing of individual events provides one way to assist the researcher in this (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

4.6 CRITICAL EVENT NARRATIVE INQUIRY FRAMEWORK

A critical event narrative inquiry method employed in this thesis builds partly on the model suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and also further develops and refines the method employed by Webster (1998) and later outlined by Webster and Mertova (2007). The method is applied to the study of the area of quality in higher education. This method consists of four components: *processes, negotiation, risks and results.* Figure 4.1 below is a schematic outline of the critical event narrative inquiry method. Descriptions of the individual components will follow.

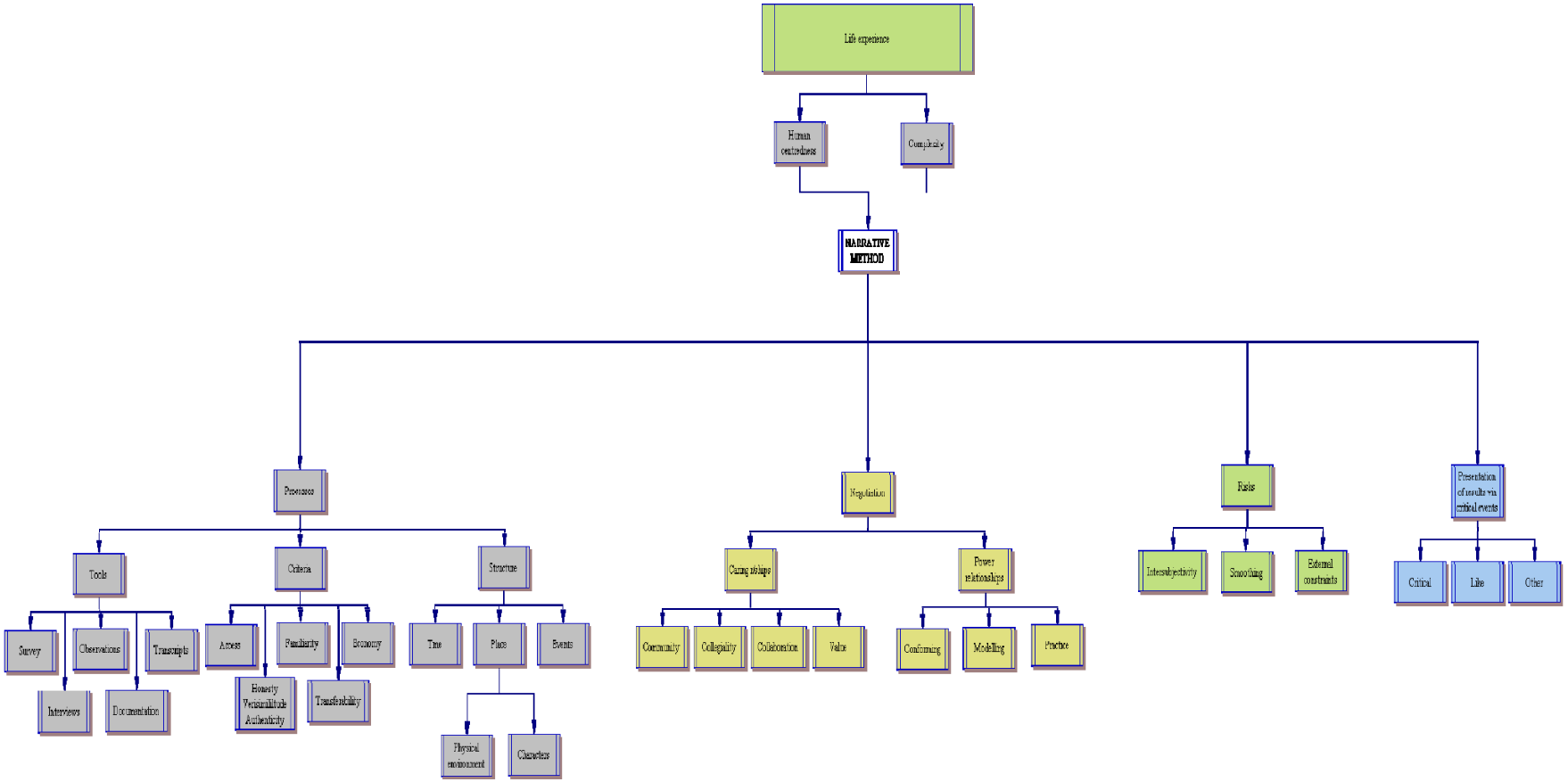

***Figure 4.1 Framework for narrative inquiry research methodology*; (adapted from Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 105).**

While some of the categories in narrative inquiry are commonly used as general research terms, these terms are defined differently within the context of narrative. *Processes* (as outlined in figure 4.2 below) provide a starting point by setting the scene and the context of the study. They consist of *structure* (*time, place and events*), *criteria* and *tools*. *Negotiation* describes the pathway of communication within the research, between the "characters" and the contexts in which the study is set. The *structure* provides a means of making sense of *time, place and events*. The *tools* allow for documenting the aspects of complexity and human centredness. Dimensions of *negotiation* in the study might involve development of effective working relationships with others in the research setting who, for instance, facilitated access to information, resources, documentation and access to facilities (Webster, 1998; Webster and Mertova, 2007).

4.6.1 Processes

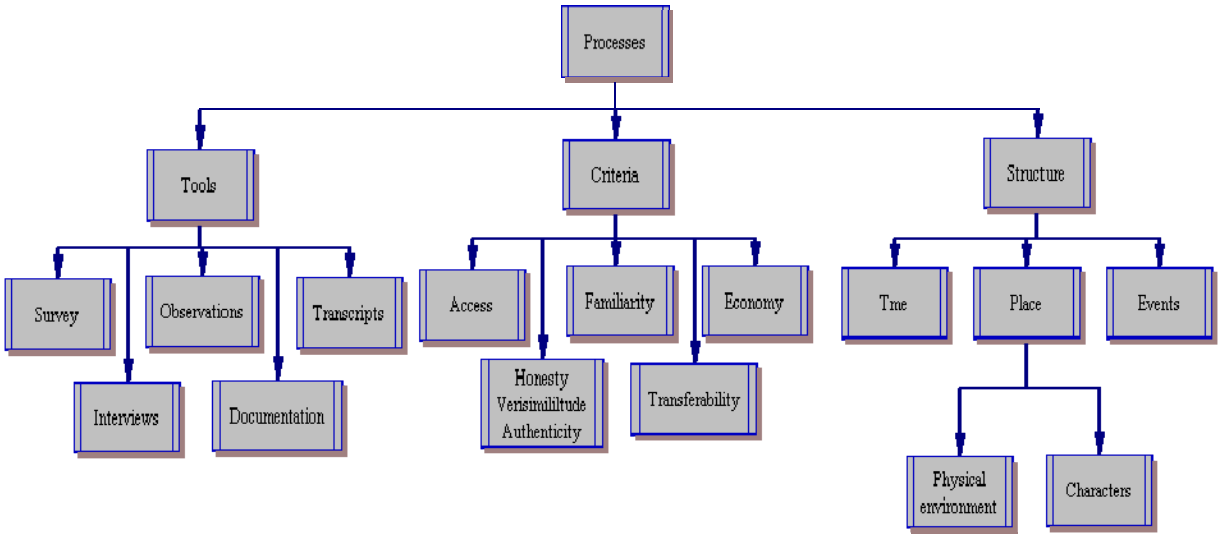

Figure 4.2 Outline of narrative inquiry **Processes; (adapted from Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 106).**

Structure

The components of *structure* (*time, place and events*) create a framework typically applied to literary analyses (often these are referred to as time, scene and plot), however, they are also applied in narrative inquiry. Time, place and events provide the structure to view the processes that inform issues of complexity in the research story. They provide a rich and informative background for readers of the research.

Time is essential to explaining the *events*. Carr (1986) associated time-related structures to dimensions of human experience, including significance, intention and value.

The *place* is a descriptive account of the research setting. It may include a description of the physical layout and the locations of various activities that are undertaken by participants in the study. Its purpose is essentially to familiarise the reader with the context of the research. There may be the need to include some comment on "behind the scenes" events, as often the functioning of a scene is reliant on a number of supports and infrastructures. However, it would appear that before any of the processes can be understood, the scene needs to be set. Any research report has to provide its readers with an exploration or description of the scene from which the narrative is drawn. Welty (1979) described time and place as essential to narrative and "*as informing as an old gossip*" (p. 163).

The unfolding of *events* is described in relation to the data collected, and the processes undertaken in the conduct of the study. Other aspects of the events may describe the context of the study, the literature, the research questions and the interrelationship between all of these aspects.

Tools

Narrative inquiry may require a mix of resources and data collection techniques such as, observation, surveys, documentation (including curriculum and policies), interviews and transcripts. Discussion of the tools and collection techniques and schedules provides a framework for the data analysis. The discussion sets the logic behind the record-keeping of the collected data and is instrumental to any reader's understanding of how to trace any specific parts of the data collected. Not all of these instruments will be used within the scope of the current study.

Criteria

Some of the *criteria* which Polkinghorne (1988), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Bruner (2002) found as more appropriate for judging narrative research include *access, trustworthiness* and *transferability* of the research. The more traditional empirical research employs criteria such as "validity" and "reliability". Such criteria have, however, been found unsuitable for the purposes of narrative research.

One of the significant implications of any narrative research is that there is a need for a well-referenced trail available for any reader to access the results and stories collected by the researcher/s. This essentially requires an indexing system that will allow any interested reader to locate a place or section of text within any transcripts or records provided by the researcher/s.

Access

Access may be viewed in two ways. Firstly, the research should be accessible to the readers, i.e. the readers should understand the cultural context and process of construction of knowledge between the researcher/s and participants of the study. Secondly, the research notes, transcripts and data on which the researcher/s based their findings should be available to the audience (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the sense that what is reported is in fact realistic and reliable. Firstly, the research and reporting of stories and critical events should resonate with the experience of the researcher/s. Secondly, the reporting should appear to have a level of plausibility.

Regarding trustworthiness or reliability of narrative research, Bruner made an insightful comment:

> *Unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve "verisimilitude". Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and "narrative necessity" rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness, although ironically we have no compunction about calling stories true or false.*
>
> (Bruner, 1991, pp. 4–5)

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested *transferability* as an "*analog to external validity*". Transferability in narrative inquiry thus implies that the researcher provides a sufficient base to permit a person contemplating application in another setting to make the needed comparisons of similarity.

4.6.2 Negotiation

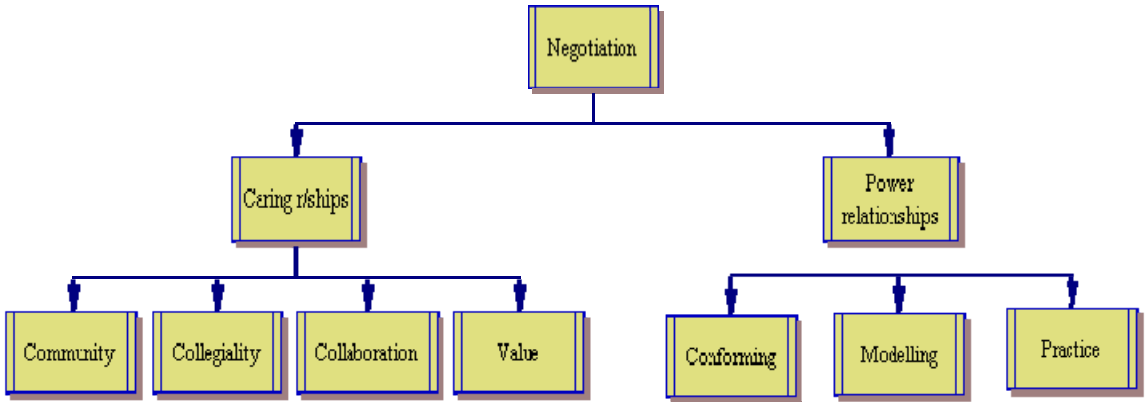

Figure 4.3 Outline of narrative inquiry **Negotiation; (adapted from Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 108).**

Negotiation (as outlined in Figure 4.3 above) involves dealing with relationships. Within the research context Webster and Mertova (2007) identified these as: caring relationships and power relationships. *Caring relationships* in the research context refer to those relationships that involve elements of collegiality, community and collaboration or are valued by those participating in the research. *Power relationships* are those relationships that involve a chain of authority and the need to conform to it.

4.6.3 Risks

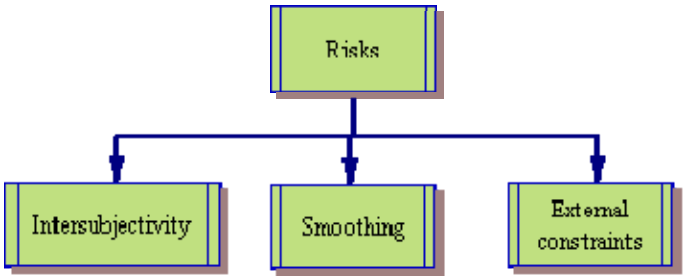

Figure 4.4 Outline of narrative inquiry **Risks; (adapted from Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 108).**

In establishing the integrity of the methodology of narrative inquiry, the benefits of narrative cannot be viewed without due consideration of the *risks* involved (as outlined in Figure 4.4 above). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), *intersubjectivity* and *smoothing* were two important constraints of the narrative inquiry method. *Intersubjectivity* is the easy slipping into a commitment to the whole narrative plot and the researcher's role in it, without any appropriate reflection and analysis. *Smoothing* is the tendency to invoke a positive result regardless of the indications of the data.

As well as the risks that are intrinsic to the research approach, there are *external risks*, including those imposed by the constraints of the culture or the operational context of the study, such as sensitivities to times that discussions can be arranged with research participants (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Another constraint can be a difficulty in gathering data in a way that does not interfere with the participants' conduct of work and other engagements, and possibly extremely tight scheduling of research sessions (Webster, 1998).

4.6.4 Results

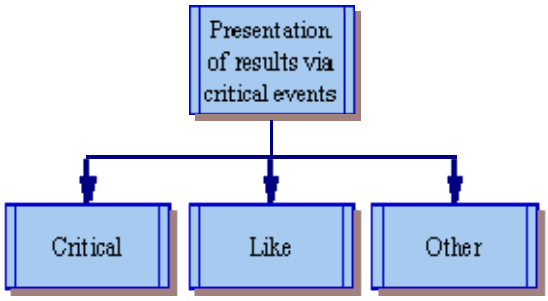

Figure 4.5 Outline of narrative inquiry **Results; (adapted from Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 109).**

Results (as outlined in Figure 4.5 above) need to be described in a way that would allow a reader to revisit extracts of collected stories, to enable them to draw their own conclusions and facilitate understanding of the research data. It was proposed that a critical event approach to presenting data has substantial benefits for research using a narrative approach (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Such an approach overcomes the many difficulties associated with the management of large data sets. A critical event narrative inquiry approach allows a "*mind filter*" to influence the reporting of the data according to their impact and importance to the storyteller (Webster, 1998).

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Over the last two decades, narrative has gained momentum as both a phenomenon and a method across a wide range of disciplines (from philosophy, education, and psychology to economics, medicine, and biology). Narrative is well-suited to address issues of complexity and cultural and human centredness, because of its capacity to record and retell events that have been of most influence on individuals.

Narrative inquiry is set in human stories of experience. It provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories. Narrative allows researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness. Narrative illustrates the temporal notion of experience, recognising that one's understanding of people and events changes. Narrative offers research a way to highlight those understandings often not revealed by traditional modes of inquiry.

It can be argued that Connelly and Clandinin pioneered narrative inquiry as a research method, and it appears that they have also coined the term "*narrative inquiry*". Narrative inquiry is concerned with exploring complexity from a human-centred perspective—the perspective of students, teachers, instructors, patients, employees or others involved in such a study. Narrative inquiry differs from traditional research methods particularly in its treatment of the aspects of temporality, context, people, action and certainty.

A critical event narrative inquiry method regards narrative as an event-driven tool of research. Identification of key events, and the details surrounding these events, is valuable in describing the matter under research. Human memory of past significant events may lead individuals to adopt strategies and processes to apply to new situations. Events are crucial parts of people's lives, and thus they may serve as a valuable and insightful tool for getting to the core of what the particular research focuses on. An event-driven approach to narrative research may also be a mechanism for dealing with large amounts of data. This research applies and further develops a critical event narrative inquiry method to investigate the area of quality in two higher education systems.

The following chapter will outline the way in which the critical event narrative inquiry is applied to the study of higher education quality of two different educational systems (English and Czech). The chapter will also provide a detailed description and explanation of the whole process of conducting the research study of higher education quality, including a description of the interview process.

Chapter 5: Applying the methodology

Chapter 5 explains the application of the critical event narrative inquiry research method to an investigation of higher education quality in two different educational systems (English and Czech). The chapter further describes and explains the whole process of conducting the research study of higher education quality, including the interview process.

5.1 APPROACH TO THE STUDY

Narrative inquiry is not a completely new method; it has existed in various forms in a range of disciplines for more than two decades. However, the various narrative inquiry approaches have been quite "disjointed", embedded in the particular disciplines where they have been applied. Webster and Mertova (2007) outlined a critical event narrative inquiry methodology, which, they argued, may be utilised in a wide range of disciplines. The methodology was employed in its previous iteration by Webster (1998) in a study of the area of air traffic control. The present study of higher education quality further develops and refines the critical event narrative inquiry method in the area of higher education quality.

"*Critical events*" were elicited through interviews of individuals dealing with the area of quality development in higher education. The researcher anticipated that the eliciting of "critical events" through interviews would uncover some important aspects of quality development which cannot be revealed through using the more traditional empirical methods of inquiry. Employing the critical event narrative

inquiry approach, the investigator aimed to highlight important aspects of higher education quality and thus assist the improvement of the practice of quality development in higher education institutions.

5.2 CRITICAL EVENT NARRATIVE INQUIRY METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK: HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

The present study further refines and adopts the critical event narrative inquiry method (described in the Chapter 4) to suit an investigation of the area of quality in higher education. The refined methodology applied to the area of higher education quality consists of four components: *processes, negotiation, risks* and *results*, as outlined in Figure 5.1 below. These components have been adapted to suit the current study.

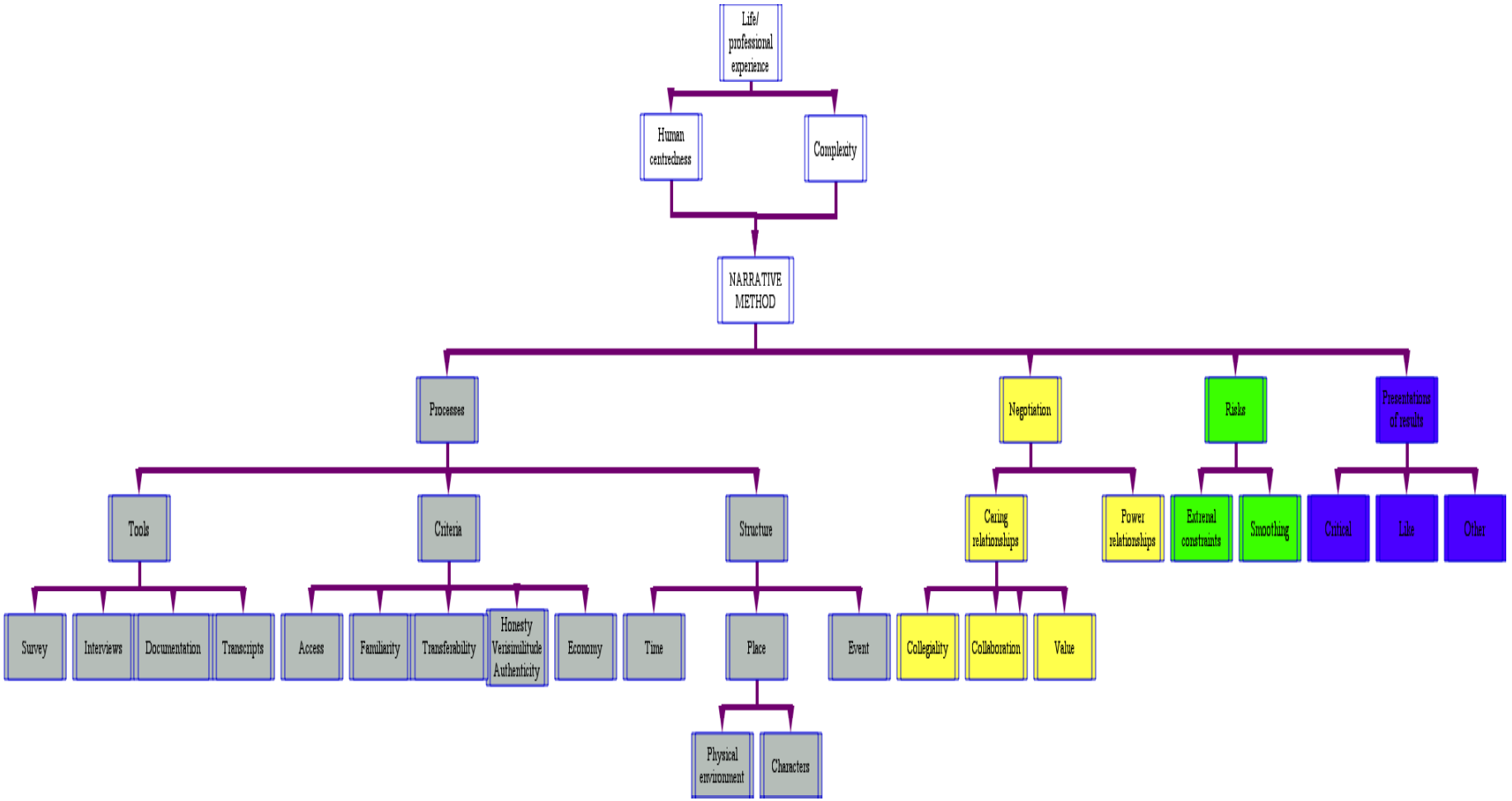

Figure 5.1 Framework for critical event narrative inquiry research in higher education quality

The following sub-sections explain how the individual critical event narrative methodology components (described in the Chapter 4) are adapted to suit the current study of higher education quality.

5.2.1 Processes

Processes assist in setting the scene and context of the study. They consist of *structure* (*time, place and events*), *criteria* and *tools*, as outlined in Figure 5.2 below.

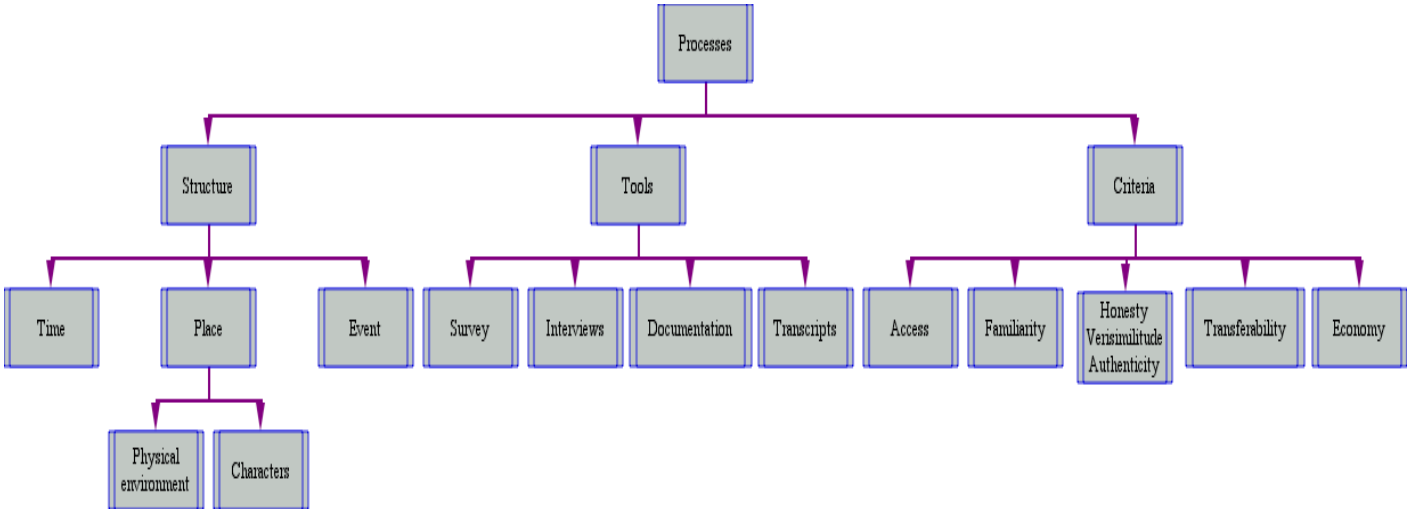

Figure 5.2 Outline of critical event narrative inquiry in higher education quality: **Processes**

Structure

Time, place and events provide the overall *structure* to view the processes that inform issues of complexity in the research story. They provide a rich and informative background for readers of the research.

Time is essential to explaining the *events* in professional and often also personal lives which impact on professional practice (in this case of academics and higher education leaders). Time in narrative inquiry is a significant component which assists in clarifying human experience, including significance, intention and value. Focusing on *critical*, *like* and *other events*, the present study will highlight the ways in which past experiences may significantly impact on present and future practices. In this respect, the study treated experiences as moving, changing and shaping "objects", rather than treating them as static, impacting on the individual and their practices in just one particular point in time. Therefore, the significance of *time* in this study was considered particularly in relation to the events described by academics and higher education leaders.

The stories of *critical*, *like* and *other events* were collected during a period of 14 months from April 2006 to June 2007 (the exact timeframe is provided in Table 5.2 below.

The *place* refers to a descriptive account of the research setting. Its purpose is essentially to familiarise the reader with the context of the research. There may be the need to include some comment on "behind the scenes" events, as often a *place* is

reliant on a number of supports and infrastructures. However, this was not the case in the present study.

If *place* is taken in broader terms, the present research was undertaken within the domain of higher education quality. The domain of higher education quality was outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

In more specific terms, this study considered three further types of place: geographical focus – the research focused on two different higher education systems (England and the Czech Republic), disciplinal focus – the research was undertaken within the areas of social sciences and humanities, and immediate location of the individual interviews. The two different higher education systems (English and Czech) were described in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The significance of the disciplinal focus of this study could only be appreciated, if the outcomes of the present study were compared to outcomes of a similar study undertaken in other disciplines. However, this was not within the scope of the present study.
The immediate locations where interviews took place will not be described in detail in this study, as they did not have any significant impact on the outcomes of the individual interviews.

Identification of the *events* represented the most crucial part of the critical event narrative inquiry employed in this study. In particular, the critical, like and other events focused on significant aspects in the area of quality in professional practice of academics and higher education leaders.

Tools

Tools, in the context of a narrative inquiry, allow for documenting the aspects of complexity and human and cultural centredness. Narrative inquiry may require a mix of tools and data collection techniques. This study employed documentation review, face-to-face and phone interviews (and full transcripts of these interviews) and surveys of interview participants (to provide biographical data).

Criteria

Some of the *criteria*, which Polkinghorne (1988), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Bruner (2002) found to be more appropriate for judging narrative research, include *access, trustworthiness* and *transferability* of research. One of the significant implications of any narrative research is that there is a need for a well-referenced trail available to any reader to access the results and stories collected by the researcher/s. This study collated the transcribed interviews of academics and higher education leaders using an indexing system that will allow any interested reader to locate a place or section within the transcripts that they might be interested in reading more closely. The indexing system will be explained in detail in Chapters 7 and 8, which contain the analyses of the interview data.

Access

This study perceived access in two ways. Firstly, the research should be accessible to the readers, i.e. the readers should understand the cultural context and process of construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants of the study. Secondly, the research notes, transcripts and data on which the researcher based their findings should be available to the readers. The cultural context and differences

between the Czech and English higher education systems were clarified in Chapter 3 of this thesis. In Chapter 6 of this thesis, the researcher will describe the context of the individual interviews and will further clarify any cultural issues which might be considered inaccessible to the reader.

The research interview transcripts were collated and filed for future reference, if required.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness provides the sense that what is reported is realistic and reliable. The research and reporting of stories and critical events should resonate with the experience of the researcher. Further, the reporting should appear to have a level of plausibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985), Miles and Huberman 1994), and Denzin and Lincoln (2005) highlighted the value of triangulation in qualitative research. To achieve validity and trustworthiness, this study employed three forms of triangulation. Triangulation in this study was firstly provided by multiple sources of data. These multiple sources of data consisted of academic literature review, interviews with academics and higher education leaders, other official documentation concerning higher education quality published by universities, governments and other organisations and also newspaper articles. The interviews with academics and higher education leaders were transcribed and the trustworthiness of the transcriptions was verified with the interview participants (the second form of triangulation). The third form of triangulation of the study was carried out through verification of the levels of criticality of the *critical*, *like* and *other events* identified in the stories of the academics and higher education leaders. The first form of verification was provided by the interviewees, who frequently highlighted events as *critical*. The second form

of verification was undertaken through evaluation of an event against the criteria of criticality (outlined in Chapter 4, and further summarised in Chapter 6).The level of criticality of the individual events was also confirmed by two other researchers (apart from the thesis author). Finally, the identification of individual events was further reinforced by other *critical*, *like* and *other events* identified in the stories of academics and higher education leaders.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed *transferability* as an "*analog to external validity*". Transferability in narrative inquiry thus implies that the researcher provides a sufficient base to the application of the methodology so that a person contemplating employing the methodology in another setting could make the necessary comparisons of similarity. This thesis argues that the critical event narrative inquiry method is suitable for the study of higher education quality in England and the Czech Republic. It further proposes the methodology as suitable for investigation of the area of quality in other higher education systems. Other suggestions for further application of the critical event narrative inquiry methodology are made in Chapter 9 of this thesis (Section 9.6.1 "Further Research").

It is also argued that the critical event narrative inquiry methodology may be suitable for investigation of other settings, different from higher education, where complex, human-centred and/or culture-centred issues are assumed. Therefore, this thesis attempts to describe the critical event narrative inquiry methodology and its application in the area of higher education quality in such a manner so that it can

provide guidance for other researchers who may be contemplating using the methodology in similar or different research settings.

5.2.2 Negotiation

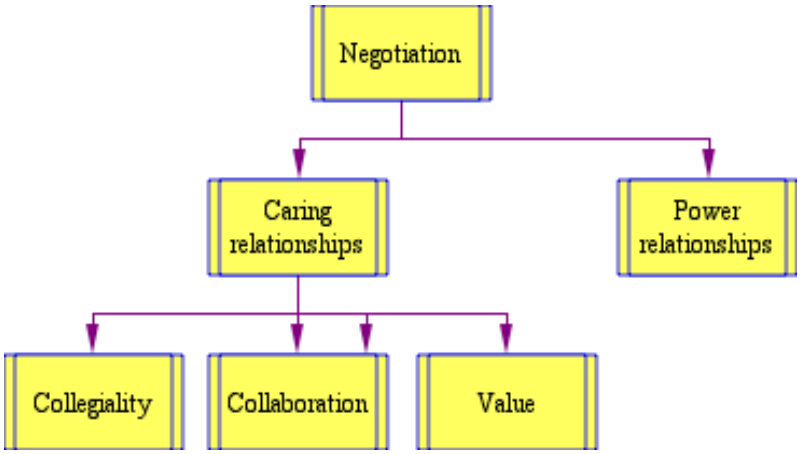

Figure 5.3 Outline of critical event narrative inquiry in higher education quality: **Negotiation**

Negotiation (as outlined in Figure 5.3 above) describes the pathways of communication within the research, between the "characters" (researcher, interview participants and others) and the context in which the study is set. It involves dealing with relationships. Webster and Mertova (2007) identified two types of relationships in research context: caring relationships and power relationships.

The present study involved direct communication between the author of the thesis and the interview participants. All the interviews and their preparation stages were undertaken in a collegial and collaborative manner, therefore this study identified *caring relationships*. The researcher did not uncover any *power relationships* that impacted on the study.

5.2.3 Risks

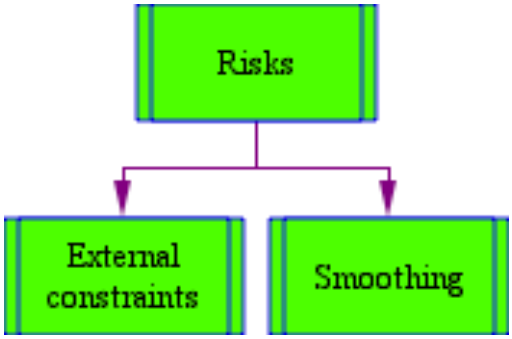

Figure 5.4 Outline of critical event narrative inquiry in higher education quality: **Risks**

In establishing the integrity of the methodology of critical event narrative inquiry, the benefits of narrative cannot be viewed without due consideration of the *risks* involved (as outlined in Figure 5.4 above).

Smoothing and *external constraints* highlighted by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as potential risks in using narrative inquiry method were also identified as possible risks in the present study. However, having carried out the study, the researcher did not become aware of any, for instance, cultural issues or issues concerning the operational context of the study that would have interfered with the participants' conduct of their work. The researcher was conscious of the lack of time available to most of the interview participants, thus provisions were made for arranging the interviews for periods suitable to the individuals and the researcher also attempted not to exceed the timeframe of 45 minutes when conducting the interviews.

5.2.4 Results

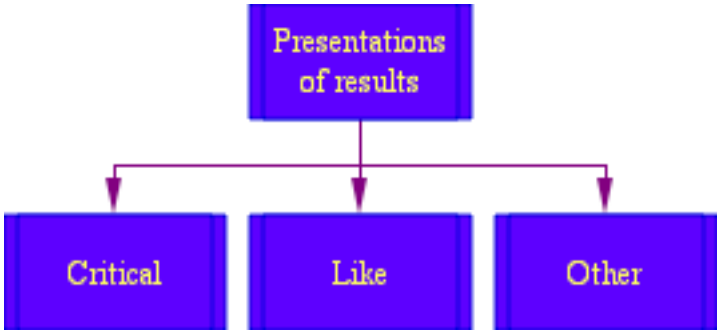

Figure 5.5 Outline of critical event narrative inquiry in higher education quality: **Results**

Results (as outlined in Figure 5.5 above) of this study will be described in a way that would allow a reader to revisit extracts of collected stories, to enable them to draw their own conclusions and facilitate understanding of the research data. The current study will present the results in the form of *critical*, *like* and *other events*.

5.3 RESEARCH COMPOSITION: OVERALL RESEARCH DESIGN

The previous section explained the way in which individual components of the critical event narrative inquiry methodology were adapted in the present study of higher education quality.

This section outlines the overall research design of the study. The description is carried out chronologically to reflect the way in which the researcher's thinking and preparation processes for the study evolved, including the actual conduct of the interviews and the data analysis stage. This section also contains further explanations

and description of the way in which the critical event narrative inquiry methodology was adapted to suit the study of higher education quality.

5.3.1 Place

Geographical focus

The original intention of this study was to examine higher education quality in the UK, Australia and the Czech Republic. The choice of these higher education systems was influenced by the fact that the author of the thesis became aware of the issues of quality in the context of the Australian higher education system. The choice of the UK higher education system was led by knowledge that the UK was one of the first countries in the world, and certainly the first in Europe (Westerheijden at al, 1994), to introduce formal quality assurance systems into higher education.

The researcher elected the Czech higher education as a system culturally different from the Anglo-Saxon UK and Australian higher education systems. Historically, the Czech higher education system has most significantly been impacted on by the German higher education system and its so-called Humboldtian tradition (Rozsnyai, 2003; File et al, 2006) of "*the unity of teaching and research in the achievement of education*" (File and Goedegebuure, 2003, p. 27). The differences between the Czech and English (or more broadly British) higher education systems were explained in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Another significantly different aspect of the Czech higher education system is the fact that it had been under the Communist rule for almost half a century, which has also considerably affected its development (File and Goedegebuure, 2003).

Realising the complexity and extent of the study of the area of quality of three different higher education systems, against the limited time and resources available for the investigation, the researcher first decided to limit the number of studied higher education systems to the UK and the Czech Republic.

Following the interviews in the pilot stage undertaken in Australia and the UK, the scope of the investigation was further refined to involve only the English and Czech higher education systems. This decision was made through further realisation of the limitations of time and resources, considering that the UK higher education system incorporates also the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish higher education systems, which all have their own specifics in relation to the English higher education system (Tapper, 2007), and considering the additional geographical distances involved in undertaking such an investigation.

Nevertheless, the face-to-face interviews of academics and higher education leaders, and library visits in two overseas countries (in relation to Australia) still required extensive arrangements and travel.

Disciplinal focus

Considering the wide range of disciplines and areas that are studied across many higher education institutions, the researcher decided to concentrate on the areas of

social sciences and humanities. This was done due to her own background and thus familiarity with the areas of social sciences and humanities. This approach further enabled a higher degree of focus and depth in the study.

5.3.2 Negotiation

Ethical approval

An inevitable part of the investigation process was, firstly, gaining an ethical approval to carry out the interviews of higher education leaders and academics. The researcher's institution, Monash University, Australia, specifically requires every research project involving humans to gain approval from the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH). In terms of psychological and/or physical impact on the interviewees, the researcher identified the investigation involving higher education leaders and academics as research of "low impact". The researcher gained approval to resume conducting interviews in April 2006, soon after the submission of her proposal to the Human Ethics Committee at Monash University [approval number: 2006/135LIR, see Appendix II].

Identification of interviewees

The study was initially piloted with 6 academics and higher education leaders in Australia and England in April 2006. The interviewees for the initial small pilot study were identified more informally, through the researcher's academic contacts in Australia and England.

Following the pilot study, the researcher started arranging further interviews in English and Czech higher education institutions. The interviewees in English higher education institutions were identified initially formally through university websites, and later other interviewees were identified through a combination of using university websites and some suggestions by the interviewed academics and higher education leaders in English higher education institutions. The final group of interviewees was identified through literature reviews on higher education quality undertaken before and throughout the interviewing process.

Apart from academics and higher education leaders who dealt with aspects of quality on a day-to-day basis, among the interviewees were also several experts who specialised in the subjects of higher education and higher education quality. The purpose of the interviews with experts in higher education and quality was not only to learn about their experiences in higher education quality, but these interviews were also utilised as a means of confirming the researcher's general understanding of the developments in the field of higher education quality in England.

The interviewees in Czech higher education institutions were identified largely through informal means – through the researcher's contacts with her former lecturers and colleagues in the Czech Republic.

Similarly to the interviews undertaken in England, the majority of the interviewees in Czech higher education were individuals who dealt with aspects of quality on a day-to-day basis. Only two interviews were undertaken with experts in the area of higher

education, however, not specifically in higher education quality. These experts were identified through a literature review on Czech higher education quality. To the researcher's knowledge, at present, there is no academic in the Czech Republic who would specialise specifically in the subject of higher education quality.

Relationships

Overall, in terms of the kinds of relationships identified throughout the various stages of the negotiation processes, due to the choice of the interview group (academics and higher education leaders), and also owing to the nature of the investigation, the researcher did not perceive any notable *power* relationships impacting on the present study. The study was conducted in a collegial and collaborative manner. Therefore, the relationships throughout the whole research process may be regarded as *caring*. This is not to suggest that there might not have been some *power relationships* working "behind the scenes", however these did not impact on the interviews or the results of the study itself.

Limitations

Due to a combination of factors, it proved more difficult to arrange and carry out interviews with academics and higher education leaders in Czech higher education institutions. [This occurred despite the fact that the researcher was more familiar with the Czech higher education system and generally the culture, having been educated in the Czech Republic, including at the tertiary level.]

One of the likely factors was the more limited time that the researcher was able to allow for the research undertaken in the Czech Republic, and also some of this limited time needed to be devoted to the reviews of literature on Czech higher education system and quality that was only available in the Czech Republic. The other likely factor was a lack of responsiveness on the part of academics and higher education leaders from outside of the researcher's informal network of contacts. One of the possible interpretations of this is that the Czech academic culture, in terms of trust, works more effectively on a more informal basis, i.e. academics are more approachable through more informal contacts than is the case in the English academic culture. Nevertheless, the more significant factor in the lack of responsiveness among some Czech academics and higher education leaders was most likely the limited time that the researcher could allow for "pursuing" potential interview participants. This remark, however, ought to be regarded as a subjective comment on a limited number of incidents regarding making contacts with academics and higher education leaders concerning an interview on a particular subject.

Due to the fact that higher education leaders and academics in both England and the Czech Republic are generally very busy individuals, a lot of arrangement and re-arrangement of interviews was necessary, which was further complicated by the fact that most of the research, apart from the majority of interviews and some review of literature not available in Australia, was carried out in Australia. This impacted on the overall number and range of higher education institutions in which the researcher was able to arrange interviews. In order to achieve a wider range of higher education institutions, i.e. be able to undertake interviews with academics and higher education

leaders in a wider range of higher education institutions, the researcher would have had to utilise more time and resources.

5.3.3 Literature reviews assisting in the refinement of methodology

Awaiting the ethical approval by the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) at Monash University, Australia, the researcher reviewed literature on narrative inquiry as a research method and further refined the methodology for the purposes of the present study of higher education quality. The researcher also made contact with potential interviewees for the pilot study and pre-arranged interviews to be carried out after the ethical approval was gained. Arranging interviews with academics and higher education leaders well in advance was an important aspect of the investigation, given that a majority of the interviewees were busy individuals.

Awaiting the ethical approval to carry out the interviews, the researcher also resumed the review of literature on quality in the UK and Czech higher education systems, and generally literature concerning the historical development of the UK and Czech higher education systems. Reviewing literature on quality in the UK and Czech higher education systems, the researcher not only gained more knowledge in the area of higher education quality, but the review also assisted her in identification of further potential interviewees in the English and Czech higher education systems.

5.3.4 Main research tool: Interviews

The main part of the research was carried out in the form of face-to-face interviews of higher education leaders and academics concerning quality in higher education to allow an in-depth investigation. To make the study more focused, the interviews were carried out within the areas of social sciences and humanities, due to the researcher's own background in these areas.

Prior to the conduct of the interviews, interview participants were sent Explanatory Statements which outlined the purpose of the study, including the methodology. In a semi-structured interview a person was prompted to think of "critical event/s" in relation to higher education quality in the course of their professional practice. Where necessary, the researcher also reiterated the understanding of a "critical event" to assist the interviewee in recollection of such an event. Table 5.1 below contains the full set of the interview questions, including explanations of the purpose of the individual questions.

It should be noted that questions 4, 5 and 6 are only applicable to the English higher education system, and thus they were not asked of the Czech academics and higher education leaders. Questions 4, 5 and 6 were added to the set of interview questions as a consequence of further literature reviews in UK higher education. These questions were specifically targeted at experts in English higher education and higher education quality (interviews undertaken in March and May 2007).

The purpose of adding questions 4 and 5 was to gain further understanding of how particular quality assessment mechanisms in English higher education developed, from the time they were introduced to the present. The purpose of question 6 was to obtain an insight into how widely have different quality models been adopted among English higher education institutions.

Table 5.1 Description of interview questions

Question number	Purpose of the question	All interview participants	Exceptions
1. Can you describe your role in this institution and what part of your role, if any, do you perceive to be related to the area of quality?	Description of a current position in higher education and possible relation to the area of quality.	√	
2. What do you understand by quality in higher education institutions?	Understanding of quality in higher education.	√	
3. Do you think… is there a difference in perception between how quality in higher education was perceived in the past and how it is seen now?	Understanding of developments and changes in higher education quality.	√	
4. Can you tell me what you remember about the RAE (research assessment exercise) from the time it was introduced in relation to your academic career? Has the RAE practice in the UK changed since then?	Further understanding of the developments and changes in the RAE quality mechanism in the UK higher education.	**X**	Relates only to English higher education. This question was specifically targeted at experts in higher education and higher education quality.
5. Can you tell me what you remember about the TQA (teaching quality assessment) from the time it was introduced in relation to your academic career? Have the TQA practices in the UK changed since then?	Further understanding of the developments and changes in the TQA quality mechanism.	**X**	Relates only to English higher education. This question was specifically targeted at experts in higher education and higher education quality.
6. Can you tell me about the quality models that you are aware of in the UK higher education since the introduction of more formal quality assurance mechanisms?	Understanding of the role of the quality models in the UK/English higher education.	**X**	Relates only to English higher education. This question was specifically targeted at experts in higher education and higher education quality.
7. Can you think of a critical event/s, which had a significant impact on your career in relation to quality in your field of expertise?	Identification of "critical", "like" and "other" events.	√	
8. Do you remember a stressful time(s)/period(s) in your academic career in relation to quality?	Further prompt to help identify "critical", "like" and "other" events, because "critical" events may be related to periods of stress.	**X**	This question was only asked of interviewees who were unable to identify any "critical" event.
9. Can you remember any memorable event/s related to quality in your academic career?	Further prompt to help identify "critical", "like" and "other" events.	**X**	This question was only asked of interviewees who were unable to identify any "critical" event or any period of stress.

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

Pilot interviews

The researcher resumed the pilot interviews with academics and higher education leaders immediately after gaining the permission from the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) at Monash University, Australia, in April 2006.

Later in April 2006, the researcher first carried out a pilot study of 6 interviews with Australian, English and Canadian academics and higher education leaders. Four interviews with Australian academics were undertaken in Australia, the remaining two interviews of an English academic and a visiting Canadian academic were carried out in England. This is outlined in Table 5.2 below. The table indicates the countries where the pilot interviews were undertaken, dates when the interviews were undertaken, gender, disciplines and the pseudonyms of the interview participants. Three pilot interview participants were female and three male. They represented disciplines of education, law and political science. Five of the pilot interview participants were academics and/or higher education leaders with at least 15 years of experience in higher education. One pilot interview participant was less senior, with 6 years of experience in higher education.

The pilot interviews helped the researcher refine the general form of the interview process and also the interview questions. The interview process was further assisted and refined by the researcher's gaining greater knowledge in the area of higher education quality through consulting more literature on the topic of higher education

quality, and the pilot interviews also generally assisted the researcher in gaining more confidence in conducting the interviews.

Main interviews

The main body of interviews was undertaken between May 2006 and June 2007. Table 5.2 below outlines the countries where the individual interviews were undertaken, dates when they were undertaken and also gender, disciplines and the pseudonyms of the academics and higher education leaders who participated in the interviews. The academics and higher education leaders (in both pilot and main interviews) were given pseudonyms to protect their identities and also to make it easier to refer to the interviews with the individual academics and higher education leaders (not to have to refer to them by their generic job titles and/or numbers).

The interviews, on average, took between 30 to 45 minutes. This was because the researcher was aware of the time pressures on most of the interviewed academics and higher education leaders in English and Czech higher education institutions. The total number of interviews that the researcher carried out in England and the Czech Republic was 30. 19 interviews were undertaken in English higher education institutions, 10 interviews were carried out in Czech higher education institutions, and 1 interview in Czech higher education was carried out over the telephone. The telephone interview was not undertaken to the same extent as the other interviews, as the purpose of this interview was to confirm the researcher's understanding of the overall situation in the area of quality in Czech higher education.

Among the 30 interview participants, 7 were females and 23 males. The interview participants represented disciplines of education, higher education, law, history, English, English literature, Russian, Slavonic studies, Australian studies, political science, sociology, medicine, psychology, media studies, geography, quality and management. 22 interview participants were senior academics and/or higher education leaders with years of experience ranging between 7 and over 20 years; the remaining 8 interview participants were less senior.

The interview preparations commenced at least two weeks prior to the interview, and in some cases the interviews were arranged two or three months in advance. Each interviewee was sent an Explanatory Statement which provided them with information concerning the subject of the study, the overall aims of the project, brief description of the methodology and also with more specific information about the interview (including its approximate length).

Prior to the interview, the participants had an opportunity to ask the researcher any questions concerning the interview or the study in general. At the interview, the researcher asked the participants to sign a Consent Form, which enabled them to decide not to participate in the interview. The researcher elected to audio-tape the interviews using a small portable dictaphone to allow her to concentrate more closely on the information given during the interviews, and also to have a better record of the interviews (rather than having to take notes which would have taken away a significant part of the researcher's attention). The participants were informed about the fact that their interviews would be audio-taped, and that they could refuse to be

audio-taped, which they could state on the Consent Form. Out of all the 35 full face-to-face interviews (including the pilot study) only one person requested not to be audio-taped.

The researcher was also considering the option of re-interviewing some of the interviewees at a later stage, mainly to clarify and confirm the information given at the first interview, and thus the Consent Form allowed the interviewees to agree or disagree with being re-interviewed. Only two interviewees (out of the 35) wished not to be re-interviewed, largely due to time pressures. Eventually, the researcher did not find it necessary to re-interview any of the English or Czech interview participants.

For the purposes of interviewing in the Czech Republic, the researcher translated the Explanatory Statement and the Consent Form into Czech, as she anticipated that most of the interviews would be carried out in the Czech language. Due to the researcher's own academic background in the area of translation (between English and Czech), it may be argued that she was the most suitable person to translate all documentation related to her research herself, as she was the person most familiar with the study, and also to further protect the identities of the interview participants regarding the translation of the individual interviews into English.

Table 5.2 Timeline of the interview process

Pseudonyms of the interviewed academics and higher education leaders	**Gender**	**Discipline**	**Years of experience in higher education**	**Locations where interviews undertaken**	**Dates when interviews undertaken**
Pilot interviews					
Stephen	M	Education	Over 15	Australia	April 2006
Rita	F	Education	6	Australia	April 2006
Rosemary	F	Education	Over 20	Australia	April 2006
Ruth	F	Law	Over 20	Australia	April 2006
Timothy	M	Political science	Over 15	England	April 2006
Robert	M	Law	Over 20	England	April 2006
Main interviews					
Margaret	F	Quality	Over 15	England	May 2006
Alexander	M	Education	10	England	May 2006
Christopher	M	Australian studies	6	England	May 2006
Elizabeth	F	History	5	England	May 2006
Donald	M	Higher education	Over 25	England	May 2006
Tomas	M	Political science, history, Russian	Over 10	Czech Republic	June 2006
Richard	M	English	Over 25	Czech Republic	June 2006
Milena	F	English	17	Czech Republic	June 2006
Jaroslav	M	Slavonic studies	32	Czech Republic	June 2006
Paul	M	English literature	5	England	August 2006

Pseudonyms of the interviewed academics and higher education leaders	Gender	Discipline	Years of experience in higher education	Locations where interviews undertaken	Dates when interviews undertaken
Leonard	M	Geography	Over 26	England	September 2006
Colin	M	English	15	England	September 2006
Roger	M	Law	Over 10	England	September 2006
James	M	Law	15	England	October 2006
Jane	F	Law	22	England	October 2006
Janette	F	Quality	6	England	October 2006
Martin	M	Psychology	17	Czech Republic	November 2006
Jan	M	Law	14	Czech Republic	November 2006
Marek	M	Sociology	Over 20	Czech Republic	November 2006
Joseph	M	Medicine, literature	Over 20	England	November 2006
Michaela	F	English, media studies, sociology	6	England	November 2006
Andrew	M	Education	17	England	March 2007
William	M	Higher education, history	32	England	March 2007
Krystof	M	Sociology	Over 40	Czech Republic	April 2007
Miroslav	M	Education	18	Czech Republic	April 2007
Ivo	M	Law, political science	7	Czech Republic	April 2007
Pavel	M	Sociology	20	Czech Republic	April 2007
Harold	M	Sociology, higher education	Over 25	England	May 2007
John	M	Higher education, management	Over 30	England	May 2007
Hana	F	Quality	NA	Czech Republic (phone conversation)	June 2007

Interview data

All the interviews on higher education quality were transcribed by the researcher. In the case of the interviews undertaken in the Czech Republic, a majority of them were carried out in the Czech language, and therefore the interviews were then translated by the researcher into English. The quality of the translations was helped by the fact that the researcher's previous degree (Master's degree) was in English language and literature, and her Master's thesis was undertaken specifically in the field of translation. This has also helped to protect the identity of the interviewees. Two interviews carried out in the Czech Republic were undertaken in English, due to one of the interviewees being a native English speaker and the other being highly proficient in the English language.

Accuracy of the interviews was verified with the interview participants. This was particularly vital for the interviews which did not record clearly. There were several interviews, which were disrupted, for example, by the ambient noise and/or the interviewee being seated further away from the interviewer. These interviews were thus more difficult to transcribe, however the interviewees assisted in making the transcriptions clear.

In a majority of the interview transcripts, verification was a case of the interviewees' confirming that the transcripts corresponded to what they remembered they had said at the interview. The verification of the transcripts by the interview participants served as a form of validation of the research data. The interview transcripts were

collated (so that the full transcripts could be easily referred to at a later stage), and de-identified to protect identity of the interviewees.

5.3.5 Other research tools: Surveys

Prior to or at the interviews, participants were asked to fill in short biographical and academic/professional background surveys mainly to enable the researcher to distinguish the interviewees by their professional backgrounds and level of experience. The full set of the survey questions may be viewed in the Appendix I of this thesis. The survey data was summarised in the previous sub-section and Table 5.2 above.

5.3.6 Other research tools: Other documentation

In order to gain further information on the higher education institutions (where the interviews were carried out) and the quality mechanisms they had in place, the researcher reviewed the mission statements and any other documentation concerning the institutions' current approaches to the area of quality assurance and quality development. The researcher also consulted the latest quality review documentation on the individual institutions' websites, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) websites in the case of documentation concerning higher education quality in England, and the Accreditation Commission and the European University Association (EUA) websites concerning documentation on higher education quality in the Czech Republic. Finally, the

researcher also reviewed newspaper articles concerning higher education quality issues.

5.3.7 Interview data analysis and results reporting

The most crucial part of the interview data analysis using the critical event narrative inquiry method is identification and distinction of the events described by interviewees. It is argued in this thesis that identification of a critical event depends on the judgement of the interviewee (or the "storyteller"). The criticality of such an event is then further assessed by the researcher according to the criteria described in Chapter 4 and further summarised in Chapter 6.

The trustworthiness of the study results was further enhanced through verification of the validity of the identification process of the three different types of critical events (*critical*, *like* and *other* events) by two research colleagues to the thesis author.

According to the criticality of their impact, events described by interviewees in this study were grouped into *critical*, *like* and *other* events.

All types of critical event (*critical*, *like* and *other* events) were spread unevenly across the interview narratives. For instance, the narrative of a single interview may have contained all critical event types, or more than one event of a single type may have occurred within one interview narrative, or different types of critical event may have

been spread across a number of different interview narratives. This will be demonstrated in detail through the interview analyses reported in Chapters 7 and 8.

It is argued in this thesis that the identification and classification of critical events provides one way to assist the researcher in dealing with a large volume of narrative data which commonly results from narrative inquiry or other qualitative research studies.

5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

When deciding on the research methodology to utilise in an investigation of experiences in quality of higher education leaders and academics in England and the Czech Republic, the researcher was guided by the holistic nature of narrative inquiry in general. In particular, the researcher found benefits in employing the critical event narrative inquiry method to investigate the area of higher education quality, specifically regarding the aspects of complexity, human and cultural centredness in the particular research context.

It is anticipated that eliciting critical events through interviews of individuals dealing with the area of quality in higher education would emphasise some important aspects of quality in higher education which cannot be uncovered using the more traditional empirical methods of inquiry. The objective of this study was to assist the improvement of the practice of quality development in higher education institutions through highlighting essential attributes of higher education quality in perception of higher education leaders and academics.

This chapter described individual components of the critical event narrative inquiry methodology in relation to the investigation of the area of higher education quality. The chapter further outlined the whole research process and structure of the study of higher education quality, including the difficulties and limitations of the study.

The following chapter will provide an introduction to the analysis of the perceptions of English and Czech academics and higher education leaders in higher education quality, and remind the reader of any issues related to the analysis.

PART III: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Chapter 6: Introduction to stories in higher education quality

Chapter 6 is designed as a short introduction and framework to the analysis of the results of the stories in English and Czech higher education quality presented in Chapters 7 and 8. It further outlines the overall form of identification of events in the analysis presented in Chapters 7 and 8.

6.1 INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The reader is reminded that the Czech and English higher education systems have had very different cultural and historical developments (as was detailed in Chapters 3 and 5). The English higher education system is often referred to as a "personality" model, historically paying more attention to the development of an individual, whereas the Czech higher education system has historically been significantly impacted on by the German "research" model of the so-called "Humboldtian" university which has paid more attention to the educational process and factual knowledge. Furthermore, the Czech education system has also been impacted on by the communist totalitarian regime of over 40 years (which ended in 1989), where the higher education system was centrally controlled and influenced by the Soviet-style education where any development of an individual was suppressed. The communist past formed a significant part of many stories of the Czech academics and higher education leaders collected in this research.

It was for these distinctive cultural and historical differences between the English and Czech higher education systems that the researcher elected to focus the research on

English and Czech higher education quality – to closely look into whether these differences have significantly impacted on the individual approaches to the area of quality.

Realising that there were many voices within the two higher education systems' approaches to quality, and that some of these voices were heard and followed more persistently over the last decade, the researcher focused on the less "audible" key voices within the higher education quality approaches. Namely, these were the voices of academics and higher education leaders.

This research involved 36 "storytellers" (academics and higher education leaders) and their stories were brought together by the researcher in a critical event analysis. However, the analysis in Chapters 7 and 8 will not include the majority of stories by academics and higher education leaders involved in the pilot study, whose stories concerned issues of quality in Australian and Canadian higher education systems. These stories helped to refine the interview process and also the scope of the whole research.

Within the stories of individual academics and higher education leaders, the researcher was particularly interested in the stories of, what will be called, "critical events" (as explained in Chapters 4 and 5), and whether these "critical events" were able to uncover some significant aspects of higher education quality, which the current approaches to higher education quality tend to overlook. The aspects of time and place will situate each story in a context.

According to the level of their criticality, the events in the stories of academics and higher education leaders will be distinguished as "critical", "like" or "other".
To briefly remind the reader of what the distinctions between the three types of events are – a "critical event" is an event which would have significantly impacted on professional practice of the storyteller (academic or higher education leader). Such an event might have entirely or considerably changed the storyteller's perception of their professional practice or even their worldview. "Critical event" can only be identified retrospectively, and such an event would have happened in an unplanned and unstructured manner. The causes of a "critical event" might be "internal" or "external" to the professional practice of an individual, or entirely personal. A "critical event" has a unique, illustrative and confirmatory nature. Table 6.1 below summarises the main features of a "critical event".

Table 6.1 Features of a "critical" event in professional practice

Feature	Presence/absence
a) Has a major impact on people involved	√
b) Is unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Is only identified after the event	√
d) May have life-changing consequences	√ **x**
e) May reveal patterns of well-defined stages	√ **x**
f) May be intensely personal with strong emotional involvement	√ **x**

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

The present study found that for an event to be defined as "critical" it does not always need to incorporate all the features of criticality outlined above. However, such an event ought to contain at least the first three features (a, b and c, as outlined in Table 6.1 above), which have been identified in the present study as distinctive and crucial

for a “critical” event. The study does not distinguish further sub-categories of criticality within a “critical” event. Therefore, when one “critical” event contains more features of criticality (as outlined in Table 6.1 above) than another “critical” event, it is not regarded in the present study as more important (“critical”) than the event which contains fewer features of criticality.

An event which has a comparable level of significance as a “critical” event, however, is not as unique as the “critical” event is referred to as a “like” event. Such an event might further illustrate, confirm and/or repeat the experience of the critical event. It may be of confirmatory or broadening nature. The presence of the features of criticality in a “like” event and additional features of a “like” event are outlined in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2 Features of a “like” event in professional practice

Features of criticality in a “like” event	**Presence/absence**
a) Has a major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Is unplanned and unanticipated	√ **x**
c) Is only identified after the event	√
d) May have life-changing consequences	**x**
e) May reveal patterns of well-defined stages	**x**
f) May be intensely personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features of a “like” event	**Presence**
aa) Not as unique (as critical event)	√
ab) Repeats and/or illustrates experience (of critical event)	√

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

Any other background information which may reveal the same or related issues to the “critical” and “like” events is referred to as “other” event. The presence or absence of

the features of criticality in "other" event and additional features of "other" event are outlined in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3 Features of "other" event in professional practice

Features of criticality in "other" event	**Presence/absence**
a) Has a major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Is unplanned and unanticipated	√ **x**
c) Is only identified after the event	√ **x**
d) May have life-changing consequences	**x**
e) May reveal patterns of well-defined stages	**x**
f) May be intensely personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features of "other" event	**Presence**
aaa) Further background information	√

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

Table 6.4 below summarises the main distinctions between "critical", "like" and "other" events.

Table 6.4 Distinction between critical, like and other events in professional practice

Critical event	An event which has a unique illustrative and confirmatory nature.
Like event	Same level of significance as the critical event, not as unique as the critical event, further confirms, illustrates and/or repeats the experience in the critical event.
Other event	A further event which provides other background information on the issue/s highlighted in the critical and like events.

Due to the extent of the analyses of the individual interviews and also due to the natural cultural distinctions between the two higher education systems, the researcher divides the analysis into two chapters: English stories in higher education quality (Chapter 7) and Czech stories in higher education quality (Chapter 8). This will also

assist in a more focused approach to the potential cultural differences in the perceptions of quality in higher education in the two systems.

6.2 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 6 has been a brief introduction to the analysis of the results of this research presented in the Chapters 7 and 8. The chapter also outlined the way in which the results of the research will be presented – in the form of “critical”, “like” and “other” events – and how these events will be distinguished.

The following chapter analyses the stories of English academics and higher education leaders in the area of higher education quality and presents the results of the study in English higher education in the form of “critical”, “like” and “other” events.

Chapter 7: English stories in higher education quality

Chapter 7 analyses the stories of English academics and higher education leaders in the area of higher education quality and presents the results of the study in the form of "critical", "like" and "other" events. It analyses the stories of five individuals in depth, and summarises the analysis of events in the stories of another 14 academics and higher education leaders. It first presents the stories and "critical events", and then provides their further analysis.

Before looking at the individual stories of English academics and higher education leaders, the reader is reminded of a significant landmark in English higher education system – the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act* – which meant that former polytechnics and some colleges of further education gained a university title. However, up until the present time, the higher education institutions which gained their university title after 1992 are frequently referred to as the "new" universities, and the higher education institutions which became universities before 1992 are referred to as the "old" universities. The terms "old" and "new" universities are employed when describing the institutions of individual interviewees.

7.1 DETAILED ANALYSIS OF EVENTS: STORIES OF FIVE ENGLISH ACADEMICS AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS

This section contains detailed analysis of five stories of English academics and higher education leaders which clearly illustrated components of criticality in their experiences of higher education quality. The analysis of the stories in English higher

education will particularly focus on the “critical”, “like” and “other” events outlined by the academics and higher education leaders. Each story is reported using sub-headings: *Background*, *Events in higher education quality* and *Other observations*. The “critical”, “like” and “other” events in the sub-section *Events in higher education quality* in each interviewee’s narrative are presented in a natural sequence as they occurred within that narrative, rather than being ordered by their level of criticality from “critical” through to “other” events.

The stories of the first three academics and higher education leaders provide further background and explanations of the developments in the area of higher education quality in England from the late 1980s/early 1990s to the present time, based on the academics’ own experiences in English higher education. The stories of the last two academics and higher education leaders will not include the aspect of developments in higher education quality over time, because the first three academics and higher education leaders will have provided the reader with sufficient background information concerning this aspect.

Table 7.1 below summarises the types of events described by the five academics and higher education leaders in English tertiary institutions whose stories will be analysed in detail. All the interview transcript quotes concerning English higher education will be cited as follows: (Interview transcript number/England (E)/pseudonym of the interviewee: page number(s), line number(s)).

Table 7.1 Summary of events outlined in the analysis of the stories in English higher education

Pseudonyms of academics and higher education leaders	*Dates when interviews undertaken*	*"Critical" events*	*"Like" events*	*"Other" events*
Andrew	March 2007	**1√**	**2√**	**1√**
Harold	May 2007	**1√**	**1√**	**1√**
John	May 2007	**1√**	**x**	**1√**
Donald	May 2006	**1√**	**1√**	**1√**
Colin	September 2006	**x**	**x**	**2√**

[Note: √ indicates presence; numerals – indicate number of events of one type; **x** indicates absence]

1. Story of Andrew

(Male; age range – 50-60 years; tertiary experience – 17 years; discipline - education)

Background

Andrew was a deputy director of a centre for teaching and learning at a College which forms a part of an "old" university, and he was also a senior academic. Andrew came to higher education in 1989/1990 and thus had 17 years of experience in the domain at the time he told his story, in March 2007. Prior to working in higher education, he was a primary school teacher and a headmaster.

In higher education, Andrew previously held a senior lecturing position at a "new" university. He had been engaged in the area of quality assurance at a range of levels

since its formal introduction into the British higher education in the early 1990s, including involvement in a university quality committee. Quality in higher education was also Andrew's research interest, and he had written a number of academic articles on the topic. He may be described as a specialist in the area of higher education quality.

To Andrew, quality in higher education was more about transformation – understood as changes in people, beliefs and practices, and he regarded quality enhancement as more important than quality assurance. However, he admitted that, currently, quality management in English higher education was more about quality assurance, and thus aspects that were considered important were related to "accountability", "fitness for purpose" and "value for money".

Andrew described his perception of the two main quality assurance measures employed in British higher education system: teaching quality assessment (TQA) and Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Since the early 1990s, Andrew had experienced significant changes, for instance, in the individual lecturer's autonomy. In the early 1990s, he perceived there was considerable autonomy held by an individual lecturer, and with the more formal introduction of quality assurance, he had seen this autonomy gradually diminish. He viewed a level of quality assurance as a helpful tool for lecturers who were less rigorous. However, he believed that the quality assurance measures had escalated from being beneficial to becoming very bureaucratic and regimented, particularly in relation to the so-called teaching quality assessment (TQA) [explained in detail in Chapter 3]. Andrew explained how the

mechanisms of the TQA had changed since the early 1990s up until the present time in the following way.

> …it came in a fairly light touch, and it was Her Majesty's Inspectorate [referring to the inspections of the former polytechnics and colleges of further education, prior to 1992] who did it first of all, and they were all very pleasant and they actually had a thing called a "little cue" and a "big cue"... (Interview transcript I/England (E)/ Andrew: p. 2, lines 55-57)
> Then post 1992 it started to get really serious, and then, of course, by the end of the 90s we had the QAA [Quality Assurance Agency], and it was very prescriptive, very mechanistic and we had the teaching observation people coming in to watch us teach, the scoring system, and it's gone from being sort of ad hoc and informal to being tremendously formal and regimented, and it occurred very quickly, it suddenly sort of happened, starting in 1992, early 90s, and then by 2001 it was a real sort of industry and you had the visits, which were all right as peer review, but everything was scored out of 24, the six areas – a tremendous change. And what was probably disappointing was that everyone really got locked into producing bits of paper, paper trails, some files, and I wonder whether in terms of opportunity cost, we could have been doing something rather more useful. This [was a] tremendous accountability exercise…(I/E/Andrew: p. 2, 58-69)

> And I don't know that it was all that terribly helpful. I think that it did tighten up on things, and it probably stopped the worst excesses or problems that there were, but I think that it perhaps did more harm than good. It got rid of the really awful teachers, they had to sharpen up, but, on the other hand it constrained the other teachers, into some sort straight jacket which wasn't very helpful. (I/E/Andrew: p. 2, 73-77)

> I'm not sure whether the quality assurance has really improved teaching or whether it is that, in the UK, university teachers must have teacher training. In the probation period the UK academics must have a proper training in how to teach (I/E/Andrew: p. 3, 103-106)…from 2004…onwards, all new lecturers coming into higher education in England and Wales have to enrol for a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice or something similar, and usually it

> is tied with their probation… (I/E/Andrew: p. 3, 108-111) And I would have thought that that's had much more effect on the quality of teaching. (I/E/Andrew: p. 3, 106 – 107)

> They've [QAA] moved from subject review, which was done until 2001, to institutional audit plus specific engagement, so they could choose to look at a particular department or a particular university, or they could take a theme like widening participation. But moving from subject review to institutional audit, there's a much lighter touch now… (I/E/Andrew: p. 3, 119-123)

Andrew observed similar bureaucratic tendencies also in relation to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) [in detail explained in Chapter 3]:

> Again, there's similar sort of development of the RAE as quality management generally – it started pretty informally. I've been involved in it in 1996, 2001 and now 2008. Again, it's become much more mechanistic, again [it has] the scoring system. It is done by peer review, of course, done by a panel of experts, but a lot of games-playing is occurring now. When I was at the modern university ["new" university], before I came here, the idea was to submit as many people as possible at a lower score, now at ["old" university college] the idea is to submit only people who are going to be high scorers. And what this does, is to take out quite a lot of people from the Research Assessment Exercise, and it's becoming like an elite system. (I/E/Andrew: p. 2, 79-87)

Events in higher education quality

Andrew told stories of four events related to higher education quality. One is described as a "critical" event, two as "like" events and another one as "other" event. The first event, "critical" event, happened during the QAA 2001 subject reviews at a "new" university, where Andrew previously worked. At that time, also the "like" event happened. He recalled the experiences related to both the events as very

negative. The “critical” event concerned a business studies review, and the “like” event concerned a school of education review. In both the cases Andrew was concerned about a person on each of the review panels and their professional aptitude to undertake the reviews.

> What was critical about them [the events] was that they concerned me regarding the quality of some of the people on the panel. I don’t mind getting higher score, medium score or low score, if it’s justified, but when you lose confidence in people, and in both cases it was one person in each of those panels, it makes life very, very difficult… (I/E/Andrew: pp. 5 – 6, 249 – 253)
>
> The reviews were not particularly bad but I was worried about these two people on each of the two panels and I was worried because I don’t think that they were appropriate for the job. Mainly because I don’t think that they had the appropriate social skills to deal with people, they would say things that were totally inappropriate and would upset people, they would say things without too much evidence, because they were only there for a few days and would see things very quickly and didn’t see everything, and would make only snap decisions. (I/E/Andrew: p. 6, 254 – 261)

The event concerning the business studies review described by Andrew was defined as “critical” because it was highlighted as “critical” by the interviewee. It also incorporated the following features outlined in Table 7.2 below confirming its criticality (as explained in Chapter 6 and summarised in Table 6.1). The criticality of the event was further verified by two other researchers, apart from the author of the thesis. The criticality of the event was also reinforced by other “critical”, “like” and “other” events identified in the stories of the other academics and higher education leaders.

Table 7.2 Presence of features of criticality in Andrew's story of a critical event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	√

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

The second event in Andrew's professional practice is defined as "like" event, because it had the same level of significance as the "critical" event. It repeated the experience of the "critical" event, and this way it confirmed the reservations that Andrew developed in his attitude towards the whole QAA reviewing process. The features of Andrew's "like" event are outlined in Table 7.3 below.

Table 7.3 Presence of features of criticality in Andrew's story of a like event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aa) Not as unique (as critical event)	√
ab) Repeats and/or illustrates experience (of critical event)	√

Describing the first two events, the "critical" event and the "like" event, Andrew pointed out the significance of human involvement in quality management:

> …it's all very good having systems, the QAA have loads of systems. They have a code of practice, benchmarks, national qualifications framework – that is absolutely fine – but when it comes to judging whether programmes I'm running meet those particular criteria, whether the processes and procedures are right, you need humans to come along and check, to make decisions. And then they have got to be the appropriate people and these two reviewers I came across on the two different panels were totally inappropriate, so that made me worry about the whole system. Because the procedures and systems that we have, are only as good as the people that operate them. (I/E/Andrew: p. 6, 268 -276)

Andrew described another event which was related to the two subject reviews he was involved in (in 2001). This was what may be described as "other" event, and it supported what he explained earlier regarding the subject reviews being rather bureaucratic and regimented. This "other" event provides further background information concerning the issues highlighted in the "critical" and "like" events.

> We had all these cardboard boxes with wallet files, and everything was sort of mechanistic and numbered, and there was a tremendous amount of work involved in that. So that's another …not very positive [event]. (I/E/Andrew: p. 6, 294 – 297)

The features of Andrew's "other" event are outlined in Table 7.4 below.

Table 7.4 Presence of features of criticality in Andrew's story of other event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aaa) Further background information	√

The story of the second "like" event concerning higher education quality went back to 2004, when Andrew was involved in another QAA review. This time it was an institutional review. Andrew found the process "rigorous", "robust" and valuable, whilst the approach remained positive, encouraging and collegial. The event is defined as "like", because it was comparative in significance to Andrew's "critical" event, however it repeated some of the issues highlighted in the "critical" event. The only difference was that, with the second "like" event, Andrew's experience was positive. The features of Andrew's second "like" event are summarised in Table 7.5 below.

Table 7.5 Presence of features of criticality in Andrew's story of a second like event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	x
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	x
e) Well-defined stages	x
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	x
Additional features	**Presence**
aa) Not as unique (as critical event)	√
ab) Repeats and/or illustrates experience (of critical event)	√

Similarly to the "critical" event, trustworthiness of the "like" and "other" events was confirmed with two other researchers. The events were also verified against other "like" and "other" events in the stories of other academics and higher education leaders.

Other observations

The stories of the "critical", "like" and "other" events in Andrew's professional practice illustrated Andrew's understanding of higher education quality. His beliefs and perceptions supported the argument of the present thesis that in the area of higher education quality, it is important to concentrate more on the human-centred aspects, rather than on creating elaborate quality review systems and structures, which will, eventually, always rely on the involvement of humans.

2. Story of Harold

(Male; age range – 50-60 years; tertiary experience – over 25 years; disciplines – sociology and higher education)

Background

Harold was a director of a research and evaluation centre at a "new" university, and he was also a senior academic – a professor. He was involved in public policy research and also had a particular research interest in the area of higher education quality. He had been involved in consultancy work reviewing standards of UK and overseas higher education institutions. Harold had more than 25 years of experience in the English higher education system. He may be described as a leading expert in the area of higher education quality.

Similarly to Andrew, Harold regarded higher education quality as a transformative process. He pointed out the complexity of the notion of higher education quality. He also highlighted the political and politicising approaches when putting the concept into practice.

> Quality, for me, is about providing transformative experience for students or transformative approach for researchers. It is about making the students more aware, developing their abilities, empowering them to learn on the one hand; and it's similar for researchers, it's about providing creative research environment, allowing people to do transformative things. So, transformational notion of quality most appeals to me.
>
> There are other definitions of quality: quality as value for money, quality as consistency of performance and then there is quality as fitness for purpose – all of those, to me, are just specific versions or specific ways of operationalising a much more complex concept, and each of those fails to class it as the complex concept, which is fundamentally the notion of qualitative change, or transformation. (Interview transcript II/E/Harold: p.1, 12 -22)

Harold explained how the quality movement in England started developing in the early 1990s. In his view, the notion of quality enhancement has mostly been at the background of the whole quality movement, and at the forefront there had mainly been notions of quality assurance, quality assessment and measuring of quality. He found that only very recently had there been more focus on the notion of improvement of the quality of learning and teaching.

Looking at the RAE as one of the quality assurance measures in English higher education, Harold underlined the fact that there was a lot of discontent among the "new" universities concerning the lack of fairness of the process, disadvantaging these institutions (which were predominantly teaching-based institutions) compared to the "old" universities (which were to a higher degree research-based institutions). According to him:

> Research Assessment Exercise has always had this mock notion of being fair and assessing the value of bits of research – its underlying rationale has always been to concentrate research, particularly expensive research, in few institutions, rather than spread it thinly. There is a sort of residual that is spread thinly, but the core money is in very few institutions…(II/E/Harold: p. 2, 55 – 59)

Harold implied that the RAE has always been treated as more important than the TQA, and for reasons of reputation and prestige, the "new" universities felt compelled to take part in the RAEs. Harold further pointed out that there had been slight changes with each Research Assessment Exercise and that there had been a move in focus towards individual output as opposed to departmental output. He also highlighted the fact that it was anticipated that, due to large costs of the exercise involving panels of experts and a lot of paperwork, in the future, the RAEs would involve more metric style of assessment based on, for instance, a number of citations or similar.

Regarding the TQA, similar to Andrew, Harold also observed a growing intensity of the quality reviews in the form of the subject reviews. He could see this happening between the mid-1990s and 2001, and he pointed out that at that time the teaching assessments quite closely inspected the actual teaching process and that many teachers felt rather uncomfortable about that. He did not find the process very constructive because, eventually, it made teachers focus more on the actual marks they received rather than improving the process. His view was that the only part of the subject reviews that teachers may have perceived as beneficial was self-assessment, but he believed that often self-assessment reports were produced by one or two individuals on behalf of whole teams, so only those individuals could potentially have benefited from the process.

Harold outlined his perception of the changes in the TQA processes between the mid-1990s and the present time, developing from subject reviews to the current institutional audit.

> There was a period in England where there was quite an aggressive relationship between the institutions and the Agency [the QAA], and there was a serious doubt, certainly in the mid to late 90s, about trust between the two… (II/E/Harold: p. 4, 156 -159) It was never quite the same with Scotland and Wales. (II/E/Harold: p. 4, 156)

> …but that has changed as the head of the QAA changed – there is a different kind of approach and the thing matured as well, both sides are less suspicious of the other now; the approach is much more accommodating, the style of the QA and, people have changed so there is much less antagonism, there's much more trust, where people are gradually beginning to see that everybody is on the same side, so that's how the field has evolved… (II/E/Harold: p. 4, 159 – 164)

> …the latest shift in the QAA thinking – is much more towards emphasizing improvement, to have a closer engagement, more of a dialogue, with institutions, to encourage reflection; the Quality Assurance Agency work much more widely than they did in the past, they have a much less aggressive relationship, particularly in England. (II/E/Harold: p. 4, 152 – 156)

Harold's perception of the changes, particularly regarding the Teaching Quality Assessment processes, underlines the fact that it was not so much the systems that were in place at particular times, but more the actual relationships of trust/mistrust between people that significantly impacted on the whole atmosphere surrounding the quality assessment processes. Therefore, similarly to Andrew, Harold also implied the importance of human values and attitudes which impact on systems.

Regarding particular quality management models that were adopted by individual universities, Harold was of the view that adoption of various management models was "fashionable" among English universities particularly throughout the 1990s, however, the models never developed a long-standing legacy in the individual institutions, and even less so within the whole higher education system.

> There was a period, again particularly in the 90s, where various English universities adopted or attempted to adopt Total Quality Management [TQM] model or ISO 9000 model. They were the two that tended to be picked up. There were other attempts to use…the Bauldridge awards model, which in Europe is known as the EFQM model [European Foundation of Quality Management model], so those have all been used at various stages by various institutions, none of them has really been sustained for any amount of time, none of them has really been institution-wide. (II/E/Harold: p. 4, 181 – 187)

> So those models have never had any significant impact. (II/E/Harold: p. 5, 208 – 209)

Events in higher education quality

The "critical" event that Harold described related to the beginnings of his teaching career, when he undertook his teacher training and was teaching in an HMV [Her Majesty's Vocational] Business Studies course at a former polytechnic in the North of England.

> I remember going along to this class, they were textile economists … (II/E/Harold: p. 7, 303 - 304) I was teaching supply and demand, or something like that, and I did all the things I was supposed to do formally, I maintained a certain kind of distance and all the rest of it. The trouble was, I was only 22 at the time, and most of the people I was teaching were as old as me or pretty close. And they thought: "who is this guy, he seems like very arrogant and distant"… (II/E/Harold: p. 7, 306 - 311)

There was another group I was teaching, they were HMV Business Studies, and they were actually a much more difficult group to teach, some of them didn't want to be there, they were much rowdier, and there was a lot more of them, there was about a hundred of them, and this was in the days when you didn't normally get classes that big. I was involved in teaching statistics, I had to run a workshop – there was a lecturer who did the lectures and I had to do the workshops. And the students didn't like statistics at all, they hated it.

And I remember, because I was similar age to them, one evening I was having a drink with a few of them in a bar before I went back to the college I was from. (II/E/Harold: p. 7, 311 – 319)

Suddenly, the guy who was doing the lecturing was off sick, he hated lecturing them as much as they hated him, and I was asked to do the lecture which was a terrifying prospect with this really quite difficult group. I remember walking into this lecture and doing all the sorts of things to get their attention, like slamming the door, there was no microphone or anything, and they totally ignored me, they just carried on, there was this slight chaos going on. But one of the guys, who I had a drink with in the bar earlier, and he was obviously a kind of leader in this place, just stood up, turned up to them, and said: "shut up you lot, he's trying to start", and they did. So, I've learnt from that you've got to adapt the style of your teaching to the people who you are teaching, you can't just use the kind of rigid style "how to teach", it has to be much more flexible – and we then got on all right. (II/E/Harold: p. 7, 320 – 330)

And from there on I really learnt, when teaching, you respond to the students, you ask them what they want, you have issues, you address them, you kind of engage them – they are the most important stakeholder in all this. Always try to have interactive sessions with students, rather than just talking at them from a kind of provider perspective. So, they are probably the kind of issues that drove my own quality. (II/E/Harold: p. 7, 337 – 342)

The “critical” event has significantly changed Harold’s perception of quality in teaching. He realised that a formal way of teaching according to rigid models he was inducted to did not work in practice and that he had to adjust his style of teaching to the needs of particular student groups. The “critical” event made Harold realise that students were important “stakeholders” in the teaching process. The event is identified as “critical” because it incorporated the following distinctive features of criticality outlined in Table 7.6 below. The event was also pointed out as “critical” by the interviewee. The criticality of the event was confirmed by two other researchers, and reinforced by the “critical”, “like” and “other” events in the stories of other academics and higher education leaders.

Table 7.6 Presence of features of criticality in Harold’s story of a critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	√
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	√

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

It is argued that the “critical” event concerning the HMV Business Studies course was preceded by a “like” event related to Harold’s class of textile economists. The event is described as “like”, despite the fact that it preceded the “critical” event, because Harold highlighted the experience with the business studies course as more significant. The experience with the class of textile economists supported the experience with the business study course and played a confirmatory role in Harold’s story.

The “critical” event was also supported by “other” event related to Harold’s getting to know closer some of his students from the class of HMV Business Studies over a drink in a pub. The event is characterised as “other”, because it provided further background to the “critical” and “like” events. The features of the “like” and “other” events in Harold’s story are summarised in Tables 7.7 and 7.8 below.

Table 7.7 Presence of features of criticality in Harold’s story of a like event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aa) Not as unique (as critical event)	√
ab) Repeats and/or illustrates experience (of critical event)	√

Table 7.8 Presence of features of criticality in Harold’s story of other event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aaa) Further background information	√

Similarly to the “critical” event, the trustworthiness of the “like” and “other” events was verified by two other researchers. The events were also verified against other

"like" and "other" events in the stories of other academics and higher education leaders.

Other observations

Similarly to Andrew, Harold's understanding of quality in higher education stemmed from a significant personal involvement in the teaching and research processes regardless of formal structures and procedures.

3. Story of John

(Male; age range – over 60 years; tertiary experience – over 30 years; disciplines – management and higher education)

Background

John was a professor of higher education management in a College of an "old" university. Until 1999, he was a registrar in another "old" university. In the College, he had launched an MBA programme and also worked on a number of large projects in his area of expertise. John had more than 30 years of experience in British higher education. He may be described as an expert in higher education policy and management.

John expressed aversion to the quality assurance movement in Britain. However, he highlighted his strong belief in high quality teaching and research. By quality in higher education he understood an involvement of personal values and rigour of individual academics. According to him, particularly regarding the quality of teaching, more trust should be given to individual academics, because he was of the

view that formal bureaucratic structures and procedures cannot contribute to improvement of teaching. He pointed out that quality assurance does not bear any relevance to the actual quality of teaching and research.

John highlighted the fact that the introduction of a range of quality assurance mechanisms into the British higher education was a result of deliberate public policy decisions on the part of the British governments, and that the governments were following their political interests when introducing and ending particular quality assurance regimes. John was of the view that formal quality assurance mechanisms were highly ineffective in "guarding" the quality in higher education, and that the trust in professionalism of academics would be a more effective and efficient way of preserving quality in the educational processes.

> …if you go to some [British] universities, you would find things going on which make the blood run cold. But these things never seemed to be picked up by the QAA mechanism. But, in fact, if you trusted the professionalism of the university teachers, you would actually get a much more effective quality assurance system. And even at the least highly rated universities, the professionalism of the academic staff and their consciences…and good interchanges with students would produce much more effective teaching than building up huge collections of documents to be inspected by a group of academics from outside. (III/E/John: p. 2, 54 – 61)

> So, I think that the whole QAA visitation thing is about performance management, it's not actually about what is going on. If you want to know about how to maintain good teaching, then it's absolutely clear that colleagues should sit on one another's lectures, and there should be a proper appraisal and commentary afterwards. And in most good universities, that is the normal practice. (III/E/John: p. 2, 88 - 92)

John commented on the origins of the whole quality movement in higher education, referring to Robert Birnbaum's 2000 book *Management Fads in Higher Education* (for further reference see Chapter 3), and he pointed out the political origins of the quality assurance movement.

> I think Birnbaum's point, which he makes in his book [Management Fads in Higher Education], is important. Birnbaum says that the quality movement was created in the industry, and was picked up in higher education at about the point when the industry got fed up with it and showed that it wasn't doing anything. The quality movement got a kind of foothold in higher education, and ministers love it. It tells them something, they think. They don't actually believe it but it's very hard to stop. (III/E/John: p. 3, 135 – 140)

Events in higher education quality

John told a story of one event, which he did not identify as a "critical" event, however the researcher found it highly significant in illustrating John's point about the effectiveness and efficiency of quality assurance in English higher education. This story described the measures that some universities resorted to in order to be rated favourably by the quality review inspection teams. It also explicated what Andrew earlier referred to as "games-playing".

> …the first time we were visited, and I am going back to [an "old" university] now, we were visited by the academic audit unit. I decided that, if this is going to be a competition, we are going to win it. And so, we prepared incredibly thoroughly, and the person I had doing that… (III/E/John: p. 2, 63 – 66) did a superb job in preparing all the documentation and so forth. We found a number of departments who didn't have the minutes of the staff-students liaison committees for the last three years easily available, so people went off and wrote them in order to prepare for the visit. In other words, we did a really good job in preparation. My academic colleagues…performed extremely well on the day and we were later told that we've

> done extremely well. However, it bore a very different relation to how good the university was in teaching. What it told you was that we've done a very good job in preparation…
> (III/E/John: p. 2, 67 – 75)

The event was identified as "critical" because it incorporated the following features of criticality summarised in Table 7.9 below. (Note: Despite the fact that some aspects of the event were clearly planned and certain outcomes might have been anticipated, the overall event was identified as unplanned and unanticipated, because the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was the driving and decision-making force in that event.) In this case, the event was not highlighted by the interviewee as "critical", however, the researcher identified it as critical in the context of other "critical" events identified by other academics and higher education leaders. The criticality of this event was further verified by two other researchers and reinforced by other "critical", "like" and "other" events identified in the stories of the other academics and higher education leaders.

Table 7.9 Presence of features of criticality in John's story of a critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

Further, John told a story of another event. This event reinforced John's view of higher education quality stemming from the individual academic's professionalism and personal sense of satisfaction in the educational process. This event is referred to

as “other” event. This event concerned John’s setting up of an MBA programme in his current institution, and it enabled him to alter his colleagues’ perceptions of the quality of teaching through introducing different and innovative ways of teaching into the institution. The event was identified as “other”, because it provided further information to the issues highlighted by John through the “critical” event. The trustworthiness of the identification of the event was confirmed by two other researchers.

> I brought on board quite a lot of people from business schools to teach on the programme. Because I thought if you are to talk about strategy, you should have people who write best about strategy, and some of the best people who write about strategy, have nothing to do with education, they are in business schools or prepare strategies in companies. So, one of the interesting things was to compare the different kinds of strategies. My colleagues, who spent all their teaching careers here [in the higher education institution], were actually amazed at the quality of teaching from the business schools….And in our group of people involved in the MBA, it changed the style of teaching completely. (III/E/John: p. 4, 191 – 200)

The features of the “other” event in John’s story are outlined in Table 7.10 below.

Table 7.10 Presence of features of criticality in John’s story of other event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aaa) Further background information	√

Other observations

John's story further reinforced the significance of human-centred approaches to the area of higher education quality, highlighting the need for trust in professionalism of the academics.

4. Story of Donald

(Male; age range – 50-60 years; tertiary experience – over 25 years; discipline – higher education)

Background

Donald was a professor of higher education in a College (of an "old" university) and a co-director of a school. In the past, he was a dean in the College. He had over 25 years of experience in English higher education. Donald had written a number of academic publications on the issue of higher education quality. He may be described as an expert in the area of higher education quality.

As a dean, Donald was responsible for quality assurance in the College and also developed a number of quality enhancement strategies and mechanisms in the institution at that time. He further pointed out that he was much more enthusiastic about quality enhancement in general.

> Quality assurance is very easy [simplistic, reductionist], it's about making judgements in relation to a set of criteria – does it come up to the mark, given your criteria of rightness? Relatively, that is easy. The tricky thing is to improve practices and procedures in institutions and systems. (Interview transcript IV/E/Donald: p. 1, 37 – 40)

Donald further highlighted that the notion of quality in higher education was a highly complex and contentious issue.

> Quality is a matter of doing things right, but then it raises all sorts of issues – What do you mean by doing things right? Who is to decide what is right? And then you are starting to get all sorts of tricky judgements.
>
> Now, what rightness means in a contested environment such as higher education? That would be a starting point and if we are concerned about teaching and learning, and it is fascinating how people just assume that quality in higher education usually means in brackets "teaching and learning". (IV/E/Donald: p. 1, 25 – 32)
>
> But given what I've just said, rightness has something to do with the rightness of the development of students as human beings. But that's also a highly contentious definition and not everybody would agree with it. (IV/E/Donald: p. 1, 34 – 36)

Events in higher education quality

Donald described two events which happened during his time as a dean in the College. These events are defined as "like" and "other" events. These events had a highly positive impact in terms of the enhancement of quality of educational practices within the College and also impacted on the wider English and UK higher education. The first event Donald outlined referred to his being involved in introducing a professional magazine concerned with enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education which was published through the initiatives of the College. The first event was identified as "like", because it had the same level of significance (even higher significance) to Donald as the "critical" event (which is described later in

Donald's story). It further illustrated Donald's view of the quality assurance processes in English higher education.

> When I was a dean, I did a number of things which I was quite proud of. For example, I introduced a magazine which was called [name, concerned with learning issues] (IV/E/Donald: p. 1, 41 - 43) …it was about getting professionals to be more professional about their work, and to share their reflections with others, to describe what they were doing, and as it were, come out with others… (IV/E/Donald: p. 1, 45 – 47)

The first event highlighted the value that Donald ascribed to professionalism as an intrinsic motivator in academic work. This aspect was more valuable to Donald than the extrinsic focus on measurement of quality. The features of criticality present in Donald's story of a "like" event are outlined in Table 7.11 below.

Table 7.11 Presence of features of criticality in Donald's story of a like event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aa) Not as unique (as critical event)	√
ab) Repeats and/or illustrates experience (of critical event)	√

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

The second event, "other" event, also happened during Donald's time as a dean in the College. This event involved Donald in setting up several small development projects to enable enhancement of quality in the institution. The event was identified as

"other", because it provided additional information on the issues pointed out in Donald's "critical" and "like" events. Table 7.12 below summarises the features present in Donald's story of "other" event.

Table 7.12 Presence of features of criticality in Donald's story of other event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aaa) Further background information	√

The trustworthiness of the "like" and "other" events in Donald's story was confirmed by two other researchers. The events were further verified against other "like" and "other" events in other stories of academics and higher education leaders. The stories of these two events reinforced Donald's belief in the personal pursuit of quality enhancement in higher education, and his conviction in that personal professional pursuits of academics and their enthusiasm are much more powerful tools in enhancing quality in higher education than any measures imposed on institutions from the outside.

Another event, a "critical" event, Donald outlined concerned a QAA subject review of his institution in 2001. This happened also at the time when he was a dean in the College. This was an overwhelmingly negative experience for Donald. The event documented his persuasion about the insensitivity and single-mindedness of quality

assurance systems imposed on higher education institutions from the outside. He believed that quality assurance was a rather simplistic and simplifying set of procedures and practices and that it served generally as a political tool imposed on British higher education institutions.

> I happened to be the dean responsible for organising our efforts here in relation to a Quality Assurance Agency subject review…(IV/E/Donald: p. 2, 64 – 65)

> And because this institution largely falls within one subject area, i.e. education, it was, in effect, a whole-institution review. It wasn't just picking the department of economics or department of chemistry. We have something like 60 Masters courses here, so it was a massive review of this place. I found it a highly challenging experience, in many ways, the most challenging experience of my professional life, and a one that I wouldn't want to endure again. It has impacted on me in a wholly negative way, even the word negative probably understates the whole experience. (IV/E/Donald: p. 2, 66 – 72)

Donald further specified why this particular "critical" event had such a negative impact on him. This also explained why he disliked what is referred to in the UK higher education context as quality assurance.

> The most significant features that I recall about the subject review…By the way, we scored 22 out of 24, which was considered by some a failure. The judgement turned me in on one particular point…just about half an hour before they [panel of QAA reviewers] concluded and delivered their verdict, they put a question to us, a question about non-completion rates of our students on Masters courses, and it was clear that depending on the answer we gave them, there was a point at stake. We gave them the best answer we could, but it clearly didn't satisfy them, and we lost a point on that particular dimension. We lost a point on quality assurance systems as well, so we lost 2 points. There were scores 1 to 4 on six headings. So, we lost a point, but to this day, I don't know what answer we could have given them that would have

> satisfied them. It is a shameful instance of the workings of public policy – public policy workings should be transparent. Judgements can be made on things, once the criteria on which they should be made were made clear. And to me not to know what answer we should have or could have given, which might have had a more beneficial outcome, is a disgraceful state of affairs, it is simply an incompetent use of public moneys. It is also an unjust system… (IV/E/Donald: p. 2, 80 – 96)

> …I take quality and matters related to quality very seriously, I spend a lot of time, personal energies and efforts related to quality and talking about quality, and advising other institutions around the world about quality, but quality assurance, to me, can become overbearingly bureaucratic and insensitive to context. (IV/E/Donald: p. 3, 104 – 108)

In the "critical" event, Donald highlighted the issue of a lack of feedback given in a systematised and mechanistic approach of the QAA subject reviews, which did not provide space for quality enhancement in higher education. And yet he believed that quality enhancement was crucial to higher education development. Table 7.13 below outlines the features that support the criticality of the event of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject review described by Donald. The event was also identified as "critical" by the interviewee. The criticality of the event was further confirmed by two other researchers and reinforced by other "critical", "like" and "other" events in the stories of the other academics and higher education leaders.

Table 7.13 Presence of features of criticality in Donald's story of a critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	√
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	√

Other observations

Similar to John, Donald believed that quality assurance mechanisms and procedures in British higher education were employed as means of political control over higher education and academic staff, and that these mechanisms and procedures did not support quality enhancement. He believed that more trust should be afforded to the professionalism of academics.

5. Story of Colin

(Male; age range – 40-50 years; tertiary experience – 15 years; discipline – English, currently pro-vice chancellor)

Background

Colin was a pro-vice chancellor for students and quality in a "new" university. He had an overall responsibility for quality management in the university. Colin was responsible for the design and implementation of instruments to evaluate quality throughout the institution. He was also involved in the strategic planning within the institution. Colin had 15 years of experience in higher education. He also had considerable experience as an auditor with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

Events in higher education quality

Colin told a story of "other" event which related to his previous work as a QAA auditor. These were a series of events significant to Colin which will be, for the purposes of this analysis, grouped together as one event. Colin believed that working as an auditor was an important learning experience for him. He learnt through

analysing the ways in which different higher education institutions managed their educational processes. He felt that it was "unproductive" for institutions to get locked into particular ways of management, justifying their practices by a tradition. Through his experiences as an auditor – through an exposure to a wide range of higher education management styles within the English and UK higher education systems – he discovered that practically every UK tertiary institution had its own specifics, and that tertiary institutions used very different approaches to achieving the same goals. This experience taught him that there were many ways of approaching a task, and that it was important to be flexible and open-minded about quality enhancement practices, but, at the same time, it was necessary to question quality enhancement practices and not just take them for granted, accepting that existing practices did not need to be improved.

> I've always liked to view that [role of an auditor] as quite a privileged role, because there is nothing better in staff development terms than taking other institutions apart and see how they do things. (Interview transcript V/E/Colin: p. 2, 61 – 63)

> …what that's taught me is that institutions always engage in processes because they'd always done it that way, and I think more than anything, what I do now and what I encourage others to do is to question everything, and not to be frightened of throwing it away and starting off again. (V/E/Colin: p. 2, 64 – 67)

> I've learnt to think that there is not just one way of doing something. And I think that it's revealing how differently UK higher education institutions do the same thing. You generally recognise the process, but the different ways that people get to it is really quite staggering at times. (V/E/Colin: p. 3, 101 – 104)

> I think that an exposure to an awful lot of systems was the most valuable aspect of what I've done in the past. (V/E/Colin: p. 3, 115 – 116)

Colin's story of the "other" event, taken from a more institutional-level perspective than it was the case in the stories of the previous four English academics, underlined the fact that the human involvement in quality enhancement practices – constantly questioning the value of these practices and their appropriateness for a particular purpose or situation – is a crucial aspect of the quality enhancement processes in higher education.

Colin also described a second "other" event related to his work with the QAA. He pointed out that the auditing processes involved working in teams of auditors from a range of different disciplines. He believed that each academic discipline had its own "culture" and that people educated through particular disciplines have corresponding ways of thinking. And thus, Colin found it highly beneficial to work in teams of auditors with different academic backgrounds. He believed that the various academic cultures contributed to the enhancement of the auditing processes, and thus potentially contributed to the enhancement of quality of individual institutions.

Both the events described by Colin were identified as "other", because they provided additional information to what was highlighted in the stories of the previous four English academics and higher education leaders, from a more institutional level perspective. Trustworthiness of the events in Colin's story was verified with two other researchers. The trustworthiness of the two "other" events was also reinforced by "critical", "like" and "other" events in the stories of other academics and higher

education leaders. Tables 7.14 and 7.15 outline the features present in the two "other" events in Colin's story.

Table 7.14 Presence of features of criticality in Colin's story of the first other event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aaa) Further background information	√

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

Table 7.15 Presence of features of criticality in Colin's story of the second other event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aaa) Further background information	√

Other observations

Colin believed that considering a range of different perspectives was beneficial in a review process and had a potential for future enhancement. He also perceived innovation as crucial to the future advancement of his university, and of British higher education in general. Colin was also the least sceptical of the five academics (whose

stories were analysed in detail) regarding the quality mechanisms in British higher education, most likely due to his own background as an auditor in higher education.

7.2 SUMMARY OF EVENTS: STORIES OF THE REMAINING ENGLISH ACADEMICS AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS

An analysis of the stories and "critical", "like" and "other" events of the remaining 14 English academics and higher education leaders (including 1 pilot study interview) supported the issues and concerns underlined by the detailed analyses of the stories and "critical" events of the five English academics and higher education leaders above. The stories and particularly "critical" events reiterated many of the concerns and issues already highlighted in the detailed analyses of the five interviews above.

Table 7.16 below outlines the types of events identified in the stories of the remaining English academics and higher education leaders. With each identified event type ("critical", "like" and "other"), the table contains a reference to the below Summary of issues in English higher education quality highlighted through "critical" events (Section A) and/or Summary of other issues in English higher education quality underlined in the stories (Section B), stating which issue the event relates to. The individual issues in Sections A and B below are numbered, and thus the Table 7.16 contains references the particular Section followed by the issue number (for instance, B.7 or A.4). Each event in the table also contains a reference to the particular interview transcript (citing the transcript number, acronym of the country, pseudonym

of the interviewee, relevant page and line numbers in the transcript where the event can be found).

Similarly to the detailed analyses of the five interviews above, all the types of events ("critical", "like" and "other") in the analysis of the remaining interviews in English higher education were confirmed by the criteria of criticality (as explained in Chapter 6). They were also verified by two other researchers, and validated against other "critical", "like", and "other" events in the stories of the English and Czech academics and higher education leaders.

Table 7.16 Overall summary of events outlined in the remaining stories in English higher education

Pseudonyms of academics and higher education leaders	*Dates when interviews undertaken*	*Field of expertise*	*Years of experience*	*"Critical" events*	*"Like" events*	*"Other" events*
Timothy	April 2006 (pilot)	Political science	Over 15	**X**	**X**	**1√** A. 4 XI/E/Timothy: p. 4, 184 – 199.
Margaret	May 2006	Quality	Over 15	**1√** A. 5 XII/E/Margaret: p. 2, 67 – 71; p. 2, 80 – 83.	**1√** B. 10; B. 7 XII/E/Margaret: p. 2, 71 – 78; p. 2, 83 – 87; p. 2, 89 – 93.	**X**
Alexander	May 2006	Education	10	**1√** B. 9; A. 4 XIII/E/Alexander: p. 2, 55 – 58; p. 2, 74 – 76; p. 2, 81 – 87.	**X**	**X**
Christopher	May 2006	Australian studies	6	**1√** A. 4 XIV/E/Christopher: p. 4, 158 – 160; p. 4, 174 – 183.	**X**	**X**
Elizabeth	May 2006	History	5	**1√** A. 4; B. 7 XV/E/Elizabeth: p. 4, 183 – 186.	**1√** A. 4 XV/E/Elizabeth: p. 5, 203 – 210.	**X**
Paul	August 2006	English literature	5	**X**	**1√** A. 4	**X**

Pseudonyms of academics and higher education leaders	***Dates when interviews undertaken***	***Field of expertise***	***Years of experience***	***"Critical" events***	***"Like" events***	***"Other" events***
					XVI/E/Paul: p. 1, 36 – 47.	
Leonard	September 2006	Geography	Over 26	**1√** B. 12 XVII/E/Leonard: p. 2, 75 – 91.	**X**	**1√** A. 4 XVII/E/Leonard: p. 2, 57 – 66.
Roger	September 2006	Law	Over 10	**X**	**1√** B. 7; A. 4 XVIII/E/Roger: p. 2, 81 – 96; p. 3, 114 – 119.	**X**
James	October 2006	Law	15	**2√** 1. A. 4 2. A. 4; B. 7 1. XIX/E/James: pp. 2 – 3, 96 – 140. 2. XIX/E/James: p. 4, 159 – 177.	**1√** A. 4; B. 7 XIX/E/James: p. 4, 184 – 193.	**1√** A. 3 XIX/E/James: pp. 4 – 5, 194 – 201.
Jane	October 2006	Law	22	**X**	**X**	**1√** A. 3 XX/E/Jane: p. 4, 154 – 168.

Pseudonyms of academics and higher education leaders	***Dates when interviews undertaken***	***Field of expertise***	***Years of experience***	***"Critical" events***	***"Like" events***	***"Other" events***
Janette	October 2006	Quality	6	**1√** B. 13 XXI/E/Janette: p. 6, 262 – 284.	**1√** B. 13 XXI/E/Janette: p. 7, 323 – 336.	**X**
Joseph	November 2006	Medicine, literature	Over 20	**X**	**X**	**1√** A. 4 XXII/E/Joseph: p. 2, 82 – 89; p. 2, 91 – 92.
William	March 2007	Higher education, history	32	**1√** A. 5; B. 8; B. 12 XXIII/E/William: p. 3, 109 – 129; p. 3, 133 – 144.	**X**	**X**

[Note: √ indicates presence; numerals – indicate number of events of one type; **X** indicates absence]

7.3 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS IN ENGLISH HIGHER EDUCATION

Sections A and B below summarise the dominant issues in English higher education quality based on a critical event narrative inquiry into the experiences of academics and higher education leaders. Section A summarises the issues highlighted through the "critical" events in stories of the English academics and higher education leaders. Section B summarises the issues highlighted through both the "like" and "other" events in stories of the English academics and higher education leaders. The issues in sections A and B are documented by reference to the interview transcripts where the issue was underlined.

A. Summary of issues in English higher education quality highlighted through "critical" events

The "critical" events in quality of English higher education described in the stories of the academics and higher education leaders (analysed above) highlighted the following issues:

1. **Significance of a regard for and value of the academic voice in the quality evaluation and enhancement processes in higher education.**

   The issue of disregard for the academic voice has been referred to by the English academic, Andrew (I/E/Andrew: p. 6, 268 -276). A concern regarding the lack of academic voice in higher education quality was also expressed by the English

academics, higher education leaders and experts in higher education, Donald (IV/E/Donald: p. 3, 109 – 113) and John (III/E/John: p. 2, 54 - 61).

These findings support what was argued or implied in a number of academic papers, such as Lomas, 2007a; Davies et al, 2007; and Hill et el, 2003. Students were regularly referred to as stakeholders in the higher education processes, whereas the academics were very rarely mentioned as stakeholders in the educational processes which implied a lack of attention to their perspectives. The value of students as stakeholders in higher education is, for instance, underlined by the British government supporting the activities of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), which focuses on the enhancement of various aspects of student experience.

2. **Quality systems, evaluations and their outcomes proved to be highly dependent on the attribute of interpersonal relations between the evaluators and those being evaluated.**

The importance of interpersonal relations between the evaluators and the evaluated was underlined by the English academic, Andrew (I/E/Andrew: pp. 5 – 6, 249 – 253; I/E/Andrew: p. 6, 254 – 261). This issue was also emphasised by another English academic and higher education leader, Donald (IV/E/Donald: p. 2, 80 – 96). Although the issue of interpersonal relations highlighted by Andrew and Donald referred to a quality assurance system which was employed in the English higher education system until 2001, the issue of interpersonal relations

may play a role in any quality assurance system, as there would almost certainly always be humans involved in such a process.

3. Important role of the human-centred aspects in the area of higher education quality.

The role of the human-centred aspects in the area of higher education quality is reflected in point 2 above which underlines what the English academic, Andrew, pointed out concerning quality mechanisms and systems – that the quality mechanisms and systems were only as good as the people who operated them (I/E/Andrew: p. 6, 268 – 276). Two other English academics, James (XIX/E/James: pp. 4 – 5, 194 – 201) and Jane (XX/E/Jane: p. 4, 154 – 168), also emphasised the way in which the quality of their academic work was impacted on by their personal lives.

4. Quality in higher education stems from personal involvement of the academic in the educational processes – importance of individual conscience, values and endeavours.

The role of personal values and endeavours in the enhancement of quality of the academic processes was emphasised by a majority of the interviewed English academics and higher education leaders. This aspect was, for example, pointed out by Christopher (XIV/E/Christopher: p. 4, 158 – 160; p. 4, 174 – 183), Elizabeth (XV/E/Elizabeth: p. 5, 203 – 210), and James (XIX/E/James: pp. 2 – 3, 96 – 140). For these three English academics, to engage students, academic peers or readers,

and to make them understand and reflect on what they read or heard was important. These aspects, to them, formed the substance of quality in higher education. And, yet, what matters to academics is felt to be currently disregarded in the quality assurance systems in place in higher education (Jones, 2003; Mathias, 2004).

5. **It is essential for external quality monitoring to involve positive, transparent and collegial approaches aimed at quality enhancement, through comparison of practices and learning from mistakes.**

This point relates to the previous issue underlining the significance of collegiality in academic work in general. Collegiality, positive and transparent approaches were stated as vital components of quality enhancement. The issue of the nature of external quality monitoring was further highlighted, for instance, by the English academic, Roger (XVIII/E/Roger: p. 2, 81 – 96; p. 3, 114 – 119).

B. Summary of other issues in English higher education quality underlined in the stories

6. **Importance of innovation and change in higher education.**

The significance of the aspect of innovation and change in higher education quality enhancement was implied by the English higher education leader, Colin (V/E/Colin: p. 2, 64 – 67; V/E/Colin: p. 3, 101 – 104). Colin underlined the

necessity of innovation and change in the current English higher education environment, related to its dynamic and changing nature.

Further, the issue of the current drive in quality assurance effectively obstructing innovation and change was pointed out by the English academic, Andrew (I/E/Andrew: p. 4, 175-183).

7. Collegial approach to quality enhancement among academics (sharing and comparing views and practices and reflecting on them) as a part of professional development of each academic.

The English academic and higher education leader, Donald (IV/E/Donald: p. 1, 41 – 43; IV/E/Donald: p. 1, 45 – 47), underlined collegiality and its role in quality enhancement in higher education. This aspect was also highlighted by another English academic and higher education leader, John (III/E/John: p. 2, 88 - 92). They both argued that reflection and collegial feedback from academic colleagues were more effective ways of enhancing the quality of academic work.

8. Research in English higher education treated as having greater value than teaching.

Several English academics and higher education leaders emphasised that research assessment has always been considered as more important in English higher education than the assessment of teaching, which implied a greater value afforded to research in English higher education. The issue was underlined by the English academic and higher education leader, William (XXIII/E/William: p. 3, 109 –

129; p. 3, 133 – 144). Two other English academics, Andrew (I/E/Andrew: p. 2, 83-87), and Harold (II/E/Harold: p. 2, 55 – 59) also implied a greater weight given to research assessment in English higher education by pointing to the elitist nature of the assessment of research as opposed to the assessment of teaching. The views of the above three academics support the findings of the Kogan et al (2000) study.

9. External quality evaluations (particularly in the late 1990s and early 2000s) perceived as increasing bureaucracy instead of increasing efficiency, and also insensitive to the context [i.e. differences between individual higher education institutions].

For instance, the English academic and higher education leader, Donald (IV/E/Donald: p. 3, 104 – 108), and the English academic, Andrew (I/E/Andrew: p. 2, 58-69), emphasised the issues of increased bureaucracy and insensitivity to context related to the QAA assessments of teaching, particularly between the late 1990s and early 2000s. From Donald and Andrew's experience, these assessments did not result in actual enhancement of the quality of teaching.

10. Important change in the style of quality inspection in English higher education over the last five years.

A number of the interviewed English academics and higher education leaders pointed out the change in the style of quality assessment of teaching in English higher education since 2002. The English academics, Andrew (I/E/Andrew: p. 3, 119-123), and Harold (II/E/Harold: p. 4, 156 -159; II/E/Harold: p. 4, 159 – 164),

underlined the current less “aggressive” and more collegial nature of teaching quality assessments in English higher education and also a gradual move towards a greater emphasis being placed on enhancement of quality.

11. The lack of sustainability of quality management models in higher education.

With the growth of importance of quality management in English higher education in the 1990s, many English universities adopted various quality management models. However, these models (coming from the business sector) have never been sustained by English tertiary institutions.
This aspect was pointed out, for instance, by the English academic and higher education leader, Harold (II/E/Harold: p. 4, 181 – 187; II/E/Harold: p. 5, 208 – 209). This supports the argument made by Birnbaum (2000) who found that business sector management models were largely unsuitable for the higher education sector.

12. Quality assurance introduced into English higher education as a mechanism of political control.

The aspect of quality assurance introduced as a means of political control over higher education was suggested by the English academic and higher education leader, Harold (II/E/Harold: p. 4, 156 -159; II/E/Harold: p. 4, 159 – 164). This aspect was further emphasised by the English academic and higher education leader, John (III/E/John: p. 3, 135 – 141). John also highlighted the way in which

quality assurance has served the British government as an accountability tool (III/E/John: p. 2, 88 – 92; p. 3, 135 – 140). This understanding confirmed what was pointed out by Harvey (2005).

13. Need for a reflection concerning the use of quality mechanisms; necessary to consider the context and the purpose of quality assessment approaches.

The English academic, Janette (XXI/E/Janette: p. 7, 323 – 336), emphasised the importance of reflection regarding quality mechanisms employed in higher education institutions and also the significance of seeing one's particular field of higher education in a wider context, in communication with other higher education fields. The English academic and higher education leader, Donald (IV/E/Donald: p. 1, 45 – 47), similarly highlighted the value of reflection on higher education practices. Donald further underlined the importance of considering the institutional context in the quality evaluation process (IV/E/Donald: p. 3, 104 – 108).

14. Value in accommodating and comparing perspectives and approaches from a wide range of different disciplines; beneficial for enhancing quality of the educational processes in higher education.

The importance of the aspect of considering different worldviews as a way of enhancing higher education quality was highlighted by the English higher

education leader, Colin (V/E/Colin: p. 3, 118 – 128), and also by the English academic, Janette (XXI/E/Janette: p. 7, 323 – 336).

15. Separation of research and teaching in higher education not having a positive impact on the overall quality of higher education provided.

The English academic and higher education leader, John (III/E/John: p. 4, 179 – 183), underlined the increasing separation of research and teaching in English higher education. He perceived this development as harmful in terms of future enhancement of higher education as a whole.

7.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The analysis of stories of English academics and higher education leaders identified a number of significant issues in the area of quality in English higher education which tend to be overlooked in the current practice of quality assurance. This analysis will be further discussed in Chapter 9.

The following chapter will analyse stories of Czech academics and higher education leaders and present the results in Czech higher education.

Chapter 8: Czech stories in higher education quality

Chapter 8 analyses the stories of Czech academics and higher education leaders in the area of higher education quality and presents the results of the study in the form of "critical", "like" and "other" events. It analyses the stories of five individuals in depth, and summarises the analysis of events in stories of the remaining 7 academics and higher education leaders. It first presents the stories and "critical events", and then provides their further analysis.

Prior to examining the individual stories of Czech academics and higher education leaders, the reader is reminded of a significant political landmark which had greatly impacted on the development of the Czech higher education system and which will be referred to by most of the academics and higher education leaders in their stories. This event was the so-called Velvet Revolution which took place in the former Czechoslovakia in November 1989.

In relation to this event, it is worth pointing out that, in 1989, the number of Czech higher education institutions was relatively small – 23, according to the statistical data available on the Czech Institute for Information on Education website (IIE, 2007). Between 1989 and 1999, the number of higher education institutions remained virtually unchanged. The most significant growth in the number of higher education institutions and also students in Czech higher education began in 1999, when the 1998 Higher Education Act (which endorsed the establishment of new private institutions) took effect (CHES, 2001). By the academic year 2002/2003, the number of Czech higher education institutions has grown considerably to 62 – 24 public, 4 state and 34

private higher education institutions (Bastova et al, 2004). In 2007, according to information on the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports website (updated on 10 April 2007), there were 71 higher education institutions in the Czech Republic – 26 public, 2 state and 43 private higher education institutions (MSMT, 2007a). There was a corresponding growth in the number of students in Czech higher education between academic years 1989/1990 and 2006/2007. During that time, the number of students in Czech higher education more than doubled (Bastova et al, 2004; MSMT, 2007b). Figure 8.1 below summarises the growth of Czech higher education institutions between the years 1989 and 2007.

In addition, in comparison to the English higher education system, there is a wider range of Czech higher education institutions. It consists of public, private and state higher education institutions (this distinction is explained in a greater detail in Chapter 3).

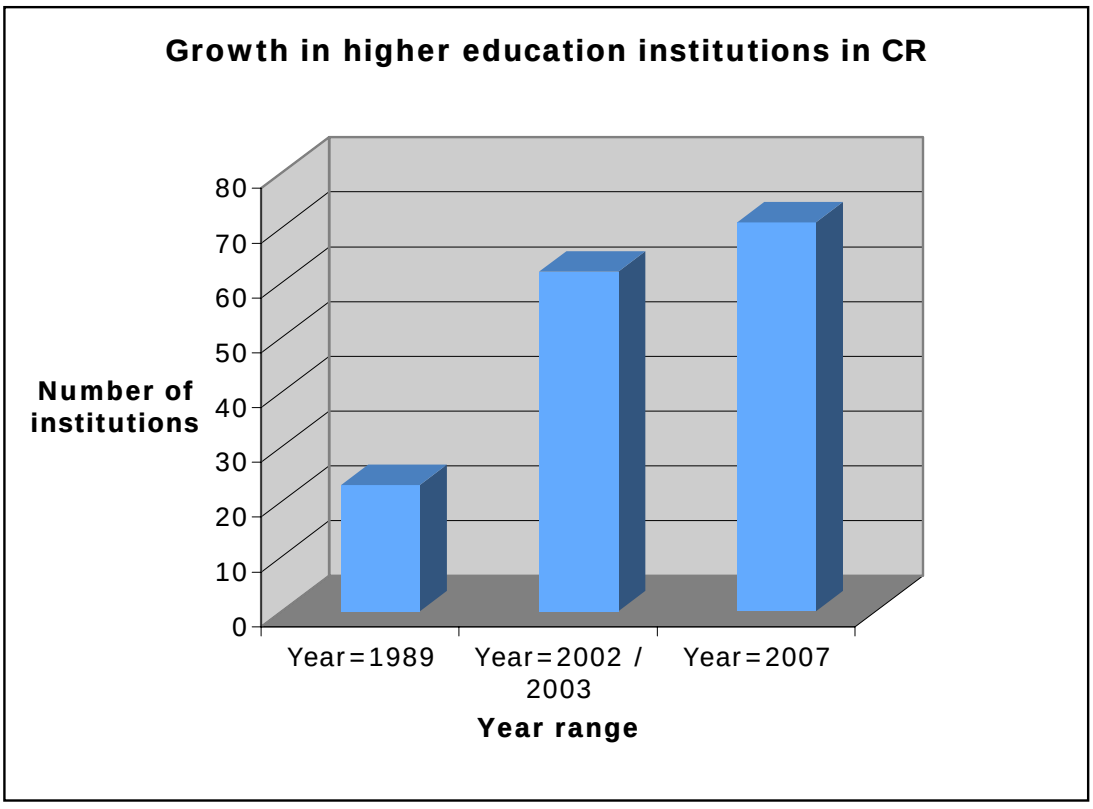

Figure 8.1 Summary of the growth in higher education institutions in the Czech Republic

However, due to the constraints explained in Chapter 5, this research study only covers the public higher education institutions. The public higher education institutions include universities which existed under the Communist regime, these are generally large research-intensive institutions based in metropolitan centres, but also, newer universities, sometimes referred to as the "regional" universities, which were set up or gained in size and importance during the 1990s (particularly in the latter part of the 1990s) and are based in smaller regional towns and cities in the Czech Republic.

8.1 DETAILED ANALYSIS OF EVENTS: STORIES OF FIVE CZECH ACADEMICS AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS

This section contains a detailed analysis of five stories of Czech academics and higher education leaders which clearly illustrated components of criticality in their experiences of higher education quality. The first story is of an academic currently working in an English university. The academic, however, originally comes from the Czech Republic and has a good knowledge of the Czech higher education system, and therefore she provides a comparative reflection on both the higher education systems. This story is followed by stories of four academics and higher education leaders based in Czech higher education institutions. All the four stories reflect on some aspects of the historical development and change in Czech higher education, particularly after 1989. The analysis will then focus on the important aspects of higher education quality highlighted through "critical", "like" and "other" events. Similarly to the previous chapter, each story is reported using sub-headings: *Background*, *Events in*

higher education quality and *Other observations*. The "critical", "like" and "other" events in the sub-section *Events in higher education* in each story will be presented in a natural sequence as they occurred within each story, rather than being ordered by their level of criticality from "critical" through to "other" events.

Table 8.1 below summarises the types of events described by the four academics and higher education leaders in Czech tertiary institutions whose stories will be analysed in detail. The events described by the first academic (currently based at an English tertiary institution) will be incorporated into the table because the significant event she outlined relates to Czech higher education. Similarly to the last chapter regarding English higher education, all the interview transcript quotes concerning Czech higher education will be cited as follows: (Interview transcript number/Czech Republic (CR)/pseudonym of the interviewee: page number(s), line number(s)).

Table 8.1 Summary of events outlined in the analysis of the stories in Czech higher education

Pseudonyms of academics and higher education leaders	***Dates when interviews undertaken***	***"Critical" events***	***"Like" events***	***"Other" events***
Michaela	November 2006	**1√**	**x**	**x**
Tomas	June 2006	**2√**	**x**	**x**
Richard	June 2006	**1√**	**x**	**1√**
Krystof	April 2007	**2√**	**x**	**2√**
Ivo	April 2007	**2√**	**1√**	**x**

[Note: **√** indicates presence; numerals – indicate number of events of one type; **x** indicates absence]

1. Story of Michaela

(Female; age range – 30-40 years; tertiary experience – 6 years; disciplines – English, media studies, sociology)

Background

Michaela was a research fellow in a "new" university in England. She had 4 years of experience in Czech higher education and 2 years of experience in English higher education. In the Czech Republic, she previously taught in two courses in a department where she undertook her doctoral studies. This was in a research-intensive university. (Note: It is a common practice in Czech universities that PhD students teach in at least one course per semester.)

Michaela's current role in the English university mainly focused on research. Michaela was the only interview participant who had recent experience in lecturing and research in both Czech and English higher education systems (providing a comparison between the two systems), and thus she was included among the stories of more senior Czech academics and leaders, despite her being more junior.

Michaela remarked on the differences between the approaches to quality of teaching in English and Czech higher education systems. She perceived that quality in English higher education was more "institutionalised" than in the Czech higher education system and she also implied that the English system to her was more equitable in the relationship between the lecturer and the students.

> When I was a student in London, I was at a very prestigious university [an "old" university]…the way that courses were structured was that there was one professor or senior

> member of staff who was responsible for the course as such, and he would usually give the lectures. There would be another person who would be a teaching assistant or a PhD student who would be responsible for the seminars and would sometimes do the marking of the essays and student work.
>
> Now, this would be very different in the Czech Republic where the system would almost always involve one person who would teach the whole course and also do all the marking. That somebody would have a teaching assistant would be extremely rare. (Interview transcript VI/E/Michaela: p. 1, 21 – 29)

> …in Eastern Europe [Czech Republic], it is just one person who assures the quality [of a course]. As if the quality was "embedded" in that person; and he is a kind of guarantor of the quality… (VI/E/Michaela: p. 1, 34 – 36) and the quality is also embedded in the requirements of the course. It is not so much that single person who will decide what the quality is, but it is more the institutional set-up which would decide… (VI/E/Michaela: p. 1, 39 – 41)

Events in higher education quality

Michaela described a "critical" event which was related to the cultural differences in English and Czech higher education systems. Michaela started her PhD in England, however, for financial reasons she had to return to the Czech Republic to undertake a PhD programme there. Her negative PhD study experiences in the Czech Republic made Michaela seriously consider a withdrawal from her study. She eventually finished her PhD in 2005. However, she seriously questioned the standard of her PhD programme undertaken in a department of media studies in a Czech university. Her view was taken from a student and also lecturer/researcher perspective.

> I came to the UK, originally, to do a PhD and after a year here, because we were not a part of the European Union yet…[and because] I didn't want to stay in a kind of insecure financial situation, I decided to take up a PhD in the Czech Republic.

> And this was a huge shock to me, because when you do a PhD in Western Europe, the PhD students are in some ways the benchmark of quality of the institution, while in the Czech Republic, the PhD students are no benchmark of anything because the university doesn't have to care about the dissemination of knowledge. The only thing that the university has to care about is the number of students because of the way it is funded.
>
> So, that was a huge shock to me and after about…a year and a half, I was thinking of quitting my PhD in the Czech Republic. Because, if I am to talk about the quality of teaching, it was incomparable…I was at a top institution in Britain, because this university is arguably one of the three top institutions in Britain in media studies [but nevertheless]… (VI/E/Michaela: pp. 4 – 5, 196 – 209)

Michaela further highlighted the issues she faced during her PhD study in the Czech Republic. These issues related to her negative experience with supervision of her thesis and generally the approach of some lecturers to teaching and students, but also the general services that were provided to students in her institution.

> …when I was doing my PhD [in the Czech tertiary institution], one was simply at a mercy of the administrators, who either would help you or they wouldn't. While in Britain, this is a sort of service: "I'm paying my tuition fee, and you are here to help", which may have implications for quality, these can be both positive and negative.
>
> I could talk about how the Czech Republic was a complete failure in terms of the quality of the PhD experience itself, in terms of teaching, in terms of the supervision. In the Czech Republic, at least in my experience of the PhD, there is nothing like a regular supervision. When I arrived there, and my supervisor learnt that I started doing a PhD in London, he said: "fine, you'll write it, and then just show it to me". I had two supervision sessions in four

> years. While in Britain, it is a regular thing, you write minutes for your PhD student etc… (VI/E/Michaela: p. 5, 211– 222)

> In Britain, some things are taken for granted, for example, providing a syllabus, or that you comment on students' essays, and some of these are still not a usual thing in Eastern Europe [Czech Republic]… (VI/E/Michaela: p. 5, 224– 226)

> In the Czech Republic, it might often happen that professors would arrive late for exams [PhD students in the Czech Republic are generally required to take some exams during their PhD study], so the students would be waiting there for an hour or an hour and a half just to be examined, which is something that would be unimaginable in Britain. (VI/E/Michaela: p. 5, 228– 232)

It needs to be pointed out that Michaela was reflecting on her experience with approach to supervision and lecturing in a single department of one university, therefore her experience cannot be taken as a representation of approaches across the whole Czech higher education sector. Michaela herself admitted that the situation is currently changing. However, this is not to suggest that there might not have been other departments or schools within Czech higher education where students experienced similar approaches as was the case with Michaela.

Nevertheless, it was not within the scope of this study to investigate to what degree have approaches of lecturers to students changed across the whole of Czech higher education system. Table 8.2 below outlines the features of criticality (as summarised in Chapter 6) identified in Michaela's story of a "critical" event. Michaela's "critical" event contained all the features of criticality outlined in Chapter 6, including defined stages of the event (start of her PhD studies in England, resumption of a PhD

programme in the Czech Republic, serious doubts about the value of her programme, and finishing her PhD). Michaela also highlighted the event as critical. The criticality of this event was further verified by two other researchers, and reinforced by other "critical", "like" and "other" events in the stories of the other academics and higher education leaders.

Table 8.2 Presence of features of criticality in Michaela's story of a critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	√
e) Well-defined stages	√
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement.	√

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

Other observations

Michaela's "critical" event highlighted some of the cultural issues regarding quality in Czech higher education through her own experiences as a student in a PhD programme, but also through her present research/lecturing experience in English higher education. These were essentially issues of disregard for the student on the part of the Czech lecturer, but also, for instance, on the part of the student services. The issue of the approach of lecturers to students will also be highlighted later in general terms in the story of one other Czech academic, Richard.

2. Story of Tomas

(Male; age range – 30-40 years; tertiary experience – over 10 years; disciplines – political science, Russian, history, currently associate dean)

Background

Tomas was an associate dean for education in a faculty of a research-intensive university in the Czech Republic. He was also an associate professor in a school of political science in the faculty. Tomas had over 10 years of experience in higher education.

As an associate dean, Tomas was directly responsible for the quality of the educational and research processes in his faculty and for the quality of services provided to their students.

Tomas understood quality in higher education as resulting from the co-existence of an academic "free market" and of a tradition of an academic rigour. Quality, according to Tomas, was a "relative" notion. He believed that:

> …quality results from a co-existence of a kind of academic "free market" on the one hand, and of something as conservative and elitist as a collegium of "the elders" [senior academics, frequently senior in age as well], the professors, who will decide who should be promoted to an associate professor or a professor. This process is very exclusive and also may be rather discriminating. However, I believe that this is the crux of the academic freedom which produces and reproduces quality. (VII/CR/Tomas: p. 1, 35 – 41)

> One can recognise good quality only if they can compare it to some poor quality. If there was no poor quality in higher education, then one would never know that something is better. The

> idea that everything that is "produced" in higher education ought to be outstanding is absurd. We always need some sort of "comparative framework" which helps us distinguish between something better or worse. (VII/CR/Tomas: p. 1, 42 – 49)

> I do not believe in some kind of "objective good" [quality understood as an "objective good"]. (VII/CR/Tomas: p. 2, 50 – 51)

When considering the quality of the publishing of research outcomes by Czech academics, Tomas perceived some significant socio-cultural issues compared to the Anglo-Saxon countries and also other Western European countries.

> When judging the quality of the publications, [of Czech academics] I realise that there is, for instance, a language barrier. In order to reach as many readers as possible, articles and other publications, these days, must be written in English. This, however, represents a socio-cultural issue for many Czech academics: "If I start publishing in English, I will stop creating new terminology in Czech." (VII/CR/Tomas: p. 2, 64 – 68)

Tomas expressed his belief that the whole purpose of a university is in the striving for the creation of quality.

> The whole purpose of a university is in a search for something – in fact, a search for a "truth", where the way or the method of searching for this "truth" is important. And I am not in favour of the postmodern way of thinking that everything has the same value, in the end. On the contrary, I think that this way of thinking is dangerous and may lead to the demise of quality [in higher education]. (VII/CR/Tomas: p. 2, 78– 82)

> I believe that if, from the start, my criterion is that everything will be "awarded" the same value, then I may end up with no value at all, in the end. (VII/CR/Tomas: p. 2, 83 – 85)

Further, Tomas explained that there had been significant changes in the perception of quality in higher education between the communist era (until 1989) and the present time [interview held in June 2006]. He pointed out that the only criterion of quality in higher education during the communist era was the loyalty to the regime.

Events in higher education quality

The first "critical" event Tomas described concerned a significant political event, the so-called Velvet Revolution of 1989, which brought the end of the communist regime in the former Czechoslovakia. This meant not only major changes in the society but also in the set-up and governance of the Czech universities. Tomas outlined the difference between the university environment before 1989 and after 1989. He also pointed out the unpredictability of the impact of such a "critical" event on the society as a whole, but also on the university environment, in particular. This was a key political event which significantly affected Tomas's personal and academic/professional life, and also the lives of many others. It not only had an immediate impact on, but it considerably influenced the future development of the society and the running of universities as well. In his story, Tomas implied that this political event brought with it important qualitative changes in the way universities were run (from a "closed", rigid and regimented style to a more "open" style). Table 8.3 below summarises the features of criticality contained in Tomas's "critical" event. The only feature the "critical" event did not include was well-defined stages. Tomas himself identified the event as critical. The event's criticality was also confirmed by two other researchers, and reinforced by other "critical", "like" and "other" events identified in the stories of the other academics and higher education leaders.

Table 8.3 Presence of features of criticality in Tomas's story of the first critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	√
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	√

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

Tomas further described another "critical" event which happened in the tertiary institution where he studied at the time of the Velvet Revolution in 1989, and the event was instigated by the "critical" political event of the Revolution. The "critical" event was, in fact, a series of events, which will be for the purposes of this analysis classified as a single event. This "critical" event related to the sudden entry of "new" academics (who were banned from lecturing during the communist era) into Czech higher education and broadening the range of topics and knowledge that Tomas and other students could suddenly access. This event brought considerable interest and motivation into Tomas's academic life (then as a student). The event illustrated the kind of qualitative changes that were happening in the Czech higher education after 1989.

> I remember the first lectures by people I might have heard of [previously], but who could not lecture until 1989. All of a sudden, you were "confronted" by these people who really had the knowledge and the ability to "pass" this knowledge on. But even those who could lecture under communism, but perhaps were lecturing just on Soviet literature or something like that, suddenly liberated themselves and started lecturing on, eg. Classical Russian literature, or on the "forbidden" authors…(VII/CR/Tomas: p. 4, 158 – 164)

> At the same time, we managed to get rid of those who had no place in the university environment. I remember, for instance, one compulsory seminar we had in history run by the deputy of the Communist party regional committee, who was a professor, of course, but who had never published a single academic piece. But [after 1989], luckily, he very quickly realized that he had no place in the university.
>
> So, that was a very inspiring time. (VII/CR/Tomas: p. 4, 168 – 173)

The second event in Tomas's story was identified as "critical", because it contained most of the features of criticality, apart from the defined stages in the event (as summarised in Table 8.4 below). Tomas himself identified the event as critical. The event's criticality was further confirmed by two other researchers, and reinforced by other "critical", "like" and "other" events identified in the stories of other academics and higher education leaders.

Table 8.4 Presence of features of criticality in Tomas's story of the second critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	√
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	√

Other observations

Even though Tomas experienced very different types of academic environments and the Czech academic culture generally differs from the English academic culture (as has been explained in Chapters 3 and 5), and despite the fact that the history of Czech higher education system has been quite turbulent compared to the English system [with Czech tertiary institutions being closed between 1939 and 1945 under the Nazi occupation of the country during WWII, and then from 1948 to 1989 they were under

the communist rule (Connelly, 2000)], there were still some striking similarities between the stories of the English academics and Tomas's. In particular, it was the focus on personal pursuits, endeavours and values that Tomas considered to play a significant role in his academic career. Tomas pointed out that it was the individual conscience of the academic that eventually played a decisive part in the judgment of quality in higher education.

The first "critical" event that Tomas described instigated a considerable transformation of the Czech higher education, and this, as Tomas depicted it, impacted particularly strongly on the aspect of quality in higher education. The qualitative changes in Czech higher education were highlighted in the second "critical" event which had important motivational value for Tomas.

3. Story of Richard

(Male; age range – over 60 years; tertiary experience – over 25 years; disciplines – English, currently director of an office for international studies)

Background

Richard was a director of an office for international studies in a research-intensive university in the Czech Republic. He was previously a lecturer and also a head of the English department of the same university. He had more than 25 years of experience in Czech higher education.

Richard explained that the office for international studies was set up to centralize various aspects of international relations at the university-level, and the office were

responsible, for instance, for bilateral agreements between the university and other overseas institutions, for teacher and student mobility, programmes in English, other domestic programmes for international students, presentation of the university abroad, and similar.

Richard expressed a belief that quality was related to virtually all activities that went on in higher education. He found the most significant weakness of Czech higher education in the lack of efficiency and effectiveness of administrative and management processes in tertiary institutions.

He perceived that his institution focused mainly on two areas in terms of quality enhancement: teaching and research. He believed that there was a clear hierarchical relationship between the two, with a preference for research, which Richard perceived as dangerous for higher education. He felt that there should be a balance in the focus on quality of teaching and research.

> Although these should be complementary, not only here but in other universities, they are often put into a hierarchy of research being important, teaching not so important. And, for me, this is a disaster for the university. But it's happening to many prominent universities all over the Western world. And I think that it's an extremely dangerous development. There should be as much concern about the quality of teaching as there is about the quality of research. (Interview transcript VIII/CR/Richard: p. 2, 77 – 82)

To illustrate the range of issues that he came across in Czech higher education related to quality, Richard gave an example of the European University Association (EUA) evaluation that his university took part in, in the academic year 2003/2004. The office

for international studies was responsible for organising the whole evaluation process, including the visits by the evaluators, assembling all the documentation and the final self-evaluation report of the university. Richard pointed out two key difficulties in the evaluation process. One issue was that a majority of the academics who were asked by the Chancellor to take part in the evaluation felt that because quality was not directly related to their own specialist areas, they were not competent enough to comment on it. The second issue was in the unwillingness of Czech academics to openly discuss weaknesses in their respective higher education institutions, and their "defensive" attitudes towards the concept of quality. Richard also highlighted a third related aspect and that was the understanding, associated with the communist era, that a greater quantity automatically meant a greater quality.

Therefore, Richard believed that it was difficult to make Czech academics understand that, in order to enhance their practices, it was necessary for them to admit the weaknesses in their practice.

> The EUA is an interesting example of the kind of standard that is being spread over Europe. They give you a very clear set of guidelines by which you have to prepare the self-evaluation. At that time, when the Rector [chancellor] had to nominate a team from all faculties and different institutions to work on the report, we got together and there were two key difficulties. One was that people said that they felt they were not competent to talk about this, which is one of the problems in this culture, and it is that everybody is, or thinks they are, highly specialised in one little area, and "I've never heard about quality, then I can't talk about it". And then the other thing was, of course, that they thought that quality would be measured in numbers. (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 1, 37 – 45)

> There is another aspect to quality and quality assessment here: people in this culture are not used to - when it comes to talking about quality - publicly saying anything other than good things. (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 2, 59 – 61)

> I think that in the Czech university culture there is a tendency to say: "Everything we do is the best." And so quality ceases to have any kind of meaning. (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 2, 68 – 70)

Events in higher education quality

The first "critical" event that Richard outlined concerned the changes in the department he was heading after the political change-over of 1989. The political change-over was an underlying "critical" event which enabled Richard's "critical" event to happen, however Richard did not explicate it, and thus the event will not be analysed in Richard's story.

The changes Richard described concerned a major pedagogical shift in his department in terms of the improvement of quality in teaching. This meant moving away from rote learning to putting more emphasis on thinking and interpreting of ideas; and introducing mainly a written form of examination. Richard also initiated the widening of the range of courses and seminars within the various sub-disciplines in his former department. He expressed a realisation of the dangers of such an approach in terms of the quality of the knowledge gained by students.

> I was primarily, for most of my career, involved in quality of, or I realised in retrospect, that I was involved in the quality at the teaching level. (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 2, 88 – 90)

> …after the changes in 1989, I was elected the head of the English department, and my primary concern right away was to change the whole structure of the studies, and to change teaching

> and evaluation methods in order to improve the quality. For me, this meant first of all: much less emphasis on rote learning, much less emphasis on this idea of compactness of knowledge, much more emphasis on thinking, interpreting, which meant, of course, openness to theory… (VIII/CR/Richard: pp. 2 – 3, 91 – 96)

> Another change was a shift towards written as opposed to oral examinations. Because if a part of teaching is also evaluation, you cannot give good evaluations at an oral examination, except in special circumstances. Obviously, a doctoral examination where you have 2 or 3 hours to examine, yes…but in the normal way of things, you cannot possibly evaluate objectively in the kind of oral examination that they have here [in many Czech tertiary institutions] – at the most, a 20-minute examination. In examinations of this kind all the power is on the side of the professor and none on the part of the student, there's no way of checking on things. And oral examinations have been misused by professors. To me, this was an absolutely non-quality way of examining, so we shifted to more course work, written essays, etc. We shifted away from the kinds of comprehensive courses which were basically encyclopaedic knowledge courses. We shifted more towards courses focusing on a certain area, theme or whatever, where people could explore and find connections and so on. We shifted towards a written examination system in which – oral examinations are designed to test what you don't know, they are negative examinations essentially, at least the way they operate in this country. Written examinations should encourage the student to show what he or she does know and is interested in, has done extra work in… (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 3, 111 – 126)

The "critical" event of a transformation in the pedagogy of the department Richard was heading meant, to him, also a significant change and improvement in the quality of teaching in the department. This event was partially enabled to happen by the political change-over in the whole country, and partly this involved a considerable initiative on Richard's part. Richard was educated in an Anglo-Saxon tradition (Canada and Britain), and thus he was familiar with different pedagogical approaches from the approaches employed in the Czech higher education system and was able to

introduce the teaching styles based on the Anglo-Saxon tradition into his English department. Therefore, the "critical" event was largely dependent on Richard's personal notion of quality and the event, in the form of transformation in pedagogy, happened through Richard's beliefs, endeavour and initiative. Such a qualitative transformation would most likely never have happened without Richard's knowledge and initiative.

Table 8.5 below outlines the features of criticality identified in Richard's story of a "critical" event. The story of the "critical" event did not indicate any life-changing consequences. The "critical" event happened owing to Richard's life-long conviction in certain qualities in pedagogy. The "critical" event also did not contain any defined stages. The event was pointed out as critical by the interviewee. The criticality of the event was further verified by two other researchers, and reinforced by other "critical", "like" and "other" events in the stories of other academics and higher education leaders.

Table 8.5 Presence of features of criticality in Richard's story of a critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	√

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

The second event ("other" event) Richard described concerned the process of internationalisation that was being debated in his institution. Richard outlined it as an ongoing process or debate in the institution. To him, the process of internationalisation was closely related to quality, and there were a number of issues

associated with the possible approaches to internationalisation with underlying implications for quality. Richard pointed out one specific aspect of quality enhancement related to internationalisation in the Czech higher education culture which was the introduction of programmes taught in English. The event was identified as "other", because it related to further information on the range of measures of quality enhancement, which Richard saw gradually being introduced into Czech higher education, in particular to his University. Trustworthiness of identification of the event was confirmed by two other researchers. It was further verified by other "critical", "like" and "other" events in the stories of other academics and higher education leaders.

> To me, internationalisation is a quality measure because it's got so many aspects which relate to quality...Our aim, very vaguely, is to have many more international students in the university but, of course, this means, in the first place, how are we going to get them? Are we going to encourage them to come here and study in Czech or in a foreign language? And there's one group of people at the University who think that we can heavily recruit from places like Slovakia, from Russia, Serbia and so on. Slovaks can study here with no problems, the others with a short intensive course of Czech, and we can attract very good students this way. There's another group that says no, the only real way to internationalise is to move significantly towards English language programmes…
>
> There're a lot of implications for quality there because I think that you are going to be much more aware of your quality if you are creating English language programmes, because suddenly you are in a total internationally competitive network. If we are saying we want the best students to do our degrees in Czech, basically what we are saying is: our degrees in Czech are better than their degrees there. (VIII/CR/Richard: pp. 4 – 5,176 – 190)…but, to me, there is an element of self-satisfaction in this attitude, and there is not much question of quality. (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 5, 194 – 195)

The features of the "other" event described by Richard are outlined in Table 8.6 below.

Table 8.6 Presence of features of criticality in Richard's story of other event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aaa) Further background information	√

Other observations

Reflecting on the second event, Richard implied the culture-specific aspect/s of internationalisation in the Czech tertiary education context. The dominant cultural feature in this event was the aspect of the language of delivery– the question whether programmes for foreign students should be taught in a foreign language, i.e. English. Richard indicated that the question of the language of delivery was a noteworthy aspect of making the quality of programmes in Czech higher education more transparent. In comparison, such an aspect would not play a role in the process of internationalisation of English higher education because programmes in English universities are predominantly delivered in English.

4. Story of Krystof

(Male; age range – over 70 years; tertiary experience – over 40 years; discipline – sociology)

Background

Krystof was a professor of sociology and also a former dean of a faculty of a research-intensive university in the Czech Republic. He had more than 40 years of experience in Czech tertiary sector.

Krystof believed that quality improvement was an integral part of his work not only in his own institution but also more broadly within the Czech higher education system. To him, quality in higher education represented a permanent challenge. He further explained what he meant by the challenge.

> I believe in the second law of thermo-dynamism, which means that if we leave "things" as they are, they are only going to get worse. For instance, a broken watch will not repair itself. This law also applies to institutions. So, if we want the institutions to at least remain in the same state, we have to continuously endeavour to improve them. If we left them without any intervention, then they would gradually worsen. (Interview transcript IX/CR/Krystof: p. 1, 9 – 14)

Krystof believed that there was a constant need for academics to improve quality of higher education. However, when reflecting on the general understanding of the concept of quality in the current Czech higher education, Krystof made an observation that quality at present was substituted by a concept of popularity of higher education

institutions. He also pointed out that he perceived a lot of antagonism towards quality monitoring in general among higher education institutions in the Czech Republic.

> Not many academics in this country at present believe that there is something like quality in higher education. Currently they only believe in popularity of higher education institutions. Quality is irrelevant. At present, popularity is the most important aspect [in Czech higher education]. (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 3, 118 – 121)

> This does not mean that popularity would not reflect the quality of an institution, but it reflects it only indirectly. (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 3, 125 – 126) It does not mean when a tertiary institution has more applicants that it is necessarily better than another institution with fewer applicants. (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 3, 130 – 131)

> It will still take many years before tertiary institutions in this country get a grasp of what quality really means. (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 3, 138 – 139)

> I believe that the biggest obstacle in any quality monitoring in Czech higher education are own interests of individual universities which are represented by the Council of University Chancellors, where many are against the idea of quality evaluations in Czech higher education. On the one hand, we have the oldest university in the country which is very much against the idea of quality monitoring…(IX/CR/Krystof: p. 3, 108 – 112) On the other hand, you have the newer regional universities, which are aware of their issues regarding quality, so they are not interested in quality evaluations either. (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 3, 115 – 117)

To help understand some of the current issues that Czech higher education is dealing with, Krystof explained the historical context of the political and social realities which significantly impacted on the Czech higher education system and implicitly also on its quality – Nazi occupation and the communist regime (lasting 50 years). Krystof pointed out that, at the end of the communist era, Czech universities were in a very

bad state. As a result of that, Krystof believed that Czech universities were still (interview held in April 2007) "lagging" behind the development in some of the Western European universities.

> …[at the end of the communist regime] we were greatly lagging behind the dynamic development of the tertiary sector in the Western world: in terms of the internal, social and managerial development of universities which took place in the second half of the 20th century. (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 1, 27 – 30)

> So, the first challenge for us was to reach some sort of "normality", "get our bearings" in all that, think it all through, and only then start moving towards becoming a standard European university, so that our university system started functioning according to the needs of the society.

> And if we talk about Europe, or the European Union, there are, of course, universities of better and worse standard within the European Union, and that does not depend on the East-West dynamic. However, if we consider the East-West dynamic, 17 years later [17 years since the end of the communist regime], we still have not managed to fully catch up on the 50-year "handicap". (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 1, 36 – 44)

Events in higher education quality

Krystof described three major events which occurred in his professional career. The first event, "other" event, happened in the late 1960s, when there was a brief period of "relaxation" in the communist regime, which meant that Krystof could travel to Western Europe and establish some contacts with Western European academics, who later (in the 1970s and 1980s) helped him stay in touch with the developments in his field of expertise. The event highlighted the determination and devotion that Krystof had to his academic field and to the ethos of university in more

general terms. This event implicitly expressed Krystof's strong belief in the continuous improvement of quality in higher education. The event was identified as "other", because it further confirmed Krystof's devotion to the ethos of higher education and its enhancement. The trustworthiness of identification of the event was confirmed by two other researchers. The event was further verified against other "critical", "like" and "other" events identified in the stories of other academics and higher education leaders. The features of criticality in Krystof's first "other" event are outlined in Table 8.7 below.

Table 8.7 Presence of features of criticality in Krystof's story of the first other event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aaa) Further background information	√

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

The second event, "critical" event, in Krystof's professional career happened in the early 1990s, when Krystof won a scholarship to spend a year overseas devoted to his professional development.

> The second important moment came when I applied for a scholarship at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Holland… (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 2, 55 – 56)… eventually I was awarded the scholarship. This happened just at the time when the [communist] regime collapsed. And so it seemed to me as a completely surreal gesture, and subsequently I spent the academic year

> 1990/91 in the Institute in Holland among a selected group of 40 social scientists from all over the world. This [study trip] helped me complete my understanding of what a good university should be like. (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 2, 59 – 64)

This event highlighted Krystof's belief in the contribution of an individual academic's strive to quality enhancement which may impact on the wider tertiary system. Krystof was troubled by the state of the Czech higher education after the end of the communist regime, and the debates and reflections with other overseas academics during his study trip helped his understanding and subsequent actions regarding the enhancement of Czech higher education. Table 8.8 shows the features of criticality in the first "critical" event described by Krystof. The only feature which the "critical" event did not indicate were well-defined stages of the event.

Table 8.8 Presence of features of criticality in Krystof's story of the first critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	√
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	√

The third event, "critical" event, Krystof described concerned his idea of separating social science disciplines from other art-based disciplines at a Faculty of Arts of his university and forming a separate new faculty. The formation of the faculty helped Krystof and his colleagues in social sciences to focus more on innovation and change in higher education, through introducing a new approach to pedagogy and a three-cycle model of higher education (Bachelor, Master and Doctoral programmes).

> Another moment was when in the late 1990s I managed to gain a support from the leadership of the University to divide the Faculty of Arts and form the Faculty of [name], which was still considered rather foolish and unnecessary around 1992 or 1993…(IX/CR/Krystof: p. 2, 74 – 77)

> This way, we could introduce a new approach to pedagogy, moving away from the focus on lectures and rote learning and focus more on the student's creative work and writing. We could also introduce the three-cycle model of higher education [Bachelor, Master and Doctoral programmes] – the Faculty of Arts [their former faculty] was "made" to introduce it as a result of the Bologna Agreement more than five years later –…(IX/CR/Krystof: p. 2, 82 – 87) [and focus on] innovation and a change. (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 2, 88)

Table 8.9 below outlines the features of criticality incorporated in the second "critical" event described by Krystof.

Table 8.9 Presence of features of criticality in Krystof's story of the second critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	√
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**

Both the "critical" events were highlighted by Krystof as critical. They were judged by the criteria of criticality (outlined in Chapter 6). The events were further verified by two other researchers, and validated against other "critical", "like" and "other" events in the stories of other academics and higher education leaders.

The last significant "other" event that Krystof pointed out was a division of tertiary studies in his school into three cycles: Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral. This, to

him, was another important step towards the improvement of higher education studies in his school; at that time the three-cycle system was not accepted across the whole Faculty of Arts [his former institution], due to a lack of agreement.

> In 1995, I managed to assert a division of the studies in the school of sociology into Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral programmes and also to introduce a credit system, which was regarded by many in the Faculty [their former faculty] as completely "insane". At that time, we had the traditional 5-year programmes in Czech universities, and this was the same in Germany and Austria, and so to come up with a three-cycle model was considered as rather unusual.
>
> But I believe that this was the right decision, at the right time, because about 6 or 7 years later this model was approved in the so-called Bologna Agreement, and the system is now being introduced all over Europe. And I think that this Institution has benefited from the early introduction of the system. (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 2, 89 – 98)

The event was identified as "other", because it further illustrated the issues highlighted in Krystof's "critical" events. The identification of the event was confirmed by two other researchers. It was further verified against other "critical", "like" and "other" events described by other academics and higher education leaders. Table 8.10 below outlines the features of criticality contained in Krystof's second "other" event.

Table 8.10 Presence of features of criticality in Krystof's story of the second other event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aaa) Further background information	√

Other observations

The four events that Krystof described illustrated his personal commitment to the enhancement of quality in Czech higher education. The first "other" event pointed to his devotion to academic endeavours during the Communist period, despite the fact that he was not certain that he would ever be able to return to academia.

The second event ("critical") further highlighted Krystof's endeavour to enhance Czech higher education through collaboration with colleagues from the Western world.

The third event ("critical") and the fourth ("other") event involved Krystof in separating social science-based disciplines from a Faculty of Arts and forming a new Faculty. This assisted him and his colleagues in introducing a change in pedagogic approaches, which, according to Krystof, meant an improvement in the style of teaching and learning in social sciences focusing more on creativity and thinking processes than rote learning (style more traditionally used in Czech higher education

institutions). This also helped Krystof and his colleagues in introducing a three-cycle model of higher education: Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral programmes, which among other benefits meant more flexibility in higher education studies.

5. Story of Ivo

(Male; age range – between 20 and 30 years; tertiary experience – 7 years; disciplines – political science, law, currently chancellor's executive officer)

Background

Ivo was an executive officer of a chancellor in a research-intensive university in the Czech Republic. He had 7 years of experience in higher education, which included his experience as a student representative in the university senate. He was responsible for organisational and legal affairs in the chancellor's office and for an internal audit of the university. Despite his young age, Ivo held a senior leadership position in the university. He also taught a course in a school of political science in the university.

Ivo believed that there was a need for a greater flexibility in monitoring quality in individual academic departments and centres.

> Inflexible quality models are not useful for the purposes of managing university staff and academics. It might be more useful to have more flexible models/mechanisms. It is much more important to have "orderly" mechanisms in the centre (in the administration) of universities with "chaos" [more flexible mechanisms] on the "outer edges" (with individual academic centres) because quality mechanisms are dealing with very intelligent people (academics) – every single one is different, thus it is impossible to fit them into "one box". (Interview transcript X/CR/Ivo: p. 1, 28 – 34)

Ivo reflected on the recent changes in quality of the academic and administrative processes in his university.

> I studied in this university from 1997 to 2004. During that time, I held a range of roles within the student council in the university senate, and now I am the chancellor's executive officer. So, I have been involved in higher education politics from about 2000. I believe that, certainly, quality within this institution is improving in formal aspects; and so teaching as well as administrative processes in the institution are becoming more transparent, more structured, more standardised, and also generally other academic processes are becoming more standardised. (X/CR/Ivo: p. 1, 36 – 42)

He further remarked on a recent academic trend in his institution, which he perceived as rather negative.

> What I currently perceive as dangerous for the quality of teaching in this university is the way we define ourselves as a research institution, and thus there is an increasing pressure on academics to prioritise research before teaching. (X/CR/Ivo: p. 2, 57 – 59)

Events in higher education quality

Ivo described a "critical" event which he experienced in university administration. The event concerned a unification of study rules for Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral programmes across the university. This new set of rules was put into practice in the academic year 2006/2007. Ivo perceived this as a crucial move forward in the way of thinking of all the faculties which constituted the university. Ivo believed that the university central administration achieved a breakthrough in terms of bridging different cultural perceptions of the various faculties.

> Since then [the unification of the study rules across the university], academics started realising their requirements and expectations in a context, and subsequently the results and requirements across university became more easily comparable. (X/CR/Ivo: p. 2, 75 – 77)

> I believe that the key moment of change in the University was the integration of the study rules. This also showed that there were not such big differences between the individual faculties, as it was first claimed. Because when the topic was first brought up, representatives from individual faculties claimed that every faculty had their distinctive features, and that it was not possible to have the same study rules in, for example, faculties of arts and law. Then, when we further discussed the issue, it turned out that there were no specific distinctive features in individual institutions; there might have been some minor differences. But this debate took some time. It had been quite a difficult process and some faculties were strongly against it at first. However, gradually, we managed to change the way of thinking in some faculties – we made them realise that it was much easier not to think through the specifics of individual faculties. (X/CR/Ivo: p. 3, 119 – 130)

Table 8.11 below outlines the features of criticality present in the first "critical" event described by Ivo.

Table 8.11 Presence of features of criticality in Ivo's story of the first critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	√
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**

[Note: √ indicates presence; **x** indicates absence]

The “critical” event had significant changing consequences for the whole institution, rather than for Ivo’s role.

The “critical” event was followed by a “like” event, which concerned a unification of a credit system throughout the university. Ivo believed that these two events: the “critical” and “like” events were key in terms of making the university environment more transparent and responsive to student needs and also subsequently to the academics’ needs.

> The second significant moment, for me, was the unification of the credit system across the University. This happened not only formally but we managed to unify the methodology of estimating the value of credits in all our faculties. (X/CR/Ivo: p. 2, 72 – 74)

Table 8.12 below summarises the features contained in Ivo’s story of a “like” event. The trustworthiness of identification of the event was confirmed by two other researchers. The identification of the event was also reinforced by “critical”, “like” and “other” events described by other academics and higher education leaders.

Table 8.12 Presence of features of criticality in Ivo’s story of a like event

Features of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	**x**
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	**x**
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	**x**
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**
Additional features	**Presence**
aa) Not as unique (as critical event)	√
ab) Repeats and/or illustrates experience (of critical event)	√

Ivo described another “critical” event at the university level – this was the election of the current chancellor. This second “critical” event preceded the first “critical” event described by Ivo, however, the first “critical” event might not have happened without the second one.

Ivo believed that the significant change in the ways of thinking among the individual faculties was greatly helped by the initiatives of the current chancellor. As a result, many faculties became more proactive. This led to creation of a number of collaborative degree programmes between faculties which were traditionally regarded as having nothing in common. Ivo perceived these developments as a significant positive move forward for the university.

> Another significant change was when the current chancellor was elected. This meant that the communication within the University became more systematic, and the University in the last three years really became a university in that the faculties started acting as if they became a real part of the university, they started looking for ways of contributing to the University.
>
> And it is almost unbelievable that faculties which traditionally had nothing in common suddenly realised that they could attract a different cohort of students. So, new interesting programmes are being created, such as management of chemical laboratory. And this was a result of the unification of the formal requirements across the whole University. (X/CR/Ivo: p. 3, 131 – 140)

Table 8.13 below indicates the features of criticality contained in the second “critical” event described by Ivo.

Table 8.13 Presence of features of criticality in Ivo's story of the second critical event

Feature of criticality	**Presence/absence**
a) Major impact on people involved	√
b) Unplanned and unanticipated	√
c) Identified after the event	√
d) Life-changing consequences	√
e) Well-defined stages	**x**
f) Personal with strong emotional involvement	**x**

Similarly, to the first "critical" event, the second "critical" event had significant changing consequences for the whole institution rather than for Ivo personally. Both the "critical" events were judged by the criteria of criticality. They were both highlighted by the interviewee as critical. The events were further confirmed by two other researchers, and verified against other "critical", "like" and "other" events in the stories of other academics and higher education leaders.

Other observations

The two "critical" events and the "like" event that Ivo described concerned significant cultural changes in his university. He indicated that these events were to a significant degree initiated by the current chancellor. Ivo also highlighted the considerable personal commitment and endeavour on the part of the chancellor.

8.2 SUMMARY OF EVENTS: STORIES OF THE REMAINING CZECH ACADEMICS AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS

An analysis of the events ("critical", "like" and "other") in the stories of the remaining 7 Czech academics and higher education leaders confirmed and supported the concerns and issues highlighted in the analysis of the stories and "critical" events

described by the five Czech academics and higher education leaders (analysed in detail above).

Table 8.14 below summarises the types of events outlined by the remaining Czech academics and higher education leaders. With each event type ("critical", "like" or "other"), the table contains a reference to the below Summary of issues in Czech higher education quality highlighted through "critical" events (Section A), and/or Summary of other issues in Czech higher education quality underlined in the stories (Section B) and/or Summary of culture-specific issues in Czech higher education quality underlined in the stories (Section C), stating which issue the event relates to. The individual issues in Sections A, B and C below are numbered, and thus the Table 8.14 contains references the particular Section followed by the issue number (for instance, A.1, B.5 or C.9).Each event in the table contains a reference to the interview transcript (citing the number of the interview, acronym of the country, pseudonym of the interviewee, the relevant page and line numbers in the transcript where the event can be found).

Similarly to the detailed analyses of the five interviews above, the types of events ("critical", "like" and "other") in the 7 remaining interviews were verified by the criteria of criticality (explained in Chapter 6). The event types were also confirmed by two other researchers. The identification of these events was further reinforced by other "critical", "like" and "other" events in the stories of Czech and English academics and higher education leaders.

Table 8.14 Overall summary of events outlined in the remaining stories in Czech higher education

Pseudonyms of academics and higher education leaders	*Dates when interviews undertaken*	*Field of expertise*	*Years of experience*	*"Critical" events*	*"Like" events*	*"Other" events*
Milena	June 2006	English	17	**X**	**X**	**1**√ B. 6 XXIV/CR/Milena: p. 2, 70 – 78.
Jaroslav	June 2006	Slavonic studies	32	**1**√ C. 10 XXV/CR/Jaroslav: p. 1, 38 – 45; p. 1, 33 – 36.	**1**√ C. 10 XXV/CR/Jaroslav: p. 1, 38 – 45.	**X**
Martin	November 2006	Psychology	17	**1**√ B. 5 XXVI/CR/Martin: p. 1, 33 – 41.	**1**√ B.5; A. 4 XXVI/CR/Martin: pp. 1 – 2, 42 – 53.	**1**√ B. 5; A. 4 XXVI/CR/Martin: p. 2, 56 – 61.
Jan	November 2006	Law	14	**1**√ B. 7 XXVII/CR/Jan: p. 2, 51 – 58; p. 2, 61 – 79.	**1**√ A. 4 XXVII/CR/Jan: p. 1, 43 – 50.	**X**

Pseudonyms of academics and higher education leaders	***Dates when interviews undertaken***	***Field of expertise***	***Years of experience***	***"Critical" events***	***"Like" events***	***"Other" events***
Marek	November 2006	Sociology	Over 20	**1**√ A. 4; A.1; C. 10 XXVIII/CR/Marek: pp. 1 – 2, 46 – 63.	**1**√ A. 4; A. 1; C. 10 XXVIII/CR/Marek: p. 1, 42 – 45.	**X**
Miroslav	April 2007	Education	18	**X**	**X**	**1**√ B. 5; A. 4 XXIX/CR/Miroslav: p. 2, 77 – 81.
Pavel	April 2007	Sociology	20	**1**√ C. 11; A. 4; B. 8 XXX/CR/Pavel: p. 3, 116 – 136.	**X**	**X**

[Note: √ indicates presence; numerals – indicate number of events of one type; **x** indicates absence]

8.3 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS IN CZECH HIGHER EDUCATION

Sections A, B and C below summarise the dominant issues in Czech higher education quality based on a critical event narrative inquiry into the experiences of academics and higher education leaders. Section A summarises the issues highlighted through the "critical" events in stories of the Czech academics and higher education leaders. Section B summarises the issues highlighted through the "like" and "other" events in stories of the Czech academics and higher education leaders. Section C provides a summary of the culture-specific issues highlighted in the stories of the Czech academics and higher education leaders. These issues were identified as culture-specific because some interviewees acknowledged them as culture-specific. These issues were also distinctive from the issues in the stories of the English academics and higher education leaders, in other words, the English academics and higher education leaders did not highlight such issues.

The issues in Sections A, B and C are documented by reference to the interview transcripts where the issue was underlined.

A. Summary of issues in Czech higher education quality highlighted through "critical" events

The "critical" events in quality of Czech higher education outlined in the stories of the academics and higher education leaders (analysed above) underlined the following issues:

1. **Need to focus on innovation and change in higher education.**

The need for innovation and change in higher education was emphasised by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Krystof (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 2, 82 – 88). The importance of this aspect in current higher education was further underlined by the Czech higher education leader, Ivo (X/CR/Ivo: p. 3, 119 – 130).

2. **Importance of a transparency of educational processes – valuable for the students but also the academics.**

The role of transparency of educational processes in higher education was highlighted by the Czech higher education leader, Ivo (X/CR/Ivo: p. 1, 36 – 42). An English academic with significant experience in the Czech higher education system, Michaela (VI/E/Michaela: p. 5, 224– 226; 228– 232), found that transparency of educational processes was effectively taken for granted in English higher education, whereas this was not the case across the Czech higher education institutions. However, both Ivo and Michaela underlined that this was gradually changing with the transformation of Czech higher education.

3. **Cultural change towards collaboration among higher education institutions.**

Until very recently, individual faculties within Czech universities regarded themselves as autonomous and “self-sufficient” institutions. Gradually, faculties

are starting to realise the importance of collaboration and a more proactive approach to educational processes university-wide. The aspect of positive cultural changes regarding collaboration and more proactive approaches among faculties of a Czech university was, for instance, pointed out by the Czech higher education leader, Ivo (X/CR/Ivo: p. 3, 131 – 140).

4. **Quality in higher education stems from personal involvement of the academic in the educational processes – importance of individual conscience, values and endeavours.**

The Czech academic and higher education leader, Krystof (detailed analysis above), described four events (2 "critical" and 2 "other") which implied considerable personal endeavour on his part aimed at enhancing higher education quality. Another Czech academic and higher education leader, Tomas (VII/CR/Tomas: p. 2, 78– 82), expressed a belief that the whole purpose of higher education was in striving to "produce" quality.

B. Summary of other issues in Czech higher education quality underlined in the stories

5. **Significance of a collegial approach and sharing of opinions and values.**

The value of a collegial approach among academics on local, national and international levels was highlighted by two Czech academics and higher education leaders, Martin (XXVI/CR/Martin: pp. 1 – 2, 33 – 53), and Miroslav

(XXIX/CR/Miroslav: p. 2, 77 – 81). The collegial sharing of opinions, values and expertise were stated to be particularly vital to the Czech academics due to the communist past of their higher education system (i.e. disconnection from contacts with the Western world), and thus they believed that they were lagging behind in terms of the knowledge of the developments (in the Western world) in their fields of expertise.

6. Value of research for teaching practice.

The significant role of research in the enhancement of teaching practice was highlighted by the Czech academic, Milena (XXIV/CR/Milena: p. 2, 70 – 78). This aspect was also related to the attribute of innovation in higher education.

7. Enhancement of quality of higher education learning experiences through exposure to a range of different worldviews.

The value of the exposure to different worldviews (within a range of disciplines) as a form quality enhancement for higher education lecturers and students was highlighted. The importance of considering different worldviews as a way of enhancing higher education was underlined, for instance, by the Czech academic, Jan (XXVII/CR/Jan: p. 2, 51 – 58; p. 2, 61 – 79).

8. **Concern about hierarchical relationship between research and teaching, greater value given to research.**

This concern was expressed by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 2, 77 – 82). He believed that research and teaching in higher education ought to be afforded equal value. Similar concern was expressed by the Czech higher education leader, Ivo (X/CR/Ivo: p. 2, 57 – 59), who underlined the current strong emphasis on research in Czech higher education influenced by such a trend in Western Europe.

C. Summary of culture-specific issues in Czech higher education quality underlined in the stories

9. **Significant transformation of the university environment after the end of communism and introduction of greater academic freedom.**

This point confirmed findings by Scott (2002) who stated that, since the end of the communist era, Central and Eastern European higher education has undergone a transformation of a scale and complexity never experienced in English and more broadly Western higher education. As a consequence, Central and Eastern European higher education continued to "lag behind" certain aspects of the latest developments in Western higher education, long after the end of communism.

The issue of transformation of Czech university environment and the need for "catching up" with Western higher education after the end of communism was, for

instance, highlighted by the Czech academics and higher education leaders, Krystof (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 1, 27 – 30; 36 – 44), and Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 4, 149 – 162).

10. Perception of a need for a fundamental change in the style of pedagogy in Czech universities.

Such a change was not initiated across the whole Czech tertiary sector or even university-wide. This was only instigated in individual departments and faculties of some universities. This change meant:

a. Move away from rote learning and "encyclopaedic" knowledge to focus on thinking processes and argumentation;
b. Move away from predominantly oral to written form of examination.

This issue was highlighted by the Czech academics and higher education leaders, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: pp. 2 – 3, 91 – 96; p. 3, 111 – 126), and Krystof (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 2, 82 – 87).

11. Continuing perception of a disregard for the student in the educational process.

A continuing perception of a disregard for the student (related to the lecturer-centred and predominantly expository approach to education) in some Czech higher education institutions was expressed. This approach was believed to be slowly changing.

This perception and also the variation among Czech higher education institutions in the treatment of students was indicated by the Czech academic, Pavel (XXX/CR/Pavel: p. 3, 116 – 136), and by the currently English academic, Michaela (VI/E/Michaela: p. 5, 211– 222; 228 – 232). Pavel and Michaela confirmed the findings of the CHES/OECD (2006) report and also of the ACSA (2007) study.

12. Reluctance among Czech academics to get involved in the area of quality in higher education.

The problem of involving Czech academics in the area of higher education quality (as a completely new field, unknown to most Czech academics) was underlined by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 1, 37 – 44). He emphasised this seemingly minor aspect as an issue specific to the Czech "culture".

13. Belief of some Czech academics that quality can only be expressed numerically.

The belief that quality can only be expressed numerically was indicated to be "ingrained" in many academics' minds from the Communist era, when "more" was associated with "better". The matter of measurement as a narrow and restricting representation of higher education quality was pointed out by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 1, 44 – 45). This understanding of higher education quality (related to the communist past)

incidentally coincides with the current dominant focus on measurement in English and more broadly Anglo-Saxon higher education.

14. Reluctance of Czech academics to publicly point out weaknesses in their practices.

The aspect was highlighted by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 2, 59 – 61; 68 – 70). Richard perceived this as a fundamental failure to understand the concept of higher education quality.

The reluctance of Czech academics to engage in quality evaluation was also in many cases reinforced by the Czech academics' perception of quality evaluation as a form of political control, which some of them resisted due to their negative experiences associated with the Communist past. This related issue was also brought up by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: pp. 7 – 8, 320 – 323). This claim supported the findings of Brennan et al (1998) and File et al (2006) studies.

15. An aspect of quality improvement in Czech higher education related to the introduction of programmes in the English language.

The concern among some Czech academics about introducing English language programmes was brought up by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: pp. 4 – 5,183 – 188). This relates to point 14 above

concerning the reluctance of some Czech academics to get involved in constructive criticism.

16. Concern about the pressure on Czech academics to publish their research in English.

The issue of pressure put on Czech academics to publish in English (rather than in Czech) in order to get international recognition was emphasised by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Tomas (VII/CR/Tomas: p. 2, 64 – 68). Similar language issues do not concern English higher education, because the main language of publication is English.

17. Perception of current focus on popularity of Czech higher education institutions as a substitution for (or direct equivalent of) quality.

The matter of popularity as a substitution for quality in Czech higher education was emphasised by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Krystof (IX/CR/Krystof: p. 3, 118 – 121; 125 – 126; 129 – 131; 138 – 139). He perceived popularity of higher education institutions as a minor aspect of quality. In that respect, Krystof further indicated that, in terms of understanding of higher education quality, Czech higher education remained behind many Western European higher education systems, such as the English higher education system. This relates to the culture-specific issue 9 above. Krystof's argument supports the findings by Van der Wende and Westerheijden (2003), and File and Goedegebuure (2003).

18. **Need to focus on a positive approach to teaching, learning and assessment in higher education.**

The aspect of a traditionally negative approach to teaching and assessment in Czech higher education was highlighted by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 3, 111 – 126). He believed that there was a need for a broader transformation of this negative (lecturer-centred and predominantly expository) approach to teaching, learning and assessment in Czech higher education.

8.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 8 presented and analysed the stories of Czech academics and higher education leaders concerning their perceptions of higher education quality. The analysis using a critical event narrative inquiry method identified significant issues in the area of higher education quality in Czech higher education, which tend to be overlooked in the current quality assurance practices. The analysis of stories in Czech higher education quality further uncovered a number of culture-specific issues, such as the need for a fundamental change in the style of pedagogy in Czech higher education, perception of the continuing disregard for the student in the educational process, and perception of popularity of higher education institutions as an equivalent of quality.

Based on the results and analyses reported in Chapters 7 and 8, the following chapter will discuss the findings of this research. It will make links to other research and

present recommendations for improvement of the current practices in the area of quality in Czech and English higher education.

PART IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 9: Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings and implications of the research presented in this thesis. The chapter first summarises the thesis focus. It then outlines the main findings and how they relate to the findings of other researchers. Further, it reviews the research questions. Thereafter, the chapter outlines the contributions to knowledge and limitations of the study. Finally, suggestions for further research are made and recommendations for improvement of the current practices in the area of quality in English and Czech higher education are presented.

9.1 THESIS FOCUS

This thesis aimed to highlight the concern that quality assurance may be detrimental to the "real" quality in higher education, as the quality movement appears to be pushing higher education more towards uniformity.

This research has arisen from a realisation that the current approaches to higher education quality, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world (represented by countries such as the UK or Australia), have been largely management-driven, dominated by a focus on measurement (Jones, 2003), and that these approaches almost entirely omitted the significant human-centred aspects of higher education, in particular, academic work. There is currently a visible focus on the student voice and needs in terms of higher education quality (Lomas, 2007a, 2007b; Davies et al, 2007; Hill et al, 2003; ESIB, 2005; ACSA, 2007). However, the academic voice appears to be largely missing in the area of quality. Therefore, the current research study addressed the

issue of the lack of influence of the academic voice over the area of higher education quality.

In order to investigate the academic voice concerning quality in higher education, the researcher employed a critical event narrative inquiry method, aimed at highlighting important aspects of higher education quality from the academic perspective. To investigate the academic perspective of the area of higher education quality, the researcher elected two higher education systems: the English and Czech. The study utilised face-to-face interviews with academics and higher education leaders. In particular, the substance of the research method employed in this study resided in obtaining “critical”, “like” and “other” events in professional practice of academics and higher education leaders.

9.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

9.2.1 English higher education

The “critical”, “like” and “other” events in the stories of English academics and higher education leaders identified the following significant issues that require attention in the area of quality in English higher education. These findings confirmed some of the arguments made in the literature reporting on and critiquing the current approaches to higher education quality (Chapter 3 of this thesis – section Quality in British higher education; and Chapter 2 of this thesis – section Critique of current higher education quality models). The main research findings are outlined in Table 9.1 below.

Table 9.1 Summary of the research findings in English higher education quality

No.	*Issues in English higher education quality*	*Reference in thesis*
1.	**Regard for the academic voice in the quality evaluation and enhancement processes in higher education.**	Chapter 7, Summary section A
2.	**Quality systems, evaluations and their outcomes are highly dependent on interpersonal relations between evaluators and those being evaluated.**	Chapter 7, Summary section A
3.	**Role of the human-centred aspects in the area of higher education quality.**	Chapter 7, Summary section A
4.	**Importance of innovation and change in higher education.**	Chapter 7, Summary section B
5.	**Quality in higher education stems from personal involvement of the academic in the educational processes – importance of individual conscience, values and endeavours.**	Chapter 7, Summary section A
6.	**Collegial approach to quality enhancement among academics.**	Chapter 7, Summary section A
7.	**It is essential for external quality monitoring to involve positive, transparent and collegial approaches aimed at quality enhancement, through comparison of practices.**	Chapter 7, Summary section B
8.	**Research in English higher education treated as having a greater value than teaching.**	Chapter 7, Summary section B
9.	**External quality evaluations (particularly in the late 1990s and early 2000s) perceived as increasing bureaucracy instead of increasing efficiency and also as insensitive to the context.**	Chapter 7, Summary section B
10.	**Important change in the style of quality inspection in English higher education over the last five years.**	Chapter 7, Summary section B
11.	**Lack of suitability of quality management models for the tertiary sector.**	Chapter 7, Summary section B

12.	**Quality assurance introduced into English higher education as a mechanism of political control.**	Chapter 7, Summary section B
13.	**Need for a reflection concerning the use of quality mechanisms; necessary to consider the context and the purpose of quality assessment approaches.**	Chapter 7, Summary section B
14.	**Value in accommodating and comparing perspectives and approaches from a wide range of disciplines for enhancement of quality.**	Chapter 7, Summary section B
15.	**Separation of research and teaching in higher education not having a positive impact on the overall quality of higher education.**	Chapter 7, Summary section B

Referring to an earlier framework for an effective quality assurance system in higher education proposed by Brown (2004), see Table 9.2 below, the "critical", "like" and "other" events in the experiences of English academics and higher education leaders found in this study confirm some of the assumptions highlighted by Brown.

Table 9.2 Framework for an effective quality assurance system in higher education; adapted from Brown (2004, p. 162).

•	The underlying purpose must be improvement, not accountability.
•	The regime must focus on what is necessary for quality improvement.
•	The regime must bolster, not undermine, self-regulation.
•	The arrangements must be meaningful to, and engage, all those involved.
•	The arrangements must promote diversity and innovation.
•	There must be adequate quality control (of the regime).
•	There must be clear accountability (of the agency).
•	There must be proper coordination with other regulators or would be regulators.

Relating the findings of the current research to Brown's assumptions in Table 9.2 above, it ought to be pointed out that Brown's assumptions were quite closely related to the actual process of quality assurance. However, the present research investigated issues of higher education quality more broadly, incorporating all aspects of academic work as the academics perceived them.

Despite some recent significant changes to the assessment of the quality of teaching in English higher education institutions, English academics and higher education leaders interviewed in the course of this research perceived that there continued to be a lack of attention paid to the voice of the academic regarding the issue of higher education quality. This issue supported Brown's assumption 4 that quality mechanisms in order to be meaningful must engage all those involved in the process.

The research interviews in English higher education underlined the fact that one of the implicit and explicit values held by English academics and higher education leaders was to improve quality of their work, and thus they preferred quality enhancement to quality assurance. This related to Brown's assumptions 1 and 2. English academics and higher education leaders felt that quality assurance in the UK higher education was implemented primarily as a measure of political control (this related to Brown's assumption 3).

The aspect of quality assurance introduced as a tool of political control related to what English academics and higher education leaders felt about quality assurance as a factor discouraging diversity and innovation (related to Brown's assumption 5). The aspect of innovation was felt to be highly important to academic work. Yet, it was

pointed out that the current drives for quality assurance essentially worked against the aspirations for innovation. None of the English academics and higher education leaders referred to Brown's assumptions 6 – 8, as these were specifically related to the quality assurance process.

Further to Brown's framework for an effective quality assurance system (Table 9.2), English academics and higher education leaders emphasised the need for a close link between research and teaching. They also pointed out the current negative trend of undervaluing teaching in comparison to research.

The issues of higher education quality (common to the English and Czech higher education systems), as highlighted by English and Czech academics and higher education leaders, and which were not referred to or were only implied in Brown's framework, will be summarised in Table 9.5 below.

9.2.2 Czech higher education

The "critical", "like" and "other" events in the stories of Czech academics and higher education leaders identified the following significant issues that academics and higher education leaders in the Czech Republic considered important and/or were particularly concerned about. Many of the issues identified were similar to those highlighted by the English academics and higher education leaders. Table 9.3 below outlines these similar issues.

Table 9.3 Summary of the research findings in Czech higher education quality: issues similar to English higher education

No.	*Issues in Czech higher education quality*	*Reference in thesis*
1.	**Significance of a collegial approach and sharing of opinions and values.**	Chapter 8, Summary section B
2.	**Focus on an innovation and change in higher education.**	Chapter 8, Summary section A
3.	**Value of research in teaching practice.**	Chapter 8, Summary section B
4.	**Quality in higher education stemming from personal involvement of the academic in the educational processes.**	Chapter 8, Summary section A
5.	**A concern about the hierarchical relationship between research and teaching, with a greater value given to research.**	Chapter 8, Summary section B
6.	**Enhancement of the quality of higher education learning experiences for teachers and students through exposure to a range of worldviews, within different disciplines.**	Chapter 8, Summary section B

Culture-specific issues

The "critical", "like" and "other" events in the professional practice of the Czech academics and higher education leaders further highlighted some culture-specific issues concerning higher education quality in the Czech Republic. These issues were distinctively different from the issues underlined by English academics and higher education leaders, and some of the interviewees have also acknowledged them as culture-specific. Some of these issues were, for instance, influenced by the specific nature of the Czech people (in this case academics), but also by other social and

historical circumstances. There were two specific issues, which were identified as partly culture-specific, because they were attributed to what several Czech academics referred to as “lagging” behind the developments in Western higher education. The culture-specific issues are outlined in Table 9.4 below.

Table 9.4 Summary of the research findings in Czech higher education quality: culture-specific issues

No.	*Culture-specific issues in Czech higher education quality*	*Reference in thesis*	*Additional comments*
1.	**Impact of an extensive transformation of the university sector after the end of communism.**	Chapter 8, Summary section C	
2.	**Need for a fundamental change in the style of pedagogy in higher education institutions. Move away from rote learning and "encyclopaedic" knowledge to enable focus on thinking processes and reasoning.**	Chapter 8, Summary section C	
3.	**Continuing perception of a disregard for the student in the educational process.**	Chapter 8, Summary section C	
4.	**Importance of a transparency of educational processes – value for the student and the academic.**	Chapter 8, Summary section A	This issue was identified as partly culture-specific.
5.	**Cultural change in attitude of individual faculties – value in collaboration among faculties.**	Chapter 8, Summary section A	This issue was identified as partly culture-specific.
6.	**Reluctance of Czech academics to get involved in the area of quality in higher education without enough specialist knowledge.**	Chapter 8, Summary section C	

No.	*Culture-specific issues in Czech higher education quality*	*Reference in thesis*	*Additional comments*
7.	**Belief of some Czech academics that quality can only be expressed numerically (a belief "engrained" in Czech academics' minds from the communist era).**	Chapter 8, Summary section C	
8.	**Reluctance of many Czech academics to publicly point out weaknesses in their practices.**	Chapter 8, Summary section C	
9.	**An aspect of quality enhancement in Czech higher education related to the introduction of programmes in the English language.**	Chapter 8, Summary section C	
10.	**Concern about the pressure on Czech academics to publish their research in English rather than in Czech for prestige reasons.**	Chapter 8, Summary section C	
11.	**Perception of the current focus on popularity of Czech higher education institutions as a substitution for (or direct equivalent of) quality.**	Chapter 8, Summary section C	
12.	**Need to focus on a positive approach to teaching, learning and assessment in higher education.**	Chapter 8, Summary section C	

9.2.3 Frameworks for quality enhancement in English and Czech higher education

Table 9.2 above adapted from Brown (2004) summarised issues of quality enhancement more specifically focusing on the quality assurance processes in higher education. Whereas the issues highlighted by the English and Czech academics and higher education leaders in the present study referred more broadly to issues of quality in all the higher education processes. Table 9.5 below forms a framework for a human-centred approach to quality enhancement based on the common issues underlined by the English and Czech academics and higher education leaders. The table incorporates some of the issues related to Brown's framework (Table 9.2), and also some additional issues identified in this research.

Table 9.5 Framework for a human-centred approach to quality enhancement in higher education

1.	Regard for the academic voice in higher education quality policy development.
2.	Attention to human-centred aspects of higher education quality.
3.	Need for a collegial approach and reflection on the purposes of quality evaluation processes.
4.	Value in the close links between research and teaching.
5.	Equal value afforded to teaching and research.
6.	Focus on innovation and change.
7.	Enhancement of higher education quality through exposure to a range of worldviews, within different disciplines.

Focusing specifically on Czech higher education, Table 9.6 presents a framework for a human-centred approach to quality enhancement based on the culture-specific issues underlined by Czech academics and higher education leaders. The framework

highlights the issue of culture-specific needs in higher education quality to be considered particularly when adopting existing quality frameworks.

Table 9.6 Framework for a human-centred approach to quality enhancement – culture-specific aspects and issues particular to Czech higher education

1.	Significance of transparency in educational processes.
2.	Value in collaboration among higher education institutions and a proactive approach to educational processes.
3.	Need for a fundamental change in the style of pedagogy in higher education institutions; to focus more on thinking processes and reasoning.
4.	Need for a more systematic move towards a student-centred approach across the whole higher education system.
5.	Move towards a "qualitative" understanding of higher education quality among higher education institutions.
6.	Need for a change in understanding of reflection on weaknesses in academic professional practice (as a beneficial approach resulting in quality enhancement of higher education).
7.	Introduction of some English language programmes in Czech higher education as an aspect of quality assessment and enhancement.
8.	Need to address the factor of pressure on Czech academics to publish mainly in English in order to receive international recognition.
9.	Need for education of Czech academic staff to enable a broader and better understanding of the concept of higher education quality in the context of the Czech higher education system.
10.	Need to focus on positive approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.

9.3 REVIEW OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the above summarised research findings, it is pertinent to highlight how they have addressed the originally posed research questions:

Question 1. Does the academic voice have a part to play in the formation of higher education policies in the area of quality?

The concern about the lack of academic voice in the area of higher education quality was highlighted in several research studies, such as Newton (2001), Lomas (2007a) and Cartwright (2007).

The present study further underlined the need for a re-evaluation of the current role of academics in higher education quality policy formation, with the prospect of increasing the impact of academics on the area of higher education quality. The need for a greater academic voice in higher education quality was stated not only by regular academics and higher education leaders interviewed in this study, but also by academics and higher education leaders who were experts in higher education and quality. This was found to be the case particularly in the context of English higher education. The aspect of a lack of academic voice in higher education quality was not found to be so pronounced with Czech academics. On the contrary, in several instances, a lack of attention or an imbalance in attention to the student voice in the educational process in Czech higher education institutions was underlined in the current study. The issue was, for instance, highlighted by the currently English

academic with previous significant experience of Czech tertiary system, Michaela (VI/E/Michaela: p. 5, 216 – 232), and the Czech academic, Pavel (XXX/CR/Pavel: p. 3, 116 – 136). This confirmed earlier findings by the ACSA (2007) and CHES/OECD (2006) studies. However, this did not concern the academic voice in the policy making context in the Czech Republic, only in the context of individual higher education institutions.

Question 2. Is a critical event narrative inquiry approach an appropriate method to investigate the domain of higher education, and in particular the area of quality in higher education?

A critical event narrative inquiry was previously employed in an air traffic control training environment in Webster's (1998) PhD study. An outline of the critical event narrative inquiry method was provided by Webster and Mertova (2007). The present study modified and elaborated the critical event narrative inquiry method for the area of higher education quality. Arguably, the area of air traffic control is a very different work environment from higher education. The most significant difference is in that air traffic control is a more technical and also homogenous environment with tangible and potentially immediate and dire consequences of actions. Whereas higher education is more "abstract", heterogeneous and consequences of actions frequently tend to be less tangible, gradual or would occur in a more long-term scope.

Despite the different nature of higher education compared to the field of air traffic control, the researcher found that the critical event narrative inquiry was an equally

suitable method for an investigation of the area of higher education quality. The researcher in conversation with interview participants identified “critical”, “like” and “other” events in professional practice of the interview participants. The identification of the event types was verified against the criteria of criticality outlined in Chapters 4 and 6. In the case of “critical” events, frequently, the interviewees identified the events as critical. The trustworthiness of the event types was also confirmed by two other researchers, and reinforced by events identified in the stories of other academics and higher education leaders.

The researcher found differences in the nature of “critical”, “like” and “other” events between the fields of air traffic control and higher education. In the field of air traffic control, Webster (1998) identified a single “critical” event and multiple “like” and “other” events. Whereas the present study identified multiple “critical” events across a range of social science and humanities disciplines, and also multiple “like” and “other” events. The most likely reason for identification of multiple “critical” events in the field of higher education was the more diverse nature of higher education practices in comparison to the area of air traffic control.

The critical event narrative inquiry methodology fulfilled its purpose in the current study in that the “critical”, “like” and “other” events provided a means of highlighting frequently overlooked and underestimated issues and aspects of higher education quality in Czech and English higher education systems. Many of these issues were felt to have potentially negative consequences for future development of higher education

generally or, specifically, for a further development of a particular higher education system.

Question 3. Is the critical event narrative inquiry a suitable methodology to uncover important aspects of the area of quality in higher education, which would otherwise not be uncovered by other qualitative and also quantitative research methods?

It is argued in this thesis that the critical event narrative inquiry method was able to uncover issues which quantitative research methods would not be able to uncover, because they do not give enough attention to detail. Therefore, it is highly likely that quantitative research methods would, for instance, not be able to identify culture-specific issues. Further, quantitative research methods are by their nature unable to pay attention to human-centred and complex issues. Yet most of the issues uncovered by the present critical event narrative inquiry method may be regarded as human-centred, and quality in higher education may be considered a complex issue (as discussed in Chapter 2).

This indicates that a significant proportion of issues in higher education quality are likely to remain uncovered when employing quantitative research methods. One example of such a human-centred issue may be the value that academics place on their individual involvement in higher education practices – incorporating their values, consciences and endeavours (as highlighted in several interviews, such as XV/E/Elizabeth: p. 5, 203 – 210; XVI/E/Paul: p. 1, 36 – 47; XXVII/CR/Jan: p. 1, 43 – 50).

Compared to other qualitative research methods, the critical event narrative inquiry method has an advantage of targeting significant issues directly. Other qualitative research methods might be able to uncover similar issues to those revealed by the critical event narrative inquiry method. However, these methods would arguably have to extract these issues from much larger amounts of data and also they would approach this task more indirectly. Therefore, it may be argued that the critical event narrative inquiry method is more "efficient" than other qualitative research methods in terms of the amount of data that is gathered.

Further, the critical event narrative inquiry method may present a framework for more focussed qualitative research studies. It may also provide a guidance for or validation of quantitative research studies.

Question 4. Can critical event narrative inquiry method reveal some different or similar aspects of higher education quality in two different cultural settings?

The findings of the current research study revealed a range of similar and also culture-specific issues in the area of higher education quality. This indicated that the critical event narrative inquiry method is capable of focusing more closely on the aspects of cultural difference, and therefore is able to uncover culture-specific issues.

A specific illustration of such a culture-specific issue is an event identified by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: pp. 4 – 5,176 – 190), describing the process of internationalisation through the introduction of

English language programmes in Czech higher education as a means of evaluating and enhancing quality.

The culture-specific issues may play a significant role, when identifying a suitable quality enhancement framework which would suit a particular cultural context, rather than adopting a framework which worked within a different cultural context. The critical event narrative inquiry method thus enables a greater attention to detail, allowing a closer focus on culture-specific issues as well as, more broadly, on human-centred issues in the area of higher education quality.

9.4 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Based on how this study addressed the above four research questions, the contributions to knowledge made by this research can be distilled. It is argued that the contributions to knowledge fall into two categories: contributions to academic knowledge and contributions to educational practice.

9.4.1 Contributions to academic knowledge

The present study highlighted new views and approaches in the area of higher education quality, based on the voices of academics and higher education leaders, which have not been previously considered.

The study adapted and further elaborated a critical event narrative inquiry method to suit a cross-disciplinary study of the area of higher education quality. The study provided an example of how the proposed critical event narrative inquiry method may be utilised for investigation of potentially "abstract", multi-disciplinary and thus heterogeneous professional practice environments, such as higher education. Through identification of "critical", "like" and "other" events in a range of social science and humanities disciplines of two higher education systems, the study uncovered a number of significant issues that academics and higher education leaders identified as harmful or obstructive to the enhancement of higher education quality in the two educational systems and potentially for other educational systems, in case of adoption of some of these practices. See Tables 9.5 and 9.6 above.

The study highlighted some issues of concern that were common to both English and Czech higher education systems, which indicated that there were certain common understandings and tendencies in the area of quality in both the educational systems. One of these issues was, for instance, the hierarchical relation between research and teaching in higher education. In both the higher education systems, research was felt to be regarded as having a higher value than teaching, which was highlighted as damaging to higher education (as indicated in interviews XXIII/E/William: p. 3, 109 – 131; and VIII/CR/Richard: p. 2, 77 – 82).

Further, the present study showed the way in which the critical event narrative inquiry method is capable of uncovering culture-specific issues, and that the methodology may thus be able to assist in identification and addressing issues of cultural difference.

It revealed some issues which were specific just to the Czech higher education system, whereas the study did not uncover any culture-specific issues concerning quality in the English higher education system.

Such culture-specific issues would almost certainly be overlooked by quantitative research methods, and other qualitative research methods would provide more indirect ways to uncovering the culture-specific issues than the critical event narrative inquiry method. See Table 9.6 above.

The identification of the culture-specific issues highlighted the fact that higher education quality systems and mechanisms ought to reflect cultural specifics of individual higher education systems. Therefore, it underlined the fact that higher education quality systems and mechanisms ought to be developed in a way to incorporate culture-specific aspects in the area of quality to enable more effective enhancement of the particular higher education system.

The study also showed the way in which the critical event narrative inquiry method is able to focus on human-centred issues which are a vital component of the higher education sector, despite being currently undervalued. The need for attention to human-centred issues in the area of quality in higher education was highlighted by the English academics, Andrew (I/E/Andrew: pp. 5 – 6, 249 – 253; 254 – 261), James (XIX/E/James: pp. 4 – 5, 194 – 201), and Jane (XX/E/Jane: p. 4, 154 – 168.

The present research highlighted the significant, but undervalued, role of the academic voice in the area of higher education quality. The issue of a lack of academic voice was pointed out, for instance, by the English academic and higher education expert, John (III/E/John: p. 2, 54 – 61), who expressed a belief that more trust afforded to academics in the area of higher education quality would provide a more effective and efficient way of quality enhancement (and quality assurance) in higher education. The issue was further highlighted by another English academic and higher education expert, Donald (IV/E/Donald: p. 3, 104 – 108; 109 – 113).

The research study illustrated the way in which the critical event narrative inquiry method is capable of dealing with potentially large amounts of narrative data more efficiently than other qualitative research methods. This was demonstrated through utilising the tables of criticality (when distinguishing the types of "critical" events) in Chapters 7 and 8, and also through the summary tables of the events in the remaining interviews in Chapters 7 and 8.

9.4.2 Contributions to educational practice

The current study provides a framework which can assist quality enhancement developers and planners in reviewing and further developing the approaches to quality enhancement It highlighted areas that need to be addressed urgently in order not to have further damaging consequences for the Czech and English higher education systems, and potentially other higher education systems.

Some of the issues which were common to both the higher education systems provided an indication of possible common tendencies developing on a wider scale among a number of higher education systems. Other issues were more specific to a single education system, particularly in the case of the Czech higher education system. These culture-specific issues may be an indication of developments among a wider group of culturally related higher education systems, for instance in Central and Eastern Europe. See Tables 9.5 and 9.6 above.

The findings of this research may provide a general as well as a more specific guidance for transformation of higher education quality assurance systems and mechanisms currently in place. See Tables 9.5 and 9.6 above.

Furthermore, the research findings may provide some warnings concerning the current directions of the quality evaluation and assurance systems not only in the Czech and English higher education systems, but also in other higher education systems which might be looking into adopting quality assurance systems and mechanisms similar to those currently in place in England and the Czech Republic. See Tables 9.5 and 9.6 above.

9.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As with any single PhD research programme, a number of limitations need to be acknowledged and borne in mind. One of the key limitations of the study was the fact that the researcher was mainly based in Australia, which meant that the researcher had

only limited time available to organise and carry out the interviews with academics and higher education leaders in England and the Czech Republic. This was coupled with limited resources available to the researcher.

Further, there was also a disproportion between the periods of time spent in England and the Czech Republic, with significantly longer time allowed to spend in England. The investigator needed to devote some of the time spent in the Czech Republic to reviews of the literature which was not available in Australia or online. In comparison, a significant part of the literature concerning English higher education and the area of quality was available in Australia or online. This factor has impacted on the total number of interviews that the researcher was able to conduct in the Czech Republic compared to England.

The time and resource limitations further impacted on the overall range and number of institutions in England and the Czech Republic where the researcher was able to arrange the interviews. In the Czech Republic, interviews with academics and higher education leaders were carried out in two large research-intensive universities.

In England, interviews were undertaken in two “old” research-intensive and six “new” universities.

The range of higher education areas that the researcher covered – social sciences and humanities – may also be considered a limitation of the study. Social sciences and humanities were consciously elected due to the researcher’s own background in these areas, and also to enable an in-depth investigation of the perceptions of academics and

higher education leaders of similar backgrounds. However, this, at the same time, presented a potential limitation to the study, or at least a limiting of scope.

From an Australian research perspective, another limitation may be the fact that, eventually, it was not within the scope of this study to include Australian higher education system into the investigation, despite it being the researcher's original intention. This was due to a combination of factors, such as, breadth and complexity of the study in relation to the time constraints.

9.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.6.1 Further research

This thesis proposes that there is a need to undertake a study or series of studies of similar nature (to cover the academic voice in quality) in a higher education context more widely. This would situate the present research in a broader context, and would address one of the limitations of the present study, as was highlighted above. Therefore, it would be desirable to investigate the academic voice in a wider range of higher education fields and disciplines to include, for instance, the more scientific fields and disciplines.

In the English higher education context, a further study or series of studies of a larger number of "old" and "new" English universities (to provide a wider picture of the approaches to quality in the "old" and "new" universities) would be beneficial. A

study involving a more fully representative sample of the “old” and “new” universities might, for instance, enable a closer investigation of possible differences in approaches to higher education quality between the “old” and “new” universities.

Similarly, a more extensive study of quality in a wider range and a larger sample of Czech higher education institutions (including the metropolitan-based universities, regional universities, as well as the non-university type institutions) would give a broader picture of the approaches to quality within the Czech tertiary sector.

Further, it was originally intended to include the Australian higher education system in the present study. However, eventually it was not within the final scope of the study. Thus, it is proposed that it would be beneficial to carry out a similar investigation in the Australian higher education context, as a different example of an Anglo-Saxon higher education system, to look into the degrees to which the tendencies in the Australian higher education system are similar to, or different from, the trends in the English higher education system.

As other Western European countries, such as the Netherlands, followed the British lead in introducing quality monitoring and evaluation mechanisms into higher education, an investigation of several of these systems using the methodology applied in this study might assist further development of the quality mechanisms employed in the British and other European higher education systems, with possible wider applications in other countries worldwide.

Considering the lack of similar current Czech studies and also given the views of several Czech academics interviewed in the course of the present study (stating varied practices and attitudes to teaching and learning in Czech higher education), it is argued that the Czech higher education system would benefit from a system-wide research study which would assess the current attitudes and approaches of Czech academics to teaching and learning in a broad range of higher education disciplines. The aim of such a study or a series of studies would be to assist Czech academics in reflecting on their current teaching and assessment practices, with the view of enhancing these practices.

Given that the Czech Republic shares similar history, and to a degree culture, with other Central and Eastern European countries and higher education systems, a further study (employing the methodology utilised in the present investigation) would be worthwhile. This study might cover a number of Central and Eastern European higher education systems and could assist a wider understanding of the culture-specific issues in higher education quality (particular to that region). It may also recommend specific approaches to tackling these issues, considering the local circumstances within the region.

It might also be beneficial to investigate the student voice utilising a critical event narrative inquiry method. Such a study may provide a counter-balance to the present study of the academic voice and may provide some further insights into the area of higher education quality.

9.6.2 Educational practice

The present research study found that, despite recent changes in the method of quality evaluation of teaching in English higher education, the academics and higher education leaders continued to perceive the system as largely politically and management-driven. There was still a dominant focus on quality assurance rather than quality enhancement in English higher education, despite the fact that the importance of attention to quality enhancement was gradually gaining recognition. Therefore, there is a need for a further move in focus towards quality enhancement in English higher education. The frameworks outlined in Tables 9.5 and 9.6 may assist in this endeavour.

The accreditation of Czech higher education institutions and their programmes was found to be a rather formal and not a sufficiently robust process, and it did not encourage quality enhancement (File et al, 2006; Temple and Billing, 2003). Further, a lack of understanding of the concept of quality and a lack of willingness to engage in quality enhancement was perceived on the part of some Czech higher education institutions (as indicated in interview IX/CR/Krystof: p. 3, 118 – 121; 125 – 126; 129 – 131; 138 – 139).

Employment of quality enhancement mechanisms among Czech higher education institutions is currently still piecemeal (CHES/OECD, 2006). Therefore, the Czech higher education system would benefit from a development of a quality enhancement mechanism that would be adopted more systematically across the whole of Czech higher education, considering the type of the institution. The frameworks outlined in Tables 9.5 and 9.6 may provide some guidance in this endeavour.

In more general quality enhancement terms, it would appear that there are some valuable lessons for the Czech higher education system to be learnt from English higher education. For example, taking a more positive and student-centred approach to teaching, learning and assessment would benefit the Czech higher education system as a whole. Teaching, learning and assessment ought to be perceived as a two-way relation between the lecturer and the student (as highlighted in interviews XXX/CR/Pavel: p. 3, 123 – 136; VI/E/Michaela: p. 5, 211– 222; 224– 226; 228– 232). This would mean moving away, as far as possible and practicable, from the traditional, predominantly expository approach to lecturing. This would also mean a significant departure from the traditionally dominant focus on rote-learning and learning of facts, and focusing more on the development of thinking and the cognitive processes.

Such a transformation is already happening or has already happened in some Czech higher education institutions (as indicated in interview VIII/CR/Richard: pp. 2 – 3, 91 – 96; 111 – 126). However, it would appear that a wider adoption of more positive and student-centred approaches to teaching, learning and assessment would benefit the Czech higher education system.

A possible way in which quality of Czech higher education can be enhanced may be through introducing some English language programmes for overseas students, which might assist in a gradual move away from the traditional expository way of teaching and learning. The introduction of English language programmes for overseas students would, for instance, enable effective reflection of the Czech lecturers on their programmes normally taught in the Czech language. The reflection may be enabled

through preparation of the teaching materials for the programmes taught in English, and also through evaluation of the feedback gained from the overseas students. This would give the Czech lecturers helpful insights from students coming from different higher education systems. The aspect of introduction of English language programmes into Czech higher education as a particular form of quality enhancement was pointed out by the Czech academic and higher education leader, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: pp. 4 – 5, 176 – 195).

One of the negative lessons from English higher education system, which the Czech higher education system would be advised not to emulate is the predominantly managerial drive of the quality evaluation system in English higher education and also the focus on measurement. The English academics and higher education experts, John (III/E/John: p. 2, 88 - 92) and Donald (IV/E/Donald: p. 3, 109 – 113) highlighted the negative impacts of such development on English higher education.

The following recommendation may apply to a more universal trend in higher education in general. To paraphrase Brown's words: a quality evaluation system, in order to be effective and efficient, needs to be meaningful to all people involved in it. Thus, a mechanism giving a greater regard to the perspectives of the academics on quality ought to be incorporated in the current quality assessment system. In that respect more trust should be awarded to academics and higher education leaders regarding the process of quality evaluation, which would in turn make the system more efficient and effective.

Therefore, it can be argued that it is highly desirable that the policy makers pay closer attention to the concerns of the academics and higher education leaders regarding higher education quality, because it appears that the system cannot operate effectively and efficiently without them. The urgency of this aspect was underlined by two English academics and higher education experts, John (III/E/John: p. 2, 54 – 61) and Donald (IV/E/Donald: p. 3, 104 – 108; 109 – 113) and also a Czech academic and higher education leader, Jaroslav (XXV/CR/Jaroslav: p. 1, 30- 32).

Further, it is important to create closer links between teaching and research in higher education, as there is a value in the interconnection and balance of these two components of higher education. Teaching ought to be awarded the same value as research, as the current trend of preference given to research may impact negatively on the quality of the whole higher education system in the long-term. This aspect was highlighted by the English academic and higher education expert, John (III/E/John: p. 4, 179 – 183), the Czech academic and higher education leader, Richard (VIII/CR/Richard: p. 2, 77 – 82), and the Czech higher education leader, Ivo (X/CR/Ivo: p. 2, 57 – 59).

9.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 9 discussed the research findings of this study in the area of higher education quality. The research identified a number of similar issues in the area of higher education quality in the Czech and English higher education systems, suggesting a possible wider occurrence of these trends among other higher education systems worldwide. These issues were then related to an earlier framework for effective quality assurance in higher education developed by Brown (2004). Subsequently, a

framework for a human-centred approach to higher education quality based on issues common to both Czech and English higher education systems was developed (Table 9.5). The framework complemented and extended Brown's framework, by going beyond issues related to the quality assurance processes.

The study also uncovered some culture-specific issues in the area of quality in Czech higher education, and it developed a framework for a human-centred approach to culture-specific issues based on the culture-specific issues identified in Czech higher education (Table 9.6). No culture-specific issues were identified in English higher education.

Chapter 9 further reviewed the research process and findings in relation to the research questions set for this study. The research findings confirmed the assumptions made in the research questions.

The chapter outlined contributions to knowledge resulting from the current research. The limitations of the study were presented and discussed. Finally, recommendations for further utilisation of the research findings were made.

The following chapter will conclude the thesis providing an overall outline of what was achieved by the study of the academic voice in Czech and English higher education systems.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

This research highlighted the concern that quality assurance may be detrimental to the "real" quality in higher education, as the quality movement appears to be pushing higher education towards greater uniformity.

The research stemmed from a realisation that the current approaches to higher education quality, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, have been largely management-driven, dominated by a focus on measurement, and that these approaches almost entirely omitted the significant human-centred aspects of higher education, in particular, academic work.

It is concluded that the critical event narrative inquiry method employed in this study was well-suited for an investigation of the area of higher education quality with particular focus on the academic voice. The methodology assisted in uncovering important aspects of higher education quality in two different higher education systems. It revealed some common and some culture-specific aspects of higher education quality. Yet these aspects appeared to be largely overlooked in the current higher education quality practices in both the English and Czech higher education systems.

Despite the cultural and historic differences between the Czech and English higher education systems, the present study identified a number of similar issues and concerns in higher education quality underlined by Czech and English academics and higher education leaders. These were, for instance, a need for a greater trust afforded

by policy makers to the professionalism and voice of the academic, a requirement for teaching to be regarded as equal to research, and a need to give more consideration to human-centred values.

It was established that there are some common tendencies in the area of quality in both the Czech and English higher education systems, which may indicate some generalisation to a wider range of higher education systems. The issues and concerns highlighted by English and Czech academics and higher education leaders may therefore express some warnings to other higher education systems in Europe and worldwide, which may be considering adoption of higher education quality mechanisms from overseas. The study therefore proposed further research (employing the methodology applied in the present study) into the current quality practices of other higher education systems in Europe and elsewhere, including widening of the disciplinal focus.

The study further revealed a number of culture-specific issues, particularly in relation to the Czech higher education system. These were, for example, a need for transparency in educational processes, a requirement for a more systematic move towards a student-centred approach across the whole higher education system, and a need for positive approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. These issues may be indicative of some wider trends among higher education systems in the Central and Eastern European region (given their similar cultural backgrounds and histories). In that context, it was proposed that a further similar study of other Central and Eastern European higher education systems would be beneficial, and may prevent the

potentially damaging effects that such trends may have on higher education systems in that region.

The identification of culture-specific issues in higher education quality highlighted the fact that, when adopting higher education quality systems and mechanisms in a range of higher education systems, cultural specifics ought to be closely considered.

Despite the gradual recognition of quality enhancement in English higher education, the research identified a further need for a greater focus on quality enhancement as opposed to quality assurance, which was still found to dominate. The study further revealed that Czech higher education would benefit from a more systematic adoption of a quality enhancement mechanism which would be employed across the whole of the higher education system.

It was proposed that it would be beneficial to undertake a similar critical event narrative inquiry investigation of the student voice, to provide a "counter-balance" to the academic voice in the area of higher education quality. This would allow a different, yet equally important, set of stakeholders to be investigated using the same research approach.

It is argued that the current study demonstrated the way in which the critical event narrative inquiry methodology can be applied in a study of such heterogeneous and complex environments as is higher education. This study may, therefore, provide direction in how to undertake a critical event narrative inquiry investigation into problems in other heterogeneous and complex environments (such as healthcare or

government). The study may further provide guidance concerning transformation of quality management systems and mechanisms in Czech and English higher education, and potentially other higher education systems around the world.

In some form, quality systems in higher education are here to stay. Therefore, improvement based on education-focused quality systems is critical to the future of higher education. This thesis asserted that a human-centred approach to quality improvement is one way of attaining an educational focus in quality enhancement, including taking account of culture-specific aspects.

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APPENDIX I: Interview Participant Biographical Survey Questions

Survey
Higher Education Quality

Background Information

The purpose of this survey is to gather general information on your work and educational background.

Question 1. Please, enter your surname and first name.

Surname

First name

Question 2. Please, enter your contact telephone number.

Phone number

Question 3. Please, enter your email address.

Email address

Question 4. Please, enter your age.

Age	
	21 - 30
	31 - 40
	41 - 50
	51 - 60
	60 or more

Question 5. Please, enter your sex.

Sex	
	Male
	Female

Question 6. Please, enter your current position and duties.

Position

Would like to comment on anything specific regarding your duties related to your current position?

Questions 7 - 10 refer to your formal qualifications.

Question 7. Please, enter years of your work experience.

Years of experience	
	1 - 6
	7 - 12
	13 - 18
	More than 19

Question 8. Please, enter your formal qualifications. Choose all that apply.

Qualifications gained	
	Undergraduate degree
	Postgraduate degree
	Other - please specify

Question 9. Please, tick the corresponding year range you gained your most recent formal qualification.

Most recent qualifications	
	Before 1971
	1971 - 1975
	1976 - 1980
	1981 - 1985
	1986 - 1990
	1991 - 1995
	1996 – 2000
	2001 – 2005
	2006 -

Question 10. Please, tick the corresponding field of your most recently completed formal qualification.

Field of study	
	Humanities
	Social Sciences
	Law
	Medicine
	Science
	Agriculture
	Economics and business
	Engineering
	Other - please specify

APPENDIX II: Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research on Humans Letter of Approval

Subject: **2006/135 - Letter of approval**

Date: Tue, 11 Apr 2006 16:23:16 +1000

From: scerh

To: Patricie Mertova, Leonard Webster

Assoc Prof Len Webster
Faculty of Law
Clayton Campus

11 April 2006

2006/135LIR - Critical event narrative inquiry into quality development in higher education

Dear Researchers,

Thank you for the information provided in relation to the above project. The items requiring attention have been resolved to the satisfaction of the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH). Accordingly, this research project is approved to proceed.

Terms of approval

1. This project is approved for five years from the date of this letter and this approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
2. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all information that is pending (such as permission letters from organisations) is forwarded to SCERH, if not done already. Research cannot begin at any organisation until SCERH receives a letter of permission from that organisation. You will then receive a letter from SCERH confirming that we have received a letter from each organisation.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by SCERH.
4. You should notify SCERH immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. Amendments to the approved project: Changes to any aspect of the project require the submission of a Request for Amendment form to SCERH and must not begin without written approval from SCERH. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. Future correspondence: Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. Annual reports: Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. Please provide the Committee with an Annual Report determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. Final report: A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. SCERH should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. Monitoring: Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by SCERH at any time.

11. Retention and storage of data: The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

All forms can be accessed at our website
www.monash.edu.au/research/ethics/human/index.html

We wish you well with your research.

Dr Andrea Lines
Interim Human Ethics Officer (on behalf of SCERH)

Cc: Ms Patricie Mertova