STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING
AT RUSKIN COLLEGE

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Education
at the University of Leicester
by
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April 2006
Abstract

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Title: Strategic Management and Strategic Planning at Ruskin College

The thesis explores strategic management and strategic planning at Ruskin College, an adult education college with a long history of contributing to lifelong learning and social inclusion. It has been written during a period of turbulence in the college – the collapse of a property strategy, the departure of a Principal, a failed inspection, the appointment of a new Principal and a successful re-inspection. Turbulence is a theme of the thesis and underpins some of the models for understanding strategy provided in the literature. The thesis reviews the literature, particularly that relating to further and higher education, on strategic thinking, strategic planning, strategic intent, organisational culture, mission and vision, governance, quality and inspection and how these relate to strategic management. These themes generate the research questions, which are explored using a triangulation of methods – documentary analysis, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observations – and respondent triangulation, involving all levels of staff and governors. The research findings show the strategy development process operates within a strong cultural dimension, but is subject to strong external forces. Internal and external perspectives of the college’s experience of strategic planning are largely negative. Staff and governors take a cultural perspective on strategy and recognise how concepts of strategic management, such as strategic thinking and strategic conversations, might link to vision and mission. The culture of the governing body and its’ changing role in strategic management are identified as significant. The research shows that the relationship between quality and strategic management is unclear and varies according to the definitions of these concepts. It shows that the inspectorate has sought to influence strategic management but the inspection framework does not recognise culture. The conclusion proposes a way forward for strategic processes and approaches in the college as well as for future research on strategic leadership.
Contents

Chapter 1 - Introduction 1

Chapter 2 - Literature review 9

Defining strategy 9

Strategic management 11

Strategic thinking 18

Strategic planning 22

Strategic intent 34

Organisational culture 37

Linking culture and strategic management 42

Vision and mission 46

Linking vision, mission and strategic management 52

Governance and strategy 55

Quality: definitions and management 61

Quality and values 65

Quality and strategic management 68

Inspection and strategic management 70

Conclusion of literature review 75

Chapter 3 - Methodology 78

Research methods 83

Questionnaires 83

Governance healthcheck questionnaire 91

Interviews 93

Observation 99

Documentary analysis 102
Chapter 4 - Findings and Analysis

What is the strategy development process in the college? 105

What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning? 117

How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management? 123

What is the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management? 132

What is the role of the governing body in strategic management? 137

What is the relationship between quality and strategic management? 153

What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management? 165

Chapter 5 – Conclusion 176

Conclusions in relation to research questions 176

How the research aims have been achieved 186

The original contribution of the thesis and strengths and weaknesses 188

Implications for practice and for future research 191

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Strategy development questionnaire 193

Appendix 2 – Strategy development profile 196

Appendix 3 – Interview schedule 197

References 198
Chapter 1 - Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore strategic management and planning at Ruskin College. The thesis focuses on Ruskin College, an adult education college which presently has three sites in Oxford. It reviews the literature on strategic management, particularly as it relates to further and higher education. This review includes the literature on organisational culture, vision and mission, strategic thinking, strategic planning, strategic intent, quality and external inspection, and how these link to strategic management.

The study is located within the interpretive paradigm with a focus on the subjective reality for individuals. It is a semi-ethnographic study undertaken in the researcher's workplace. The chapter on methodology explores the advantages and disadvantages of using the interpretive approach and its appropriateness to the research questions. The research design involves a triangulation of methods—documentary analysis, questionnaires, interviews and observations of meetings. Documentary analysis of primary documents, such as the mission statement, strategy documents and minutes of meetings, and of secondary documents, such as inspection and review reports, is used to find out what has been written about strategic management and planning. A standard strategy development questionnaire (Bailey and Avery, 1998) is used with staff and governors to seek to find out how they think strategy comes about. The main questionnaire uses six dimensions of strategy development—planning, incremental, political, cultural, command and enforced choice—to profile individual and collective views on how strategy comes about. Semi-structured interviews with staff and governors completing the questionnaire are used to discuss the strategy development profiles and the key research questions. Observations of governing body meetings are used to observe the governing body's role in strategic management. A second questionnaire is used with governors to seek to find out what they think about the governing body's role in developing strategy. The chapter on methodology discusses issues of validity and reliability, ethics, data gathering and analysis in relation to these methods.
Ruskin College "was founded in 1899 with two main purposes: enabling working class students to fulfil their potential and have access to university education; and training the actual and potential leaders of the working class movements" (FEFC, 2001a, p.2). The founders were "two young non-conformist Americans committed to social reform" (ibid, p.2), Charles Beard and Walter Vrooman, who named the college after John Ruskin, having in mind his "influence as a friend of labour and critic of contemporary society rather than as an artist" (Pollins, 1984, p.12). The college "has a long history of contributing to lifelong learning and social inclusion" and "there are strong historical links with the trades union and labour movement and with the local community" (FEFC, 2001a, p.2). However a former tutor comments: -

It is a passing curiosity that a pioneering educational institution in Britain should have been established by visiting Americans and be named after someone who had nothing to do with it. Although associated informally with the labour movement it originated not from it but from middle-class reformers. Its beginnings were clearly rooted in the particular conditions of the time, but it survived and indeed flourished in the subsequent different environment.

(Pollins, 1984, p.12)

Perhaps "different environments" might be more accurate given the college's hundred year history. Certainly the funding environment has changed, from 1907 when, "more than half the total income came from trade unions, and some from the co-operatives" (Pollins, 1984, p.17), to the 1960s when "student fees and the Department of Education's grant each amounted to 40 per cent of total income" (ibid, p.47), to 1993 when the college was "designated as eligible to receive financial support from the Further Education Funding Council" (FEFC, 1997b, p.2). Designation for FEFC funding led to changes, recognised by inspectors in 1997: "in terms of both ethos and management Ruskin College is in a state of transition" (ibid, p.7). The environment changed again in April 2001 when the newly formed Learning and Skills Council became the main funder of the college. However throughout its history Ruskin has been an independent college and a company limited by guarantee.
The instrument of government, within the memorandum and articles of association of Ruskin College, defines the governing body:

The College shall be governed and its affairs administered by a Governing Executive which shall consist of a number of persons not exceeding nineteen, elected by the Council from its own members at its Annual General Meeting, two of whom shall be student members and five shall be staff members. Of the staff members two shall be members of the full-time academic or academic-related staff, one a member of the clerical staff, one a member of the domestic staff, and one the Principal.

(Ruskin College, 1996, p.8)

The twelve 'ordinary' members of the Governing Executive are nominated by trade unions and other labour movement organisations, as well as "organisations, local, national or international, whose work influences that of the College" (ibid, p.5). At present the 'ordinary' members include nine senior national trade union officials.

The college was inspected twice by the Further Education Funding Council in March 1997 and October 2000. Governance and management were judged to be satisfactory in 1997 and good in 2000 (FEFC, 1997b; FEFC, 2001a). The college was inspected again in October 2003 during the period the research for this thesis was being conducted. It was conducted within the common inspection framework for inspecting post-16 education and training, used by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). One of the key questions in the framework is "How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?" (ALI, OFSTED, 2001, p.13). One of the factors for inspectors to evaluate in answering this question is "the extent to which governors or other supervisory boards meet their responsibilities" (ibid, p.13). When making judgements inspectors are asked to consider the extent to which governors "effectively oversee the provider's strategic direction, and regularly monitor the quality of provision and their own performance" (ibid, p.13). The ALI inspectors judged the leadership and management of the college to be unsatisfactory and
as a result the college was re-inspected in late 2004. At the re-inspection the ALI inspectors found leadership and management to be good.

The ALI inspection report describes how "the mission of the college is to provide educational opportunities for excluded and disadvantaged people, and through education to transform their lives" (ALI, 2003, p.1). This description is a synopsis of the mission statement and strategy produced by the then Principal and adopted by the governing body in April 1998. In 2001 FEFC inspectors claimed that "governors are committed to the college and its mission, and work to maintain its role as a strategic partner for the trades unions and labour movement" (FEFC, 2001a, p.14) and that the mission "is well understood by staff and students" (ibid, p.15). The ALI inspection report does not comment on stakeholders' views on the mission.

The continuing relevance of the college's mission is demonstrated in a comment in joint proposals made by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in December 2001:

There is a marked skew in HE participation by socio-economic group. Those in the highest socio-economic group are seven times more likely to enter HE than those in the lowest group. So the greatest scope for increasing HE participation lies in the more disadvantaged groups in society, who are currently significantly under-represented.

(HEFCE, 2001, p.3)

The DfES (2003, p.71) recognises that "a key role in supporting participation among under-represented groups is played by further and higher education colleges, and by the seven long-term residential colleges". The DfES white paper, 'The Future of Higher Education' goes on to outline the role of Ruskin College within this:-

The role of the long-term residential colleges was first shaped more than a century ago by Ruskin College, which developed provision for trade unionists and working class people to prepare for higher education.
More recently the colleges have offered higher education provision in direct partnership with higher education institutions. Since the 1980s, this work has been paralleled for adults who cannot take up residential provision by Access course provision in further education colleges and specialist adult education provision across the country.

(DfES, 2003, p.71)

This description accords with that of FEFC inspectors in 1997, who described Ruskin as having "an impressive record of providing access to education for people with few prior educational achievements (FEFC, 1997b, p.1). The main aim in the college's strategic plan in 1997 was to expand learning opportunities for working class adults. A new Principal took up post in early 1998 and produced a new strategy in April 1998, without the participation of most staff. This approach was contrary to what the FEFC inspectors had described as a "traditional emphasis on participative decision-making" (FEFC, 1997b, p.7). The strategy proposed a massive expansion in part-time and short course student numbers, without firm evidence from the external environment to support it. The Governing Executive approved this new strategy, alongside the mission statement, in April 1998. However the strategy adopted did not address college property issues.

The research has taken place in the context of a major strategic development, which arose after the original thesis proposal had been formulated. The strategic development was the property strategy, involving "the proposed sale of three college sites, at Walton Street, Stoke Place and a 20-acre plot in Headington, and the purchase of a new 1.7 acre site" (Grace, 2002, p.9). In some ways the proposal was not new; "selling the three sites to consolidate the college on a single site has been on the cards for some years and, though by no means everyone on the staff accepts the economic logic of such a move, there has been a general willingness to discuss its merits" (ibid). However a specific property strategy was formulated in April 2002 "when the principal presented a detailed five-page proposal to a meeting of the governing executive for a move to a north Oxford site that had previously been a Unipart factory and was now owned by Berkeley Homes" (ibid). The proposal was controversial;
"the college's AUT group has voiced its reservations, as have some trade unions and the Ruskin Fellowship, a group representing college alumni" (ibid). However the property deal fell through in late February 2003 "because of a disagreement between the college and Berkeley Homes over the price of the site" (Sanders, 2003, p.3). The Times Higher reported on the financial context of the property strategy and quoted from a briefing note by an academic adviser to the college outlining the business case for a move to a single site. The governing body of the college subsequently reaffirmed its commitment to search for a single site.

The national press in May 2003 reported on the resignation of the Principal "after a bitter wrangle over relocating the historic trade union institution" (Macleod, 2003, p.11). The article reported on a statement issued by the college's Governing Executive:

> The executive recognised the massive expansion of student numbers, the development of a wide range of new courses, the setting up of important partnerships with unions and employers and the steady development of quality assurance standards that has taken place in the five years since the Principal's appointment and thanked him for all his work on behalf of the college.

(Macleod, 2003, p.11)

Arguably this statement can be read as a review of the college's strategy at that point. The local press reported the Principal as saying "I arrived five years ago and was asked to create a strategy for the college. I did this and have delivered that strategy. It is time to move on" (Anon, 2003, p.1). Commenting on the future of the college, Guardian Education (Macleod, 2003, p.11) reported "the governors now have to work out a new strategy", although it was arguably commenting on the property strategy only, rather than the college's overall strategy.

The recruitment process for a new Principal began in early September 2003. The national press followed the process and an article on the front page of the
Higher section of the Guardian Education with the headline 'Labour pains' commented:

Everyone within Ruskin appears upbeat about the process, and those involved in the campaign against the move to the Unipart site reckon the appointment will herald a new era of consensual management. But the new applicant will need to be a skilled diplomat. There are still strong feelings over whether the three sites should be sold and how best to secure Ruskin's long-term financial future. And there's much at stake.

(Crace, 2003, p.9)

As a result of this major strategic development a key research objective is to explore the context of strategic management and the impact this context has on the culture of the college and the strategy development process. A key theme of the thesis is the duality in the concept of strategic management – the relationship between theory and practice in strategic management.

The thesis has been written during a period of turbulence in the college – the collapse of a property strategy, the resignation of a Principal, a failed inspection, the appointment of a new Principal and a re-inspection. It has also been a period of severe turbulence for one of the other long-term residential colleges. Plater College, Oxford closed in July 2005 after failing an ALI inspection in late 2004. Turbulence is a theme of the thesis and also underpins some of the models for understanding strategy provided in the literature.

The literature on strategic management specific to schools and colleges has been developing in recent years. Broad aspects of strategic management in education are addressed in Middlewood and Lumby (eds.) (1998), including vision, mission and culture, planning and implementing strategy, and evaluating and reviewing its effectiveness. Some of the literature is normative (e.g. Watson, 2000), some links strategic management to leadership (e.g. Bush and Coleman, 2000; Bush and Bell (eds), 2002) and other literature links it to improvement (e.g. Fidler, 2002). A key issue is the nature of the strategic management process, which Lumby (2002) argues is both rational and political,
and both pre-planned and emergent. In relation to strategic planning, it has been argued that little research has been undertaken on the impact of inspection on the longer term planning of colleges (Coleman, 1998).

There has been a shift in the most recent literature from seeing strategy as a management function to seeing it as a leadership process (Davies and Ellison, 2003; Davies, 2004; Dimmock and Walker, 2004; Davies and Davies, 2005). At the same time there has been an increasing awareness of the limitations of planning. This has led to writers advocating strategy being thought of as a perspective and a process and not only as a rational plan.

The literature review generates the key research questions:-

- What is the strategy development process in the college?
- What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?
- How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?
- What is the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management?
- What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?
- What is the relationship between quality and strategic management?
- What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?
Chapter 2 - Literature review

Defining Strategy

It has been claimed that, "strategy as a concept can be, and often is, misunderstood in the way it is commonly used" (Davies, 2005, p.55), so it is important to seek to define it. A good basic definition of strategy is provided in the business literature:

Strategy is the direction and scope of an organisation over the long term which achieves advantage for the organisation through its configuration of resources within a changing environment, to meet the needs of markets and to fulfil stakeholder expectations.

(Johnson and Scholes, 1999, p.10)

The literature specific to schools and colleges has sought to define what is meant by strategy:

Strategy is the term used to describe the overall, or synoptic, management of organisations. It generally operates over an extended timescale and guides decision-making during that period. Strategy provides the link between the vision of the organisation and its operational management and helps to ensure integration between different parts of the school or college.

(Bush, 1998, p.40)

Davies (2003, p.295) has defined strategy as "a specific pattern of decisions and actions taken to achieve an organisation's goals". He goes on to suggest four initial elements of strategy as a way of developing an overall understanding of the concept:

1. Strategy can be considered to include a broader view dealing with aggregated data or trends rather than disaggregated detail.
2. Strategy deals with the medium- to long-term rather than the short-term operational view.

3. Strategy should be considered as a perspective and it is important to focus on strategic thinking.

4. Strategy should be seen as a template against which to assess current actions.

(Adapted from Davies, 2003, p.295)

With regard to the second element, Davies and Ellison (2003) make a distinction between the operational short-term (1-2 years), the strategic medium-to long-term (3-5 years) and the longer-term futures view (5-10 years), although Davies admits that it is not always easy to define “where exactly the strategy fades out and the futures view begins” (Davies, 2003, p.295).

In the most recent literature which links strategy and leadership, Davies and Davies (2005) make use of five concepts in defining strategy which refine those previously suggested by Davies (2003):

1. Strategy is concerned with the idea of direction-setting. To decide on the direction for the institution, it is necessary to understand its history and its current situation.

2. Strategy, while very often associated with planning in traditional definitions might better be thought of as perspective, as a holistic way of looking at things.

3. Strategy does not get involved in the day-to-day activities but is concerned with the broad major dimensions of the organisation.

4. Strategy should be considered using a medium-to longer-term framework.

5. Strategy can be used as a template against which to set shorter-term planning and activities.

(Adapted from Davies and Davies, 2005, p.11)
In this definition the idea of direction-setting comes first and is linked to a
definition of strategic thinking (Garratt, 2003). Arguably it is also linked to
organisational culture and context.

Having defined the concept of strategy, the literature review moves on to
strategic management, which can be seen as the means of operationalising
strategy. Strategic management can be defined as “the overarching process
which includes strategic thinking, strategic planning, implementation and
review” (Lumby, 2002, p.90). The literature review goes on from a section on
the overarching process of strategic management to sections on strategic
thinking, strategic planning and strategic intent.

It moves on to a section on organisational culture and how this links to strategic
management. It then moves on to a section on vision and mission and how
these in turn link to strategic management. The next section covers
governance and strategy. The review then moves on to sections on quality,
including definitions and management, quality values and the link between
quality and strategic management. The next review then covers inspection and
strategic management. The conclusion of the literature review summarises the
concepts of strategic management and relates them to the seven research
questions.

**Strategic Management**

The model of strategic management outlined by Johnson and Scholes (1999)
contains three elements – strategic analysis, strategic choice and strategy
implementation. However Johnson and Scholes (1999) admit that their model
does not describe how organisational strategies actually come about in practice.

In a chapter in Preedy et al (eds) (2003), Johnson and Scholes (2002) develop
the concept of strategy, using three perspectives to explore how strategies
develop in practice and put forward various models of the strategy process.
These three strategy 'lenses' or ways of seeing things are strategy as design,
as experience and as ideas and is summarised below:
Strategy as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overview summary</td>
<td>Deliberate positioning through rational, analytic, structured and directive processes</td>
<td>Incremental development as the outcome of individual and collective experience and the taken for granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions about organisations</td>
<td>Mechanistic, hierarchical, logical</td>
<td>Cultures based on history, legitimacy and past success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of top management</td>
<td>Strategic decision makers</td>
<td>Enactors of their experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for change</td>
<td>Change = Implementation of planned strategy</td>
<td>Change incremental with resistance to major change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinning theories</td>
<td>Economics; decision sciences</td>
<td>Institutional theory; Theories of culture; psychology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Preedy et al (eds), 2003, p.143)

Johnson and Scholes (2002) claim that the design lens is the orthodox approach to strategy development most often written about in the literature. However they emphasise the importance of the other lenses in terms of the challenges they raise when thinking about and managing strategy. The experience lens "is rooted in evidence of how strategies develop incrementally based on experience and the historical and cultural legacy of the organisation; and suggests that it is much more difficult to make strategic changes that the design lens might imply" (Preedy et al (eds), 2003, p.143). The ideas lens "helps an understanding of where innovative strategies come from and how organisations cope with dynamic environments" and "poses questions about whether or not top management really has control over strategic direction to the extent the design lens suggests" (ibid, p.143).

Mintzberg et al (1998) agree with Johnson and Scholes (2002) that the literature of strategic management has highlighted the rational and prescriptive side of the process, namely three of their definitions of strategy – plan, pattern and
position – rather than their other two definitions – perspective and ploy. As perspective, "strategy looks in – inside the organisation, indeed, inside the heads of the strategists, but it also looks up – to the grand vision of the enterprise" claim Mintzberg et al (1998, p.14). They assert that this bias towards the rational and prescriptive is reflected in practice, particularly in the work of corporate and governmental planning departments.

There may not be one simple definition of strategy but Mintzberg et al claim that there are some general areas of agreement about the nature of strategy:

- Strategy concerns both organisation and environment
- The substance of strategy is complex
- Strategy affects overall welfare of the organisation
- Strategy involves issues of both content and process
- Strategies are not purely deliberate
- Strategies exist on different levels
- Strategy involves various thought processes

(adapted from Mintzberg et al, 1998, p.16)

The issues around the process of strategy development are explored by Johnson and Scholes (2002). Three broad explanations of strategy development are presented: strategy developed as managerial intent; strategy developed as the outcome of organisational processes and strategy imposed on an organisation. They argue that it is rare to find organisations in which singular explanations are adequate to explain the complexity of strategy development and there are likely to be a number of different configurations of strategy development processes. The three broad explanations of strategy development contain different dimensions.

Strategy as managerial intent contains planning and incremental dimensions. Strategy developed as the outcome of organisational processes contains political, cultural and incremental dimensions. The six dimensions have been summarised as follows:
1. The planning dimension. Strategy is developed through an analytic, intentional and sequential process of planning.

2. The incremental dimension. Strategy is developed in an evolutionary but purposeful manner, iterative and adaptive process of trial and error.

3. The cultural dimension. Strategy is directed and guided by the cultural aspects of an organisation, its history and the shared assumptions and beliefs of its members.

4. The political dimension. Strategy is developed through a process of bargaining, negotiation and influence between internal interest groups.

5. The command dimension. Strategy is defined and determined by a particular powerful individual within an organisation.

6. The enforced choice dimension. Strategy is developed as a result of external pressures which limit an organisation's ability to determine its own strategic direction.

(Bailey and Avery, 1998, p.182)

A strategy development questionnaire, developed by Bailey and Johnson at the Cranfield School of Management, can be used to explore processes of strategy development in organisations.

The processes of strategy development in public sector organisations were researched by Collier et al (2001). The research questions were:

First, whether there is a significant difference in the 'weight' of these different processes between the public and private sectors. For example, is planning more commonly used in one or other sectors? Second, within the public sector, are there any significant differences in the weight of the processes between the different types of public sector organisation and their degree of publicness?

(Collier et al, 2001, p.17)
The research method was the strategy development questionnaire completed by 6,280 managers in public and private sector organisations. Within this total 1,017 managers classified their organisation to the public sector. Although five categories of public sector organisations were examined separately, including local government, national health service, police and prison service, probation service and market organisations (Post Office, Royal Mail and BBC), educational organisations were not examined separately. Indeed it is not clear whether managers from educational organisations were included in the survey.

The main conclusion of the research was that "public sector managers place much more emphasis than those from all other organisations on the enforced choice dimension of strategy development" (Collier et al, 2001, p.30). They also found that there was a lower emphasis placed in the public sector on the importance of the contribution to strategy development of senior individuals. However they concluded from the breakdown of the results for different categories within the public sector that the closer the activity was to the commercial sector, the importance of this 'command' dimension was greater. In relation to their research questions, Collier et al (2001) found that there were substantial differences between the public sector and other types of organisation in the process of strategy development, but the public sector was not homogeneous in terms of the factors which determine strategy. The research does not provide specific data or conclusions about strategy development in educational organisations. The implications of the conclusions are that managers should recognise the reality of strategy development:

Not only in the public sector, but in many private sector organisations, there have been traditions of equating strategy development and strategic planning. However, it needs to be recognised that formal planning mechanisms are not necessarily the only way – perhaps not the most effective way – in which strategies develop.

(Collier et al, 2001, p.30)
They claim that their analysis suggests that managers seek to undertake strategic management in different ways according to their different organisational objectives and their different contexts.

Much of the educational management literature equates strategic development and strategic planning. In a higher education context Watson (2000, p.88) claims that “managing strategy is not just about producing a plan; it is even more about managing a process, or, more accurately a series of processes”. However the processes which he describes appear to fit the rational – logical model at a more detailed level. “It is only through an interlocking series of sub-strategies, policies and arrangements for their monitoring and evaluation that anything like strategy on an institutional or corporate scale emerges”, Watson (2000, p.88) argues. Writing from the perspective of a Director of a University, Watson admits that his personal perspectives developed “the character of a survival guide for the senior manager in carrying out his or her most sensitive task, as part-architect, part-steward of his or her institution’s strategy” (2000, p.95). This might suggest an element of the command dimension in addition to the planning dimension.

In a further education context Watson and Crossley examine the strategic management process through research in a college “as it moved from its public sector roots under the control of the LEA into the quasi-private sector” (2001, p.114). Their article analyses the impact of the strategic management process upon the college, with particular reference to the role and influence of the Senior Management Team. Watson and Crossley (2001) claim that a key aspect of the strategic management process that is missing from the rational – logical model is its significance as a social process in promoting change across the whole college culture. Their rationale for researching the strategic management process was that it was “an area that had become central to the development of all colleges of FE following incorporation” and “little previous research on this theme had been conducted in this form of educational setting” (Watson and Crossley, 2001, p.115).
The research method involved two questionnaires issued to all staff three years apart and in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 lecturing staff below the level of senior management. It is not clear why senior managers, governors and support staff were not interviewed. This is particularly the case with governors, since Watson and Crossley (2001, p.117) argue that “the new corporation, freed from the control of the LEA, had a significant role in determining the educational character and mission of the college” and that “the corporation, through the principal now designated as chief executive officer (an important, symbolic change of title), would facilitate and control the creation of a strategic planning regime”.

The political dimension of the strategy development process (SMP) is emphasised by Watson and Crossley (2001). “The creation, implementation and management of strategy has political implications and managers may need to utilise, influence and shape power relationships to cope with new learning and possible resistance”, (Watson and Crossley, 2001, p.118) they argue. They found that “the development of the strategic management process at the college initially took place in an arena of overt conflict – and that over the period of the research conflict became more contained and, perhaps, more covert” (ibid, p.121), perhaps through the enactment of the process of power. However they do not suggest “a deliberate and planned process, for there is little evidence to support such a rational approach, but it is a process of internal politics, managed decision-making, facilitation and compromise” (ibid, p.121). Indeed they argue that there has been a failure of management in FE to understand that “an apparently rational SMP may be a chimera in practice” (ibid, p.123). In their research Watson and Crossley found individuals who questioned the SMP rationale and many expressed feelings that:

(a) The need to conform to the ‘top down’ demands of strategic planning is seen as an attack on their professional standing;
(b) individuals had more confidence in their own instinct and experience than in solely following the targets of a strategic plan;
(c) there was a regard for the traditional way of doing things which does not need to be sanctified by ‘strategy’;
cynicism or indifference was endemic in opinions about the way in which the discourse of strategy was used by management.

(2001, p.123)

It is assumed that those who expressed these feelings were the lecturers who were interviewed rather than the governors, managers and support staff who were not.

The cultural dimension of the strategy development process is emphasised by Watson and Crossley (2001) in their conclusion. They advocate the development of "a more sophisticated and culturally informed understanding of the multi-dimensional significance of the SMP" (ibid, p.124) in the wider FE context. They claim that their study "reinforces the need for greater recognition and understanding of the SMP as a social and cultural process that goes well beyond the rational, while being more supportive of the implicit values of education" (ibid, p.124). However they do not offer a way forward in terms of further research on the strategic management process in the FE sector to help achieve this understanding.

The research question which emerges from this section of the literature review is "what is the strategy development process in the college?"

**Strategic thinking**

It has been claimed that it is important to consider strategy as a perspective, as well as a process, and in particular to focus on strategic thinking (Davies, 2003).

A definition of strategic thinking is:

The process by which an organisation's direction-givers can rise above the daily managerial process and crises to gain different perspectives of the internal and external dynamics causing change in their environment and thereby give more effective direction to their organisation. Such perspectives should be both future-orientated and historically understood. Strategic thinkers must have the skills of looking both
It has been argued that developing a strategic mode of thinking is essential for leadership and management of schools and colleges in the twenty-first century (Middlewood, 1998). Some recent literature on strategic management specific to schools and colleges link the concept to leadership (eg. Bush and Coleman, 2000; Bush and Bell (eds), 2002; Peeke, 2003; Davies, 2004). Peeke (2003, p.172) argues that “the starting place for an analysis of the skills and qualities needed by leaders in the FE sector is the set of occupational standards published by FENTO (2001), for management in further education”. One of the four key areas at the core of the standards is ‘develop strategic practice’, which is sub-divided into: develop a vision, plan to achieve a vision and manage change and continuous improvement. Peeke (2003) goes on to cite other leadership frameworks (University of Texas, 2001; Callan, 2001; Home and Stedman-Jones, 2001) and argues that a common element to these is an emphasis upon strategic thinking.

Strategic thinking can be defined as “seeing” (Mintzberg, 2003, p.79) and the strategic manager must see “ahead and behind, above and below, beside and beyond” (ibid). Mintzberg argues that “seeing through” (ibid, p.82) is an essential aspect of strategic management, i.e. moving through vision to implementation of strategy. The differences between strategic and operational thinking have been summarised as follows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic thinking is</th>
<th>Operational management thinking is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longer term</td>
<td>Short term, immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In whole organisation terms</td>
<td>Concerned with the section needing attention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflective | To lead to action quickly
---|---
Looking to use fully whole organisational capabilities | Looking to use accessible resources
Conceptual | Concrete
Creative, breaking new ground | Ongoing, routine
More concerned with effectiveness | More concerned with efficiency
Identifying opportunities | Resolving existing problems
Constantly examining the external environment | Focusing on the internal context
Demonstrating a 'hands-off' approach | Demonstrating a 'hands-on' approach
With a 'helicopter' perspective | With an 'on-the-ground' perspective

(Middlewood and Lumby, 1998, p.8)

For Mintzberg (1995) the idea of “thinking as seeing” implies that others share in the thinking so that possible consequences can be foreseen. Middlewood (1998, p.8) argues that “strategic thinking, although it is a requirement of leaders, is not the sole prerogative of individual heads or principals; others have their part to play too”, but he does not define who these ‘others’ might be.

Earley (1998, p.149) recognises the responsibilities of senior staff in strategic management but argues that “this does not mean, however, that middle managers and other staff will not be able to contribute to strategic thinking; there will be a need to make use of all the resources at the organisation’s disposal”. Peeke (2003) argues that the emphasis on strategic thinking in the leadership frameworks raises the issue of the extent to which leaders in FE have responsibility for strategy:

Frequent contact with principals through a range of development activities provided by the LSDA, suggests that a number of principals view their strategic capability as severely limited by constant external interference from government or the funding agencies. The
establishment of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and its 47 local arms, with a remit for planning provision across the local area, casts further doubt over the degree of freedom colleges have to think strategically.

(Peeke, 2003, p.174)

Clearly Peeke (2003) is using anecdotal rather than research evidence. However he cites research by Smith et al (2001, p.2) who claim that the FE sector has “fallen victim to a mechanistic view of strategy as planning through a filter of ever reducing degrees of freedom rather than a more holistic perspective incorporating strategic thinking, formulation and implementation”. In their research Smith et al (2001) found a range of ‘logics’ exist which serve to help colleges make sense of their environment, the three sets of dominant logics being:

1. Stability maximising: Principals of these colleges argue that in reality neither they nor their team are strategists but operators who are there to provide an education-based, community service as efficiently and effectively as they can within the constraints set by funders and other stakeholders.

2. Market maximising: The principals of these colleges have embraced the ‘college as business’ model, which accepts commercial realism and points to market orientation as the only viable option.

3. Resource maximising: Here the dominant strategic logic centres on the college as a set of educational resources and capabilities. There are educational needs to be met, and these are congruent with the focus of the college. These colleges do not ignore the market but attempt to benefit from their capability rather than seek markets and learn how to exploit them.

(Peeke, 2003, p.175)
An implication which can be drawn from this conclusion about the dominant patterns of strategic thinking in colleges is that senior managers may see their role as operational rather than strategic. Peeke (2003) takes this argument further in claiming that, given the role of the local LSC in planning, the role of college principal is reduced to that of ‘branch manager’ ensuring the supply of educational courses and services. However this argument might not apply to a residential college which attracts students from a national rather than a local market. In a local context Peeke (2003) admits that the need to plan provision in collaboration with the local LSC does not take away the need for strategic thinking within individual colleges, as they “will continue to need to seek out new opportunities, to take some commercial risks and to form strategic alliances and partnerships” (p.176).

The limitations of strategic thinking are indicated in the literature. Middlewood (1998, p.8) argues that “if the strategic manager’s thinking remains detached from implementation, there is a risk that it will remain purely theoretical, and based solely upon rational assumptions about change”. Lumby (2002, p.92) claims that other literature stresses “the place of intuition, that true strategic thinking is in short supply and involves the use of a creative process engaging both intuition and emotion as well as rational intellect”, citing Ansoff and McDonnell (1990) and Ohmae (1982), but not any educational literature. Peeke (2003) asserts that there are no studies exploring the impact of emotional intelligence upon college management.

**Strategic planning**

The literature about strategic management in schools and colleges appears to be dominated by the notion of strategic planning (e.g. Weindling, 1997; Lumby, 1998; Watson, 2000; Lumby, 2002; Foskett and Lumby, 2003). This is not surprising since the planning dimension is, perhaps, the approach traditionally associated with how strategies develop (Collier et al, 2001). Strategic planning has been defined as:
A process operating in an extended time-frame (three to five years) which translates vision and values into significant, measurable and practical outcomes. Although the primary responsibility of senior management, the process requires two-way communication at all stages and has to be focused on the core purpose and practical activities of the school or college.

(West-Burnham, 1994, p.84)

Middlewood (1998) asserts that strategic management is much more than strategic planning, but that the two terms are often used interchangeably. He goes on to argue that "strategic planning is critically important as a means of integrating strategy at its implementation" (Middlewood, 1998, p.10). However he concludes that "it would be dangerous for autonomous schools and colleges if they were to assume that devising a strategic plan indicated that most of the work was complete" (ibid, p.14).

Crisp provides a definition for strategic planning which differentiates it from strategic management:

Strategic planning is a set of activities designed to identify the appropriate future direction of a college, and includes specifying the steps necessary to move in that direction. Strategic management, on the other hand, is concerned with the total process of planning, implementing, monitoring and maintaining the strategy over a longer period.

(1991, p.3)

Strategic planning can also be viewed as an element within strategic analysis:

Strategic analysis aims to form a view of the key factors which will influence the school in the medium-term. These factors will affect the strategies which are chosen to achieve the strategic intent and the strategic plan. Strategic analysis can be seen in practical terms to involve two sequential processes: first obtaining strategic data and,
second, building an aggregated strategic view of the school through interpreting and integrating that data to turn it into useful information.

(Davies and Ellison, 2003, p.157)

In an international context Foskett and Lumby (2003, p.118) argue that “the planning paradigm has permeated education systems sufficiently to ensure it is a significant process in any consideration of leadership and management”. They assert that “the literature is unclear on how strategic planning differs from long-term planning, and throughout the world development planning, action planning, business planning are all used to describe plans devised by educational institutions” (Foskett and Lumby, 2003, p.119). They go on to claim that “the mystification of language in the literature resolves itself into a number of possible approaches to strategic planning” (ibid). The four approaches they identify are cultural, rational, ‘fluid reactive’ and “a blend, where meaning creation may precede and run alongside a sequence of planning and actions that are founded on logic and rationality” (ibid). In this blended approach the stakeholders function in different systems simultaneously, so for example:

Staff may engage in discussion on a rational level, arguing for plans from the perspective of advantages and disadvantages to learners, but at the same time there are micropolitical considerations as they are anxious to forward their personal professional values and practice and to uphold their own status and conditions.

(Foskett and Lumby, 2003, p.119)

The emphasis of the approach to strategic planning may change over time, with an emphasis on the cultural or micropolitical in the early stages changing to an emphasis on the rational in the later stages when conflicts around values and power have been partly resolved (Davies and Morgan, 1983). This assumes that such conflicts can be resolved.

Within the context of England and Wales, “prior to the incorporation of colleges in 1993, much of the strategic planning for further education was undertaken by local education authorities” (Lumby, 1998). It is not clear how the strategic
planning of colleges not funded by local education authorities prior to 1993 took place, or if it took place at all. Writing prior to the incorporation or designation of colleges, Wheale (1991) identifies two purposes for business planning. Firstly a practical purpose of enabling efficiency and effectiveness and secondly a political purpose of satisfying the funding bodies. Foskett and Lumby (2003, p.119) argue that "strategic planning is frequently a response to the requirement of funding bodies". They cite Farrant and Afonso (1997), who claim that the African universities most forward with strategic planning are those most heavily reliant on donor aid, although in reality what is termed strategic planning may be little more than a wish list. Foskett and Lumby (2003) identify a third response for planning, that of achieving a 'feel good' factor, which "appears to diminish the threat of uncertainty and change" (p.121). They cite examples at national level (Jennings, 1994) and at institutional level (Stott and Walker, 1992) to argue that simply having a plan provides a good feeling and suggests a sense of purpose and direction, even if the plan has little impact. It is not clear however who benefits from this 'feel good' factor. The conclusion which Foskett and Lumby (2003, p.121) reach about the purpose of planning is that, "much more research is needed to move beyond the current body of largely normative, hortatory literature and to examine what purpose planning serves in schools and colleges and how it is undertaken". They recognise that planning might serve a variety of cultural, political, emotional and practical purposes, but "the real trick for school and college leaders is to discern the purpose that planning and strategy need to serve in the individual case, and to use them effectively to that end" (Foskett and Lumby, 2003, p.127). This suggests research within individual institutions on why and how strategic planning is undertaken.

Arguably the reason why colleges in England and Wales first produced strategic plans was because the FEFC asked them to do so. In 1992 the FEFC issued guidance on a framework for strategic planning which suggested that the plan should include:

- college mission
- needs analysis
• three-year strategic overview of objectives for student numbers and provision, and physical resources
• sensitivity analysis
• operating statement for the sixteen-month period commencing 1 April, to include the college’s financial forecast
• numerical information to support the strategic objectives for students and provision.

(FEFC, 1992a, pp.3-4)

Lumby (1998) asserts that the FEFC strategic planning framework is rational in its approach and that the guidance relates to the content of the plan rather than on how the planning process is undertaken or on implementation. Peeke argues the reason for the nature of the guidance is that the framework is a strategic planning framework rather than a strategic management one:

Consequently, it has little to say about the internal college processes necessary to produce the plan. Analysis of the external environment, and internal assessment of the institution’s strengths and weaknesses, are not mentioned. Participative processes are not considered.

(1994, p.132)

However the FEFC did recognise that there were internal college processes involving some participation:

The strategic plan has a pivotal role in the management of a college. It is the route map which guides the college in its short and long term planning and provides the setting for the college’s operating plans. Most importantly, the plan is the culmination of a process, within the college, of analysis, testing, discussion, negotiation, persuasion and finally, agreement on the fundamental purpose and direction of the college.

(TEFC, 1992b)
Lumby (1998) cites evidence from the National Audit Office (1994) and research by the Further Education Development Agency (1995) to argue that colleges have not been successful at the process of strategic planning and the effective implementation of plans. The 'weaknesses' in colleges strategic plans identified by the National Audit Office following visits to 15 colleges included:

- targets which were unrealistic or unrelated to the college mission or strategic aims;
- lack of costing or identification of resource requirements of objectives included in the plans;
- lack of governing body involvement in discussion and approving plans.

(1994, p.29)

The NAO found that these weaknesses remained in 1994-97 plans and planning processes in their follow-up a year later. However this evidence is from 1995, as is the FEDA research, and colleges have had a number of years to learn from their experiences of strategic planning.

There is a range of views in the literature on how far all staff and stakeholders need to be involved in strategic planning. Despite advocating a normative rational model of strategic planning FEDA (1995) asserts that the involvement of staff is essential. Limb argues strongly in favour of involving staff in the process:

The majority of the full-time staff of Milton Keynes College are trained teachers with some industrial and commercial experience: planning skills form a part of their portfolio of competences. I believe it is professionally honest and managerially sensible to value, develop and promote the use of these abilities in determining the college's strategic plan.

(1992, p.168)

However her definition of staff appears to be limited to full-time teaching staff.
It has been argued that the process of strategic analysis within a school should involve a wide range of stakeholders:

Although the information will usually be assembled by the senior management team, to appreciate fully the strategic position of the school it is necessary to understand how a wide range of stakeholders, such as pupils, staff, employers, governors and the community, view the situation which the school faces and its possible direction.

(Davies and Ellison, 2003, p.158)

The authors suggest the use of SWOT analysis to provide an "analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, the opportunities which are available and the threats it faces, as perceived by a range of stakeholders" (Davies and Ellison, 2003, p.164). However they caution that using SWOT analysis simply to gather stakeholders’ perceptions could be subjective use of this tool. They argue that a more ‘rational’ approach to SWOT analysis "requires that senior leaders in the school consider the validity of the data gathered so that it provides valuable information" (Davies and Ellison, 2003, p.174). It is not clear who is defined as a ‘senior leader’, nor is it clear why this would necessarily make the approach more rational.

In their study of strategic planning across three differing FE colleges Drodge and Cooper (1997) found evidence of participative methods of managing the planning process but the degree of participation in planning varied between the colleges. At one of the colleges they studied, a lecturer commented that “the nature of the planning process was such that ‘if you want to be, you can be involved, and make it part of your working life’” (Drodge and Cooper, 1997, p.210). In contrast at another college “there was a perception, however, that main grade lecturers felt a degree of ‘remoteness’ from the planning process and that the scope for staff to develop ideas existed, but only if they were aligned with strategic objectives” (ibid, p.211). Holder (1996) asserts that the requirement to achieve staff ownership of the strategic plan is unrealistic. The conclusion of Drodge and Cooper (1997) about the varying degree of participation in the process can apply within a single institution. Cowham
(1994) reports on a range of views within a senior management team in a single institution on the most effective approach to strategic planning, ranging from centralist to collegial. This may reflect the tension within the strategic planning process "between the need to create ownership by allowing sub-units of the college to contribute their own strategic aims to a central plan, and the need for a whole-college approach, which would have to be mediated by one group, often senior management, at the risk of appearing remote and irrelevant to the mass of staff in the college" (Lumby, 1998, p.97).

The debate in the literature about the involvement of staff in planning is not confined to the formulation of the plan but refers to its implementation. Watson and Crossley (2001, pp.121-122) argue that "wider involvement is needed to gain ownership from the stakeholders responsible, not only for the strategy's construction but also for its implementation". They make a case for allowing all staff an opportunity to participate in the process, as a counter to the FEFC rational approach which, they argue, "can inhibit and undermine autonomy and the role of lecturers as professionals" (ibid, p.122). Lumby's (1999) research shows the importance of this aspect of the process and she argues that undertaking the process makes staff feel more effective. In her survey of college principals in England, she found that all principals agreed that the strategic planning process had resulted in:

- a greater sense of purpose
- an increased feeling of independence
- a benchmark against which decisions could be measured
- better systems and efficiency
- better communication as there was something to communicate.

(Lumby, 1999, p.81)

Watson and Crossley (2001) assert that the strategic management process must be viewed as a total approach, although they do not define what they mean in practice.
In a higher education context Pidcock's (2001) study to investigate strategic planning as carried out in a new university focused on the match between the planning model identified and the actual practice. The study used semi-structured interviews but also referred to internal documentation. However the interviews were limited to one department and to academic staff only. The study found that staff awareness of institutional mission was low, as was perceived staff involvement in strategic planning. The common view was that there was no link between strategic planning and the university's core business of teaching, learning, scholarly activity and research. Pidcock (2001) concluded that comparative studies of further institutions would provide valuable insights into the actualities of strategic planning in universities. Given that Pidcock's (2001) research was limited to a single department a comparative study of a small institution could provide equally valuable insights into the practice of strategic planning.

There is little in the literature on the implementation and monitoring of plans in colleges. Lumby (1998) claims that implementation is a more challenging task than the process of planning, although she recognises that planning and implementation cannot be separated and are not sequential activities. FEDA (1995) argues that the successful implementation of plans is founded on a process for their production involving staff participation. However FEDA (1995) recognises that there are other factors influencing implementation and barriers such as organisational structure, campuses spread apart and resource issues. Lumby agrees that successful implementation involves "ensuring that the structures in place allow people to work together strategically, across internal divisions, to achieve college-wide targets" and "the accurate use of resources to underpin plans and to motivate staff" (1998, p.102). She goes on, however, to critique the normative approach to implementation (National Audit Office, 1994; FEDA, 1995) which advocates setting SMART targets, implemented by named individuals.

This approach was identified in the research conducted by Watson and Crossley, where it became apparent that for the SMT "there had been a growing formalisation of meetings, with actionable minutes recorded, the identification of
named individuals to take agreed decisions forward, and a developing agenda featuring permanent, high-order items on strategy and related aspects such as finance, human resources and estates" (2001, p.121). Lumby argues that this approach is insufficient and "the power base and capability of the person responsible underpin the capacity to achieve change" (1998, p.102). She goes on to highlight the role of monitoring in assessing "not only whether targets have been achieved but also how far structural changes, staff development and support from more senior staff may be needed to build the capacity to implement plans" (Lumby, 1998, p.102).

In the business literature Jennings and Wattam (1998) provide a framework for strategic management which shows two frames of reference for strategic planning and strategic management:

Chaos: a new framework for strategic management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Today's frame of reference</th>
<th>A new frame of reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-term future is predictable to some extent.</td>
<td>Long-term future is unknowable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visions and plans are central to strategic management.</td>
<td>Dynamic agendas of strategic issues are central to effective strategic management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly shared cultures.</td>
<td>Contradictory countercultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesive teams of managers operating in a state of consensus.</td>
<td>Learning groups of managers, surfacing conflict, engaging in dialogue, publicly testing assertions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making as a purely logical, analytical process.</td>
<td>Decision-making as exploratory, experimental process based on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term control and development as the monitoring of progress against planned milestones.</td>
<td>intuition and reasoning by analogy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control and development in open-ended situations as a political process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constraints provided by rules, systems and rational argument.</td>
<td>Constraints provided by need to build and sustain support. Control as self-policing and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy as the realisation of prior intent.</td>
<td>Strategy as spontaneously emerging from the chaos of challenge and contradiction, through a process of real-time learning and politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top management drives and controls strategic direction.</td>
<td>Top management creates favourable conditions for complex learning and politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General mental models and prescriptions for many specific situations.</td>
<td>New mental models required for each new strategic situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive equilibrium with the environment.</td>
<td>Non-equilibrium, creative interaction with the environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Lumby, 2001, p.97)

Lumby (2001) argues that the two columns may represent parallel processes which are currently operating and likely to continue. So the strategic planning process, she asserts, will remain “both rational and political, preplanned and emergent” (ibid, p.98). She argues this on the basis of her review of the evidence from the educational management literature (Lumby, 2001). However the research evidence from colleges is limited and much of it adheres to the rational model. More recent research evidence (Watson and Crossley, 2001) stresses the need to understand the process as a social and cultural one that goes well beyond the rational. Foskett and Lumby (2003, p.127) summarise the two planning processes as “managing culture” and “taking and recording bureaucratic decisions about what is to be taught and with what resources”.

32
They go on to argue that "the real trick for school and college leaders is to discern the purpose that planning and strategy need to serve in the individual case, and to use them effectively to that end" (Foskett and Lumby, 2003, p.127). However they do not suggest how an institution might discern its own purpose for strategic planning.

Davies (2003) reaches a similar conclusion to Lumby (2001) about the applicability of the chaos approach. He argues that "the conceptual framework of planning must develop into one that encompasses the idea that strategy can develop in a non-linear or emergent way" (Davies, 2003, p.301). He claims that this perspective "underscores the point that simplistic models of predictive certainty are no longer adequate to deal with our current complex educational world" (ibid). Bell (2003) agrees about the complexity and sites Handy's (1994) claim that we are faced with an unpredictable world in which the only certainty is uncertainty. He offers a way forward using the concept of 'connected knowing' as distinct from 'separate knowing' which he claims is inherent in strategic planning:

Connected knowing is a collaborative process of looking for what is right by accepting the validity of a range of different perspectives. Meanings are constructed and developed through reasoning with others through narratives rather than analysis, which take place within inclusive and communal relationships, the foundation of which is a commonality of experiences, not a defence of differences. Such connected knowledge, and the processes inherent within in, provide a foundation on which flexible yet inclusive policy formulation, based on different but shared values and perspectives, can be developed.

(Bell, 2003, p.98)

The concept of connected knowing appears to use the definition of strategy as perspective and to enact strategic thinking. It also appears to adopt a cultural perspective on strategy in using shared values as a basis. The justification of this way forward provides a critical perspective on strategic planning:
Such an approach to strategic planning is far removed from the linear, rational, positivist methods rooted in the unequal distribution of power and a belief in the sanctity of order and control on which the employment of strategy is based.

(Bell, 2003, p.99)

However this is arguably still an approach to strategic planning rather than to another perspective of strategy.

Strategic intent

Strategic planning can be viewed as one perspective of strategy. Davies and Ellison (2003) cite Boisot's (2003) framework for analysing approaches to strategy development in relation to levels of environmental turbulence and of organisational and individual understanding. This framework is based on four perspectives of strategy: strategic planning, emergent strategy, intrapreneurship and strategic intent. Davies and Ellison (2003, p.37) argue that "strategic planning is effective in an environment in which there is a low to medium rate of change and the school can understand, react to and cope with that change". However they go on to argue that the rapid change in the last ten years has cast doubts as to whether strategic planning is practicable or possible for all activities. They claim that strategic intent "has a great level of value for the educationalist" and is "a very powerful way of linking future thinking and strategy as a means of providing direction and purpose for an organisation whereas broad visions or goals may be too vague to be of practical use to the school" (Davies and Ellison, 2003, p.39).

Strategic intent can be defined as "a process of coping with turbulence through a direct, intuitive understanding, emanating from the top of the firm and guiding its efforts" (Boisot, 2003, p.43). In an educational setting it has been claimed that:

A school which is dealing with either a longer-term time frame or a less predictable environment needs to build in all of its staff a common
strategic intent, based on the values and ambitions of the school, which all the staff can articulate and to which they can align themselves. Thus, faced with new and untried situations they can draw on that common understanding as a frame of reference.

(Davies and Ellison, 2003, p.40)

Strategic intent can be developed, it is argued, by using the 'ABCD model':

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Articulate</td>
<td>Strategic intent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Build</td>
<td>Images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Metaphors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Create</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shared understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Define</td>
<td>Strategic perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Formal plans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Davies, 2002, p.204)

Using this model "the leader develops understanding by sharing images and experiences and using metaphors to build a picture of what an alternative direction or state of the school could be" (Davies and Ellison, 2003, p.40). Once this has happened a "strategic conversation" (ibid) can take place amongst staff, which can lead to a shared understanding and a move towards establishing a strategic perspective and then formal plans. Davies and Ellison (2003) contrast this process with strategic planning, which they claim goes straight to 'define' in stage 4. Arguably this might depend on how the strategic planning process was carried out and who was involved. The advantage of the ABCD model it is claimed is that:
Strategic intent allows the building of meaning and purpose but also allows time to establish capability and capacity to tackle the challenge. As such it allows leaders to say they know where they are going but they don’t know how to get there yet!

(Davies and Ellison, 2003, p.41)

However they recognise that once capability and capacity have been built, strategic intent turns into strategic planning.

So strategic intent arguably combines intuition and rational analysis. Boisot (2003, p.44) argues that it “apprehends turbulence through a more intuitive, rather than a purely analytical, understanding but, since such an understanding is accessible to the firm as a whole, it can be used to energise a coherent and sustained organisational effort”. Davies (2005) claims that determining strategic intent may be dependent on leadership intuition as well as leadership analysis. Dimmock and Walker (2004, p.45) support the notion of strategic intent as “an amalgam of the rational and intuitive”. They claim that it is also dependent on “a clearly articulated set of values as well as visions of schools and schooling that are enduring over longer-term periods of five to ten years” (Dimmock and Walker, 2004, p.45). So strategic intent can be linked to values and vision, although it is uncertain whether there are visions of colleges and what they do which might exist over such long-term periods. Dimmock and Walker (2004) claim this timeframe may raise a problematic issue concerning the mobility of leaders. They pose the question whether new leaders would be prepared to commit to the strategic intent of their notion of school design. As well as leadership, Dimmock and Walker (2004) recognise the role of strategic thinking in formulating the strategic intent. They also recognise that strategic intents reflect the social and cultural contexts of educational institutions.

The research question which emerges from the sections of the literature review on strategic thinking, strategic planning and strategic intent is “what has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?”
Organisational culture

Bush and Coleman (2000, p.42) claim that organisational culture has "increasing importance in the literature". Dimmock and Walker (2000, p.146) support this and state "culture at the organisational level is now a well-recognised and increasingly studied concept in school leadership and management" but argue that "culture at the societal level, however, has not received similar attention". Wallace and Hall (1997) cite some organisational theorists and researchers into school management who have adopted a cultural perspective (Sergiovanni and Corbally, 1984; Deal, 1985; Nias, Southworth and Yeomans, 1989; Nias, Southworth and Campbell, 1992) and others who have adopted a political perspective. They claim that "both approaches offer valuable insights but, in focusing the research, each may be constrained by its emphasis on one set of concepts to the detriment of the other" (Wallace and Hall, 1997, p.86). However they recognise that in taking a dual perspective "we lose distinctions between related concepts within either a cultural or a political orientation" (ibid, p.88).

Bush (1998, p.32) argues that organisational culture "stresses the informal features of organisations" and "focuses on the values, beliefs and norms of people in the organisation and how these individual perceptions coalesce into shared organisational meanings". The culture of a group can be defined as

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

(Schein, 1997, p.12)

Schein claims that there are three levels of culture: "artefacts", defined as "visible organisational structures and processes"; "espoused values", defined as "strategies, goals, philosophies"; and "basic underlying assumptions", defined as "unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings"
Deal uses terms similar to Bush (1998) and Schein (1997) to define culture as "an expression that tries to capture the informal, implicit – often unconscious – side of any human organisation," which "consists of patterns of thought, behaviour and artefacts that symbolise and give meaning to the workplace" (Deal, 1985, p.605).

Bush (1998, p.33) claims that "culture emanates from the values and beliefs of members of organisations", but emphasises that these may not always be explicit. He cites Morgan (1986) in arguing that although individual beliefs coalesce into shared values to create organisational culture, this does not necessarily mean that individual values always accord with others. This can create multiple cultures, which Bush claims is "more likely in large, multipurpose organisations such as universities and colleges" (1998, p.34). However multiple cultures can arguably exist in smaller organisations such as small colleges and schools. Indeed Fullan and Hargreaves (1992, pp.71-2) argue that some schools develop a "balkanised" culture where "teachers …… attach their loyalties and identities to particular groups of their colleagues" with whom they spend most time. Although they omit support staff from the cultural map Fullan and Hargreaves' (1992) argument could equally apply to a small college, especially one on three sites. Bush (1998, p.34) considers "balkanised" culture "may be particularly significant in vocational education with its commitment to different, and often separate, disciplines", but this could be said of general education as well.

The development of shared norms and meetings, through interaction between members of the organisation, "sometimes allow the development of a monoculture" (Bush, 1998, p.35). However "there may be several subcultures based on the professional and personal interests of different groups" (ibid).

Wallace and Hall's (1997) research on senior management teams (SMTs) illustrates a subculture within an organisation. They discovered that SMTs developed "a culture of teamwork", where the norm "was that decisions must be reached by achieving a working consensus, entailing the acknowledgement of any dissenting views" (ibid, p.28). Lumby (2001, p.144) supports this argument: "within colleges, different sites or different curriculum areas may constitute
distinct cultures, resulting in a kaleidoscope of cultural signals relating to the
culture of different groupings of people”. However she cites Johnson (1993) in
arguing that despite this, a “paradigm”, “a single core set of beliefs does exist in
each organisation and can be discerned” (Lumby, 2001, p.144). She goes on to
hypothesise that there is a “dominant paradigm in further education”, which “is
different to that which prevailed prior to incorporation” (ibid). Lumby (ibid)
claims that “the micro political perspective, with its emphasis on power and
conflict, may be relevant” as well as the cultural perspective. She argues that
“cultural change is a shift in power, and that in further education from 1993,
there has been essentially a shift of power away from lecturers and towards
students and managers” (ibid). However her argument is based on research
conducted within colleges which moved from being LEA managed to becoming
self-managed in 1993, and may not apply in a situation where the environment
did not change so radically.

The conflict created by cultural change and a shift in power in a large FE
college at the time of incorporation is described by Elliott and Crossley (1997).
In their case study college they found that:

In practice, it seems that oppositional cultures coexist, giving rise to an
ongoing state of mutual hostility, characterized by miscommunication,
non-compliance, misunderstanding of practice and lack of consensus.
Underpinning these contestations is a fundamental difference between
lecturers and senior managers over the definition of quality, value and
improvement.

(Elliott and Crossley, 1997, p.89)

They propose “further investigation as to the extent to which contested values
and competing cultures are typical or indicative of situations elsewhere” (ibid,
p.89). They suggest that “successful colleges may be those that can assimilate
variety and difference within an adaptive consensual approach (agreeing to
differ) which both recognises and supports pedagogic and other existing work
cultures” (ibid, p.90). However they do not make any distinction between the
different types of colleges in the FE sector.
Research undertaken within five South West colleges identified cultural issues connected with trying to fit HE into an FE culture. The research was conducted using questionnaires, sent to all staff teaching HE and to managers, and semi-structured telephone interviews. The cultural issues related to:

- mixed-economy teaching;
- FE timetables;
- quality systems differences between FE and HE

(Harwood and Harwood, 2004, p.162)

There is no research evidence of the cultural issues arising from trying to fit FE into an HE culture.

The literature (e.g. Bush, 1998; Elliott and Crossley, 1997; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Wallace and Hall, 1992) largely neglects the influence of students and governors on organisational culture. In discussing culture change in sixth-form colleges Lumby (2003) argues that the government’s policy of putting students at the centre by opening market choice and operating funding systems in which funds follow the student, has impacted on the stability of culture. Lumby (2003, p.171) asserts that “the stability of the culture of colleges is directly related to its student mix”. She admits however that there has been little research on the effects of student mix on leadership and management. Lumby (2003) goes on to argue that colleges relate to different constituencies, contrasting general FE colleges, where many students are either employed or will go directly into jobs, with sixth-form colleges where many students will go on to university. As a consequence “the expectations of leadership may be different, reflecting the culture of universities and the perceptions of what constitutes effective academic leadership, rather than good business leadership” (Lumby, 2003, p.169).

Hofstede (1991) differentiates between organisational and societal culture. Based on the experience of two large empirical studies, one cross-national and one cross-organisational, he argues that “at the organisational level, cultural
differences reside mostly in practices, less in values" (Hofstede, 1991, p.182). Hofstede (ibid) claims that “shared perceptions of daily practices should be considered to be the core of an organisation’s culture”. From his research Hofstede produced a six-dimensional model of organisational cultures, “defined as common practices: symbols, heroes and rituals” (1991, p.197). Dimmock and Walker (2000, p.156) support the view that “organisational cultures differ mostly at the level of more superficial practices”, which allows them “to be managed and changed, whereas national cultures are more enduring and change only gradually over long time periods, if at all”. Their adaptation of Hofstede’s six dimensions recognises that some of them might be multi-dimensional. Dimmock and Walker’s (2000, pp.156-8) dimensions are “process and/or outcomes – oriented”, “task and/or person oriented”, “professional and/or parochial”, “open and/or closed”, “control and linkage”, which contains three aspects, “formal – informal”, “tight – loose”, and “direct – indirect”, and pragmatic and/or normative”. They explain how these dimensions can be applied to the various elements of a school and school-based management through research, suggesting that the selection of elements and dimensions will depend on the research question and purpose. However it is unclear whether Dimmock and Walker’s (2000) dimensions have been used by researchers as yet.

Deal and Kennedy (1982) suggest a framework for understanding how culture is enacted in organisations, which amplifies Hofstede’s (1991) definition of “practices” and includes heroes and heroines, ritual, ceremony, stories and informal network of cultural players. Bush (1998, p.36) claims that “culture is reflected in the achievements of heroes and heroines who embody the values and beliefs of the organisation”. Beare et al (1989, p.191) link heroes and heroines to stories: “The heroes (and anti-heroes) around whom a saga is built personify the values, philosophy and ideology which the community wishes to sustain”. Lumby (2001, p.153) describes how her interviews with college managers “were full of stories which encapsulated how things were prior to 1993 and how things were after”. However she admits that “the network of players who acted as priests and storytellers...... were the managers themselves” (Lumby, 2001, p.154) in that case.
Ritual is defined by Turner (1990, p.5) as "a relatively rigid pattern of acts specific to a situation, which constructs a framework of meaning over and beyond the specific situational meaning". He goes on to argue that "the most important function of ritual is to indicate what is highly valued and what is of less value, what are the dominant concerns and what are peripheral, what are central goals and what are marginal" (ibid, p.6). Lumby (2001) suggests that inspection and self-assessment may be examples of ritual. Bush (1998) links rituals and ceremonies "which are used to support and celebrate beliefs and norms". He cites Beare et al who claim that culture is symbolised in three modes:

- Conceptually or verbally, for example through use of language and the expression of organisational aims;
- Behaviourally, through rituals, ceremonies, rules, support mechanisms, and patterns of social interaction;
- Visually or materially, through facilities, equipment, memorabilia, mottoes, crests and uniforms.

(1989, p.176)

Lumby (2001, p.152) gives examples of ceremonies in colleges — "the annual talk by the chief executive to employees" and "the annual strategic awayday of the college board or of other departments". However these examples may not apply to all colleges.

**Linking culture and strategic management**

Bush (1998, p.44) argues that "culture is an important dimension of organisations but it has to be understood within the broader framework of strategic management". He defines strategy as "the overall, or synoptic management of organisations" which "generally operates over an extended timescale and guides decision-making during that period". He argues that both strategy, and culture, are underpinned by values and beliefs:
The main difference concerns the ways in which these beliefs are operationalised. The values provide the vision which informs strategy and leads to consistent decision-making; an ostensibly rational process. The beliefs also lead to norms which gradually coalesce to form the culture of an organisation. This latter process is much more uncertain and elusive than strategic planning.

(Bush, 1998, p.43)

However Bush (1998) seems to be defining strategy as a plan, whereas Mintzberg et al (1998) claim that strategy requires five definitions – plan, pattern, position, perspective and ploy. Most strategies are both deliberate (i.e. planned) and emergent, argue Mintzberg et al (1998). So the strategy formation process may not be as ‘rational’ as Bush (1998) claims and may be equally as uncertain and elusive as that of culture.

Turner (1990) goes further in integrating strategy and culture. He argues that culture “is the set of core values and proclaimed standards, the stated goals, the published mission, the organisational ideology”. But he also seems to define strategy as plan and not to recognise emergent strategy.

Mintzberg et al (1998) describe the school of thought that considers strategy formation to be rooted in the culture of an organisation. They argue that in the cultural school, the strategy formation process is viewed as fundamentally collective and co-operative. The advantages of this are that “it offers the integrated consensus of ideology”, “it roots strategy in the rich tapestry of an organisation’s history” and “strategy formation becomes the management of collective cognition” (ibid, p.283). However they recognise that the latter is not an easy process to manage. The main problem with the “discourse of culture”, Mintzberg et al (1998, p.282) argue, is that it explains too easily what already exists “rather than tackling the tough questions of what can come into being” (ibid). There is the additional problem of “resistance” to change, in which necessary strategic adaptation is blocked by the inertia of established culture” (ibid, p.283). Bush (1998, p.43) suggests that “the strategic plan should match the culture of the organisation if it is to receive the active support of staff” and
warns of the dangers of weak implementation or failure “where leaders ignore or underestimate the cultural norms of the organisation and promote strategies incompatible with the dominant ethos” (ibid, p.44). Lumby (2001) cites Schein’s (1997) model for identifying the behaviour of leaders designed to influence culture. For her this model “suggests that the cultural message is transmitted by what the principal and other members of the senior management team say, do and decide, and that these words, actions and decisions are interpreted by others as cultural signals” (Lumby, 2001, p.155). However this appears to view leadership from a “top-down” perspective whereas Hall (1998, p.133) argues “there is a bigger question mark over who the leaders are”.

Leader (2004) argues that academic middle managers in FE are involved in the strategic decision-making process and in articulating the cultural message. She claims that the cultural perspective of a college can explain some of the differences in performance within the institution itself:

Seemingly, the effectiveness of middle managers in contributing to that strategic decision-making process is either facilitated or impeded by the management culture and structural framework of the individual college. However, it is crucial that the contribution of middle managers is perceived as more extensive and persuasive than simply paying lip service to or fulfilling the requirements of a FE strategic management tool.

(Leader, 2004, p.77)

However Leader (2004) appears to emphasise the management culture rather than the overall culture in facilitating or impeding the effectiveness of middle managers in contributing to strategic decision-making. Although Leader (2004) concludes that there is a strong case for consensual strategic decision-making in colleges, she does not appear to include support staff, middle managers or staff not defined as managers within this consensus.

Bush (1998) suggests a further way in which culture and strategy are linked. Although both tend to relate to the whole organisation “recognition of the value
of alternative cultures may enrich the organisation" and "a strategy of mutual
tolerance and compatibility is likely to be more effective than attempts to 'weed
out' the alien culture" (ibid, p.44). However this assumes that the subcultures
are not in conflict and that the 'alien culture' is not being introduced by leaders.

Turner (1990, p.11) rejects the notion that "something as powerful as culture
can be much affected by the puny efforts of top managers". However Turner
(1990) was writing prior to "incorporation of colleges in 1993, and subsequent
dramatic shifts in funding patterns" (Bush, 1998, p.42) which led to culture
change. In Lumby's (2001, p.156) interviews with managers, "the answer to
whether culture had changed in each college was a unanimous 'yes'". Lumby
concludes:

Though it may not be possible to impose culture, the evidence collected
points to a deliberate and successful process of influencing culture. The
government used levers such as the funding mechanism to exert
pressure for cultural change and this pressure then rippled outwards into
colleges.

(2001, p.157)

However Lumby (2001) does not discuss how strategic management within the
colleges contributed to this process.

Hargreaves (1999, p.59) claims that "most people's beliefs, attitudes and values
are far more resistant to change than leaders typically allow". However he
identifies three circumstances when culture may be subject to rapid change:

- The school faces an obvious crisis, for example a highly critical
  inspection report or falling pupil numbers, leading to the prospect
  of staff redundancies or school closure.
- The leadership is very charismatic, commanding instant trust,
  loyalty and followership. This may enable cultural change to be
  more radical and be achieved more quickly.
The leader succeeds a very poor principal. Staff will be looking for change to instil a new sense of direction. (adapted from Hargreaves, 1999, pp.59-60)

These circumstances could be relevant to culture change at Ruskin College. Hargreaves (1999, p.60) concludes that “if none of these special conditions applies, assume that cultural change will be rather slow”.

The government’s policy of attempting to increase HE participation by the more disadvantaged groups in society (HEFCE, 2001) is arguably further pressure for cultural change in colleges and universities. Ball et al (2002) argue that recent debates about increasing participation have focused on barriers to application or entry, which tells only part of the story. They claim that “many students, especially working-class students, never get to a position where they can contemplate HE. Others are qualified to do so but exclude themselves. Others who do apply avoid certain institutions” (Ball et al, 2002, p.70). In their research none of the mature students on an HE Access course at Fennister FE College chose Oxbridge as first choice of university (ibid). Although Ball et al (2002) do not discuss culture, the implication is that the perceived culture of HE in general and the perceived culture of particular institutions act as barriers to entry for working-class students.

The research question which emerges from this section of the literature review is “How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?”

Vision and mission

Vision and mission can be seen to be underpinned by values, (Marsh, 1993) in the same way as culture and strategy (Bush, 1998). Foreman (1998, p.22) claims that vision is “a catalyst for action, and reflects core values”. Vision can be defined as:-
An image of what might be; an ideal which is unique to the person or the organisation and recognises dissatisfaction with the present. (Foreman, 1998, p.22).

Some futuristic ideal, (to) some notion of how things could/should be, and reflect an aspired state of being for either an individual, an organisation, or society at large. (Kenny, 1994, p.17).

Shared understanding, shared decision-making, shared evaluation. (Staessens and Vandenberghe, 1994, 199).

Mission can be defined as:-

A public statement which defines the purpose of an organisation: why it exists and what that means for customers – both internal and external. (Foreman, 1998, p.23).

The purposes and values of the organisation. (Jennings and Wattam, 1998, p.261).

The organisation’s statement of purpose, intentions and priorities: its direction... the basis for planning and decision-making. (Stott and Walker, 1992, p.50).

Lumby (2002) notes the similarities between definitions of vision and mission and argues that “definitions of mission include the word ‘direction’ more often and therefore imply a greater degree of concreteness than vision” (p.88). Bush and Coleman (2000, p.12) similarly argue that “mission is usually regarded as a more specific expression of the values of the institution; a vehicle for translating the inspiration into reality”. Foreman (1998, p.29) claims that both vision and mission are problematic aspects of leadership in schools and colleges and argues for “the avoidance of vagueness and overgeneralisation inherent in both vision and mission statements and making them specific and unique to any institution”. He admits that the reality in the FE context is that vision is “greatly restricted by the requirements and financial controls wielded by the FEFC” and mission “expresses something of the uniqueness of a college, but is essentially a business statement to ensure its future existence” (Foreman, 1998, p.26).
Halliday (1996), writing about values and further education, argues that there are tensions in this relationship:

Notions of equality of educational opportunity, community, and practically based vocational education are central to what might be called the mission of colleges in FE. It is not hard to see the tensions between this value-laden mission and the perceptions that FE is a value-neutral commercial response to a presumed market in education.

(1996, p.67)

Lumby (2002) argues that it is difficult to distinguish the process for the creation of vision from that of cultural management. She claims that "whether the process is termed vision-building, purposing or managing culture, the common element is the attempt to achieve some degree of shared principles or guiding assumptions" (Lumby, 2002, p.88). Foreman (1998) claims that the research evidence shows that vision cannot be imposed from above, although he does not quote the research evidence. He argues that "vision-building is about enrolling the interests and aspirations of others" (Foreman, 1998, p.24) but claims that this is not a natural role for many leaders. This may be because leaders feel uncomfortable with the whole notion of vision (Holmes, 1993) or through a lack of training or opportunity (Kouzes and Posner, 1996). Lumby (2002) recognises that the principal may lead in the process of building a shared vision, but argues that "staff share in the re-creation and adjustment of vision on a daily basis, by actions which embody or symbolise the shared values or assumptions" (p.89). She cites Staessens and Vandenberghe (1994), who describe the staff of a Belgian primary school who use the same language and ideas when asked about vision, to argue that vision can be created through activity and daily informal discussion between teachers. Lumby (2002, p.89) argues that "rather than a formal process, or conceivably as well as formal processes, vision can be created by an ongoing informal dialogue which nudges understanding towards greater congruence". However Lumby (2002) recognises that the process for attempting to build a shared vision may be very different in many schools and colleges. Indeed the education literature which she cites (Staessens and Vandenberghe, 1994; Beare et al, 1989) refers to
mainly schools rather than colleges. In some organisations "the vision or mission has been more formally derived through being written by senior management and, sometimes, sent out for consultation" (Lumby, 2002, p.89). However this could arise from senior managers doing what is expected of them.

Foreman (1998, p.25) claims "the evidence arising from studies of vision-building in schools and colleges indicates that headteachers and principals see themselves as the source of a vision for their institutions, working through various processes of consultation, to enlist the support of their staff". Lumby (2002) agrees that shared vision-building is expected. However both Foreman (1998) and Lumby (2002) question the success of shared vision-building. Foreman (1998) cites evidence about the function of vision in England and Wales gathered by the School Management Task Force Professional Working Party (Bolam et al, 1993), where the vision described by headteachers in interviews was not specific to the school and where comparatively few teachers in most of the schools were able to speak with any confidence about the elements of the vision. Lumby (2002, p.90) suggests that the effects of shared vision-building may be various "from a genuine force shaping teaching and learning to a political means of defusing criticism and disguising unpalatable truths".

There are similar questions in the literature about the effectiveness of mission statements. Foreman (1998, p.27) claims "there is little evidence as to the use of mission statements in education and their effectiveness". However Coleman (1998) describes how FEFC inspectors would comment on colleges' mission statements in inspection reports, even though their comments "may be limited to a description of the mission statement, or the fact that one exists, rather than a comment on its relevance or quality" (p.182). Foreman (1998) argues that mission statements are extremely general and not specific to the particular school or college, linking this to the problem with vision identified by Bolam et al (1993). He cites a survey conducted by Stott and Walker (1992) among Singaporean heads of department about mission statements in their schools. Stott and Walker (1992) found that central government policy was strongly influential in the formulation of mission statements, which were ambiguous and
not kept up-to-date, even during a period of major changes, and that there was uncertainty about the use of these mission statements in planning processes. Lumby (2002), commenting on the conclusions of Stott and Walker (1992), argues that the purpose of these mission statements was more political than "the orthodox model of aligning values and direction" (Lumby, 2002, p.90). In a UK context, Murgatroyd and Morgan (1993) were critical of the use of mission statements:

Such statements tend to be long and complex, and often the result of compromises among a staff with competing and different interests. Many are not inspiring ...... are rarely 'owned' by anyone and ...... often not remembered. (p.69).


Peeke (1994), in discussing the concept of institutional mission in further and higher education, suggests

The mission process may be viewed, then, as a process which promotes planning, aids decision making and communication, and also facilitates marketing and evaluation strategies. In short, the process may be viewed as a powerful method of promoting organisational change. (p.11).

However Peeke (1994) questions whether mission in practice lives up to these claims. He concludes that

The clarification of mission is an important part of strategic analysis, and where strategic management is practised effectively within an organisation, it can be expected that the mission will become influential in guiding organisational action through the process of strategy implementation. It is likely, however, that strategic management is not yet widely practised within British further education at least, and that the
mission statements of most colleges have failed to impact strongly on organisational processes.

(Peeke, 1994, p.9)

A small-scale research project undertaken in late 1994 and early 1995 about how three further education colleges managed strategic planning revealed evidence of the way in which mission formation contributed to the strategic planning process (Drodge and Cooper, 1997). The research was conducted using structured interviews with senior managers and other staff in the three colleges. Drodge and Cooper (1997) do not explain why they used this research method. Their research showed that the way in which mission contributed to the strategic planning process varied between colleges and the way in which interviewees saw the process also varied within colleges. They found evidence to support some of the issues Peeke (1994) identified as being associated with introducing mission concepts into further education:-

- The difficulty of establishing a single, meaningful, common mission for an organisation of professionals;
- Suspicion of the process of developing a mission statement;
- Difficulty of acceptance of a centrally led mission.

(Drodge and Cooper, 1997, p.209)

The data Drodge and Cooper (ibid) collected in their interviews with managers included “comments about the benefits deriving from the process of mission formulation coupled with the expression of doubt as to how far these were appreciated by staff”. They relate these comments to Peeke’s (1994) reference to the suspicion which relates to a centrally led mission development process. Drodge and Cooper (1997) found that the colleges shared a broadly top-down approach to mission development, although there were important differences about the degree of consultation involved in the process. They also found that “decisions about the declared mission of each college lie at senior management or even chief executive level and that mission or vision plays a significant part in shaping strategic planning” (Drodge and Cooper, 1997, p.210). It is interesting
to note that no mention is made of the colleges' governing bodies. Foreman (1998) takes the argument about a centrally-led mission development process further, and asks "how can the support of FE lecturers be harnessed for a college mission which is fundamentally serving the needs of central government?" (p.30).

**Linking vision, mission and strategic management**

The relationship between vision, strategy, medium-term plans and day-to-day activities can be seen as a pyramid with vision, mission and strategic plan at the apex and the daily work of the school or college at the base (Middlewood, 1998, p.15). This reflects "today's frame of reference" in which "visions and plans are central to strategic management" (Jennings and Wattam, 1998, p.323). However there is also a "new frame of reference" in which "dynamic agendas of strategic issues are central to effective strategic management" (ibid) rather than visions, missions and strategic plans. Lumby (2002, p.94) argues that "attempts to link vision and strategy happen both at the inception of a plan, in trying to relate the targets and goals to the vision, and on an ongoing basis by asking staff to justify requests for resources or other operational activity by relating them to the strategic plan", but claims that "the result is often rather tenuous". In her study of the strategic plans of further education colleges in England, Lumby (1999) found that although plans attempted to follow the expected form of vision/mission statements, followed by statements of plans detailing how these would be achieved, the plans did not achieve this. She found it difficult to discern how the detailed plans related to the vision or even to the corporate goals. Lumby (2002) claims that the attempt to link actions to vision and goals is problematic. She cites her research into management development (Lumby, 1997a; 1997b) where staff were asked to link their development needs to the strategic plan and the vision but were unable to do so consistently. The vision and its underlying values needs to be general, Lumby (2002) argues, in order to gain general support. If they are too specific, they are more likely to conflict with the range of views of staff. Lumby concludes
The potential for vision to provide guidance on choices and priorities is therefore limited. It may be that vision in action in many institutions may relate far more strongly to achieving a general sense of corporateness, a belief, justified or otherwise, in a degree of common aim. Vision building and maintaining provides a background wash which colours but does not shape strategic plans. (2002, p.95)

Whilst indicating the limitations of vision in relation to strategic management Lumby (2002) does not advocate abandoning it and argues that educational managers have to “attempt to impose order on change, through agreeing a vision of the future and strategically planning to reach the desired destination” (p.98).

Peeke (1994, p.131) agrees that a key role “for the strategic manager in F/HE is to have a clear vision for the college, to agree broad missions and values consistent with this vision, which can then allow considerable operational autonomy for individuals and groups”. He suggests a strategic management framework which incorporates the mission, a set of institutional values, the strategic plan and review and evaluation processes. It is interesting to note that Peeke’s (1994) framework does not include the vision. Peeke (1994) argues that the funding councils’ framework is a strategic planning framework rather than a strategic management one. He claims that the funding councils’ framework “has little to say about the internal college processes necessary to produce the plan” and that “participative processes are not considered” (Peeke, 1994, p.132). An element of Peeke’s strategic management framework is

The mission, informed by an environmental analysis and developed via participative workshops. The mission is better expressed in broad dimensions and needs to reflect the concerns of participants, by including statements about the nature of the curriculum and the experience offered to students. (1994, p.132)
So Peeke's (1994) framework makes some proposals about the form, content and development of the mission as part of a broader strategic management approach which includes the operational value of the mission. However Peeke suggests that more detailed research would be valuable on the following questions:

Further investigations into attempts to operationalise missions in Britain. How widespread is the use of strategic planning in the F/HE sector? How could strategic planning processes be encouraged? How much involvement can staff expect in such a process where it exists? How effective is it in linking the mission to change in the organisation?

(1994, p.135)

The questions about strategic planning in colleges has been answered by the requirements of the FEFC and LSC. However there has not been much research on the link between mission and strategic management. The research question which emerges from this section of the literature review is "What is the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management?"
Governance and strategy

It has been claimed that "studies of educational management and administration too often neglect the framework of governance within which school leaders operate" (Glatter, 2002, p.226). Much of the recent literature links governance to improvement (Creese, 1998; Horsfall (ed) 2001) rather than strategic management.

Creese (1998) discusses the strategic role of the governing body and considers what improvement means in this context. He claims that "strategic thinking is proactive rather than reactive; governors thinking in this way will have a long-term vision, shared with the staff, for the future of the institution of which they are a part" (Creese, 1998, p.121). This implies that the governors' long-term vision is general rather than too specific otherwise it would be more likely to conflict with the views of staff (Lumby, 2002). Creese (1998) cites Corrick (1996) in arguing that strategic thinking demands from governors high levels of skill, knowledge and confidence. Governors need to have a sound knowledge of the range of options and to consider these very carefully before making decisions, as well as evaluating equally carefully the impact of those decisions (Creese, 1998). Earley (2003) compares company boards which have non-executive directors to school governing bodies and argues that the greater use of non-executive directors, like governors, can bring a wide range of experience to a company and help broaden its vision, especially in strategic planning. He claims that:

   Often boards of directors (including non-executive directors) will have meetings (usually off-site) which concentrate on strategic planning and help determine the organisation's long-term aims and the strategy to achieve them – a practice which some school governing bodies have taken up.

   (Earley, 2003, p.362)
This accords with “the annual strategic awayday of the college board” (Lumby, 2001, p.152), although it is unknown how many college governing bodies follow this practice.

The Guide for College Governors (FEFC, 1994) defines the main aim of the governing body of an FE college as agreeing policies and strategies and monitoring progress in implementing them. A study by the Learning and Skills Development Agency “to establish how the make-up and operation of governing bodies are changing in response to the Government’s agenda for raising the standards of stewardship and accountability” (Davies and Horsfall, 2001, p.2) also provides data about governing bodies and strategic management. The LSDA research project was a questionnaire survey of all FE sector colleges in England and Wales which achieved a 58% response rate. Within the questionnaire colleges were asked how much time governing bodies spent on ten different aspects of their business (curriculum planning, evaluating academic performance, finance, mission, monitoring college progress towards achieving targets, personnel, property, quality assurance, strategic planning and target setting). They were asked to rate that time on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 equals a very small amount of time and 5 equals a very great amount of time. The range of mean weighting was from 2.4 to 4.2, with mission rated as having the least amount of time spent on it. Strategic planning achieved a mean weighting of 3.4 and was rated as having the third highest amount of time spent on it after finance and property. However colleges anticipated that governing bodies’ time would be taken up differently in the near future, with target setting, quality assurance, monitoring college progress towards achieving targets and evaluating academic performance requiring increased time. Although 35% of respondents perceived increased time would be spent on mission, 60% anticipated the same amount of time would be spent and 5% anticipated decreased time would be spent on it. So it appears from the LSDA survey that college governing bodies do not currently and do not anticipate spending time discussing the mission. However the survey does not provide data on colleges’ views of the relative importance of the ten aspects of governing bodies’ business. The preliminary conclusions of Davies and Horsfall (2001, p.11) are, “there are signs that overview of the educational performance of the college has
become a major part of the content of governance business*. They draw no conclusions about mission and strategic planning within the content of governance business. However it can be argued that overviewing education performance is part of reviewing the effectiveness of strategic management.

Further research conducted by the Learning and Skills Development Agency in 2001/02 using a governance healthcheck questionnaire provides evidence about college governance and strategy. The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to enhance the self-assessment capacity of college governing bodies. The questionnaire comprised ten sections including one on strategy and mission. Each of the sections was sub-divided to capture individual governors’ perceptions of board performance, the assessment of the contribution of individual governors and the quality of information provided by senior managers. Governors were asked to respond to statements or questions on a continuum ranging from ‘very satisfied’, ‘satisfied’ and ‘undecided’ to ‘somewhat dissatisfied’ and ‘very dissatisfied’. Each response was given a numerical value and data was generated on each section, including strategy and mission. The data was benchmarked against other college governing bodies. The research report comments on the validity of the data:

Care should be taken with the nature of the data – it is based on the subjective perceptions of individuals. However, from 246 colleges, the trends and themes that emerge are significantly robust in terms of their validity. A remarkably consistent outcome emerges from the benchmarking process.

(Barclay, 2003, p.7)

However it can be argued that the validity of the research could have been improved by triangulation of methods, possibly involving observation of governing body meetings and documentary analysis. The research findings in relation to strategy and mission were as follows:

Here there appears to be confidence in the boards’ responsibilities for educational character, mission and strategy together with the quality of
information on enrolment, retention and achievement. The appreciation of the role of monitoring is well to the fore, but the level of sophistication with which it is carried out is a key issue. This confidence is significantly reduced in addressing 'strategic' data that provides an overview of college performance. So confidence about information on the needs of the local community, accommodation strategy and marketing is significantly lower. In addition there is a concern about benchmarking with other colleges.

(Barclay, 2003, p.15)

In relation to 'strategic' data the research found that governing bodies consistently scored themselves low in the following areas:

- Performance of similar colleges and benchmarked data
- Human resource management planning and reports
- Needs analysis
- Marketing
- Community and industry needs
- Understanding the key terms, bodies and organisations.

The research report comments on these findings on needs analysis, marketing and community and industry needs:

This is an example of the extent to which boards are inhibited in their contribution to college strategic thinking if they are unable to access external data vital to the development of the college portfolio.

(Barclay, 2003, p.43)

This point about the governing body's role in strategic thinking is emphasised in one of the conclusions of the research report:

If governance is about operating as a strategic critical friend then senior managers must ensure that governors are able to make links between different areas of college activity and ensure that managers are engaged
in 'joined-up thinking'. There is a need to operate from an holistic rather than parochial viewpoint. Not only do governors need to be aware of the interlocking nature of curriculum strategy, human resources strategy and accommodation strategy, they also need to be able to evaluate the extent to which there has been coherent strategic thinking around those elements of the strategic plan.

(Barclay, 2003, p.45)

Although this conclusion appears to accept that the strategic plan is at the heart of strategic management in colleges it accords with Creese's (1998) claims for strategic thinking within the strategic management process.

There is evidence from consultation events with college governors, sponsored by the DfES and the Association of Colleges (AoC) in June and July 2003, about governors' views on the strategic management process in colleges. The purpose of the events was to consult college corporation members (governors) on their needs and how best to address them. Over 400 governors attended the five events, representing 150 out of the 400 colleges in the further education sector. The views and comments arising from these events formed the basis for the construction of a questionnaire, which was distributed to all colleges with an interim report on the events. There were 307 responses to the questionnaire, which was only about 4% of the total number of governors.

The conclusion of the final report published in July 2004 in relation to strategic planning was that:

At the consultation events, corporation members felt that they did not have enough control over their strategic plans, that strategy had to respond too much to an external agenda and was having to fall in line with funding possibilities. There was also said to be insufficient time for strategic plans to be properly debated, so that most were being rubber-stamped.

(AoC/DfES, 2004, p.9)
The results of the questionnaire survey appear to contradict the latter point. Of those responding to the questionnaire, 82% said there had been ample opportunity to debate the current strategic plan. The report claims the explanation for this was a reflection of the passage of time between the consultation events and the survey:

In the summer at the time of the consultations, corporations were working to tight deadlines to present their strategic plans to the LLSC. By the late autumn there had been time for greater reflection on the planning process that had occurred.

(AoC/DfES, 2004, p.9)

Another explanation might be that the small number of responses to the questionnaire were not representative of the views of governors on this issue. The report goes on to conclude:

The issue still exercising the minds of many governors is the perceived power of the LLSC to determine the character and nature of their college's strategy and policy through the funding methodology, especially in those areas not given a high funding priority nationally. Many governors commented on their reliance on the principal as their chief executive and primary link with the LLSC to be aware of latest developments to keep them informed.

(AoC/DfES, 2004, p.9)

This conclusion might suggest governors believe that "enforced choice" (Bailey and Avery, 1998, p.182), where strategy is developed as a result of external pressures which limit an organisation's ability to determine its own strategic direction, is the dominant dimension in operation in colleges at present.

In a higher education context Watson (2000) cites chapter 15 of the Dearing Report, which focused directly on the management and governance of institutions (NCIHE, 1997, pp.228-47) and reiterated that the performance of an institution was at the centre of a governing body's responsibility. The
Committee of University Chairmen guide for members sets out this responsibility:

The governing body has a duty to enable the institution to achieve and develop its primary objectives of teaching and research. This responsibility includes considering and approving the institution's strategic plan which sets out the academic aims and objectives of the institution and identifies the financial, physical and staffing strategies necessary to achieve these objectives.

(CUC, 1998, p.3)

Watson (2000, p.44) argues that the relationship between governance and management “will rarely be noticed by the bulk of the university community in a well managed and stable environment”, but “it is at the heart of the strategic management process”. He indicates several key ways in which the relationship can go wrong and HEFCE’s role in monitoring and auditing institutions for which it has funding responsibility:

The HEFCE audit team's involvement with governors inevitably involves discussions about the institution's strategic decision-making process, the quality of information available to the governing body, and the risks associated with particular governance sub-structures.

(HEFCE, 1998, p.3)

The research question which arises from this section of the literature review is "What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?"

Quality: definitions and management

Lumby (2001) claims that although there might be universal support for the concept of quality, there is division as to how to define it. Other writers agree that quality is difficult to define, for example Sallis (1996, p.1) calls quality "an enigmatic concept" but goes on to argue that it is a dynamic idea and that too
Lumby argues that definitions of quality face in two directions:

First, many definitions face inwards and stress matching customer expectations. Quality is meeting or exceeding student expectations, students being the primary customer. At the same time, definitions may face outwards, recognising that expectations may be low, particularly from those whose previous educational experience may have been unsuccessful, or insufficiently informed by knowledge of the vocational area in question.

(2001, p.70)

In the case of the latter, Lumby (ibid, p.70) claims "the professional judgement of educators may need to establish expectations". Stone (1997) describes three definitions of quality based on customers, standards and professional assessment. His definition of professional assessment is not confined to external inspection and he recognises that "peer assessment and review, by a mixture of internal and external staff, has long been a feature of quality assurance arrangements in higher education and many colleges have developed their own systems, occasionally in partnership with other agencies, in order to reproduce for themselves elements of the inspection process" (Stone, 1997, p.7). He argues that self-assessment "forms a useful bridge between the need to satisfy external stakeholders while avoiding the demotivating aspects which may follow the imposition of unrealistic or insensitive external targets" (ibid, p.7). However Stone (1997) does not mention the micro political aspect of self-assessment, which Lumby (2001) claims may cause some difficulties.

Lomax et al (1996, p.2) find it difficult "to identify with the language of the market place" used in some of the literature (e.g. Murgatroyd and Morgan, 1993). They cite Tasker and Packham (1993) and assert that they do not see "students as customers in the sense that they know what they want and can buy in from us" (Lomax et al, 1996, p.2).
Bottery (2000) concurs that quality has both external and internal meanings but argues that "while there may be a need for some form of external quality, the best kinds of quality initiatives are internally generated, and in the public sector should be a natural outgrowth of a civic culture value system" (p.82).

There is also division in the literature on the means to manage quality. West-Burnham (1997, p.15) argues that "quality has to be seen in terms of relationships rather than intangible (and unattainable) goals". These relationships may be seen in the nature of the processes of quality management which Dale and Plunkett (1990) and West-Burnham (1997) describe as a hierarchy, with inspection at the bottom, through quality control, quality assurance to total quality assurance (TQM) at the top. Sallis (1996) defines quality control and quality assurance in terms of time. Quality control is "an after-the-event process" (Sallis, 1996, p.19), while quality assurance is "a before and during the event process" (ibid, p.19). Sallis (1996) argues that total quality management incorporates quality assurance but extends and develops it. Taylor and Hill (1997) differentiate between total quality management and quality assurance. They claim that quality assurance "places great emphasis on written evidence, documented systems and procedures" (Taylor and Hill, 1997, p.164) but it does not require any focus on continuous improvement per se and therefore tends to preserve the status quo. "By contrast, TQM has 'improvement' as its main goal" they argue (ibid, p.164).

In the context of the Anglophone Caribbean, Roberts (2001) discusses global trends in tertiary education quality assurance. This supports Sallis's point (1994, p.232) that "quality cannot stand still" and implies that quality management is not static. Roberts (2001, p.476) concludes that "important global trends in quality assurance systems include co-ordination, self-critique, transparency and flexibility".

In the context of further education Sallis (1996) identifies four imperatives for introducing TQM: professional, moral, competitive and survival. West-Burnham (1997) changes the language slightly in his imperatives for introducing TQM in schools: moral, environmental, survival and accountability. He incorporates the
professional imperative into the moral imperative and argues that "being a professional confers a moral imperative to deliver consistent, high levels of service" (West-Burnham, 1997, p.7). Roberts avoids suggesting imperatives for introducing quality management systems, but concludes that "stakeholder commitment to tertiary education quality enhancement seems to thrive on fostering institutional autonomy and academic freedom, tempered by professional responsibility and demonstrated commitment to quality" (2001, p.438).

Bottery (2000) uses seven different concepts of quality: traditional, expert, bureaucratic, 'cold' management, 'hot' management, consumer and civic. He argues that management approaches to quality can be located along a spectrum "from the obviously 'cold' approaches of targets, outcomes and performance indicators, to the transparently 'hot' cultural and TQM approaches" (Bottery, 2000, p.90). Bottery (ibid, p.94) recognises the advantages of TQM, "its insistence on the high standard of any service", "the increased enjoyment felt by many individuals in their work", and "teachers' increased participation in satisfying their 'customers'". However he suggests that "to any government which does not trust its teachers, TQM and other 'hot' management approaches could look very unappealing, and may well be why, in the UK at least, one has heard so little of it in official publications in the last few years" (Bottery, 2000, p.94). The FEFC recognised the use of TQM in colleges:

Most colleges now recognise that continuous quality improvement is essential if they are to survive and prosper. Often this is reflected in their mission statements and strategic and operational plans. A management philosophy with which many people in FE are familiar and feel comfortable is Total Quality Management (TQM). It has continuous quality improvement at its heart.

(FEFC, 1997a, pp.39-40)

The evidence for the assertion that people in FE feel comfortable with TQM is not clear. Bottery (2000, p.95) claims that TQM "might be interpreted as a strategy to gain organisational commitment which had little to do with individual
welfare". He cites Tuckman (1995) in arguing that TQM is conceived "to reinterpret the meaning of liberationist words like 'empowerment' and 'participation', in Orwellian fashion, to mean no more than the right of the individual to participate and be empowered in the delivery of managerially defined agendas" (Bottery, 2000, p.95). He concludes therefore that TQM, "despite its focus upon internal quality location, was conceived, and continues to act, as an aspect of management quality: it attempts to 'capture the discourse', to interpret quality in managerialist terms" (ibid, p.96).

Quality and values

Lomax et al (1996, p.2) claim that quality management systems “exclude what we would see as the most important vehicle for quality, what could be called self-driven quality, which is the process through which we attempt to live our educational values in our practice as educational managers”.

Bottery (2000, p.96) argues that “quality is not a value-neutral term, and one needs to be particularly suspicious of those who would argue that theirs is the true version, or worse, the only one”. In a higher education context, Brennan and Shah (2000) identify four main types of ‘quality values’ underpinning different approaches to quality assessment: academic, managerial, pedagogic and employment focused. In academic ‘quality values’, they argue, the “focus is upon the subject field and its criteria of quality stem from the characteristics of the subject” (Brennan and Shah, 2000, p.14). Managerial values are “associated with an institutional focus of assessment, with a concern about procedures and structures, with an assumption that quality can be produced by ‘good management’” (ibid, p.14). They argue that “TQM provides an underlying ideological justification for a managerial approach” (ibid, p.14), although it has little direct focus on academic matters. Pedagogic values focus on “people, on their teaching skills and classroom practice” (ibid, p.14) and is associated with training and staff development. Employment-focused values place emphasis on “graduate output characteristics, on standards and learning outcomes” (ibid, p.15).
Brennan and Shah (2000) argue that academic quality values vary across the institution whereas managerial and pedagogic values are invariant across the institution and employment-focused values comprise some features which are invariant and some which vary according to subject. They claim that "in practice, conceptions of quality in particular countries and institutions can entail several types of values" (ibid, p.15) but the balance between the types differ. They assert that "where new arrangements for quality assessment challenge existing values, they are more likely to be resisted" (ibid, p.15). Brennan and Shah (2000) go on to discuss the use of micro politics and power where quality values conflict.

Bottery (2000) contrasts the values of the private sector with those of the public sector. He argues that

> While efficiency, effectiveness and economy are certainly values which need to be shared with the private sector, there are other values, such as justice, care, equity and democracy, which need to be added to the kind of list which a healthy public sector should pursue, and which should be central to the mission of the education system, and central to the internal value-orientation of citizens

(Bottery, 2000, p.99)

He asserts that "the conflation of the missions of the private and public sectors at present... Prioritises the values of the private sector, and downgrades those public and democratic values without which society, schools and the individual citizen may be profoundly damaged" (ibid, p.99). For Bottery (2000) this leads to the notion of civic quality, unique to the public sector. Civic quality "does not dispense with the other forms of quality, but takes the best from other systems to build a set of values which leads to an empowered citizenry" (Bottery, 2000, p.101). So civic quality

- embraces the need for research-based evidence, but looks for this beyond the providers of the service
requires evidence of effectiveness
accepts the need for regard to economy and efficiency, but does not see these as necessarily the primary values by which a service is evaluated
incorporates other values such as equity and justice
accepts the need for consumer responsiveness, but with caveats

(adapted from Bottery, 2000, pp.101-102)

Bottery (2000) is in danger of claiming civic quality to be the true or only version of quality. He provides no empirical base for his claims about the concept of civic quality. However, Lumby (2001) asserts in her discussion of approaches to achieving quality, “the empirical base of much of the relevant literature is missing and the so-called management gurus are essentially providing normative textbooks which are not necessarily underpinned by evidence of the effectiveness of the proposed methods in business, let alone in education (Crosby, 1979; Deming, 1982; Ishikawa, 1985; Juran, 1988)” (p.72). Lomax et al (1996, p.4) argue that “quality educational management is more likely to emerge from quality educational research than from quality control systems”.

In their case study of a large FE college Elliott and Crossley (1997) identified fundamental differences between lecturers and senior managers over the definition of quality value and improvement:

The lecturers in this study shared a real and deeply held orientation to a student-centred pedagogy, which led them to reject instrumentalist, mechanistic interpretations of quality assurance as contrary to their students' and their own best interests.

(Elliott and Crossley, 1997, p.89)

They conclude:

It appears that in so far as formal quality assurance procedures neglect teaching and learning, they may fail to win the active
support of educational practitioners, which indicates that there will therefore be real limits to the potential for improvement in the quality of educational practice.

(ibid, p.89)

However this research was conducted at the time of incorporation, well before the introduction of the ALI/OFSTED common inspection framework with its strong emphasis on teaching and learning.

**Quality and strategic management**

Bush (1998, p.43) argues that both strategy and culture "are underpinned by values, leading to a clear vision of the future of the school or college". He goes on to assert that "the values provide the vision which informs strategy and leads to consistent decision-making; an ostensibly rational process" (ibid, p.43). Quality is arguably underpinned by values and may relate to strategy in a similar way. However, other writers (e.g. Mintzberg et al, 1998) argue that the strategy formation process may not be as rational as Bush (1998) claims. Similarly many writers agree (e.g. Fitz-Gibbon, 1996; Lumby, 2001; Sallis, 1996) that defining and achieving quality is elusive.

Lumby (1998) describes the FEFC's (1992a) framework for strategic planning which "used the mission statement as a basis for a 3-5 year plan, encompassing the key elements of numbers of students and their provision, human resources, physical resources and finance" (p.94). She omits quality from this list but the key elements are underpinned by "planning for quality" (FEFC, 1992a, p.7) in the framework. Bush and Coleman (2000, p.59) claim that "the wording of aims and of mission statements may include reference to effectiveness or to improvement, but may equally include aspirations involving quality". Foreman (1998, p.27) asserts that "mission and vision are key components of total quality management".

Sallis (1994, p.237) argues that "quality needs a strategic dimension, and the quest for quality must be an integral part of the mission of the institution".
However he recognises the contrary meanings of quality; for example it is both a strategic and an operational concept. Moreover “quality can be allied to both ‘hard’ and measurable standards as well as to ‘soft’ and more intangible standards about care, courtesy, concern and compassion” (Sallis, 1994, p.232). The difficulty of this in the context of colleges is that the LSC expects both strategic and operational plans to contain ‘SMART’ (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timed) targets and it reviews these at “provider performance reviews”, which are “comprehensive, regular and formal assessments of the quality of education and training offered” (LSDA, 2001b, p.10).

Taylor and Hill (1997) contrast total quality management and quality assurance in relation to strategy. They argue that “TQM implies a truly strategic approach to the alignment of the organisation with its environment, whereas quality assurance can often be a delegated, operational issue” (Taylor and Hill, 1997, p.167). Taylor and Hill’s (1997) argument is that in a complex and relatively unstable environment quality assurance is likely to limit an organisation’s speed of response, because of its emphasis on written procedures and formalised methods, whereas TQM, “with its greater emphasis on problem ownership and decentralised decision-making, would appear to be quite different in approach” (p.168). They recognise however that “the approach to quality which an organisation adopts should be contingent on other organisational factors in addition to the nature of its environment” (Taylor and Hill, 1997, p.168), and that the approach will need to take account of the particular circumstances of the institution. However Taylor and Hill’s argument runs contrary to the FEFC’s inspection framework (FEFC, 1996) which has a fixed definition of the quality assurance arrangements expected in any college.

Stone (1997) accepts the FEFC inspection framework as given, but suggests the choice of his definitions of quality (customer-centred, standards-centred, professional assessment) should be linked to organisational strategy. However he does not mention either institutional mission or values in relation to making this choice. Nor does he discuss how government policy on further education influences choice of both strategy and approach to quality. Lumby (2001)
argues that there has been a cultural change in colleges since 1993, which “has been essentially a shift of power away from lecturers and towards students and managers” (p.144). This shift of power arguably has shifted the definition of quality from internal professional assessment towards a combination of customer-centred, standards centred and external professional assessment. In a similar way a shift of power in higher education in England arguably has moved the balance between Brennan and Shah’s (2000) quality values from academic towards a combination of managerial, pedagogic and employment focused.

The research question which emerges from this section of the literature review is “What is the relationship between quality and strategic management?”

**Inspection and strategic management**

Coleman (1998) argues that the new arrangements for inspection of schools and colleges since 1993 have increased the influence and power of the government over them. She highlights “the importance of the concepts of strategy and planning in ‘frameworks’ and reports produced by OFSTED and the FEFC” (Coleman, 1998, p.178). Similarly in the ALI/OFSTED common inspection framework, inspectors consider the extent to which “clear direction is given through strategic objectives, targets and values that are fully understood by staff” (ALI/OFSTED, 2001, p.13). Coleman (1998, p.183) claims “the most obvious link between inspection and planning is likely to lie in the development of the action plan following the inspection report”. She admits that little research has been undertaken on the impact of inspection on strategic planning of colleges. Coleman (1998, p.184) hypothesises that “the growing importance of self-assessment may lead to the production of action plans which are ‘owned’ by the college and therefore more likely to be integrated into a longer-term development process”. However the importance of self-assessment appears to have diminished under the ALI/OFSTED common inspection framework compared to the FEFC inspection framework.
External inspection of a school or college can be viewed as part of evaluating or reviewing the effectiveness of strategic management (Middlewood and Lumby, 1998). Since strategic management is not always a linear and predictable process "it is possible that the impact of an inspection is such that the planning process of a school or college may be significantly altered by an unexpected set of inspection findings" (Coleman, 1998, p. 187). However, "even in institutions where there are unexpected inspection findings, the underlying culture of the organisation may temper the long-term effect of the inspection process" (ibid). Coleman (ibid) argues that "the perceived impact of external inspection on strategic planning and management will only be tested by research that takes place at an appropriate interval or intervals after the inspection". However she does not suggest how the research might be undertaken or what an appropriate interval or intervals might be. Coleman (ibid) argues that the research data (Glover et al, 1996; Russell, 1996) relating to inspection and planning appears to indicate that "the external factors pertaining to the school or college may have more influence on strategic thinking than the inspection findings" and "the individual culture of an institution is an underlying and important influence on strategy" (1998, p. 188). The research data which Coleman (ibid) cites comes from schools rather than colleges however. Nevertheless she concludes that

It does appear likely that the impact of the inspection findings on planning may be reduced over time by a range of factors, in particular, the values and culture of the institution and the impact of external factors specific to the school or college.

(Coleman, 1998, p. 188)

A case study approach taken by Chapman (2002) in ten recently inspected secondary schools facing challenging circumstances addressed three research questions:

- how do teachers perceive the inspection process?
- to what extent does Ofsted inspection generate changes in teaching and non-teaching practice in schools in challenging circumstances?
• Does Ofsted inspection identify similar priorities for change to those identified internally by schools in challenging circumstances?

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a survey and examination of documentary evidence. The findings in this research illuminate the complex nature of the relationship between OFSTED inspection and the change process in these schools. There were also findings about perceptions of inspection in relation to strategic planning:

Headteachers and senior managers held the most positive perceptions of the process, recognising it as a lever to implement change. However, they also articulated a number of limitations entrenched within the current framework, including the high levels of pressure that encourages short-term rather than strategic planning.

(Chapman, 2002, p.261)

From a questionnaire survey of colleges in the FE sector, Commons (2003) found that the inspection process did not in itself act as a major driver for improvement but it had contributed to improving teaching and learning styles and aspects of college management. In particular, the effect of inspection was seen as fairly important on the link between strategic and operational planning and on governors' involvement and commitment. In the recommendations for further research he admits some of the limitations of his research:

Since the survey reflects only the views of (senior) management, further research exploring the same issues with other college staff is needed. This work should check the views of staff, drawn from different levels and a range of college functions.

(Commons, 2003, p.43)

However he does not mention including governors in the research, which is surprising given his findings about the effect of inspection on governors' involvement and commitment.
The FEFC inspection process included an evaluation of the performance of college governing bodies. Graystone (2001) conducted an analysis of 309 inspection reports on the governance of English colleges carried out by teams of FEFC inspectors and published by the FEFC within a three-year period, starting in September 1997, with the new self-assessment arrangements. He sought to discover the key areas of governance by analysing the major issues identified by inspectors over the three years. He did this by breaking-down the strengths and weaknesses at the front of each section on governance into 14 key areas and one other catch-all category. The analysis showed that “Monitoring of the strategic plan and college performance and policies” is commented on most frequently by inspectors followed by ‘commitment and expertise of governors’ and ‘involvement in strategic planning and policies’ “(Graystone, 2001, p.15). However there was a change of emphasis over the three years:-

In 1997-98, the items most frequently commented on were the governing body's involvement with strategy and policy and the conduct of business. In 1999-2000, monitoring of college academic performance had replaced involvement in strategy and policy as the top issue. Emphasis had switched from governors' involvement in determining strategy, mission and the conduct of business to monitoring college performance.

(Graystone, 2001, p.17)

Graystone (2001) argues that this analysis illustrates the changing emphasis of inspectors. He does not comment on whether this could be a change of emphasis by governing bodies, but his research might support the conclusions of Davies and Horsfall (2001) that overview of the educational performance of the college has become a major part of the content of governance business.

The last annual report of the FEFC Chief Inspector (FEFC, 2001b) emphasised the role of governors in monitoring academic performance in commenting that “it is particularly encouraging to note that governors are paying more attention to quality and standards, and that the more effective governing bodies play a key role in setting and monitoring targets for student retention and
achievement". With regard to the role of governors in colleges' strategic direction the Chief Inspector (FEFC, 2001b) commented that they "act effectively in setting and overseeing the strategic direction of the college", but "some strategic plans still lack the targets and performance criteria which would enable governors to monitor the college's performance with a sufficient degree of precision". This latter comment can be read as a critique of the concept of strategic planning.

Davies (2003, p.299) claims that "inspection frameworks seldom understand strategy, often seeing it as simply the addition of an extra year to an existing short-term planning framework". He argues that inspection systems "often require planning frameworks with definable outcomes that can be measured" (ibid) and although this precision is fine for some activities it is not appropriate for activities that are more complex and culturally bound. Davies (2003) links inspection to organisational culture and advocates 'strategic intent' rather than strategic planning as a way of tackling deep-seated cultural change.

There is evidence to illustrate the relationship between organisational culture and the OFSTED inspection framework. Gold et al's (2003) research in schools provides some evidence about the nature of the values held and articulated by heads regarded as 'outstanding' by OFSTED inspectors. The authors claim there is an inconsistency between "the technicist and managerial view of school leadership operationalised by the Government's inspection regime" and the heads' focus on "values, learning communities and shared leadership" (ibid, p.127). Gold et al's (2003) research found that heads demonstrated the following values and beliefs through their words and deeds:

- inclusivity
- equal opportunities
- equity or justice
- high expectations
- engagement with stakeholders
- co-operation
However they conclude by posing the question as to whether current developments in the English education system, notably the emphasis on outcomes and performance targets, will enable these kinds of values to continue and flourish. Wright (2003) recognises the tension between the OFSTED approach and the values-driven approach. However he argues that few heads are likely to defy OFSTED and therefore will have to implement national programmes rather than develop policies based on their own values, until the values-driven approach is endorsed by OFSTED. There is no such research evidence from colleges about the relationship between values and the inspection regime.

The research question which arises from this section of the literature review is “What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?”

Conclusion of literature review

The literature review has explored the literature on strategic management specific to schools and colleges, which has been developing in recent years. Much of the literature specific to further and higher education concentrates on strategic planning, in FE colleges (Drodge and Cooper, 1997; Lumby, 1998; Watson and Crossley, 2001) and in universities (Watson, 2000; Pidcock, 2001). The most recent literature specific to schools has recognised that strategic planning is only one of a number of approaches to strategy (Davies and Ellison, 2003; Davies, 2004; Dimmock and Walker, 2004; Davies and Davies, 2005). This recognition has been influenced by models in the business literature, particularly by Boisot (2003) who considers there are four approaches to strategy – strategic planning, emergent strategy, intrapreneurship or decentralised strategy and strategic intent.
In another model in the business literature Johnson and Scholes (1997) provide three broad explanations of strategy development – strategy developed as managerial intent, strategy developed as the outcome of cultural and political processes in and around an organisation and strategy imposed on an organisation. This model has been developed by Bailey and Avery (1998), who describe six dimensions of strategy development – planning, incremental, cultural, political, command and enforced choice. The model has been used by Collier et al (2001) to explore strategy development in public sector organisations, although not specifically schools and colleges. Arguably the model has considerable applicability for exploring strategy development in educational organisations. It has particular applicability for Ruskin College, given the context in which strategic management has taken place, including the external environment, and given the college’s history, culture and ethos. The six dimensions within the model can be viewed as a means of interrogating the seven research questions arising from the literature review:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>• What is the strategy development process in the College?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What is the relationship between quality and strategic management?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental</td>
<td>• What is the strategy development process in the college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>• What is the strategy development process in the college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>- What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What is the relationship between quality and strategic management?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>- What is the strategy development process in the college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforced Choice</td>
<td>- What is the strategy development process in the college?</td>
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<td>- What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?</td>
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<td>- What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?</td>
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</table>

How these research questions were approached in the methodology and research methods is discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 3 - Methodology

The research aim is to explore strategic management and planning at Ruskin College. The research objectives are:-

- to explore the context of strategic management and the relationship this context has with the culture of the college and the strategy development process;
- to examine the duality in the concept of strategic management – the relationship between theory and practice in strategic management.

The research questions derived from the literature review are:-

- What is the strategy development process in the college?
- What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?
- How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?
- What is the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management?
- What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?
- What is the relationship between quality and strategic management?
- What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?

The study is located within the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm "is characterised by a concern for the individual", where the central endeavour is “to understand the subjective world of human experience” (Cohen et al, 2000, p.22). So interpretive researchers “begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them” (ibid, p.23). My approach to the research can be compared with the summary of normative and interpretive approaches to research shown below:-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normative</th>
<th>Interpretive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Society and the social system</td>
<td>The individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium/large-scale research</td>
<td>Small-scale research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impersonal, anonymous forces regulating behaviour</td>
<td>Human actions continuously recreating social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model of natural sciences</td>
<td>Non-statistical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Objectivity’</td>
<td>‘Subjectivity’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research conducted ‘from the outside’</td>
<td>Personal involvement of the researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizing from the specific</td>
<td>Interpreting the specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining behaviour/seeking causes</td>
<td>Understanding actions/meanings rather than causes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assuming the taken-for-granted</td>
<td>Investigating the taken-for-granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro-concepts: society, institutions, norms, positions, roles, expectations</td>
<td>Micro-concepts: individual perspective, personal constructs, negotiated meanings, definitions of situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structuralists</td>
<td>Phenomenologists, symbolic interactionists, ethnomethodologists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical interest</td>
<td>Practical interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Cohen et al, 2000, p.35)

My approach is concerned with the individual and the perspective of individual stakeholders rather than with society and the social system. The research is small-scale, since the college itself is relatively small, and an interpretive approach is appropriate to a project of this scale. The "human actions continuously recreating social life" (Cohen et al, 2000, p.35) within the interpretive paradigm are relevant to the research question about organisational culture. My approach is non-statistical and seeks "to understand the subjective world of human experience" (Cohen et al, 2000, p.22) in seeking to understand stakeholders’ views about the college's strategy. My personal involvement as
researcher, rather than research being conducted 'from the outside', also shows an interpretive approach. In analysing the data I am interpreting the specific rather than generalising from it.

The research objectives and approach seek to understand meanings rather than to explain behaviour or to seek causes. This links with the definition of strategy as perspective, where "all strategies are abstractions which exist only in the minds of the interested parties" (Mintzberg et al, 1998, p.18). My approach involves seeking to access the minds of stakeholders and to understand their meanings of strategy. It is also an investigation of the 'taken for granted' in its exploration of the culture of the college. "The values and expectations of the different stakeholder groups play an important part in the development of strategy" (Johnson and Scholes, 1997, p.32). These values and expectations can be taken for granted and under a positivist approach they would be assumed rather than investigated. The 'micro-concepts' of "individual perspective, personal constructs, negotiated meanings, definitions of situations" (Cohen et al, 2000, p.35) are explored in the research. As a researcher who works in the college I have a practical interest rather than a technical one.

It has been argued recently in the business literature that there should be "a shift in strategy process research towards a micro perspective on strategizing" (Johnson et al, 2005, p.176). This involves delving into "the black box of the organisation", being "in direct and close contact with the actors" and conducting "small scale in-depth studies" (Johnson et al, 2005, p.177). This black box contains the internal dynamics of the organisation including its culture, politics and tensions. The actors are the people who make the strategy. In-depth studies enable the development of the holistic and contextual understanding essential to the study of strategy. My research approach adopts a micro activity-based perspective and seeks to explore the complexities of strategic activity.

The research approach seeks to ensure authenticity through addressing questions of validity and reliability. Easterby-Smith et al (1994) acknowledge the reservations about applying the concepts of validity and reliability to
interpretive research but argue that these notions are valuable for all researchers:

Provided the researcher is committed to providing a faithful description of others' understandings and perceptions, then ideas such as validity and reliability can provide a very useful discipline.

(Easterby-Smith et al, 1994, p.89)

The approach seeks to address validity “through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of the triangulation and the disinterestedness of the researcher” (ibid, p.105).

Within qualitative research a definition of reliability includes “fidelity to real life, context and situation-specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents” (ibid, p.120). The section on research methods discusses how these approaches to validity and reliability were applied in order to provide a faithful description of others' understandings and perceptions of strategic management.

The research approach seeks to address ethical issues. Gill and Johnson (1997, p.93) argue that ethical issues particularly apply when researchers derive data from "one organisation, and especially so in respect of surveys that are commissioned by one interested party, such as management". Although my research was not commissioned by management it was undertaken by myself as a senior manager of the college. Ethical issues that can arise at any stage of a research project are related to:

- the nature of the project itself;
- the context of the research;
- procedures adopted;
- methods of data collection;
- nature of the participants;
- the type of data collected; and
- what is done with the data and how it is disseminated.

(Cohen et al, 2000, p.49)
The contexts in which educational research is conducted arguably impact on the ways in which the researcher engages with other participants. These contexts include:

- the nature of the institutions within which research is carried out;
- the nature of the people with whom the research is carried out; and
- the socio-political contexts within which the research is carried out.

(Busher, 2002, p.76)

In some institutions senior staff can restrict the range of participants with whom researchers can work. No such restrictions were placed on my research by governors or senior managers at Ruskin College. Existing cultures arguably shape how research and researchers are perceived (Weber and Mitchell, 1999) and so how participants respond to invitations to take part in research. The 'higher education' culture of Ruskin College embraces research and staff and governors responded positively to invitations to participate in the research, occasionally making suggestions about how it should be conducted.

As an 'insider researcher' I recognised a number of ethical problems. One dilemma was how far I could use information available to me as a senior manager and clerk to the governors within my research. It was not clear whether participants could be said to have given their informed consent to supply this information for research purposes. Another dilemma was whether information gathered for research purposes could be used within the micro-political processes of the college (Busher, 2002). This dilemma links to my status and power within the college and how this influenced participants' decisions on what information to give and how to present it. Some participants might have been concerned about how the information they gave me was to be used. How ethical issues were addressed is discussed further within the discussion of each of the research methods.
Research Methods

The research design involved a triangulation of methods – questionnaires, interviews, observation of meetings and documentary analysis. Triangulation was used to cross-check data to establish its validity. Cohen et al (2000, p.112) argue that "triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from one standpoint and, in so doing, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data". Methodological triangulation was used, involving four approaches to researching strategic management. Respondent triangulation was also used, involving asking the same research questions of different participants. This triangulation within a research method "takes as its starting point the claim that the 'reality' of a situation is not to be apprehended from a single viewpoint" (McFee, 1992, p.216). Triangulation within the questionnaire and interview methods involved academic staff, support staff, managers and governors completing questionnaires and being interviewed. This enabled me to respond to the multiplicity of perspectives present in the college. Cohen et al (2000) claim that triangulation can be used in either positivist or interpretive research and is particularly valuable in case study research. So it is appropriate for a case study of a college where both the positivist and the interpretive approaches are relevant to the research questions. However although using mixed methods and a range of participants contributed to validity, it is recognised that the value of triangulation "is easy to overestimate" (McFee, 1992, p.215).

Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were used in the research. A standard strategy development questionnaire (Bailey and Avery, 1998) was used with staff and governors to seek to discover their perceptions of how strategic decisions are made. This questionnaire was used to collect data on three of the key research questions:-

- What is the strategy development process in the college?
How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?
What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?

The original work on the strategy development questionnaire was sponsored by ESRC grant no.R000235100, and was developed by Andy Bailey and Gerry Johnson at the Cranfield School of Management. The questionnaire was “derived from extensive research” (Bailey and Avery, 1998, p.181):

A review of research on strategy development processes was undertaken and questions developed from this which represented the characteristics that were uniquely attributable to each of the underlying dimensions. To ensure validity an expert panel evaluated each item's characteristics using a Likert scale. Items were included if they had been endorsed by 70% of the panel and if they scored above the mean score on the Likert scale. These items were then analysed by managers to gauge their relevance to strategy development in a practical working environment.

(Collier et al, 2001, p.22)

The composition of the expert panel is not clear and it is not known whether managers from the public sector were engaged in gauging the relevance of items to strategy development in a public sector environment. The questionnaire comprises 36 statements that relate to six dimensions of strategy development. The key characteristics of these dimensions are described below:

**Characteristics of the six dimensions**

**Planning**

Strategies are the outcome of rational, sequential planned and methodical procedures.

Strategic goals are set by senior organisational figures.
The organisation and environment are analysed.
Definite and precise objectives are set.
Precise plans for implementation are developed.
The strategy is made explicit in the form of detailed plans.

**Incrementalism**
Strategy is continually adjusted to match changes in the operating environment.
Strategy options are continually assessed for fit.
Early commitment to a strategy is tentative and subject to review.
Strategy develops through experimentation and gradual implementation.
Successful options gain additional resources.
Strategy develops through small-scale changes.

**Cultural**
A ‘way of doing things’ in the organisation impacts on strategic direction.
Strategies are evolved in accordance with a set of shared assumptions that exist in the organisation.
A core set of shared assumptions based on past experience and history guides strategic actions.
Organisational history directs the search for and selection of strategic options.
Strategy not in fit with the culture is resisted.

**Political**
Strategies are developed by negotiation and bargaining between groups.
The interest groups seek to realise their own desired objectives.
Influence in strategy formulation increases with power.
Power comes from the ability to create or control the flow of scarce resources.
Interest groups form coalitions to further their desired strategy.
The control and provision of information is also a source of power.
A strategy acceptable to the most powerful interest groups is developed.

**Command**
An individual is the driving force behind the organisation’s strategy.
Strategy is primarily associated with the institutional power of an individual or small group.
The strategy represents the aspirations for the organisation's future of this individual.
The individual becomes the representation of the strategy for the organisation.
An individual has a high degree of control over strategy.

**Enforced choice**
Strategies are prescribed by the operating environment.
Strategic choice is limited by external forces which the organisation is unable to control.
Strategic change is instigated from outside the organisation.
Organisations are not able to influence their operating environments.
Barriers in the environment severely restrict strategic mobility.

( Bailey and Avery, 1998, p.183)

Over 6,300 managers, from over 1,000 organisations, have completed the questionnaire since it was first used in 1992 (Collier et al, 2001), including public sector organisations. So the reliability of the questionnaire had been proven. There is no evidence in the literature of this standard questionnaire having been used in research on strategic management in an educational institution and arguably this was the first use of the questionnaire in research within a college. In order to improve its validity some of the language in the standard questionnaire was changed to fit a college setting, for example 'Chief Executive' was changed to 'Principal' and 'organisation' was amended to 'college'. The questionnaire is included as appendix 1.

The output from this self-completion questionnaire is a strategy development profile, which is a pictorial representation identifying the dominant processes operating within an organisation. It has been claimed that the use of the strategy development questionnaire has a number of benefits:

- It builds on a conceptual framework and language for explaining strategy development that clarifies the complex processes at work in organisations
It allows such processes to be made explicit when, so often, they are taken for granted or masked by what managers think should occur rather than what does occur.

In this way it can facilitate the discussion of processes which are often not discussed.

In addition, it can be used to compare different perceptions of strategy development processes: for example, differences between parts of an organisation, differences between levels of management or differences over time, e.g. before and after a programme of strategic change.

(Bailey and Avery, 1998, p. 182)

Arguably these benefits can apply to other stakeholders, i.e. governors and staff, as well as managers. Bailey and Avery (1998, p.184) argue that “it is important that the participating managers have some knowledge of strategy development within their organisation, although it is not essential that managers are actively involved in every stage of defining strategy”. At Ruskin all staff have some knowledge of strategy development as a result of their involvement in committees and a termly staff conference.

The staff conference at the beginning of the autumn term 2003/04 was used as the opportunity for staff to complete the questionnaire. Bailey and Avery (1998, p.184) assert that an “important requisite for administration of the questionnaire is that a predefined frame of reference is given to the managers prior to the managers prior to completion – for example, is the SDQ to be completed on the basis of the SBU, the division or the organisation as a whole?” They argue that “this stipulation ensures that the resulting profiles are drawn from a common origin so that comparisons made across and between individuals are in fact valid” (ibid, p.184).

The frame of reference for completion of the questionnaire was the whole college. This was clearly articulated in the rubric at the front of the questionnaire which adapted the model devised by Bailey and Johnson. The
frame of reference was emphasised again once the questionnaires had been
given out ready for completion.

Bailey and Johnson (1998, p. 184) argue that "it is important to stress that it is
the general nature of the strategy development process that is of interest, not
the process employed in the resolution of a specific strategy decision". Again
this point was made in the rubric at the front of the questionnaire. It was
highlighted again when the questionnaires were given out for completion,
emphasising that the focus was on the general nature of the strategy
development process not the property strategy process, given the events of
earlier in the year.

Guidance on how to complete the questionnaire was given in the rubric at the
front:

- Please answer all the statements (it will take approximately 5-10 minutes
to complete)
- Give the answer that first occurs to you. Do not give an answer because
  you feel it is the right thing to say or you feel it is how things should be
- Respond to each of the statements by circling the appropriate number on
  a scale of 1 (you strongly disagree with the statement in relation to the
  college) to 7 (you strongly agree with the statement in relation to the
  college).

Once the questionnaire had been given out I explained to staff that the purpose
of the questionnaire was to collect data for my research for a thesis as part of
the Doctorate of Education at the University of Leicester. A brief, verbal outline
of the thesis was given to staff. Confidentiality was promised and staff were
informed that there was no need for them to put their names on the
questionnaire unless they wished to do so. Staff were advised that no one other
than myself, as researcher, would see the completed individual questionnaires.
These guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity were an attempt to deal with
one of the ethical issues – the informed consent of respondents. Fogelman
(2002, p.96) states that this issue "can arise for the survey researcher in a particularly acute form in relation to anonymity and/or confidentiality". He argues that it is rarely possible to ensure the anonymity of the respondent in surveys, since the researcher will normally want to ask for respondents' names, or use a coding system, in order to follow up and send reminders to those who have not completed the questionnaire (Fogelman, 2002). Distributing the questionnaires at the staff conference overcame this issue.

The guidance in the rubric at the front of the questionnaire was read out to staff. I then asked staff if they had any questions about the questionnaire or the research process. Two members of the academic staff asked about the definition of 'the Principal' in some of the statements in the questionnaire. I answered that it referred to the substantive post of Principal and not to the acting Principal. I explained that I had discussed the questionnaire and this particular point with the acting Principal prior to the staff conference when seeking her consent.

Staff then completed the questionnaire. A limitation of using questionnaires is that they "are generally completed alone and only stimulate occasional informal debate between those who complete them" (Peeke, 1994, p.102). There was some informal debate between staff completing the questionnaires as they sat at tables of between five and eight people. Some staff took longer than others to finish the questionnaire, possibly nearer to twenty minutes rather than the five to ten stated in the guidelines. A member of staff on each table collected up the completed questionnaires and brought them to my table. I thanked staff for taking part in the survey and told them that I would analyse the results for the whole college, as well as individually, using the scoring sheet and producing a total score for each of the six dimensions. I promised them that the strategy development profile for the staff as a whole would be presented to a future conference. There were thirty-five questionnaires returned, of which twenty were from academic and related staff and fifteen were from support staff.

The questionnaire was posted to the twelve 'ordinary' members of the Governing Executive as there was not a meeting imminent. It was
accompanied by a letter explaining that the purpose of the questionnaire was to collect data for my research for a thesis on strategic management. The letter gave guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity in order to ensure the informed consent of respondents. However only one of the respondents returned the questionnaire anonymously. A self-addressed envelope was sent with the questionnaire. There were eleven questionnaires returned, out of the twelve sent out, giving a response rate of 92%.

Prior to analysing the questionnaires I took a pre-analysis intuitive guess at what the profile might look like for the whole organisation and made a record of this in my research diary. The pre-analysis guess and the findings from the analysis of the questionnaire are discussed in the chapter on findings and analysis. Before analysing the questionnaires completed by staff I sorted them into two piles, one for academic and related staff and one for support staff. In sorting them I discovered that one part-time, member of academic staff had written on the questionnaire, “I have very little knowledge of how strategy is developed within Ruskin and so feel it would be inappropriate for me to complete the questionnaire”. The remaining questionnaires had all been completed and I checked that every statement in each questionnaire had been evaluated, which they had. Two members of academic staff had commented on the questionnaire that there was no provision for ‘don’t know’. Perhaps the rubric could have advised that circling the fourth on the seven point scale would indicate a neutral response to a statement. However I had not wished to encourage respondents to choose the mid-point of the scale. Another member of academic staff commented on the questionnaire that the statements were “often ambiguous” and questioned the validity of the results, although the only statement highlighted was one which stated “to keep in line with our business environment we make continual small-scale changes to strategy”, in which the words ‘continual’ and ‘small-scale’ were circled.

The analysis of this questionnaire was conducted using a scoring sheet shown at the end of appendix 1. The number circled for each statement within each questionnaire was transferred on to a grid containing six columns relating to the six dimensions – planning, incrementalism, cultural, political, command and
enforced choice. Each column contained six boxes, with the number at the left of the box indicating the questionnaire statement to which it refers. Having transferred the number for all statements to the grid, each column was totalled and 24 was subtracted from each of the column totals to produce a score for each of the perspectives.

Each questionnaire was given a reference code using a letter identifying the stakeholder group ('A' for academic and related staff, 'S' for support staff and 'G' for governors) followed by a number. The scores from each of the coded scoring sheets were transferred to a tally chart for each stakeholder group. The scores for each stakeholder group and for all staff were calculated by summing all the individual scores for each dimension and then dividing that by the number of individuals. The total scores for each stakeholder group were then mapped on to a strategy development profile template which is shown in appendix 2. I followed the guidance provided with the questionnaire on the interpretation of the profile:

The interpretation of the strategy development profile is based on distance from the mid-point ring (highlighted in bold). Points moving away from this ring towards the outside of the map (accompanied by a positive score) represent the degree to which the dimension is seen to be a characteristic of the strategy development process in the organisation. Points moving towards the centre (accompanied by a negative score) represent the degree to which the dimension is uncharacteristic of the process. Points at zero or low positive or negative scores indicate that the attributes associated with that dimension are not particularly characteristic or uncharacteristic of the strategy development process.

(Bailey and Avery, 1998, p.184)

**Governance healthcheck questionnaire**

A second standard questionnaire was used with members of the Governing Executive. This questionnaire was used to collect data on the research question "What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?"
This questionnaire was part of the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) 'governance healthcheck' questionnaire which "is designed to assist the governing body with a self-assessment of its performance and to identify ways of making improvements" (LSDA, 2001a, p.2). The section of the questionnaire on 'strategy and mission' was used.

The questionnaire was used twice, in July 2002 and in July 2004, so there was a two year interval between its use. The first use of the questionnaire was to collect data for an assignment as part of the Doctorate of Education. This was to be a piloting of the questionnaire for its use within the research for this thesis. The questionnaire was piloted by posting it to the 'ordinary' and staff members of the Governing Executive, which was sixteen people. They were accompanied by a letter explaining the purpose of the questionnaire and promising anonymity and confidentiality. The disadvantage of this method was that it was not possible to send reminder letters when some governors did not respond, as the questionnaires were returned anonymously. However there were ten questionnaires returned, out of the sixteen sent out, giving a response rate of 62.5%. This is considered quite acceptable for a postal survey (Fogelman, 2002).

The questionnaire used a rating scale for responses to statements about the governing body, the individual member's role on the governing body and the information provided to the member. The five point rating scale ranged from very satisfied, satisfied, undecided, somewhat dissatisfied to very dissatisfied. As Cohen et al (2000) point out, this could limit the number of positions in the five point scale to a choice of three, as respondents might avoid the two extreme points. Furthermore, respondents might choose the mid-point of the scale. The questionnaire was structured although there was an opportunity for respondents to write comments in a free-text box at the end.

The LSDA governance healthcheck questionnaire was revised in 2002 "in response to the informative feedback from 247 colleges" (LSDA, 2002, p.1). The revised questionnaire continued to use a rating scale for responses to statements about the governing body, the individual member's role on the governing body and the information provided to the governing body. However
the rating scale was changed slightly so that it ranged from very satisfied, satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied to 'don't know'. This change could help dissuade respondents from choosing the mid-point of the scale, although they could still tick 'don't know'. The revised questionnaire was shorter, with nine questions compared with thirteen questions in the original. It continued to be structured but there was still a space at the end for respondents to write comments in a free-text box.

I decided to ask members of the Governing Executive to complete this revised questionnaire in order to triangulate the data with the data from the observation of the Governing Executive meetings and the documentary analysis of agendas, papers and minutes from meetings held in 2004. There was an attempt to deal with some of the ethical issues involved in completing the questionnaire. At the end of the meeting of the Governing Executive in July 2004 I explained the questionnaire and sought to facilitate governors' informed consent to completing it. I collected completed questionnaires from ten governors.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held with staff and governors completing the questionnaires to discuss the strategy development profiles and to gather data on the key research questions:-

- What is the strategy development process in the college?
- What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?
- How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?
- What is the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management?
- What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?
- What is the relationship between quality and strategic management?
- What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?
In his summary of the main characteristics of a semi-structured interview Dreyer (1995, p.13) argues "it is a formal encounter on an agreed subject and 'on the record'", as is a structured interview. The difference with a semi-structured interview is that the "main questions set by the interviewer create the overall structure", which is filled in with "prompts by encouraging broad coverage, probes by exploring answers in depth" (ibid). Unlike the 'closed' questions in a structured interview there can be a mixture of open and closed questions in a semi-structured interview. There is a key difference in level of control by the interviewer in the semi-structured interview, where "the interviewee has a fair degree of freedom: what to talk about, how much to say, how to express it", however the interviewer can assert control when necessary" (ibid).

In terms of the advantages of the semi-structured interview Wragg (1978, p.10) claims that it "tends to be the one most favoured by educational researchers as it allows respondents to express themselves at some length, but offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling". Dreyer argues that it is especially suited to educational research because of "the possibility of a shared frame of reference" (1995, p.17).

The semi-structured interview "is especially suited for investigating professional concerns and issues in educational policy and practice" (Dreyer, 1995, p.17) which are likely to arise in research on strategy. The greater freedom of response in the semi-structured interview, compared with the structured interview, would be more likely to generate views, feelings and opinions about strategy.

Bailey and Avery (1998) encourage feedback and discussion of the strategy development profiles generated by the strategy development questionnaires. As a first stage they recommend discussion with individuals and suggest the following questions:-

1. What do you think are the potential consequences of the process you describe for strategy development in your organisation?
2. Are there aspects of the organisation that make the process the way it is? For example, in what ways do influences internal to the organisation – such as structure, management systems, and the personality and behaviours of colleagues – promote the strategy development process in the form you describe?

3. Similarly, what impact do influences external to the organisation – such as nature of the market, maturity of and speed of change within the industry or government legislation – have upon the strategy development process?

4. What does such a profile suggest about your role within the strategy development process? Are there certain individuals or activities that are more effective than others in gaining influence over strategic direction?

(Bailey and Avery, 1998, p.185)

These questions were adapted and put into the research schedule. They enabled a deeper exploration of individual perspectives of the strategy development process than the strategy development questionnaire.

Watson and Crossley's (2001) research on the strategic management process in an FE college involved two questionnaires issued to all staff, three years apart, and in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 lecturing staff. However it is unclear whether a strategy development questionnaire was used and how the interviews linked to the questionnaires. Nor is it clear why senior managers, governors and support staff were not interviewed.

The interview schedule followed the advice of Dreyer (1995) who emphasises its importance in semi-structured interviewing. The questions were derived from the research questions. The main questions created the overall structure and prompts and probes were linked to these. The wording of the questions were devised using “planning for the spoken not the written word” (Dreyer, 1995, p.32). The schedule was piloted with two members of staff. This enabled me to find out whether I could make the schedule work and how long the interview would take. The interview schedule is included as appendix 3.
The strategy development questionnaire contained a question on the front sheet as to whether or not staff and governors would be prepared to be interviewed. The staff and governors chosen for interview were a cross-section of those who stated they were willing to be interviewed. Eight people in total were interviewed, including two academic staff, two support staff, two academic managers and two governors.

In agreeing the time and place for the interviews I recognised that this was a busy time in the academic year. The interviews were held in a small seminar room which does not have a telephone but does have some easy chairs. Although I recognise that “people will talk with more confidence on their own territory” (Drever, 1995, p.45), support staff often share offices, governors do not have offices and a neutral setting helped to avoid any risk of interviewees becoming too confident and taking over the interview (ibid). In order to settle the interviewee I made sure that we were not interrupted and we sat in the easy chairs for the interview. I had explained the purpose of the interviews when arranging the interview and had given interviewees a copy of the interview schedule. At the beginning of each interview I “set the scene, confirming the purpose of the interview, confidentiality, indicating what is expected of the interviewee, checking the physical location of the interview, the proximity of the furniture” (Powney and Watts, 1987, p.133). I sought to establish rapport by using easy, non-threatening questions at the beginning and appropriate non-verbal devices such as intermittent eye contact.

In semi-structured interviews listening skills are vital (Powney and Watts, 1987). So I used the main questions from the interview schedule, and prompts and probes where appropriate, but I spent most of my time listening. The interviews were tape recorded with the permission of each interviewee. I had believed that in a situation where one is interviewing one’s peers about the possibly sensitive issue of perceptions of strategy there would be objections to tape-recording. However I discovered that Powney and Watts’ (1987, p.124) advice that “once people have been assured of confidentiality and where possible anonymity, few refuse to be taped” was correct. These were the first interviews I had
conducted using a tape recorder. I was concerned that this would make me anxious and as Powney and Watts (1987, p.133) advise, "an anxious interviewer is unlikely to be a good listener". The pilot interviews helped me to overcome this anxiety, although some anxiety remained.

Although I recognised that the use of prompts and probes would be useful in drawing out the subject, I also recognised the issue of reliability involved in their use. As Powney and Watts (ibid, p.139) caution "both prompts and probes need to be used carefully as not only may they lead interviewees into a particular line of answering, they also reduce consistency in presentation between interviews, unless used in the same way in each interview". So I sought to use prompts and probes in the same way in each interview. The use of verbal and non-verbal tactics such as stock phrases, eye contact, timing and tone of voice enabled me to seek "to exercise control without dominating or 'leading'" (Powney and Watts, p.59).

Before closing each interview I asked interviewees if they wished to add to the information they had already given or to ask any questions. This is an advantage of the semi-structured interview and I recognised that it may not only provide me "with some unexpected gems of insight, but also leave the interviewees with the feeling that they have been appreciated and the whole exercise was worthwhile" (ibid, p.140). The interviewees were thanked for their time and asked to spare a little more time to check the transcript of the interview in order to validate the record.

In choosing face-to-face, one-to-one semi-structured interviews, other types of interview and variations of this type were rejected as unsuitable. In unstructured interviews "the interviewer is trying to find out the interviewee's frame of reference" (Drever, 1995, p.15). In this case the strategy development profile provided a frame of reference which made sense to the interviewees. This enabled me to follow-up in depth issues which had arisen from the strategy development questionnaire and provided richer data than could have been gained through structured interviews. Telephone interviews would not have been appropriate in a small college where staff are accessible. Group
interviews might have inhibited frankness on a subject which could have been a personal or sensitive one for some staff. Some staff might not have wished to discuss their own strategy development profiles in a group setting. Also in any group discussion certain people might have dominated whilst others might have remained silent or contributed little.

Before analysing the interview data I recognised that data analysis for semi-structured interviewing is time-consuming and that analysis time is “frequently underestimated, even by experienced investigators” (Wragg, 2002, p.154). I listened to the complete recording of each interview prior to transcription which took about 45 minutes in playback time. When attempting to playback one of the tapes of the interviews with governors I found that this had not recorded. I am not certain what had happened; as this was the penultimate interview I had some experience of operating the machine by that stage and had tested it prior to the interview starting. Rather than going back to this governor for a second interview, I arranged an interview with another governor. The transcription of each interview was even more time-consuming than I had recognised and each transcript took several hours to word process. The average interview transcript was about eleven pages long, so there were almost 90 pages of data.

Once each transcription had been completed I read it through carefully and began to draw inferences from it. The ten main interview questions, which had arisen from the research questions, were used as categories for content analysis. The data from staff and governors was analysed separately and within staff the data was analysed separately for managers, academic staff and support staff. I looked for patterns in the data, for example whether one group had more to say on a certain aspect of strategy or whether people talked about the same or different things. In exploring group views I recognised the extra caution advised by Drever (1995, p.72), “because the groups are inevitably small and individuals are therefore significant”. Any judgements made remained “purely qualitative” (Drever, 1995, p.74) and I was aware of the need to safeguard against my own bias. Given the nature of the research there was not the opportunity for “subjective content analysis and the selection of
illustrative quotations for the report to be double-checked" (Wragg, 2002, p.155).

Observation

In the business literature it has been argued recently that in 'micro studies' researchers can identify particular units of analysis than can contribute to the more general, which "could include the events or episodes that are typically critical to strategy development, for instance board meetings or away days" (Johnson et al, 2005, p.183). Observation was used as a research tool at two governing body meetings in order to collect data on two of the key research questions:-

- What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?
- How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?

The Governing Executive meets four times a year, usually for about three hours, starting at 11.00 am and ending at around 2.00 pm. The meeting in February 2004 was used as a pilot for the observation. Since this was to be my first experience of undertaking observation I did not feel adequately prepared. So the piloting acted as 'meaningful training' (Moyles, 2002, p.188) for me as the observer.

Gaining access to Governing Executive meetings is not an issue for me as, since I am clerk, I am present at every meeting. For the February and March 2004 meetings I was to be clerk and observer, adopting a participant-as-observer role (Burgess, 1984). This would enable me "to collect rich detailed data based on observations in natural settings" (Burgess, 1984, p.79). I sought the consent of the Chair and Principal to observing the meetings. This consent was given and the Chair informed the other members at the start of the meeting. Members of the Governing Executive are accustomed to me being at meetings and recognise my role as clerk, but they might not recognise me as a
researcher. So I acknowledge that my participant observer role might have affected the meeting and brought about different behaviours.

There were ethical issues in carrying out these observations. Although governors were informed about my role as observer, the intention of the research and the confidentiality of the data, some governors may not have accepted this, although none commented at the time. So some governors could have felt coerced into participating in the research. They did not have the power to exclude me, as they would with an 'external' researcher, since I had a legitimate right to be at the meetings. It would have been difficult for governors to opt-out individually from being observed since these were observations of governing body meetings. One way for individual governors to opt-out would have been for them to leave the meeting, which clearly would have affected both the meeting and the validity of my research. Governors were assured of anonymity and that no individual governors would be named in the study.

Unstructured observation was used in the meetings. I made unstructured field notes rather than using an observation schedule. An advantage of this method was that it would enable me to record behaviour in governing body meetings as it occurred. It would also allow me to compare what happens in a governing body meeting with governors' views about the strategy process and their role in strategic management arising from the questionnaires and interviews. The observations enabled me to record the behaviour of governors who might not have been able, due to time-constraints, to complete the questionnaires or to be interviewed.

Some of the limitations of unstructured observation were recognised. For example, I realised that it would use a fair amount of time, both in recording and analysing data. However, since I would have been at the meetings anyway, the only additional time spent was on the preparation and the analysis. Although I recognise that there is a limit to how long the researcher can observe in detail, I felt able to observe in detail throughout most of the duration of each meeting, even though my notes became more selective in the latter half. As I took notes I realised that I was recording data that might not be relevant, but I tried to
record it anyway in order to be honest to the situation. At the times when I was participating in the meeting as clerk I found it difficult to make notes as I was concentrating on the issue being discussed. I attempted to fill-in the gaps in my notes during the afternoon following the meeting. However I acknowledge that the accuracy of some of my notes could be challenged, particularly those that were written after the meeting.

When considering how the observation should be recorded my initial instinct had been to use a structured observation schedule; in particular I had considered using Williams's (1994, p.323) meetings rating form. However I had concerns about whether this form would provide reliability and validity, and I decided not to use it since it would mean making judgements about what I was observing rather than simply recording. I recognised that there were issues of reliability and validity in the way I undertook the observation. There was a danger that I might have "gone native" and "become too attached to the group to see it sufficiently dispassionately" (Cohen et al, 2000, p.129), especially since I am the clerk. There was a worry that I would "find it hard to look with fresh eyes" (Francis, 1998, p.586). There was not the opportunity to have another observer present to enable comparison of observation records (Simpson and Tuson, 1995). Indeed the presence of another observer whom the governors did not know might have changed their behaviour. I sought to ensure "face-validity" (Simpson and Tuson, 1995) by observing two full governing body meetings. Methodological triangulation, using questionnaires, interviews and documentary analysis, to explore the issues, was the key way of cross-checking the data from these observations to establish its validity.

When analysing the data from the observations I followed the advice of Silverman (2000) and analysed the data as it was gathered. So the data from each observation was analysed shortly after it took place. The notes of the observations were analysed manually and coloured highlighter pens were used to highlight the notes relating to the themes of strategy and culture. As I did this I spent time taking-in all the data and digesting them in the way described by Wellington (2000). The agendas of the meetings helped in ordering the data.
sought to draw some initial conclusions, which I recognised would need to be verified using other sources of data.

**Documentary analysis**

Documentary analysis of primary and secondary documents was conducted to find out what has been written which relates to strategic management and planning. It was used to collect data on the following research questions:-

- What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?
- How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?
- What is the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management?
- What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?
- What is the relationship between quality and strategic management?
- What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?

The main secondary sources were FEFC inspection reports (FEFC, 1997b; FEFC, 2001a), an ALI inspection report (ALI, 2003) and a re-inspection report (ALI, 2004). The primary sources were strategic planning documents, inspection action plans and other planning documents, self-assessment reports, publicity materials, annual reports, the quality assurance policy and procedures and minutes of Governing Executive meetings.

The advantages of using these documents are that:

These are all printed or written data, which already exist independently of the researcher, and most can be used for research as they are found. Many documents can be unobtrusively obtained at low cost; they are easily stored and can readily be re-analysed. For example, it may be a
great deal easier for a researcher to study the minutes of a meeting than to observe the meeting or interview the participants.

(Cortazzi, 2002, p.201)

In the case of Governing Executive meeting minutes I was able to triangulate the data from these with the data from observations of meetings, the questionnaires and the interviews with members of the Governing Executive. It can be argued that minutes not only reflect the reality of context but go further:

They often refer to previous minutes; parts of them tend to inform or be the focus of later talk as matters arising; and as a record of decisions or planned actions they may be referred to as reminders or checks of who should do what and whether this has been done. Such minutes do not, therefore, simply reflect what happened at the meeting but critically contribute to action. Such minutes also tend to construct their own reality; once an item is recorded in them, the record is taken as true and agreed, despite disagreements or counterarguments which may have been expressed, but not necessarily recorded or accorded due weight, yet alone those other views which may not have been expressed.

(Cortazzi, 2002, p.202)

So chairing a meeting or writing the minutes play key parts in creating a documentary reality. But that documentary reality might be different from the reality apparent from an observation of a meeting. Triangulation enables the cross-checking of data to establish its validity. Robson (1994) indicates the value of using observations and interviews for triangulation in a study based mainly on documentary analysis:

The documents have been written for some purpose other than for research, and it is difficult or impossible to allow for the biases or distortions that this introduces..... There is a need for triangulation with other accounts and data sources to address this problem.

(Robson, 1994, p.243)
Ethical issues emerge when researchers use documents which were written for one purpose or for a particular audience. There is the issue of consent for the document to be used for research purposes. It can be argued that "documents allow researchers to invade the lives of the participants in research, gaining insights into participants' views, values and attitudes which may not have been intended" (Busher, 2002, p.83). This leaves researchers with "a moral responsibility to protect the privacy and anonymity of the research participants" (ibid, p.83). In the case of Governing Executive minutes I sought the consent of the Chair to use these in my research. The privacy and anonymity of participants were protected by not using the names of anyone mentioned in the minutes.
Chapter 4 - Findings and Analysis

What is the strategy development process in the college?

The findings on this research question come from analysis of the strategy development questionnaire and the interviews with staff and governors, which followed up on the profiles generated by the questionnaire.

As stated in the research methodology chapter, prior to analysing the strategy development questionnaires I took a pre-analysis intuitive guess at what the profile might look like for the whole organisation and made a record of this in my research diary. My guess had been that the dominant processes operating within the college related to the cultural dimension and the enforced choice dimension. I recognised the conflict between the cultural dimension where "strategy is directed and guided by the cultural aspects of an organisation, its history and the shared assumptions and beliefs of its members" and the enforced choice dimension where "strategy is developed as a result of external pressures which limit an organisation's ability to determine its own strategic direction" (Bailey and Avery, 1998, p.182).

The average scores for the six dimensions for all staff who completed the questionnaires were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incrementalism</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforced Choice</td>
<td>6.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average staff gave enforced choice the highest score of all six dimensions. The second highest score was the cultural dimension. The third highest score was the command dimension. Although I had anticipated that the enforced
choice and cultural dimensions would score highest I had not anticipated that the command dimension would score as highly. The lowest score was the planning dimension.

Breaking down the analysis between academic and related staff and support staff reveals some differences between the two groups. The average scores for the six dimensions for the academic and related staff who completed the questionnaire were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>-1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incrementalism</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforced choice</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average academic and related staff gave command the highest score of all six dimensions. The second highest score was enforced choice and the third highest was the cultural dimension. As with all staff the lowest score for academic and related staff was the planning dimension.

The average scores for the support staff who completed the questionnaires were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incrementalism</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>7.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>6.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>5.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforced choice</td>
<td>8.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average support staff gave enforced choice the highest score of all six dimensions. The second highest score was the cultural dimension. So the two highest scores for support staff correlated with those for all staff. However the
The third highest score for support staff was the political dimension. The command dimension was the second lowest score for support staff, compared with being the highest for academic and related staff. The lowest score for support staff was the planning dimension, as it was for academic and related staff and all staff.

The finding that staff gave enforced choice the highest score of all six dimensions corresponds with a survey of the public sector, where managers gave this the highest score (Collier et al, 2001). The scores for that survey of public sector managers were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforced choice</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(adapted from Collier et al, 2001, p.23)

The finding that staff gave planning the lowest score also corresponds with this survey of public sector managers who also gave planning the lowest score. The command dimension was given the second lowest score by public sector managers, which does not correspond with all staff at Ruskin and is very different from the findings for academic and related staff. It is claimed that there is a relationship between the enforced choice and command dimensions:

Where strategy is largely imposed or constrained by external pressures, managers see senior executives as less able to "determine our strategic direction" or to implement their "vision of the future"

(Both statements are components of the command dimension)

(Collier et al, 2001, p.23)
So there seems to be a contradiction in the findings for academic and related staff where the command and enforced choices were given the highest scores. However although it might appear to be the case that where strategy is largely driven by external influences, this reduces the scope for the direction of strategy internally by a powerful figure, this might not be how staff perceive the relationship between these external and internal dimensions. Indeed the role of perception within the command dimension might be the key to this apparent contradiction in the findings:

The strategy can become so intrinsically linked with the senior figure that he or she is often perceived as the embodiment of the strategy. This can occur to such a degree that internal and external observers attribute responsibility for the success or failure of the strategy to the key individual. Furthermore, this widespread belief that one person creates strategy reinforces the individual's own perception that it is solely his or her responsibility.

(Collier et al, 2001, p.19)

The findings of research involving public sector managers suggested that the more 'commercial' the organisation the more managers at lower levels believed that strategic decisions were taken by those at the top. It could be argued that colleges fit their definition of 'commercial' – "where the customer chooses to buy at the point of delivery" (Collier et al, 2001, p.28). So perhaps the perception of academic and related staff at Ruskin that strategic decisions are taken at the top is not surprising.

The average scores for the six dimensions for the governors who completed the questionnaires were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incrementalism</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>7.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforced Choice</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On average governors gave the cultural dimension the highest score of all six dimensions. The second highest score was the enforced choice dimension. The third highest score was the incrementalism dimension. The lowest score was the command dimension. Although I had anticipated that the cultural and enforced choice dimensions would score highest I had not anticipated that the command dimension would score lowest.

There are some similarities between the findings for governors and those for staff. The cultural and enforced choice dimensions scored highest for both the governors and the staff, although the staff had scored the cultural dimension as the second highest rather than the highest. The planning dimension scored second lowest for the governors whereas it had scored lowest for the staff, including both groups of staff.

There is also an interesting difference around the command dimension between the findings for governors and those for staff. The governors scored the command dimension the lowest, whereas staff as a whole scored it third highest and the academic and related staff group scored it highest. This difference can be explained by the nature of the command dimension where "the strategy can become so intrinsically linked with the senior figure that he or she is often perceived as the embodiment of the strategy" (Collier et al, 2001, p.19). Clearly the governors did not perceive the Principal in this way, given their own role which is discussed in the section "What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?" The finding that governors gave the command and planning dimensions the lowest scores corresponds with the survey of public sector managers (Collier et al, 2001, p.23), although this group gave the command dimension the second lowest score. However the survey was conducted with public sector managers rather than with elected representatives, so it might not be entirely appropriate to compare the findings for governors with those from this survey.

The interviews followed up on the profiles generated by the questionnaire by asking four main questions. The findings from the interviews with staff and governors are shown under each of these four questions.
What do you think are the potential consequences of the process you describe for strategy development in the college?

All the staff interviewed identified potential consequences of the cultural dimension for strategy development. One manager described “good” and “bad” consequences of culture. The positive aspects she described were “shared assumptions”, “a value base” and “a way of doing things”, the consequences of which were “productive and creative” she claimed. However she argued there were “strong examples of resistance which could be enormously limiting”. Her explanation of this was that “if people feel so bogged down by the past, they can’t move forward”. The other manager also described “a very profound resistance to change” which she explained as being underpinned by “a belief system … which gives people a kind of reinforcement and makes them think it’s okay to carry on as if the world hasn’t changed”. One member of academic staff summarised staff’s views on the consequences of the cultural dimension:

I would identify cultural aspects, i.e. a way of doing things, shared assumptions, although they can be very positive and harmonising and make everyone feel sort of warm and fluffy, they can be very bad because they can stop an organisation moving forward. I think that does sum up Ruskin – we’ve been around a long time, we’ve got a very strong sense of our ethos, which is good. But then the down side of that is that you may put self-imposed breaks on, you may limit your ceilings and your floor space, you may not think of other ways of doing things because we’ve never done it that way before.

Most staff identified the potential consequences of the enforced choice dimension for strategy development. One manager claimed that “ultimately the government decides priorities and what our priorities are”. As a consequence “those big, external changes make our strategic planning quite difficult really”, she argued. This manager summarised the consequences of the enforced choice and cultural dimensions acting together:
It often feels as if we haven’t got a lot of autonomy. We’ve got to try and go with what there’s funding for and what somebody else’s priorities are. I suspect one of the reasons why we get a bit stuck is because there is a conflict between the strategy we’d like to have and the strategy which is realistic in relation to the outside and the funding bodies in particular.

Both members of the academic staff commented on the consequences of the enforced choice dimension. One tutor argued “those are things we can’t alter and I think that has to be an important part of strategy development in the college – things we can’t alter, externally imposed on us, we have to factor in”. The other tutor linked the enforced choice dimension to the command dimension by explaining that the “difficult operating environment” resulted in “changes coming from the top of the college”.

Two members of staff commented on the consequences of the planning dimension being scored lowest. One manager described this as “frightening” and argued, “maybe it’s about getting our faith back in that”. She concluded that the planning and cultural dimensions needed to “interact” and “you can’t plan if you don’t take the culture into account”. One tutor offered a way forward for strategy development based on the dimensions interacting, arguing “we have to be quite wary of that cultural impact, improve on planning, be conscious of enforced choice”.

Both the governors interviewed identified potential consequences of the cultural dimension. One governor argued “our cultural and historical background shows in our decision making”. He used an example of how the Governing Executive had ruled out privatisation of the catering service in the financial recovery plan because of the trade union ethos of that body.
2. Are there aspects of the college that make the process the way it is? In what ways do influences internal to the college promote the strategy development process in the form you describe?

All the staff interviewed highlighted the influence of the culture on the strategy development process and described aspects of the college's culture, especially in terms of staff behaviour. One member of support staff stated, "I think the culture, the behaviour and the attitudes have had a lot to do with shaping some of the strategic decisions". She went on to describe a culture amongst academic staff "where every decision no matter whether it was right or not was always challenged". One manager asserted that the culture arose from "the long history, the unique nature of the place and its size". She claimed the culture was "almost tangible" and was like "a family". The other manager described a culture "in which it seems to be okay not to want to change". The consequence, she argued, was "that makes it pretty difficult to move forward". One member of academic staff referred to the "ability and willingness of people to do things" as an internal influence. She also claimed the existence of "demarcation, that stops the culture of co-operation". The other member of academic staff argued that it was difficult to change behaviour, "unless you're going to send people off to psychologists or shoot them or sack them – we're probably too well established in a lot of our patterns to alter that". She went on to assert the importance of structure and management systems in bringing about change.

Most staff identified the influence of the decision-making and management structure on the strategy development process. One member of support staff highlighted the committee structure including the Governing Executive. Other staff identified the influence of the management and staff structure. One manager described how the structure had been "a flat hierarchy". The other manager claimed, "there is a resistance to the formal systems and structures which makes it quite difficult". She argued that the behaviour of staff was a more significant influence than the structure or systems. One member of academic staff emphasised the small size of the college in relation to the structure and the capacity to deliver the strategy. "There are not many full-time
academic staff. People are overworked and not willing to take on more”, she argued. This tutor highlighted the importance of delegation by management and asserted that failure to delegate “made for inefficiency and bad feeling”.

Some staff identified the influence of management systems on the strategy development process. There was a recognition that systems could arise through enforced choice. One member of support staff described the impact of the Individualised Student Records system and finance systems required by the LSC. One manager identified the influence of the quality assurance systems needed to comply with ALI and OUVS requirements. The other manager emphasised the importance of communication systems to inform staff about the decision-making process. She argued that perceptions about strategic planning could be partly the result of poor communication.

The governors interviewed identified the influences of culture and structure on the strategy development process. One governor described an aspect of the culture as “a democratic tradition and history of debate” amongst staff. “Staff have never been ones to accept decisions handed down from the top”, he argued. In relation to the structure this governor claimed, “We’ve never been a hierarchical organisation in the way that some colleges are”. The combined effect of this he argued had “a tendency to slow up strategic decision-making”.

3. What impact do influences external to the college have on the strategy development process?

Staff described the external influences as ‘huge’ and ‘vast’. All staff interviewed identified the nature of the education market as a key influence on the strategy development process. One manager argued that Ruskin had once had a ‘niche market’ but:

That has changed so dramatically and it’s absolutely the case that we’ve been squeezed all round – FE has gone into the adult market, HE has gone for adult students. There’s an access course in every college in the country and it changes all the time and they seem to be able to respond
to change more quickly ..... I'm not sure we have a niche market anymore, unless we can create one, but I don't think it's out there waiting for us to find it.

The other manager identified the influence of the funding bodies. She argued, "We're dependent upon external funders, as almost all of our income comes from external public funders". Both members of academic staff identified funding as a key influence. One linked it with government policy, arguing, "I think government policy and funding are key issues, they have a huge impact and we don't have a lot of control". The other tutor described the impact of LSC funding on the curriculum offer and the short course programme. One member of support staff linked the funding issue to the vision. She asserted:

You need somebody at the top that has got the vision, but that vision has got to fit within the constraints of the external forces, because the stakeholders are really our bread and butter – that's where the money comes from. So I do think they really do influence the strategy.

Most staff identified the influence of government policy on strategy. One manager described how the government's emphasis on skills, prioritising basic skills and qualifications at level 2, was impacting. She argued that this was "a huge intervention in our right to set our own priorities". This manager went on to claim that it was possible for Ruskin to influence political direction. However one member of academic staff took a different view, arguing, "We probably exaggerate our political influence I suspect, and generally educational institutions don't have control. We've got more because we're labour, but we don't have much control". The other member of academic staff described the impact of government policy on the curriculum, using the example of the social work degree, which had been introduced in response to the government's requirements on social workers' qualifications. She claimed that "much less develops from inside the college, more is imposed from outside".

Both managers identified the speed of change as an influence on strategy. One manager claimed that, "Ruskin has taken some hits from almost overnight
change, where it’s affected funding”. The other manager argued that, “we have been subjected to endless change and we’re a bit slow to respond”.

Two members of staff highlighted inspection as an influence on strategy, external to the college. A member of academic staff described the inspection process as “being driven to prove that we are doing what we always have done, but proving it in a very bureaucratic way with form filling”. A manager described the combined impact of the ALI and the LSC on staff – “people do feel pushed about”. She went on to assert that “the whole college was brought to its knees by external decisions”, with reference to the failed ALI inspection and LSC review. One member of academic staff identified ‘partnerships’ as a more positive influence. She argued that, “working in partnership with other organisations helps strategically”. But the general view of staff was perhaps best summarised by a manager who identified the influence of, “very, very strong external forces, not to be underestimated, they can close the college”.

The governors interviewed described the external influences as ‘increasing’. Both governors identified the nature of the education market as a key influence. One governor described the “vast opportunities for adult education in local colleges”. He went on to link government policy and the funding and inspection bodies, arguing, “we’re constantly scrutinised and subject to legislative requirements”. In relation to regulation and funding he claimed, “We were far more free under the era of Margaret Thatcher – our funding was much easier to obtain and we had a much easier regulatory regime than we have today”.

The views of governors on the combined impact of the external influences was perhaps best summarised by a governor who argued that “what goes on out there is crucial to our survival”. So staff and governors were agreed about the potential power of external influences to determine whether there was a future strategy as well as the influencing the nature of that strategy.
4. What does such a profile suggest about your role within the strategy development process? Are there certain individuals or activities that are more effective than others in gaining influence over strategic direction?

All the staff interviewed thought they had some role in the strategy development process, although the role varied according to the dimension favoured. The manager who scored the cultural dimension highest of the six dimensions argued that this meant she would “have to work by influence rather than control”. The other manager, who scored the enforced choice dimension highest and the cultural dimension second highest, answered:

I don’t actually see my role as being first and foremost strategic. I don’t think I’m responsible for the strategic development, but I do think, because we’re a small college, everybody’s important in that respect.

The member of support staff who scored the enforced choice dimension highest claimed, “I’m constrained by the external factors around us – you’ve got to take those into account, because otherwise there’s going to be no strategic planning and you’re not going to go anywhere”. The member of support staff who scored the cultural dimension highest argued, “We all have a role because we’re such a small college and we all hold Ruskin dear to our hearts”. The member of academic staff who scored the cultural dimension highest, claimed that the power of the culture could overwhelm an individual’s power within the strategy development process. The member of staff who scored the command dimension highest argued, “My involvement in making strategic decisions should be greater than it is and then I’d be more productive”.

In answer to the question about whether there are certain individuals or activities that are more effective than others in gaining influence over strategic direction, most staff identified the Principal, the senior management team or senior staff. Two staff identified the Governing Executive, including one member of support staff who narrowed it to, “people on Governing Executive who have got the links to key government people and to key people in the education sector”. Another member of support staff argued that particular
groups of staff, particularly the academic staff, have more influence over strategic direction than others. Two staff identified activities that influence strategic direction. A manager identified "partnerships with trade unions" as one such activity arguing, "It is those links and those partnerships where the direction of the college has moved and changed and they make us bigger than we are". A member of academic staff identified, "activities that bring in funding" as influencing strategic direction. However she argued that this "impacts on other strategic developments which might benefit the future".

The governors interviewed described their own role within the strategy development process from a cultural perspective. One governor argued this role was "done within the traditions of the college". They described the role as working with the various internal stakeholders. One claimed this was "a collective, consultative approach to strategy". The other governor claimed part of the role was "to keep close contact with stakeholders". Both governors described the role of the Governing Executive in relation to the Principal in similar terms. One described the role as "candid friend" in giving advice. The other argued the role was "to challenge command, but also to be supportive". The role of the Governing Executive in strategic management is discussed further in a later section. Neither of the governors mentioned the planning dimension in their answers to this question. The planning dimension is discussed further in the next section.

What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?

The findings on this research question came from analysis of the strategy development questionnaire and the interviews with staff and governors, as well as from documentary analysis.

The average scores for the planning dimension for the staff who completed the strategy development questionnaire were as follows:

- All staff: 0.97
- Academic and related staff: -1.05
- Support staff: 3.67
On average staff gave the planning dimension the lowest score of all six dimensions. Within the staff groups academic and related staff and support staff on average also gave the planning dimension the lowest score. This finding corresponds with the survey of public sector managers, where managers gave planning an average score of 3.92, the lowest of the six dimensions (Collier et al, 2001). The conclusion in relation to the findings of the survey of public sector managers can be applied to the findings from the questionnaire about Ruskin staff's experience of strategic planning:

Not only in the public sector, but in many private sector organisations, there have been traditions of equating strategy development and strategic planning. However, it needs to be recognised that formal planning mechanisms are not necessarily – perhaps not the most effective way – in which strategies develop (Mintzberg et al, 1998). Strategic management is concerned with managing the long-term development of the organisation to meet the pressure of the changing environment and the needs and expectations of stakeholders. Our analysis suggests that managers seek to undertake this in different ways according to their different organisational objectives and their different contexts. Planning may, indeed, provide a useful means of developing strategy; but there are other means too.

(Collier et al, 2001, p.30)

The findings seem to suggest that Ruskin staff believe strategic planning has been the least useful means of developing strategy.

The average score for the planning dimension for the governors who completed the strategy development questionnaire was 2.19. On average governors gave the planning dimension the second lowest score of all six dimensions. It is not surprising that governors rate planning higher than staff rate it, given the role of the governors which is discussed in the section "What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?" However, given their role it is perhaps surprising that governors did not rate planning higher. The findings
seem to suggest that Ruskin governors believe strategic planning has been one of the least useful means of developing strategy.

The findings from the interviews with staff were that staff thought the college has had a mainly negative experience of strategic planning. One manager described the experience of the college in carrying out strategic planning as “dreadful, awful”. Both members of academic staff said that the college had not done very much strategic planning. One member of the support staff described an incomplete process:

I think there was a point where, yes, the plans were done, the plans were beautifully done, but I don’t think they were always followed up. So sometimes the plans weren’t implemented and things moved on and the plans had to be reassessed and done again.

Both members of academic staff identified the difficulty of planning in a turbulent environment. One said “the goalposts are being moved all the time” and the plans were therefore “reactive”. The other said that the college was “fire fighting” as a result of enforced change, which had resulted in “short-term” planning.

Academic staff identified one positive experience of strategic planning, which was curriculum development. One described this as “making the best of things”. However the other considered curriculum development as being under-resourced as “the amount of strategic planning hasn’t built up to support this”. Neither of the managers mentioned curriculum development. One member of the support staff considered strategic planning to have improved as a result of the influence of external bodies such as the inspectorate and the Open University Validation Service.

All staff but one related strategic planning to the property strategy. One member of academic staff claimed that if the college had been doing more strategic planning, “we wouldn’t have had the fiasco of the property strategy”. One manager described the property strategy as “having a bad history” with a
"bad karma", whilst admitting that it was "still the hardest thing to solve" and "the biggest single question". This answer of the other manager to the question about strategic planning concentrated mainly on the experience of the property strategy. However the manager claimed the experience had wider, positive implications in terms of strategic planning and strategic management:

I think we've actually learnt some things ...... the notion of the property, the need to have joined up thinking, to know where the curriculum is going, what kind of size this college is going to be .... I think we've learnt that we can't wipe out the history of the college, because it's possibly one of the most important things we've got .... we've got to drag our history along with us and probably consolidate what we've got, probably carry on doing some of the things we do. Inventing a brand new college is probably not possible and maybe that's the best thing we've learnt from that bit of strategic planning.

One member of the support staff agreed that "the college has learnt and is still learning and still moving forward with the plans". So although staff were mainly negative about their experience of the strategic planning process, mainly due to the property strategy experience, there was clearly some belief in strategic planning as a process which could be used in the future.

The findings from the interviews with governors were that they were less negative about their experience of strategic planning. One governor said "I don't think we should be too unkind to ourselves about this". He gave the example of the recovery plan, produced in response to the LSC's review of financial management and governance in October 2003, and claimed this to be "a coherent recovery strategy". This governor described the process of producing the plan, having it approved by the Governing Executive, implementing and monitoring it. He argued "Look how far we've progressed on that". It is interesting to note that this governor had scored the planning dimension the lowest in the strategy development questionnaire, although it still had the positive score of 2. Again it is not surprising that governors were more
positive about strategic planning than staff, given their role which is discussed in the section "What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?"

The findings from documentary analysis of secondary documents came from two FEFC inspection reports (FEFC, 1997b; FEFC, 2001a), an ALI inspection report (ALI, 2003), an ALI re-inspection report (ALI, 2004) and an LSC report on financial management and governance frameworks (LSC, 2003). All these reports commented on strategic planning in the college. In 1997 FEFC inspectors reported that:

The college’s strategic plan includes seven strategic aims derived from the college’s mission. The plan has been reviewed recently and the outcomes reported to governors. The strategic aims form the basis of the current annual operating statement. However, the operating statement does not include dates by which specific tasks are to be completed or resource implications. The means by which objectives will be achieved are not clearly identified.

(FEFC, 1997b, p.6)

In the conclusion to the report the inspectors recommended eight action points “to improve the quality of its provision”, including "identify more clearly the processes by which strategic objectives will be achieved” (FEFC, 1997b, p.19).

In 2001 inspectors identified “good consultation with and involvement of staff in effective strategic planning” (FEFC, 2001a, p.15) as a key strength of the management of the college. Commenting on managers, they found, “They are clear about the priorities for the college and these are expressed in the detailed strategic plan and annual operating statements. Objectives are referenced to the accountable managers and have relevant timescales” (FEFC, 2001a, p.15). Commenting on staff, inspectors found:

Staff are closely involved in discussing and developing the strategic plan. There are full staff meetings each term and questionnaires are used to
collect views about important decisions. Recently, there has been a poor response to one such questionnaire.

(FEFC, 2001a, p.15)

The questionnaire referred to by inspectors was about the property strategy. The property strategy was referred to in the LSC review of financial management and governance in October 2003:

The previous review of financial management in November 2000 resulted in grades of adequate for financial management and good for governance. The report also identified future financial pressures due to convergence of funding and the College operating from two sites. Convergence has taken place over two years and the collapse of the proposed move to a new site in Woodstock Road has significantly increased the financial pressure on the College.

(LSC, 2003, p.3)

Despite finding financial management to be inadequate, the LSC reviewers commented that “financial planning is integrated with the college’s strategic planning process” (LSC, 2003, p.3). The ALI report of the inspection undertaken in October 2003, at the same time as the LSC review, comments that:

The governing executive receives appropriate planning documents, including three-yearly strategic plans, annual operating statements and development plans. However, the governing executive does not receive regular progress or monitoring reports, or evaluations of the outcomes of these plans.

(ALI, 2003, p.16)

The report also contains a comment about strategic planning within one of the two programme areas inspected:
The leadership and management of community learning are weak. There is no strategic planning and development to support the recent substantial growth of this programme.

(ALI, 2003, p.23)

The re-inspection report produced following the ALI re-inspection of the college during the Autumn term 2004 comments that “the college is implementing clear financial management and governance action plans” (ALI, 2005, p.10). With regard to strategic planning, the report comments that “a revised college strategic plan, major property strategy and revised curriculum strategy are now in preparation” (ALI, 2005, p.10). The report does not comment on staff involvement in the preparation of the strategic plan.

How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?

The findings on this research question come from analysis of the strategy development questionnaire, the interviews with staff and governors, the observations of governing body meetings and documentary analysis. The average scores for the cultural dimension for the staff who completed the strategy development questionnaire were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Group</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All staff</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic and related staff</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support staff</td>
<td>7.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average staff gave the cultural dimension the second highest score of all six dimensions. Within the staff groups academic and related staff gave the cultural dimension the third highest score, while the support staff gave it the second highest score. So overall staff thought that the cultural aspects of the college, its history and the shared assumptions and beliefs of its’ members, have a strong influence on the process of strategy development. This finding might reflect the staff’s familiarity with the college and their recognition of the historical influences upon strategy development. The college has a low staff
turnover and many members of staff have long service. Arguably staff are embedded in the college’s history and are part of its traditional culture.

The finding that staff gave the cultural dimension the second highest score corresponds to some degree with the research findings of Collier et al (2001), where public sector managers gave it the third highest score and managers in other organisations gave it the second highest score. Collier et al’s (2001) findings were that the more ‘commercial’ the public sector organisation there was a lesser emphasis on the cultural dimension and that the cultural dimension was significantly weaker in those private sector activities characterised by commercial objectives. On the other hand within local government, which they considered “the archetype of the public sector” (Collier et al, 2001, p.29), they found more of an emphasis on the cultural dimension. They argue that the emphasis on professional norms and standards within local government services, with their roots in professions such as the social services, education and library services, might help account for the high cultural emphasis on strategy development. The professional norms and standards within Ruskin College, with their roots in teaching, library services and student support, might help explain the influence of the cultural dimension. However this does not explain the emphasis which support staff gave the cultural dimension. Perhaps the impact of organisational culture upon the strategy development process is perceived more by those staff who are more immediately involved in the work of the college at an operational level. Support staff are involved in the routines of the college that are delivering the strategy. Arguably support staff possess an insight about the nature of the college as everyday reality and understand that, changing that everyday reality is important in changing strategy.

The findings from the questionnaire appear to show that staff believe that strategy does not develop as a result of the use of analytical tools so much as drawing upon experience and attitudes, values and perceptions and taken – for – granted ways of doing things. As a result strategy development proceeds to a large degree in accordance with and within the confines of the college’s culture. Perhaps the context of strategic management shortly before the time staff completed the questionnaire, in particular the collapse of the property strategy
and the departure of the Principal, emphasised to staff the confines of the college's culture and the importance of the cultural dimension. Within this dimension new strategies outside of the frame of reference are likely to be resisted, so strategies reflect a future and direction which tend to perpetuate the organisation's history and routine ways of doing things. The property strategy was outside the frame of reference for many staff and in their view it sought to radically change the college's history and ways of doing things, so it was resisted. So arguably the context of strategic management has had an impact on the culture of the college and on the staff's recognition of the importance of the cultural dimension in the strategy development process.

The average score for the cultural dimension for the governors who completed the strategy development questionnaire was 7.56. On average governors gave the cultural dimension the highest score of all six dimensions. An interpretation of this finding is that governors perceived the cultural aspects of the college, its history and the shared assumptions and beliefs of its' members, to have the strongest influence on the strategy development process. The twelve 'ordinary' members of the Governing Executive are nominated by trade unions and other labour movement organisations, as well as organisations whose work influences the college. Arguably governors are embedded in the college's history and are part of its traditional culture as much as the staff.

The findings from the interviews with staff were that they thought the culture of the college made a significant contribution to strategic management. Staff recognised that there were positive and negative contributions however. One member of academic staff argued, "It potentially plays a massive, massive role – some positive, some negative". The other member of academic staff agreed, "I think it's got to, unlike in other places where it hasn't got to, because unless we're different we won't exist". One member of support staff stated, "I think the culture, the behaviour and the attitudes have had a lot to do with shaping some of the strategic decisions". One manager described the culture as "more in tune with reacting to uncertainty, of being able to manage uncertainty".

Staff recognised that the culture was not static. One member of academic staff argued that "the culture has changed because the trade union world has
changed". The other member of academic staff claimed that new staff were having an impact on culture. A member of support staff agreed that the culture was changing. One manager felt that the culture was "slightly out of sync" with the educational environment. The other manager described aspects of the culture - "teamwork, participative styles", and related it to the aspect of the mission she described as 'democratisation'. She went on to argue that a possible reason the college had not been successful in its strategy was that the culture had not been carried through in the style of strategic management.

Most staff identified positive aspects of the culture and their impact. One member of support staff stated, "I think it's quite good that everybody is aware, that there's good communication and that people are aware of what's actually happening". One member of academic staff argued that support amongst staff for the college's ethos was "why people will go the extra mile". Most staff also identified the negative influences of the culture and how this could inhibit strategic management. A member of support staff gave an example of this:

I think there were times when, because of the culture maybe, the open discussion and everything else, things perhaps have moved more slowly than they should have done. So you've lost time and things have moved on and changed, so you're then having to re-assess where you are and, if you like, do more strategic planning.

One member of academic staff identified "resistance to change" as a negative influence.

Most staff identified the existence of sub-cultures. Some staff related the negative influences of culture to the existence of sub-cultures. One member of academic staff identified a 'subversive' sub-culture which resisted or opposed change. She went on to identify other sub-cultures relating to the curriculum, in particular the divide between 'academic' and 'vocational' courses, the sites and the different categories of staff. However she qualified this by claiming, "But there's more unanimity here than in other places I've worked". The other member of academic staff identified similar sub-cultures related to the
curriculum - "social work, trade union studies, academic courses and adult education". She argued that the existence of these sub-cultures "means that cross-college initiatives are very, very hard to float". A member of support staff described the academic staff sub-culture as "challenging" and that of the support staff as "a culture of working through, maybe looking for solutions". One manager supported the notion of the existence of sub-cultures within staff groups and argued that, "There are different frames of reference, there are different priorities, there's a different sense of what matters .... though we don't have a lot of overt conflict". Despite these different sub-cultures this manager identified 'shared values' underpinning the overall culture:

I think everybody believes in education. So at a sort of big picture level, I think it is shared. But I think some people have to deal with big issues more on the ground and others can kind of gloss over them and escape a bit.

The findings from the interviews with governors were they also thought the culture of the college made a significant contribution to strategic management. Governors also recognised the positive and negative contributions. One governor commented, "It can sometimes be a drag on strategic management, simply because some governors have a 'golden age' view of the college". He described some governors' desire "to take Ruskin back to the great days of the 40's to the 70's, when Ruskin was the Eton of the labour movement". He argued that there was a consequence from this view of the 'cultural past':

Sometimes it can make it difficult to say, "That's never going to return. So how do we shape the new vision, new strategy for the college in the new era, when we have external government pressure and lots of competition from other educational institutions?"

It is interesting to note that this governor had scored the cultural dimension the highest in the strategy development questionnaire, with a positive score of 15 out of a maximum score of 18. The findings from the interview supported this
governor's view of the importance of the cultural dimension to strategic management.

The observations of governing body meetings recorded the behaviour of governors. Since Beare et al (1989) claim that culture is partly symbolised behaviourally, the observation data provides information about the college's culture. This implies that Ruskin College has a monoculture, so perhaps the data might provide information about only a sub-culture of the college. However there were three staff governors present at both meetings, providing links with other sub-cultures. Indeed the staff governors arguably link to two sub-cultures based on staff groups (academic and support staff) and two sub-cultures based on academic disciplines. There was no indication in the observations of these sub-cultures coming into conflict.

The observations provided rich data about a ritual, in that they indicated "what is highly valued and what is of less value, what are the dominant concerns and what are marginal" (Turner, 1990, p.6). The data supports the FEFC inspectors' views in 2001 that "governors are committed to the college and its mission, and work to maintain its role as a strategic partner for the trades union and labour movement" (FEFC, 2001, p.14). This may not be surprising given the composition of the governing body.

The observations illustrated the claim that "culture is an important dimension of the context within which strategy operates" (Bush, 1998, p.43). The governing body oversees the college's strategic direction. The observation records show that governors spent most time discussing strategic issues. There was no sign in the observations that the culture was acting as a "break" on strategic change (Schein, 1997).

The buildings and rooms in which the governing body meetings took place might be reflections of its sub-culture and the overall culture of the college. The first observation was of a meeting held in the Raphael Samuel hall (at the city centre site), named after the late socialist historian following his death in 1996. Perhaps Raphael Samuel is an example of the heroes and heroines whose
achievements embodied the college's values and beliefs. These achievements were not only founding the "History Workshop" movement (Pollins, 1984, p.53), but also long service to the college, having been a tutor for over 30 years. The second observation took place in a meeting room in the headquarters of the Public and Commercial Services Union in London, a major public sector trades union. This reflects the trades union and labour movement sub-culture of the governing body and the culture of the college.

Documentary analysis provided considerable information about the culture of the college and its strategic management context. The primary sources were the strategic plan 2000-03 and its textual update, the annual report for 2000/01, the self-assessment reports for 2000/01 and 2002/03 and publicity leaflets for 2001/02. These documents were analysed for conceptual symbols of culture, for example, through the expression of organisational aims (Beare et al, 1989), and for ways in which culture and strategy might relate.

The strategy document produced by the then Principal and adopted by the governing body in April 1998 "offers a draft mission, vision and strategy for Ruskin and a set of organisational and individual values to sustain that strategic direction" (Ruskin College, 1998, p.1). So the strategy formation process was being linked to organisational values. However the values which the Principal identified – inclusivity, intellectual generosity and self-criticality – were arguably his interpretation of organisational values. There is no reference to an audit of culture (Lewis, 1996; Schein, 1999). The absence of an audit supports Lewis's (1996, p.16) conclusion that "managers are no longer concerned about the kind of culture they have, but only about the kind of culture they want to have". Arguably the document was an attempt to change cultural assumptions. It argues that values "need to be accepted and pursued by all individuals connected with Ruskin. Governors, staff, students and partners – educational, union, voluntary organisations – with whom we work need to recognise and accept that these values are our aspiration" (Ruskin College, 1998, p.2). So the document could be described as an attempt to modify culture "through espousing and communicating a vision based on clearly articulated values" (Bush and Coleman, 2000, p.43).
There is evidence that the culture of the college did not act as a "brake" on strategic change (Schein, 1997). The planned growth in student numbers set out in the strategy document was achieved, as recorded in the annual report for 2000/01 (Ruskin College, 2001a) and the strategic plan annual update (Ruskin College, 2001b). However these documents do not show whether the strategy came about through strategic planning or whether it was emergent as well (Mintberg et al, 1998), and, if so, how far the culture contributed to the emergent strategy.

The documents referred to so far were written by members of the senior management team. It could be argued that they reflect the SMT sub-culture rather than the college's culture (Wallace and Hall, 1994). The language used in documents written by other staff might perhaps better reflect the overall culture. A publicity leaflet about short residential courses available in 2001/02, written by the course co-ordinator, describes them as "relaxed, confidence-building, informative and participative" (Ruskin College, 2001c, p.1). Another publicity leaflet, for part-time, return-to-learn courses, written by a different course co-ordinator, encourages people to "join our friendly and supportive community of mature students today" (Ruskin College, 2001d, p.7). The language used in these leaflets could be said to reflect the values of inclusivity and intellectual generosity which the Principal claimed in the strategy document (Ruskin College, 1998). He had claimed that "Ruskin has relied on the intellectual generosity of its staff and its students to help and support others" (ibid, p.2). However none of the primary documents analysed can be said to reflect the influence of students on organisational culture which this implies.

There was evidence from the secondary documents analysed of ways in which students could reflect culture and influence both culture and strategy. In 2001 the FEFC inspectors found that:

Students state that their involvement in decision-making bodies is an important part of their experience at Ruskin College. The college seeks the views of students through their representation on boards and
committees and through surveys. Questionnaires are supplemented by structured group discussions.

(FEFC, 2001a, p.12)

However the language of the minutes of committee meetings might not reflect the students' influence on culture, since the authors are members of staff.

FEFC inspectors also found evidence in the college's self-assessment report for 2000/01 (Ruskin College, 2000b) of the "self-criticality" which the Principal had identified as one of the core values. The self-assessment report was "thorough and detailed" in which "judgements were evaluative and self-critical" (FEFC, 2001a, p.13). The process for the production of this report provided opportunities for students and staff to reflect their sub-cultures in the expression of organisational strengths and weaknesses: "Most staff contributed to its production through cross-college working groups, and were able to comment on and approve drafts through membership of committees. Students and governors were also involved" (FEFC, 2001a, p.13). So that self-assessment report might reflect the college's culture more accurately than other documents written by the SMT or individual members of staff. The report contained a development plan which was incorporated in the strategic plan textual update (Ruskin College, 2001b), thus providing a further contribution of culture to strategy.

In contrast ALI inspectors in 2003 found little evidence of self-criticality or inclusiveness in the production of the self-assessment report for 2002/03:

The self-assessment report is not thorough enough. Although inspectors' judgements matched some strengths and weaknesses in the reports, inspectors considered that many of the strengths identified in the report were statements of satisfactory performance. Part-time staff who teach adult and community learning courses and trade union studies are not sufficiently aware of, and have insufficient involvement in, the college's self-assessment report.

(ALI, 2003, p.18)
Perhaps this is evidence that the organisational values set out by the then Principal in 1998 were his interpretation of the college’s values rather than the college’s actual values.

The national press articles in 2003 and 2004 about Ruskin made reference to culture, ethos and values. An article on the front page of the Higher section of the Guardian Education in September 2003, about the recruitment process for a new Principal, commented ‘So who is the right person for the job? “Above all we don’t want someone from New Labour”, smiled an insider. “This time we want a real socialist”.’ An FE Focus article in the TES in February 2004 commented on the values of the new Principal:

She is, she says, a socialist – feminist. “I am not frightened of the ‘S’ word”, says the woman who is currently professor of social work at Warwick University. “And I’m not frightened of the ‘F’ word. I try to live by both these principles”.

(Midgley, 2004, p.7)

An article in the Guardian Education in March 2004 commented on the new Principal in relation to Ruskin’s ethos:

She is a heavyweight academic: a member of the Academy of the Social Sciences, she has served on social policy and social work panels for the 2001 research assessment exercise and her research at Durham and Warwick – particularly on the impact of domestic violence on children and the rights of birth relatives post-adoption – has been influential on government policy and chimes neatly with Ruskin’s ethos.


What is the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management?

The findings on this research question came from documentary analysis and analysis of the interviews with staff and governors.
The findings from documentary analysis arise in particular from a strategy document produced by the then Principal in spring 1998, following taking up his appointment in February 1998. This strategy was adopted by the governing body in April 1998 and formed the basis of the strategic plan for 2000-03. The document "offers a draft mission, vision and strategy for Ruskin and a set of organisational and individual values to sustain that strategic direction" (Ruskin College, 1998, p.1). The mission of the college is stated as:

Providing educational opportunities to the excluded and to the disadvantaged, to transform the individuals concerned and the communities, groups and societies from which they come. Ruskin College believes that education is a powerful vehicle for progressive social change, particularly when it enhances the capacity, confidence and self-belief of the less confident.

(Ruskin College, 1998, p.1)

The document goes on to set out a vision that:

Ruskin College should be a significant national and international contributor to adult education and to the development of progressive social movements…. Ruskin will provide opportunities for individual students and support and develop progressive social and economic policies that lead to important social change. Ruskin will take advantage of the latest technology to work nationally and internationally.

(Ruskin College, 1998, p.1)

The Principal argued that “to achieve this vision Ruskin will be more flexible and more responsive” (Ruskin College, 1998, p.1), working in partnership with trade unions, voluntary groups and other educational providers.

The strategy document was an attempt to modify strategic direction requiring "changes in the numbers and composition of students and in what we teach and in how we teach it…..the most visible form of these changes will be in terms of student numbers" (Ruskin College, 1998, p.3). The college’s annual report for
2000/01 records that the governing body "approved a new strategic plan for 2000-03 in July 2000" which "incorporates growth in the number of part-time and short course students" (Ruskin College, 2001a, p.1). It goes on to report an increase of 34% in part-time and short course student numbers in 2000/01 (ibid, p.2). The strategic plan textual update, approved at a governing body meeting in July 2001, gives details of the planned growth in student numbers in 2001/02 and 2002/03 (Ruskin College, 2001b). These documents demonstrate that the strategy adopted in 1998 received the active support of staff and governors and has been implemented. However, these primary documents do not demonstrate how far the mission and the vision have been supported by staff and governors and how far they have been achieved.

In 2001 FEFC inspectors claimed that "governors are committed to the college and its mission and work to maintain its role as a strategic partner for the trades union and labour movement" (FEFC, 2001a, p.14) and that the mission "is well understood by staff and students" (ibid, p.15). Their findings arose from interviews with governors, staff and students. In 2003 the ALI inspectors referred to the mission:

> The current mission of the college is to continue to provide educational opportunities to the excluded and the disadvantaged, and through education, transform their lives. The college has a long history of contributing to lifelong learning, widening participation and social inclusion.

(ALI, 2003, p.1)

They made no reference to the views of governors, staff or students on the mission, so it appears unlikely that such views were sought in the interviews they conducted. Neither the FEFC inspectors nor the ALI inspectors made any specific reference in their reports to the vision statement, although the references to lifelong learning, widening participation and social inclusion are possibly acknowledging the current as well as the past vision.
The findings from the interviews with staff were that nearly all those staff could describe the college's vision, mission and strategic management and to some extent could recognise the relationship between them. Staff agreed that there was a clear mission. One manager stated, "Unless you re-write your mission it's something you inherit, routed in the history and the essence of the organisation". One member of support staff described the mission as "what the college is all about". A manager described the mission statement as "a wonderfully succinct expression of two interacting core tasks and values". Another manager did not differentiate between mission and vision. Both members of academic staff agreed there was a mission, but one identified "constraints that the government keeps imposing". One member of support staff agreed there were "external constraints". One manager identified some internal constraints:

I think there are constraints and limitations about the reality which are not reflected in the mission and the vision, which is a more idealised picture. If you're thinking about how you manage strategically I think you have to take into account the realities of the people you've got, the numbers of staff you've got. In a way, the strategic thinking has to be bottom up really, especially in a small place.

There were a variety of definitions of vision. One manager described vision as "translating the mission into the future". Both academic staff considered there were 'visions' rather than a single vision. One explained this by commenting, "vision is important to everybody in the college – unusually important". The other member of academic staff claimed that there were "lots of visions which have just gone – disappeared". A member of support staff argued "you've got to have someone who's got vision, who's got ideas, who can see what might work, what might not work, whether that fits again within the external constraints". The question of staff ownership of the vision was raised by a manager who referred to "the extent to which staff see themselves as part of that vision".
The link between mission, vision and strategic management was summarised by a manager as “mission is who we are, vision is where we want to get to and strategy is how we get there”. A member of support staff described it differently, “you’ve got to have a vision to move forward, you’ve got to have the strategic plans to take the vision forward and both have got to be in line with the mission”. One member of academic staff claimed there was a “dotted line” to strategic management from mission and vision. She claimed that there were some good examples in curriculum development where mission, vision and strategic management had been linked together. However she claimed there were other examples of “an absence of strategic management”. Another member of academic staff described how the mission “feeds through to strategic management”. She felt that it was possible to “work around” the constraints of the mission; “if people feel able to talk about how to do this creatively then that can help in planning the future”. So as well as commenting on the link between vision, mission and strategic management, staff offered comments on aspects of strategic management, including strategic thinking, strategic conversations and strategic planning, as ways of achieving the vision and mission.

The findings from the interviews with governors were that they could describe the college’s vision and mission and the relationship between them and strategic management. The governors emphasised the college’s vision and mission in terms of its history and its ‘constituency’. One governor claimed that “the constituency from which it draws its students may have changed fundamentally” but the vision remained the same. He identified two key areas within the vision – “the highest quality education” and “the link with the labour movement”. He went on to claim there was “still a huge section of society who missed out on higher education” for whom the college offered opportunities. For this governor the role of the governing body and management was “to develop a strategy to draw those people in”. The role of the Governing Executive in strategic management is discussed further in the next section.
What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?

The findings on this research question come from analysis of the two strategy and mission questionnaires, interviews with staff and governors, observations of two governing body meetings and documentary analysis.

The findings from the questionnaire on 'strategy and mission' completed by ten members of the Governing Executive in July 2002 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Governing Body:</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Somewhat Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Is satisfied that the College Mission Statement clearly reflects the core purpose and principal role of the College.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Understands the significance and importance of educational character and ethos, in the context of the College and its constituency.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Has developed a strategic vision for the future of the College.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Has established a system for its continuing participation in the strategic planning process</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Ensures that the Strategic Plan contains clear targets for the College and its Senior Managers to achieve.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Has a systematic procedure and agreed timetable for monitoring implementation of the Strategic Plan.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Receives adequate information and data to inform the planning process especially in terms of:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* College Student Profile</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Score 1</td>
<td>Score 2</td>
<td>Score 3</td>
<td>Score 4</td>
<td>Score 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative levels of performance for groups of similar colleges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial viability</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation strategy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Assurance and Raising Standards</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Analysis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Strategy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.8 Has considered the implications for the College of the:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implication</th>
<th>Score 1</th>
<th>Score 2</th>
<th>Score 3</th>
<th>Score 4</th>
<th>Score 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Skills Council</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Learning and Skills Council</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Learning partnerships</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Development Agency</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a member of the Governing Body:</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Somewhat Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Very Dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 I understand my responsibility for determining and monitoring the mission, ethos, educational character and strategy of the College.</td>
<td>8 2 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 I have confidence in my knowledge and awareness of the College’s activities and services.</td>
<td>7 3 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11 I keep up to date with trends and important developments in post 16 education and training.</td>
<td>3 4 2 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am provided with:</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Somewhat Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.12 Evidence of local community and industry needs to support strategic proposals.</td>
<td>0 5 4 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13 Adequate and updated information to ensure my understanding of key terms, bodies and organisations.</td>
<td>2 5 2 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall there was a high level of understanding and satisfaction in particular about the governing body in relation to strategy and mission. All governors who completed the questionnaire were either very satisfied or satisfied that the governing body is satisfied that the college mission statement clearly reflects the core purpose and principal role of the college. They were all either very satisfied or satisfied that the governing body understands the significance and importance of educational character and ethos in the context of the college and its constituency. As individual members of the governing body they were very satisfied or satisfied that they understand their responsibility for determining and monitoring the mission, ethos, educational character and strategy of the college. As individuals they were satisfied that they were confident in their knowledge and awareness of the college's activities and services.

With regard to strategic planning governors were either very satisfied or satisfied that the governing body has established a system for its continuing participation in the strategic planning process and has a systematic procedure and agreed timetable for monitoring implementation of the strategic plan. However there were some governors who were undecided or somewhat dissatisfied as to whether the governing body receives adequate information and data to inform the strategic planning process. This was especially in terms of college student profile, student achievement, comparative levels of performance for groups of similar colleges, human resource management and needs analysis. Some governors were undecided or somewhat dissatisfied as to whether the governing body has considered the implications for the college of organisations in the external environment i.e. the Learning and Skills Council, local learning partnerships and the Regional Development Agency. Two governors were undecided whether as individual members of the governing body they keep up to date with trends and important developments in post-16 education and training. Similarly four governors were undecided as to whether they are provided with evidence of local community and industry needs to support strategic proposals. Two governors were undecided about whether they are provided with adequate and updated information to ensure their understanding of key terms, bodies and organisations.
The findings from the questionnaire on 'strategy and mission' completed by ten members of the Governing Executive in July 2004 were as follows:

### Strategy and mission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The governing body:</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has a college mission statement, which reflects the core purpose of the college.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has developed a strategic vision for the future of the college in conjunction with the local LSC.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews the mission statement annually as part of the strategic planning process.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensures that the strategic plan contains clear targets for the college and its senior managers.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a systematic procedure for monitoring implementation of the strategic plan.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### As a member of the governing body:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand my responsibility for determining and monitoring the mission, ethos, educational character and strategy of the college.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have confidence in my knowledge and awareness of the college's activities and services.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The governing body is provided with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of local community and industry needs to support strategic proposals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate information and data to inform the planning process, especially in terms of:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• college student profile</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• enrolment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• retention</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarking of college performance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial viability</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation strategy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality assurance and raising standards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing strategy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a lower level of satisfaction about the governing body in relation to strategy and mission than found in July 2002. All governors who completed the questionnaire were either very satisfied or satisfied that the governing body has a college mission statement which reflects the core purpose of the college. Although they were all either very satisfied or satisfied that the governing body has developed a strategic vision for the future of the college in conjunction with the local LSC, the number of very satisfied had decreased from seven to three. Most governors were very satisfied or satisfied that the governing body reviews the mission statement annually as part of the strategic planning process but two were somewhat dissatisfied. Eight of the ten governors were either very satisfied or satisfied that the governing body ensures that the strategic plan contains clear targets for the college and its senior managers, but two were somewhat dissatisfied, compared with none in July 2002. Six of the ten governors were either very satisfied or satisfied that the governing body has a systematic procedure for monitoring implementation of the strategic plan, but three were somewhat dissatisfied and one did not know. This question produced the most marked difference from the findings in July 2002, as the number of very satisfied decreased from five to two and the number of satisfied decreased from five to four.

As individual members of the governing body they were all very satisfied or satisfied that they understand their responsibility for determining and monitoring the mission, ethos, educational character and strategy of the college. However the number of very satisfied decreased from eight to five. As individuals nine
out of ten were either very satisfied or satisfied that they were confident in their knowledge and awareness of the college’s activities and services and one was somewhat dissatisfied.

There were some governors who were somewhat dissatisfied as to whether the governing body is provided with adequate information and data to inform the planning process. Although all governors were either very satisfied or satisfied with the information and data provided on college student profile, enrolment, retention and achievement, the number of governors somewhat dissatisfied with the information provided ranged from one for financial viability, two for benchmarking of college performance and quality assurance and raising standards, three for accommodation strategy, four for human resource management, five for needs analysis and six for marketing strategy. In comparison with July 2002 there were more governors who were somewhat dissatisfied with the information provided on benchmarking of college performance, financial viability, accommodation strategy, human resource management, quality assurance and raising standards, needs analysis and marketing strategy.

The increase in the number of governors who were somewhat dissatisfied about a systematic procedure for monitoring implementation of the strategic plan and those who were somewhat dissatisfied with some of the information and data provided to inform the planning process can be linked. Systematic monitoring of the implementation of the strategic plan would involve the governors being provided with adequate information. In between the two questionnaires being completed, the property strategy which had been agreed in April 2002 had fallen through. Perhaps these findings are evidence of the impact of the context of strategic management on the strategy development process. The collapse of the property strategy arguably affected the way some governors viewed the strategy development process.

One governor who was somewhat dissatisfied about adequate information and data to inform the planning process in terms of the accommodation strategy commented:
The main aim of the governing body should be to at the very least maintain quality and standards. The college has so far failed to achieve the policy on a single site college, until it does it will continue to make do with inadequate accommodation and inefficient learning facilities. It must work to become the most modern and effective learning centre for adults if it is to compete.

The findings from the interviews with staff were that staff had differing views about the role of the Governing Executive in strategic management. One manager stated that it had, “A major important role. You notice it most when it’s not there or when it’s being abused”. One member of support staff supported this:

The role of the Governing Executive is actually a key role in the strategic management of this college, because everything has to go through the Governing Executive. At the end of the day it’s the Governing Executive that actually makes the final decision. The Principal can only recommend.

One manager differentiated their role, “I think it isn’t the same as doing the day-to-day operational work. Their hands should be on the tiller”. This manager emphasised the role of the Governing Executive in the strategic financial management: “They have to take an overview, looking at the good of the college and the long-term future”.

Other staff, academic staff in particular, saw the role of the Governing Executive as supporting the Principal. One member of academic staff described them as “powerful endorsers of the command structure”. One manager agreed that “part of their role is to support the Principal and they’re not there to go into opposition”. Another member of academic staff argued that the role of the Governing Executive had changed since the property strategy episode:

There are identifiable differences now. Their role is now more properly to take cognisance of the fact that they are company directors and charity
trustees. It's to act in the interests of the organisation and be responsible. Therefore they should have an eye on what is strategic management and an input if they think it is failing and be broadly supportive of it.

There were a number of comments about the external nature of the Governing Executive. One member of academic staff stated she was struck by the "level of separation between the Governing Executive and the college" and felt "it would be good if members of the Governing Executive came into classrooms to talk to us". A member of support staff argued that this had changed:

There was a time when Governing Executive, I felt, was actually slightly distant from the college. But it's only in recent years that the governors have actually really now started to be pro-active and really actively take part in the working life of the college that Governing Executive now has a much better understanding of the decisions they're actually taking.

One manager argued in relation to the property strategy, that there were advantages to governors being external and having "slightly disinterested views, very sympathetic, to make sure it goes in the right direction".

There were some comments about the trade unionists on the Governing Executive and their influence on strategic management. One member of academic staff commented, "This is where culture really comes into play". Another member of academic staff commented, "There's something quite old-fashioned about it, set in its limited trade union ways". In contrast one manager argued that the "union university" proposal was "a good example where informed members of the Governing Executive can actually take a pro-active role". Another manager emphasised the need for the Governing Executive to be representative of the college in terms of "skills, our range of activities and interests, equality and diversity". This manager argued that "if the Governing Executive is skewed in one direction it may take skewed decisions" and gave the example of the 'union university' concept.
The findings from the interviews with governors was that they had a clear idea about the role of the Governing Executive in strategic management. However there was a recognition that their perception of the role had changed. One governor commented, "In recent times we have recognised that we have an important role". He emphasised the role in relation to strategic financial management and described the recognition of "the scale of the financial crisis". He argued,

The Governing Executive has powers under the constitution of the college and it was one of those times it needed to use them. You don’t always have the time to debate these things and carry them forward by consensus.

He commented in relation to perceptions of the Governing Executive that "staff see things as top down".

The findings from documentary analysis of secondary documents arose from two FEFC inspection reports (FEFC, 1997b; FEFC, 2001a) and an ALI inspection report (ALI, 2003) and an ALI re-inspection report (ALI, 2004). All four inspection reports commented on the role of the governing body in strategic management and show the development of that role. In 1997 FEFC inspectors reported that:

Governors and senior managers are aware of the need for clear strategic planning to address the challenges facing the college. The college’s strategic plan includes seven strategic aims derived from the college’s mission. The plan has been reviewed recently and the outcomes reported to governors. The strategic aims form the basis of the current annual operating statement. However, the operating statement does not include dates by which specific tasks are to be completed or resource implications. The means by which objectives will be achieved are not clearly identified.

(FEFC, 1997b, p.6)
In January 2001 FEFC inspectors reported that:

The roles and responsibilities of governors and managers are clear. This has improved since the last inspection and governors now spend more time dealing with matters of strategy and policy. Managers provide clear and useful papers to inform governors. Governors are offered options to consider and make decisions based on their good knowledge of the college.

(FEFC, 2001a, p.14)

Commenting on mission and strategic management the FEFC inspectors reported:

Governors are committed to the college and its mission, and work to maintain its role as a strategic partner for the trades union and labour movement. They are closely involved in setting the strategic direction of the college and have a good understanding of the strategic issues facing the college. They have supported proposals to widen the college’s curriculum and the move towards more part-time provision. Governors also have ensured that the residential character of the college has been maintained.

(FEFC, 2001a, p.14)

The ALI inspection report published in December 2003 commented on the effectiveness of target-setting within leadership and management:

Target-setting for recruitment, retention and achievement is effective. The college has accurately set and reported on the achievement of targets for the past five years. During this time there has been an eight-fold increase in learner numbers ....... The governing executive receives regular reports and pays particular attention to performance against these targets. The college has consistently met or exceeded the enrolment, retention and achievement targets.

(ALI, 2003, p.14)
Governors' monitoring of college performance is inadequate. The governing executive receives appropriate planning documents, including three-yearly strategic plans, annual operating statements and development plans. However, the governing executive does not receive regular progress or monitoring reports, or evaluations of the outcomes of these plans. The governing executive received a progress report on the college's current business plan at its meeting in July 2003. Governors evaluated their own performance in July 2002. The arrangements are not established sufficiently to ensure a regular cycle of monitoring activities.

(ALI, 2003, p.16)

A re-inspection progress report produced by the ALI lead inspector in June 2004 recorded some progress in relation to "incomplete monitoring arrangements":

There has been a thorough review of the annual timetable for the governing executive. Governors have been closely involved in current developments relating to financial management and property. A training day was held for the governing executive in January 2004, using an external facilitator.

(ALI, 2004, p.1)

The re-inspection report produced following the ALI re-inspection of the college during the Autumn term 2004 provides the latest commentary on the role of governors in strategic management:

The previous inspection found that monitoring arrangements by governors were incomplete. Since then, the annual timetable for the governing executive has been thoroughly reviewed, and a clear schedule has been defined to meet strategic objectives. New governors, including
one with specialist financial skills, have been appointed. Governors are closely involved in monitoring key strategic developments, especially concerning finances and property.

(ALI, 2004, p.10)

The ALI inspectors found "clear strategic leadership and direction" (ibid) within the college at this point and indicated the contribution the governors had made to this finding.

The first observation of a governing body meeting provided some rich data on its role in strategic management. The meeting, held in February 2004 in the Raphael Samuel Hall at the city centre site of the college, had a full agenda of fifteen items. The meeting started with formal governance business – the election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2004, apologies for absence, approval of the minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising from the minutes. The first main item was consideration of the post inspection action plan, written in response to the ALI inspection report (2003). The discussion of this item centred on the ALI inspectors' comments on the monitoring and review role of the governing body, which relates to evaluating and reviewing the effectiveness of strategic management. There was no dissent from the inspectors' perceived need for governors to carry out more performance monitoring. The meeting agreed that the annual timetable for Governing Executive business would be reviewed at its next normal meeting, in May 2004, so as to ensure that it received regular progress or monitoring reports on planning documents, including the strategic plan.

The second main item was on a key strategic issue for the college – developments in trade union education. There was no written report, but the item followed on from an item at the previous meeting in November 2003, recorded in the minutes as "the future of Ruskin College in relation to possible developments in trade union education". The previous meeting had agreed that a joint meeting between trade union education officers, relevant Ruskin staff and members of the Governing Executive would take place to discuss the issue and produce a report. At that previous meeting a member of the Governing
Executive had been asked to convene the joint meeting and to report back on progress at the next meeting. The item at the February 2004 meeting started with a verbal report from the member of Governing Executive who had convened the joint meeting. He reported that this joint meeting had involved a higher education institution and had discussed the educational and training needs of trade unions and the roles of Ruskin College and the higher education institution in future provision of trade union education. There was a concept emerging from the trade unions of a 'union university'. The verbal report and in particular the concept of a 'union university' led to a full discussion during which every governor spoke. Although there was no mention of 'mission' or 'strategy' it was clear from the discussion that the Governing Executive considered this to be a key strategic issue with which it wished to be engaged. The chair of the meeting summed up the discussion by describing the report of the joint meeting as 'extremely helpful' and urging that Ruskin must not be excluded or left behind in the emergence of the concept of a 'union university'. A further report was requested for the next meeting.

Much of the rest of the meeting was devoted to aspects of financial management and governance. There was a verbal report from the acting Principal on progress in drafting the recovery plan required by the Learning and Skills Council. As a result the Governing Executive agreed to hold a special meeting in March 2004 to consider the recovery plan. The meeting received minutes of two Finance Committee meetings, a financial report and a mid-year financial forecast. There was a progress report on an action plan in response to the LSC's review of financial management and governance. This was followed by reports on governance issues, including a report of a governor training day held in January 2004. Although observation of these items did not provide data about strategic management itself it did provide evidence of the relationship between strategic planning, financial planning and governance.

The second observation of a governing body meeting provided richer data on its role in strategic management. The meeting, held in March 2004 at the headquarters of the Public and Commercial Services Union in London, had an agenda with just two items. The first item was the recovery plan. The second
item was a discussion on the future of the college, led by the new Principal. The first item lasted thirty-five minutes while the second item lasted an hour and a half, almost three times as long.

The governors' discussion on the future of the college was clearly about the longer-term strategy. The new Principal opened the discussion by stating that she was looking for a longer-term steer by governors thinking beyond the recovery plan. She set out her vision for the college, although she did not use the words 'vision', 'mission' or 'strategy'. The vision was for Ruskin continuing to offer a blend of further and higher education and responding to the aspirations of students. This vision included Ruskin re-thinking the nature of social movements and thinking more broadly about the college's relationships with trade unions, community groups and activists within local communities. Although she did not use the word 'mission', the new Principal encouraged governors to re-think what was meant by the mission statement, including who were the marginalised and the excluded for whom the college should provide educational opportunities. The new Principal posed the question to governors, "what is the best Ruskin can be in the 21st century?"

All governors present at the meeting contributed to the debate on the future of the college. There was widespread agreement about the new Principal's vision for the college, which one governor described as 'visionary thinking'. Governors responded positively to the 'hybrid' model spanning further and higher education. One governor mentioned "the difficulties with being defined as FE", although he did not specify these difficulties. There was general agreement that Ruskin needed to be viewed as a national college rather than a regional or local one. Three of the governors, making the point about a national college, extended this to an international college. One governor indicated the need for a 'marketing strategy', defining 'customers' including individuals, trade unions, community groups and employers using a matrix to map them in relation to local, national and international markets. Although this governor used marketing language he suggested that the focus should be on the 'learners' rather than the 'product' and that the college should put learners' requirements first. One governor was concerned that the college was too small to be
"everything to all people" and he encouraged concentrating on the core business and ensuring quality. One staff governor stressed the need for 'a strategy' to develop this hybrid model and to position Ruskin in a local, national and international sense. This governor was the only one to use the term strategy, other than the governor who used it in the context of marketing. None of the governors referred to a strategic plan.

At the end of the discussion the chair of the meeting summed up. He highlighted the importance of "taking a step back and looking at the wider picture". This comment can be linked to a view of strategy as perspective, where "strategy looks in – inside the organisation, indeed, inside the heads of the strategists, but it also looks up – to the grand vision of the enterprise" (Mintzberg et al, 1998, p.14). Although the governors had not used the term 'vision' the meeting did actually discuss the grand vision of the enterprise. The chair's summing up did not use the term 'mission', but he described the historical and contemporary context of the college's mission from his perspective and knowledge of Ruskin over thirty-five years. The college was unique in the education market thirty-five years ago, he argued, but presently it was more difficult for adults to commit themselves to long-term residential education, despite the continuing existence of educational and social divisions. The chair then invited the new Principal to sum up on the future of the college. In doing so, she emphasised:-

- diversifying funding to maintain independence
- the college setting its own agenda
- quality issues: working to the highest possible standards
- focusing on learners
- a critical edge/radicalism

There was no explicit reference to 'strategic intents' but arguably this was a statement of the college's strategic intents from the new Principal's perspective. She expanded on the last point by mentioning 'democracy', 'participation' and 'radical networks'.

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152
Documentary analysis of the minutes of the meeting show a brief minute on this discussion; "Following the end of formal business there was a discussion on the future mission and direction of the college led by the Principal Designate" (Ruskin College, 2004b, p.2).

What is the relationship between quality and strategic management?

The findings on this research question come from documentary analysis and analysis of the interviews with staff and governors.

This section discusses data from documentary analysis of primary and secondary documents to illustrate quality issues at Ruskin College and how these link to the strategic management of the institution. The primary documents discussed are the quality assurance policy and procedures, the self-assessment reports 2000 and 2002, the annual report 2000/01, the strategy document 1998, the strategic plan textual update 2001/02, the annual operating statement, the inspection action plan and the curriculum development strategy.

The quality assurance policy and procedures document (Ruskin College, 2000a) does not contain a definition of quality. However the quality assurance framework that it contains is broken down into internal and external elements, which face inwards and outwards (Lumby, 2001). In the document the internal elements of the quality assurance framework incorporate:

a) the College Charter;
b) complaints procedures;
c) performance indicators and targets;
d) involvement of students in programme boards and committees;
e) qualitative evaluation and evaluation questionnaire;
f) student survey at the end of the academic year;
g) reports to programme boards and committees based on answers to evaluation questionnaires and results of student surveys;
h) service standards;
i) staff appraisal schemes;
j) teaching and learning observation;

k) self-assessment;

l) staff development policy and plan.

(Ruskin College, 2000a)

These internal elements tend to focus on 'customers' (Lumby, 2001; Stone, 1997) but also contain 'standards' and self-assessment (Stone, 1997).

The external elements of the framework incorporate

m) external examiners;

n) external advisers;

o) validation arrangements;

p) annual reports to the Open University Validation Service;

q) inspection and review arrangements;

r) internal audit arrangements.

(Ruskin College, 2000a)

These external elements are based mainly on "the professional judgement of educators" (Lumby, 2001, p.70) and professional assessment (Stone, 1997). However the framework does not describe how the internal and external elements are weighted or how they interact with each other. Nor is there any clue as to how any of these elements might bridge between the internal and the external in the way Stone (1997) suggests of self-assessment.

The title of the quality assurance policy and procedures document (Ruskin College, 2000a) appears to place the college on the quality management hierarchy (Dale and Plunkett, 1990; West-Burnham, 1997). There is no reference to 'total quality management' or to 'quality control' in this or any other of the documents analysed. There is a reference to 'inspection and review arrangements' within the quality assurance policy and procedures (Ruskin College, 2000a) and the annual report for 2000/01 (Ruskin College, 2001a) contains a section on the conclusions from the FEFC inspection in late 2000. However the latter reference is hardly surprising given the influence of the funding councils (Coleman, 1998), including on the format of annual reports.
The lack of reference to 'total quality management' in any of the documents appears to contradict the assertion that it is a management philosophy with which people in FE are familiar (FEFC, 1997a). If people within Ruskin College are familiar with TQM it is not reflected in the primary documents.

The quality assurance policy and procedures document (Ruskin College, 2000a) contains fifteen appendices and appears to place great emphasis on documented systems and procedures (Taylor and Hill, 1997). The quality assurance weaknesses which FEFC inspectors identified mainly related to incomplete or inadequate implementation of procedures – appraisal and evaluation of staff development (FEFC, 2001a). However the weakness relating to 'insufficient use of performance standards' (FEFC, 2001a, p.12) uses the language of TQM (Bottery, 2000). The text of the inspection report appears to interpret quality in managerialist terms (Bottery, 2000) by stating, "Managers make little use of performance standards" (FEFC, 2001a, p.13).

It is perhaps not surprising that the college uses 'quality assurance' in its processes of quality management, given its use by the FEFC in its planning and inspection frameworks (FEFC, 1992a; FEFC, 1997a). However the FEFC appeared occasionally to suggest the use of TQM (FEFC, 1997a), whilst not embracing the whole concept and it focus on internal quality location. The ALI/OFSTED (2001) inspection framework continues to use the concept of quality assurance despite the LSC’s move towards more internal quality location via annual self-assessment.

The quality assurance policy and procedures document (Ruskin College, 2000a) does not mention 'quality values' (Brennan and Shah, 2000). The document itself might be evidence of the existence of managerial quality values, since it has an institutional focus and is concerned with procedures and structures.

However the quality assurance framework also contains evidence of pedagogic quality values in the elements relating to teaching and learning observation and the staff development policy and plan. There is also evidence of academic
quality values especially in the external elements relating to external examiners and external advisers, whose focus is upon the subject field. The reference to performance indicators and targets within the quality assurance framework is evidence of employment-focused values. The annual report (Ruskin College, 2001a, p.2) contains a section on 'performance indicators' containing six main indicators, including change in student numbers, in-year retention rates, achievement rates and attainment of national targets. The report also contains a section on 'student destinations' (Ruskin College, 2001a, p.3), which is further evidence of the existence of employment-focused quality values. However the annual report is written to a format recommended by the LSC, so it could be the case that these values are being imposed by the LSC. The quality assurance policy and procedures document (Ruskin College, 2000a) suggests a combination of managerial, pedagogic, academic and employment-based values, but an emphasis on managerial values.

The strategy document (Ruskin College, 1998), which formed the basis of the college's strategic plan 2000-03, makes no reference to quality or to quality management. However it contains a section on the college's values and claims these to be 'inclusivity', 'intellectual generosity' and 'self-criticality' (ibid, p.3). The document asserts that "Ruskin traditionally has typified inclusivity rather than exclusivity as one of its key contributions to adult education. Accompanying that inclusivity Ruskin has relied on the intellectual generosity of its staff and its students to help and support others" (ibid, p.2). These values appear to relate to some of the values which Bottery (2000) claims underpin the notion of civic quality – care and equity in particular. Intellectual generosity might also relate to pedagogic quality values (Brennan and Shah, 2000). Self-criticality arguably can be seen to underpin quality management. The document argues that "Ruskin – to fulfil its mission – needs to demonstrate a level of self-criticality which ensures that it too goes on making not just a good contribution but a contribution which improves year by year" (Ruskin College, 1998, p.2). This seems to echo TQM, which "aims for continuous improvement" (Dale and Plunkett, 1990, p.4), although there is no reference to TQM in the strategy document.
The college's mission statement (Ruskin College, 1998) makes no reference to effectiveness, improvement or quality aspirations in the way Bush and Coleman (2000) suggest. However the mission "of providing educational opportunities to the excluded and to the disadvantaged, to transform the individuals concerned and the communities, groups and societies from which they come" (Ruskin College, 1998) suggests a view of quality as transformation (Harvey et al, 1993).

The strategic plan textual update (Ruskin College, 2001b) contains seven sets of strategic objectives, including sixteen objectives for quality assurance. The annual operating statement for 2001/02 (Ruskin College, 2001e) contains an agenda of twelve items relating to the quality assurance objectives. This demonstrates that the college views quality as both a strategic and an operational concept (Sallis, 1994). However the strategic objectives and operating statement items for quality assurance appear to define quality in 'hard' ways which can be measured rather than the 'soft' definition (ibid) implied by the mission statement, e.g. transformation and social change. The annual operating statement (Ruskin College, 2001e) contains a section on targets for student enrolment, retention and achievement by programme for 2001/02. However the LSC expects these plans to contain such 'SMART targets and judges colleges on both their plans and their achievement of them (LSDA, 2001b).

The curriculum development strategy (Ruskin College, 2002a) makes no reference to quality and therefore provides no further evidence of the link between quality and strategic planning.

The secondary documents discussed are the second FEFC inspection report (FEFC, 2001a), the ALI inspection report (ALI, 2003) and the ALI re-inspection report (ALI, 2004). The FEFC inspectors, reporting in 2001, found the college's quality assurance arrangements to be satisfactory with the following strengths and weaknesses:
- Key strengths
  - thorough, reliable and self-critical self-assessment
  - clear and detailed quality assurance framework
  - extensive and productive involvement of students in quality assurance
  - effective use of external advisers

- Weaknesses
  - insufficient use of performance standards
  - incomplete implementation of appraisal scheme
  - inadequate evaluation of the effectiveness of staff development

(FEFC, 2001a, p.12)

Although the FEFC inspection report comments on the "clear and detailed quality assurance framework" (FEFC, 2001a, p.12) it does not comment on the interaction or weighting of the internal and external elements. However the report refers to "thorough, reliable and self-critical self-assessment" (ibid) as a key strength. This is a reference to the self-assessment report (Ruskin College, 2000b) produced by the College prior to an inspection by the FEFC in 2000. Indeed the FEFC inspectors regarded two internal elements, self-assessment and the involvement of students in quality assurance, as key strengths, whereas "the effective use of external advisers" (ibid) was the only external element assessed as a key strength. However all three weaknesses could be described as internal elements; "incomplete implementation of appraisal scheme", "inadequate evaluation of the effectiveness of staff development" and "insufficient use of performance standards" (ibid). These weaknesses appear to relate to 'professional assessment' and 'standards' rather than to 'customers' (Stone, 1997).

At an inspection in October 2003 the ALI inspectors found quality assurance to be unsatisfactory. They identified only one key strength in the quality assurance arrangements – "good contribution by learners to quality assurance" (ALI, 2003, p.14). This echoed the findings of FEFC inspectors in 2000 and the
The college quality assurance committee co-ordinates the monitoring of performance of all courses. There are good arrangements to ensure that learners contribute to the improvement of the college courses. Staff and governors pay particular attention to the results of learner surveys. Detailed reports analyse these surveys but do not always contain recommendations or action plans. There is a thorough learner and teacher review at the end of each module of the certificate of higher education. The outcomes of these reviews are reported at curriculum board meetings. There are good strategies for ensuring adequate learner representation on internal committees. Learners make a valuable contribution to the work of the committees they attend. The college makes good use of external advisers in each subject area. The quality assurance arrangements are enhanced by the validation requirements of each programme and the need to use external examiners.

(ALI, 2003, p.17)

Two key weaknesses were identified by ALI inspectors in 2003 – “inadequate assessment of the quality of teaching and learning” and “incomplete monitoring of quality assurance” (ALI, 2003, p.14). The first of these weaknesses also relate to “professional assessment” and “standards” (Stone, 1997):

Assessments of the quality of teaching and learning are inadequate. In 2001, a new programme of assessments was introduced. This programme is not complete. It has not yet included tutorials, or part-time staff on the community learning programmes. Where grading has taken place all teaching has been graded good or better. During inspection, over 37 per cent of lessons were graded satisfactory or worse. Although the assessments enable good individual feedback to teachers, the programme is not thorough enough and does not effectively identify cross-college training that will improve standards.

(ALI, 2003, p.18)
The ALI inspectors' comments about the monitoring arrangements for quality assurance are consistent with their criticisms about the monitoring of strategic planning, discussed in the section "What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?" The comments also provide a critique of the quality assurance policy and procedures document (Ruskin College, 2000a):

The quality assurance monitoring arrangements are incomplete. The college has an overall quality assurance policy which identifies a number of key quality assurance processes. The policy does not identify how these coherently bring about improvements in quality of programmes. College managers do not have sufficient arrangements to ensure that quality assurance processes are completed in an appropriate and timely manner, and that good practice is effectively shared and developed throughout the college. All support teams have service standards; the standards have not been monitored, reviewed or evaluated. For some support teams these are not developed sufficiently and rely heavily on the results of learner surveys. The college has an appropriate structure of committees, each with their own terms of reference. The arrangements to record the progress of action points agreed at staff meetings are inadequate. There is no guidance about how quickly an action point should be completed, and progress or outcome of actions are not effectively recorded.

(ALI, 2003, p.18)

Again these comments accord with the ALI's comments that "the governing executive does not receive regular progress or monitoring reports, or evaluations of the outcomes of these plans" (ALI, 2003, p.16), discussed in the earlier section, "What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?"

At the re-inspection in the Autumn term 2004 the ALI inspectors found quality assurance to be good. The key strengths identified were "good use of learners' feedback to improve programmes" and "very effective use of observations to raise the quality of teaching and learning" (ALI, 2004, p.10). The inspectors'
comments on the first of these strengths reaffirms the findings of the FEFC inspectors in 2000 and the ALI inspectors in 2003:

The previous inspection found that learners made a good contribution to quality assurance. There remains a very effective system in place, which collects regular and systematic feedback from learners on their programmes and leads to clear action plans for programme improvement. The feedback and review systems operate effectively at module, programme and college levels. At each level, learners contribute fully to the reviews of their programmes. In addition, elected learners' representatives attend formal programme review meetings. The college also makes good use of external advisers, examiners and moderators in each subject area. The college produces an extensive annual college-wide review of learners' feedback, which it uses systematically to support the self-assessment process.

(ALI, 2004, p.12)

The inspectors' comments on the second of these strengths indicate an improvement in "professional assessment" and "standards" (Stone, 1997):

The college has used observations very effectively to raise the quality of teaching and learning. At the time of the previous inspection, the college had recently introduced a process for the observation of teaching and learning. An external consultant has now completed a full cycle of observations of all teaching staff, including part-time staff and tutorial staff. Extensive detailed feedback is given to staff observed, and this feedback is also used very effectively to support well-structured and clearly focused professional development activities. The system of observations, individual feedback and closely related training sessions is highly valued by staff, for the contribution it makes to their teaching skills and increased professional awareness.

(ALI, 2004, p.12)

These comments contain evidence of pedagogic quality values amongst staff.
The ALI inspectors found some improvement in the monitoring arrangements for quality assurance, but still found "some incomplete monitoring practice" (ALI, 2004, p.10) as a key weakness:

The college has satisfactory quality assurance monitoring arrangements in place for most aspects of provision. However, some monitoring practice is incomplete. For example, not enough attention is paid to achievement targets on the short courses. Although the college now has an equality of opportunity action plan in place, it has not yet evaluated it. Although counselling services are monitored, monitoring practice for some literacy, numeracy and language learning support activities is incomplete. The college is introducing a revised appraisal system progressively, but has not yet monitored it in practice.

(ALI, 2004, p.13)

There were no comments in this inspection report on the monitoring of strategic planning.

The findings from the interviews with staff were that they could recognise a relationship between quality and strategic management and some staff could recognise a relationship between the college's culture and quality. There was unanimous support for the concept of quality but none of the staff tried to define it. Some staff had difficulty with the language of quality. One manager commented:

I think education has found the whole business of quality difficult. I mean I actually don't use the phrase 'quality assurance' because I've lived for so long with education saying this is nothing to do with us - that belongs out in the commercial world. So I tend to abbreviate it to quality.

One member of academic staff referred to quality assurance but admitted, "I'm not sure what this is". The other member of academic staff claimed to understand the language but admitted, "Nine years ago I wouldn't have understood that question".
One manager linked staff values to the concept of quality:

I don’t think quality is a word that has a lot of resonance within the values of those who are engaged in teaching and learning, although I think doing things really well and to a high standard is part of the values.

With reference to teaching one member of academic staff claimed, “Quality assurance policies and diktats don’t change practice whatsoever”. She went on to assert, “You improve quality by valuing people, giving them access to education and encouragement”. The other member of academic staff claimed that “quality is inextricably built into teaching” and that, arguably, it was good management which had enabled this to happen. One manager answered that “quality is one of the things you’re trying to manage”.

There were a variety of descriptions of the relationship between quality and strategic management. One member of academic staff asserted, “They’re absolutely bound together”. One manager described it as “an interaction”. She went on to argue, “If you didn’t think about quality you could strategically manage with just as much effort but going off in a bad direction”. The other manager described the relationship as “difficult” and went on to explain this:

I think it’s a struggle to get quality embedded and there is a link there with strategic management, in that if you want to manage strategically one of the challenges is to get people to accept that quality and the assuring of quality is part of what they’re about.

One member of academic staff supported this view; “Good strategic management is that everyone needs to know what they need to do to contribute to quality”.

One member of support staff agreed that the relationship was not a simple or easy one:
I'm not sure it's an altogether comfortable relationship. I mean obviously quality management is there to ensure that standards are met and adhered to, but sometimes I do wonder if it doesn't really inhibit strategic management.

She explained how, in her view, the bureaucracy of quality processes slowed up decision-making.

One member of academic staff asserted that it would be better "if strategic management concentrated less on the formalities of quality assurance and more on the reality of making staff feel good". She went on to make a case for, "Staff identifying with the place, proud of its traditions, with good morale – that's when you get quality".

Some of these comments about quality related to the culture. One manager described the relationship as an "interaction". She described aspects of the culture as "inclusive" and "caring about the learners" and argued "we couldn't deliver good quality without that". However she asserted that the culture would not ensure quality without planning. "If you're weak on planning, quality will suffer", this manager argued. She explained her view that planning involves the analysis of data, which provides the evidence of quality. Another manager claimed that the culture created some difficulties for quality:

In all honesty there isn't a culture of self-reflection and evaluation and it takes a lot of courage to do that. I think that sort of attitude probably isn't here amongst the academic staff and that allows them to not engage with the notions of quality in any real way.

One member of academic staff related aspects of the culture to quality. "If you care about the college, want people to have a good experience, care about the students, that's what produces quality", she argued.

The findings from the interviews with governors were that they could recognise a relationship between quality and strategic management. One governor
asserted, "The two go hand in hand". This governor recognised the difficulties associated with managing quality. "It's always very easy to be dismissive of it as a load of tick boxes and what have you", he argued. But he claimed there were "serious consequences if you don't deliver on quality". This governor summarised the relationship as "running the college in an efficient way whilst delivering quality education".

What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?

The findings on this research question came from documentary analysis and analysis of the interviews with staff and governors.

The findings from documentary analysis of secondary documents came from two FEFC inspection reports (FEFC 1997b; FEFC, 2001a), an ALI inspection report (ALI, 2003), an ALI re-inspection report (ALI, 2004) and an LSC report on financial management and governance frameworks (LSC, 2003). All these reports commented on strategic planning in the college and show how strategic planning has progressed from the perspective of external inspectors and reviewers.

In conclusion to the report in 1997, inspectors recommended that the college should "identify more clearly the processes by which strategic objectives will be achieved" (FEFC, 1997b, p.19). This recommendation is an example of the inspectorate seeking to influence the strategic management process. It arises from the FEFC inspectors' view that the strategic planning process was inadequate as "the operating statement does not include dates by which specific tasks are to be completed or resource implications" and "the means by which objectives will be achieved are not clearly identified" (FEFC, 1997b, p.6). Despite this criticism of the strategic planning process the inspectors found the strengths of the college were:

- an impressive record of providing access to education for people with few prior educational achievements
- effective governors who have a clear understanding of their role
- the clear benefits students gain from tutorial teaching and from studying in a residential setting
- good retention and achievement rates
- the high level of formal and informal support for students by teaching and non-teaching staff
- strong links with the trades union and labour movement and the local community.

(FEFC, 1997b, p.18)

Arguably these strengths are strategic and arose from effective strategic management rather than strategic planning. In the 1997 inspection report the curriculum areas were all found to be good while governance and management were judged to be satisfactory.

The FEFC inspection in 2000/01 found improvements in the strategic planning process:

The senior management team has been reduced in size and is now more appropriate for the college. Managers work well together. Staff and governors regard them as accessible. They are clear about the priorities for the college and these are expressed in the detailed strategic plan and annual operating statements. Objectives are referenced to the accountable managers and have relevant timescales.

(FEFC, 2001a, p.15)

Management was judged to be good in 2001, an improvement on the satisfactory grading in 1997. One of the key strengths of management the inspectors identified was "good consultation with and involvement of staff in effective strategic planning" (FEFC, 2001a, p.15). This evidence of the improvement in strategic planning between the two FEFC inspections is arguably evidence of the influence external inspection had on the strategic management process between 1997 and 2001. However the findings of the
FEFC inspectors in 2001 can be questioned. In 2002 "there were concerns about the lack of consultation" (Crace, 2002, p.9) over the property strategy, a key strategic management issue. If the FEFC inspectors were wrong about "good consultation with and involvement of staff" perhaps they were also wrong about the effectiveness of strategic planning.

The LSC review of financial management and governance frameworks in 2003 found as a strength that "financial planning is integrated within the college’s strategic planning process" (LSC, 2003), although it did not comment on the effectiveness of strategic planning. The ALI inspectors criticised some aspects of the strategic management process, in particular the monitoring of strategic planning:

The governing executive receives appropriate planning documents, including three-yearly strategic plans, annual operating statements and development plans. However, the governing executive does not receive regular progress or monitoring reports, or evaluations of the outcomes of these plans.

(ALI, 2003, p.16)

So arguably the strategic planning process was judged to be as incomplete in 2003 as the FEFC inspectors had found it to be in 1997 and two inspections had had no impact on the long-term effectiveness of the strategic planning process, despite the findings of the FEFC inspectors in 2001. Alternatively it can be argued that the FEFC inspection of 1997 did have a short-term impact on the college’s strategic planning process. It could be that the belief amongst Ruskin staff that strategic planning has been the least useful means of developing strategy, as found from the questionnaire data, has meant that strategic planning has not been effectively embedded in the strategic management process, despite the comments of FEFC inspectors in 2001.

In contrast to the ALI inspectors’ comments about the monitoring of strategic planning, they identified "effective target setting" (ALI, 2003, p.14) as a strength of leadership and management:
Target-setting for recruitment, retention and achievement is effective. The college has accurately set and reported on the achievement of targets for the past five years. During this time there has been an eight-fold increase in learner numbers. College staff have a good awareness of the importance of achievement of these targets. Targets are set for each programme at programme board meetings and are carefully monitored by the quality assurance committee. The governing executive receives regular reports and pays particular attention to performance against these targets. The college has consistently met or exceeded the enrolment, retention and achievement targets.

(ALI, 2003, p.14)

Since target-setting is an aspect of strategic planning perhaps the ALI inspectors were not as critical of the effectiveness of the strategic planning process as it might appear from their comments about monitoring. The inspectors' comment about staff awareness of the importance of achievement of targets might appear to contradict the findings of the questionnaire about staff's views on strategic planning. However it does accord with staff's views on enforced choice, as staff would be aware that failing to meet student numbers targets would mean clawback of funding by the LSC. Arguably the effectiveness of target-setting and achievement is evidence of the effectiveness of strategic management rather than strategic planning.

The ALI inspectors did not comment on the effectiveness of strategic management, but overall they found leadership and management to be unsatisfactory. In addition to "effective target setting" the strengths identified were:

- effective partnerships with trade union organisations
- good contribution by learners to quality assurance
- particular importance of equality of opportunity to all college activities

(ALI, 2003, p.14)
These strengths echo some of the values and beliefs articulated by heads of schools in Gold et al's (2003) research, in particular equal opportunities, equity or justice, engagement with stakeholders and co-operation. The weaknesses identified outweighed those strengths:

- weak financial management
- inadequate management of staff performance
- inadequate assessment of the quality of teaching and learning
- inappropriate management structure
- incomplete performance monitoring arrangements by governors
- insufficient monitoring and evaluation of equality of opportunity policies and practice
- incomplete monitoring of quality assurance

(ALI, 2003, p.14)

These weaknesses echo Graystone's (2001) research finding that the emphasis of college inspection reports had shifted away from strategy and mission towards monitoring college performance. They emphasise performance targets and performance monitoring rather than values. As such they illustrate the tension between the technicist and managerial view of leadership of the inspection regime and the values-driven approach (Gold et al, 2003).

An analysis of the minutes of the governing body meeting held in November 2003 show a minute on the ALI inspection:

Received: from the Acting Principal a report on the ALI inspection held between 20-24 October 2003. She outlined the changes in style since the last FEFC inspection in 2000.

Noted: that whilst the inspection was taking place a three day LSC review of governance and management also took place. The LSC reviewers and the ALI inspectors had met and discussed their findings on financial management.
Noted: the first post inspection meeting of teaching staff had taken place. Staff had undertaken to consider the points made by the Inspectorate in the report about teaching and learning.

Noted: ALI inspectors and LSC officers would be visiting the college on a regular basis to monitor progress prior to a re-inspection within the next twelve months.

Agreed: the full report would be given to governors. The Governing Executive would need to approve the post-inspection action plan.

(Ruskin College, 2003b, p.4)

It is interesting to note that the minutes did not record that the ALI inspectors had found the college’s leadership and management to be unsatisfactory. Nor did they record the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors, not even the comment about incomplete monitoring arrangements by governors.

The next meeting of the Governing Executive held in February 2004 considered the post inspection action plan. The minutes of that meeting show a minute on the ALI inspection containing a reference to performance monitoring:

Noted: the need for governors to carry out more performance monitoring. The timetable for Governing Executive business would be reviewed at the next meeting. The Governing Executive would monitor its own performance through completing the governance healthcheck questionnaire.

(Ruskin College, 2004a, p.1)

This is evidence of some influence by external inspection on an aspect of strategic management – the monitoring of performance. The minutes go on to note “the interrelationship, expressed in the commentary, between the action plan, the development plan, the recovery plan and the financial management and governance action plan” (Ruskin College, 2004a, p.1). It is interesting that this list of plans does not mention a strategic plan, although arguably the development plan, which covers the period 2003-06, is akin to a strategic plan.
The self-assessment report produced prior to the inspection (Ruskin College, 2002b) judged leadership and management to be "good", so the ALI inspection findings were not expected by the college. Coleman (1998) argues that the planning process of a school or college may be significantly altered by an unexpected set of inspection findings, although the underlying culture of the organisation may temper the long-term effect of the inspection process. Documentary analysis shows that the college's planning process has been significantly altered by the inspection findings in that three new plans have been produced – an action plan in response to the LSC's review of financial management and governance frameworks (Ruskin College, 2003a), a post-inspection action plan (Ruskin College, 2004c) and a recovery plan (Ruskin College, 2004d) to address weak financial management. However this perceived short term impact of external inspection on strategic planning and management would need to be tested by research at an appropriate interval after inspection to judge the long-term impact. The research data gathered for this thesis cannot be used to test whether the impact of the inspection findings on planning may be reduced over time by the values and culture of the college.

The relationship between inspection and institutional values and culture is a complex one. Arguably inspectors need to understand the culture of the institution when assessing leadership and management. However at present culture is not part of the ALI/OFSTED inspection framework. There is also the question of the impact of inspection on institutional culture. Hargreaves (1999) argues that one of the circumstances when culture may be subject to rapid change is where the institution faces an obvious crisis, such as a highly critical inspection report. The research data gathered for this thesis cannot be used to answer this question about the impact of inspection on culture.

The reinspection report produced following the ALI reinspection of the college during the Autumn term 2004 identified the following strengths and weaknesses in leadership and management:

**Strengths**

- clear strategic leadership and direction
- effective management action to implement change
- good use of learners’ feedback to improve programmes
- very effective use of observations to raise the quality of teaching and learning

**Weaknesses**
- some incomplete monitoring practice

(ALI, 2004, p.10)

Leadership and management was judged to be ‘good’ in 2004 compared with ‘unsatisfactory’ in 2003. On this occasion the ALI inspectors did comment on the effectiveness of strategic management:

The college has clear strategic leadership and direction. At the previous inspection, the management structure was judged to be inappropriate. The college has now completed a thorough review of its structures and staffing arrangements. Following the appointment of a new principal, strategic roles at senior management level, including those of the principal, have been effectively revised.

(ALI, 2004, p.10)

The inspectors commented in relation to strategic planning that “a revised college strategic plan, major property strategy and revised curriculum strategy are now in preparation” (ALI, 2004, p.10). It is interesting to note that despite the absence of a revised strategic plan at the time of the reinspection, the inspectors found evidence of clear strategic leadership and direction. This would seem to echo the findings of the FEFC inspectors in 1997, in that the strengths are strategic and arose from effective strategic leadership and management rather than strategic planning.

The findings from the interviews with staff were that they could identify influences of external inspection and review on strategic management. However staff were divided between those who identified a positive impact and
those who identified a largely negative impact. One member of support staff commented:

I think it's had a positive influence on strategic management. I think it's actually helped drive it forward and the planning process forward. I know people haven't always liked what's come out of inspection, but I think it's a helpful process because it does help you focus and it does help you move on.

One manager agreed with this view and asserted:

Well, I think it has some very positive effects. It's a stick, it's not a carrot! But I do think that smallish sticks, as long as they don't hit you over the head and knock you out, are actually very helpful. They give us the incentive, whether we like it or not, to get certain things sorted out and I think that's really, really good for the college.

Both members of academic staff argued that inspection and review had a largely negative impact on strategic management. One described it as "the tail wagging the dog". However she recognised that there were "some requirements for inspection and review which have forced some management decisions". The other member of academic staff argued that the impact of inspection was largely negative because "it bogs down strategic management in a creative sense". Using her own experience she claimed, "I spent more time producing stuff I didn't feel I needed to produce and less time feeding into strategic management and new things". One manager agreed that inspection had a negative impact, as "it gravely interferes with the work of the place". She argued that this impact arose from "how they come and what they do" and "the weight" of the inspection process. She went on to assert that the inspectorate operated from "an arbitrary base" and that the process was "done differently in different sectors and other services" which proved that a "lighter touch" could be delivered.
Those members of staff who highlighted the negative impact of inspection also identified some positive operational aspects. One manager claimed that "you can use it as well". A tutor identified improvements in staff development arising from inspection. The manager who claimed inspection had a very positive impact commented on the operational and strategic aspects of this:

I don't think there would be much substance in something that was just strategic. I am in a sense interested in things changing on the ground, but it would be wonderful if the strategy grew out of that. If we could actually say, "Look we're doing things differently, we're doing these things better", we can feed that back into our strategic thinking. That sort of 'two-wayness' about it would be a very healthy way of moving forward.

One member of support staff commented on the impact of an inspection report on student recruitment and the curriculum offer, which are both strategic and operational issues. This member of support staff argued:

People will look at it. I know we've got a reputation, but things have changed. There's lots of other universities and colleges offering courses for adults now, so we're not quite as unique as we once thought we were. They're offering courses that adults are looking at and I think that's also having an impact on what we do, because we're having to really look at what we do now.

There were differing views on the long-term influence of inspection on strategic management. The manager who highlighted the negative influence of inspection argued that it could have both a long-term and a short-term impact if managers' time was diverted to inspection from management tasks which might be of strategic importance. The manager who was positive about inspection commented, "I don't think it's automatically a lasting impact". One member of academic staff thought the impact was "not huge" and asserted "the real impact has got to be from within". She went on to link the mission with quality. The other member of academic staff stated that she did not know, but argued that as managers changed, the role of the Governing Executive was important in terms
of a lasting impact. The member of support staff who was positive about the influence of inspection commented:

I hope it's a permanent one, because you're learning from these processes and that will help to drive things forward. I'm not confusing that with a vision of the college, because you still need the vision.

The findings from the interviews with governors were that they could identify significant influences of inspection on strategic management. Both governors identified a positive impact. One governor used the example of the ALI (2003) inspection report and asserted that "we had to take full account of it in our planning". He went on to argue, "If you don't have regard in your planning to the impact of inspection, then your days could be numbered. It's vital to survival". This governor admitted that the process "can divert management time away from running the college to fulfilling the needs of inspection". Both governors thought that inspection would have a long-term influence on strategic management because they believed that the inspection regime would continue.

The governor who referred to the college's 'survival' clearly recognised the turbulence which it had been through in recent years and the threats it had faced to its future existence. The failed inspection can be viewed as a deep fracture in the fabric of the college caused by the tension between the college's strong culture and the enforced choice of the inspectorate. It highlights the theme of turbulence, which underpins some of the models for understanding strategy provided in the literature and provided the context to the research questions. This theme runs through the conclusions to the research questions and the overall conclusion to the research problem which draws together the dimensions of strategic management and the concepts of planning, culture, mission, vision and quality.
Chapter 5 - Conclusion

This section sets out conclusions in relation to the seven research questions and substantive theoretical and methodological issues. It demonstrates how the research objectives have been achieved and establishes my position on strategic management and planning at Ruskin College. It identifies the original contribution made to the concept of strategic management in education. The section goes on to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the research. Finally the section discusses the implications for practice and for future research.

Conclusions in relation to research questions

**What is the strategy development process in the college?**

The conclusions on this research question came from analysis of the strategy development questionnaire and the interviews with staff and governors, which followed up on the profiles generated by the questionnaire. Analysis of the strategy development questionnaire showed the cultural and enforced choice dimensions scored highest for both the staff and the governors, although the staff scored the cultural dimension as the second highest rather than the highest. The planning dimension scored lowest for the staff and second lowest for the governors.

All the staff and governors interviewed identified the potential consequences of the cultural dimension for strategy development and the positive and negative aspects of this. Those interviewed highlighted the influence of the culture on the strategy development process and described aspects of the college's culture, especially in terms of staff behaviour and the democratic structure of the college. Staff and governors described the external influences as 'huge' and 'increasing'. They identified the nature of the education market as a key influence on the strategy development process. They recognised that the growth of opportunities for adult students in FE colleges and universities had an
impact on Ruskin's niche market. Staff and governors agreed about the potential power of external influences to determine whether there was a future strategy as well as influencing the nature of that strategy. All those interviewed thought they had some role in the strategy development process, although the role varied according to the dimension favoured. Most staff and governors described their own role within the strategy development process from a cultural perspective. At the same time, most staff identified the Principal, the senior management team or senior staff as more effective than others in gaining influence over strategic direction, although some staff also identified the influence of the Governing Executive. Governors described their role as working with the various internal stakeholders within the democratic traditions of the college. The research findings indicate that the strategy development process operates within a strong cultural dimension but is subject to the equally strong forces of the enforced choice dimension.

What has been the experience of the college in undertaking strategic planning?

The conclusions on this research question come from analysis of the strategy development questionnaire and the interviews with staff and governors, as well as from documentary analysis. Analysis of the strategy development questionnaire showed the planning dimension scored lowest for staff and second lowest for governors. This finding corresponds with a survey of public sector managers in which they scored planning the lowest of the six dimensions (Collier et al, 2001). The findings seemed to suggest that Ruskin staff and governors believed strategic planning has been one of the least useful means of developing strategy.

The interviews with staff confirmed that they thought the college has had a mainly negative experience of strategic planning. Some staff recognised the difficulty of planning in a turbulent environment resulting from enforced change. Most staff related strategic planning to their negative experience of the property strategy. However, despite this experience some staff expressed some belief in strategic planning as a process which could be used in the future. Governors were less negative than staff about their experience of strategic planning. This
was not surprising given the role of governors in strategic planning as required by the LSC.

Documentary analysis of FEFC, ALI and LSC reports showed a varied experience of strategic planning between 1997 and 2004 from an external perspective. In 1997 the FEFC inspectorate (FEFC, 1997b) asked the college to identify more clearly the processes by which objectives would be achieved. The inference of this recommendation was that strategic planning should be more effective. By 2001 the FEFC inspectorate (FEFC, 2001a) found planning to be effective, with staff involved in the process. By 2003 the ALI inspectorate (ALI, 2003) found that governors received strategic plans but did not receive progress reports and that there was no strategic planning within one of the two curriculum areas inspected. By late 2004 the ALI inspectorate (ALI, 2004) found that new strategic planning documents were being prepared, but they were not yet in place and they did not comment on staff involvement in planning. This evidence of the inspectorates' varied, largely negative, experience of strategic planning supports the research findings that the staff's experience in undertaking planning has been a mainly negative one.

How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?

The conclusions on this research question come from analysis of the strategy development questionnaire, the interviews with staff and governors, the observations of governing body meetings and documentary analysis. Analysis of the strategy development questionnaire showed the cultural dimension scored second highest for staff and highest for governors. These findings correspond to some degree with the research findings of Collier et al (2001) in local government where there is an emphasis on professional norms and standards. The findings seemed to show that Ruskin staff and governors thought that the cultural aspects of the college, its history and the shared assumptions and beliefs of its members, have a strong influence on the process of strategy development and that strategy draws on experience and attitudes, values and perceptions and taken – for – granted ways of doing things.
All the staff and governors interviewed thought the culture of the college made a significant contribution to strategic management. There was a recognition that the culture was not static and was evolving. Both the positive and the negative contributions of the culture were recognised. The positive contributions identified were the ability to manage uncertainty, shared values, teamwork, participative styles and good communication. The negative contributions identified were slow decision-making, the existence of sub-cultures relating to the curriculum, the sites and different categories of staff and perceptions of the college’s history.

The observations of governing body meetings provided rich data about the culture, symbolised by behaviour (Beare et al, 1989) and ritual (Turner, 1990). These rituals, involving external governors and staff, indicated what was highly valued, the dominant concerns and the central goals. In the first observation the concept of a ‘union university’ was highly valued and the dominant concern was the post inspection action plan following a failed inspection. In the second observation the dominant concern was the recovery plan to ensure future solvency and the central goals were discussed in a debate on the future of the college. Although these meetings had to deal with the consequences of the ALI inspection and the LSC review, as rituals they were very different from the rituals of inspection and review in terms of what was highly valued. The observations illustrated the cultural context within which strategy operates and some of the positive contributions of culture identified in the interviews. Even the buildings and rooms in which the governing body meetings took place reflected aspects of the culture, including its history and trade union traditions.

Analysis of primary documents provided rich information about the cultural context of strategic management. Arguably some of these documents reflected the SMT sub-culture rather than the college’s culture (Wallace and Hall, 1994). But some of the publicity leaflets written by staff used language which accords with the interview data about the positive aspects of culture, such as participative styles and supportive community. However documentary analysis provided contradictory evidence about some of the values underpinning the culture. Perhaps the most interesting documentary data on the values and
The ethos of the college came from newspaper articles about the Principal's appointment and the references to socialism.

Analysis of inspection reports showed no mention of the college's culture. This was at odds with the significance of culture found in the analysis of the strategy development questionnaire, the interviews and the observations. The simple answer might be that the inspectorates were not looking for the college's culture, as it did not appear in the inspection framework. Arguably a consequence of this was a lack of understanding by the inspectorates of the significance of the college's culture in relation to strategic management. There was evidence that they understood some aspects of the culture, such as participative decision-making, but the world-view of the inspectorates appeared very different from that of staff and governors.

What is the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management?

The conclusions on this research question come from documentary analysis and analysis of the interviews with staff and governors. Analysis of primary documents showed the college has a mission statement and a vision statement set out in a document written by the then Principal and approved by the governing body (Ruskin College, 1998). This was linked to a strategy to increase the number of part-time and short course students, although there was not a strategic plan of how this was to be achieved at that stage. Later primary documents showed that this strategy had been implemented (Ruskin College, 2001a) and further growth in student numbers was planned (Ruskin College, 2001b). They showed that by this stage a strategic plan was in existence. The primary documents did not demonstrate how far the mission and the vision have been understood and supported by staff and governors. Analysis of secondary documents provided evidence from the inspectorates that the mission was understood by staff and students (FEFC, 2001a), but there was no specific reference to the vision statement.

Nearly all the staff and governors interviewed could describe the college's vision, mission and strategic management and to some extent could recognise
the relationship between them. Staff thought there was a clear mission while governors emphasised the mission and the vision in terms of its history and its constituency. Staff had a variety of definitions of vision and some thought there were visions rather than a single vision. Some staff equated vision with the Principalship, while others questioned staff ownership of the vision. Both staff and governors provided examples of the link between mission, vision and strategic management in terms of curriculum development and widening participation through student admissions. They also provided examples of how aspects of strategic management, such as strategic thinking, strategic conversations and strategic planning, might link to the concepts of vision and mission. The interviews themselves arguably could be described as strategic conversations, although they were about the strategy process rather than the content.

**What is the role of the governing body in strategic management?**

The conclusions on this research question come from analysis of the two strategy and mission questionnaires, interviews with staff and governors, observations of two governing body meetings and documentary analysis. Analysis of the questionnaires (LSDA, 2001a; LSDA, 2002) completed by governors in July 2002 and July 2004 showed there was a high level of understanding about the governing body's role in relation to strategy and mission. On both occasions governors were satisfied that the mission statement clearly reflects the core purpose of the college. Also on both occasions governors were satisfied that the governing body has developed a strategic vision for the future of the college, although there were less very satisfied about this in July 2004. In July 2002 governors were satisfied with the strategic planning process but some were undecided or somewhat dissatisfied as to whether there was adequate information to inform the process. By July 2004 there were some governors who were somewhat dissatisfied about this and also about whether there was a systematic procedure for monitoring implementation of the strategic plan. In between the two questionnaires being completed, the property strategy, which had been agreed in April 2002, had
collapsed and arguably this affected the way some governors viewed the strategy development process.

Governors interviewed had a clear idea about the role of the governing body in strategic management and there was a recognition that the role had changed in recent times, particularly since the collapse of the property strategy and the financial crisis. Staff had differing views about the role of the governing body in strategic management, some saw it as a key role while others saw the role as supporting the Principal. There was also recognition by some staff that the role had changed in recent times, particularly since the property strategy episode. Staff also related the trade union membership of the governing body to the college's culture and to the content of strategy, particularly in terms of curriculum development.

Analysis of secondary documents showed the changing role of the governing body in strategic management from the perspective of the inspectorates. In 1997 the inspectorate's view was that although governors were aware of the need for clear strategic planning, the means by which objectives would be achieved were not clear (FEFC, 1997b). By 2001 the inspectorate's view was that the role of governors in dealing with strategy was clear, they were closely involved in setting the strategic direction and had a good understanding of the strategic issues facing the college (FEFC, 2001a). However by 2003 the inspectorate's view was that although the governing body had received reports on performance against student numbers targets, its' monitoring of college performance was inadequate as it did not consider progress or monitoring reports on the strategic plan and development plan (ALI, 2003). This links with the evidence from the strategy and mission questionnaire in July 2004 showing some governors' dissatisfaction with the procedure for monitoring implementation of the strategic plan. The latest commentary on the role of governors by the ALI inspectorate in late 2004 showed that governors were monitoring key strategic developments, especially concerning property and finance.
Observations of two governing body meetings held in February and March 2004 generated rich data on its role in strategic management. Both meetings were held in the period between the ALI inspection in 2003 and the re-inspection in late 2004. The first meeting provided evidence that governors recognised the need to carry out more performance monitoring and it took action to ensure that it received progress reports on planning documents, including the strategic plan, at future meetings. The later part of the meeting demonstrated the governors' role in financial planning as part of strategic planning. The first observation also provided evidence of the governing body's role in determining the college's strategic direction, in the discussion on the emerging concept of a 'union university'. The second observation provided more evidence that the governing body was carrying out the financial planning and monitoring role, in the discussion of the recovery plan. Unlike the minutes of the second meeting, the observation generated rich data on the governing body's role in linking the strategic direction to the mission and the vision, although they did not use these terms. The debate on the future of the college was arguably the governing body treating strategy as perspective (Mintzberg et al, 1998). There was also a statement of strategic intent by the new Principal (Boisot, 2003; Davies and Ellison, 2003).

What is the relationship between quality and strategic management?

The conclusions on this research question come from documentary analysis and analysis of the interviews with staff and governors. Analysis of primary documents demonstrated the college's quality assurance framework and its' great emphasis on documented systems and procedures (Taylor and Hill, 1997). The framework contained some evidence of pedagogic, academic and employment-based values but its' emphasis was on managerial values (Brennan and Shah, 2000). The mission statement and strategy document (Ruskin College, 1998) made no reference to quality management but suggested a view of quality as transformation (Harvey et al, 1993) and social change. A later strategic planning update document (Ruskin College, 2001b) defined quality in 'hard' ways which can be measured rather than the 'soft' definition (Sallis, 1994) implied by the mission statement. So although the
primary documents showed some link between quality and strategic management, the link was unclear because of the lack of consistent definitions of quality management.

Analysis of secondary documents showed the inspectorates' views of the college's quality assurance arrangements on three occasions between 2001 and 2004. Although the FEFC inspectorate had commented on a clear and detailed quality assurance framework (FEFC, 2001a), at the next inspection the ALI inspectorate found quality assurance to be unsatisfactory (ALI, 2003). The ALI inspectors criticised the monitoring arrangements for quality assurance in the same way they criticised the monitoring of strategic planning on that occasion (ALI, 2003). The reinspection report showed some improvements in the monitoring arrangements for quality assurance but did not comment on the monitoring of strategic planning (ALI, 2004). Overall these secondary documents show some link between the inspectorates' definitions of quality and strategic management, i.e. quality assurance and strategic planning.

None of those staff and governors interviewed tried to define quality, but they supported the concept and recognised a relationship between quality and strategic management. Staff and governors acknowledged that the relationship was not a simple or comfortable one and there were criticisms of the quality assurance model. Some staff related quality to culture and values, arguing that the positive aspects of the culture helped to deliver quality. Managers claimed that planning was also an essential element but recognised that the culture did not necessarily accept the quality assurance model. So the evidence from the research was that although quality and strategic management appeared to relate to each other, the relationship was unclear and varied according to the definitions and dimensions of these concepts.

**What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?**

The conclusions on this research question come from documentary analysis and analysis of the interviews with staff and governors. Analysis of secondary
documents showed the inspectorates' view of strategic management on four occasions between 1997 and 2004. On the first occasion there was evidence of the inspectorate seeking to influence the strategic management process (FEFC, 1997b) despite the strengths they identified in the college, which arguably arose from effective strategic management. The improvement in strategic planning identified by the inspectorate on the second occasion (FEFC, 2001a) was possibly evidence of that influence having occurred. But on the third occasion (ALI, 2003) strategic planning was judged to be incomplete, so arguably the two FEFC inspections had no impact on the long-term effectiveness of the strategic planning process. The emphasis of this third inspection report appeared to echo a finding that the emphasis of college inspection reports had shifted away from strategy and mission towards performance monitoring. They illustrated the tension between the inspectorate's technicist and managerial view of leadership and the values-driven approach (Gold et al, 2003). Arguably inspectors need to understand the values and culture of an institution when assessing its leadership and management, but this is not part of the inspection framework. On the fourth occasion, despite their finding that a revised strategic plan was still in preparation, the inspectors reported evidence of clear strategic leadership and direction (ALI, 2004). So the inspectorate's view of strategic management appeared to have shifted away from strategic planning towards strategic leadership and direction.

Analysis of primary documents support the argument that an unexpected set of inspection findings can alter the planning process of a school or college (Coleman, 1998). New plans were produced and monitored by the governing body. However this could be a short-term impact on planning rather than strategic planning and might be reduced over time by the values and culture of the college.

Staff and governors interviewed identified both positive and negative influences of external inspection on strategic management. Some staff and both governors highlighted the positive influence on planning and on operational aspects of the college. Other staff argued that the impact was negative, as inspection impeded strategic management in the creative sense and imposed a
heavy burden on the college. Governors believed that inspection would have a long-term influence on strategic management, because they believed the inspection regime would continue. Staff had differing views on whether the influence would be long-term. Those who were more positive about inspection hoped it would have a long-term impact but recognised there were other factors. Those who were more negative about inspection emphasised the influence of internal factors such as the mission and the governing body. One manager emphasised the potential short-term and long-term influence of inspection if it diverted time from management tasks which might be of strategic importance.

How the research aim and objectives have been achieved

The aim of this thesis has been to explore strategic management and planning at Ruskin College. The key research objectives have been firstly, to explore the context of strategic management, and the relationship this context has with the culture of the college and the strategy development process, and secondly, to examine the duality in the concept of strategic management – the relationship between theory and practice. The aim has been achieved through finding some answers to the research questions which explored a range of dimensions and perspectives of strategy. The first research objective has been achieved by taking a research approach which has enabled the context of the strategy development process to be explored through a triangulation of research methods and respondent triangulation. The second research objective has been achieved by considering some of the concepts of strategic management in the literature and examining these in the research questions, using methods which enabled perspectives of the practice of strategic management to be explored in depth. The thesis has been written during a period of turbulence for the college – the collapse of a property strategy, the resignation of a Principal, a failed inspection, the appointment of a new Principal and a successful re-inspection. This turbulence has been a key part of the context and has influenced perspectives of the practice of strategic management.

The conclusions to the research questions about the strategy development process and about strategic planning showed that the college’s experience of
strategic planning has been a largely negative and ineffective one from most internal and external perspectives. Given the level of environmental turbulence (Boisot, 2003) it is perhaps not surprising that strategic planning has been ineffective, despite the efforts of the funding and inspection bodies to impose this linear, rational model and to make it function. The conclusion to the research question about the contribution of culture to strategic management showed that staff and governors adopted a cultural perspective on strategy and that the college’s culture makes a significant contribution to strategic management. The conclusions to the research question on the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management showed that staff and governors could describe these concepts and to some extent could recognise the relationship between them. They provided examples of how aspects of strategic management, such as strategic thinking, strategic conversations and strategic planning, might link to the concepts of vision and mission. Arguably these conclusions demonstrate that the college started strategic planning from the wrong point. It started from the point of defining the plans (Davies and Ellison, 2003), as required by the FEFC at the time, rather than building a common strategic intent. This strategic intent could have been built using the culture, values, mission and vision, which, as the research has shown, staff and governors can articulate and to which they can align themselves. My position is that despite this failure of strategic planning, due to starting at the wrong point, it is still possible to develop strategic intent using the ‘ABCD model’ (Davies, 2002). The college’s culture would facilitate developing understanding through sharing images, metaphors and experiences, leading to strategic conversations among staff.

The conclusions on the research question on the role of the governing body in strategic management showed that governors, staff and the inspectorate recognised its role and that the role had changed in recent times. The observations of governing body meetings showed that its’ own culture could facilitate developing understanding and having strategic conversations within the governing body. The conclusions on the research question about the relationship between quality and strategic management showed that although they appeared to relate to each other, the relationship was unclear and varied.
according to the definitions and dimensions of these concepts. Arguably using the ABCD model would enable the college to reach a shared understanding of the concept of quality and how to manage it. This could be built into a statement of key strategic intents. The conclusions on the research question on the influence of external inspection and review showed there was evidence of the inspectorate seeking to influence the strategic management process, but its' view appeared to have shifted away from strategic planning towards strategic leadership and direction.

Staff and governors identified both positive and negative influences of inspection on strategic management and had differing views about whether the influence would be long-term and whether it would be reduced long-term by the values and culture of the college. Arguably an inspection should reflect the social and cultural context of an educational institution in the same way that strategic intents should reflect these (Dimmock and Walker, 2004). If this alignment between the inspection framework and the concept of strategic management were to occur then the question of influence would become less relevant.

The original contribution of the thesis and strengths and weaknesses

The thesis makes an original contribution to the study of strategic management and strategic planning within colleges. It builds on research on strategic planning in FE colleges (Drodge and Cooper, 1997; Lumby, 1998; Watson and Crossley, 2001) and in universities (Watson, 2000; Pidcock, 2001). Since Ruskin College is a unique adult education college, offering a hybrid of further and higher education, the research was undertaken in a unique environment. The research goes beyond strategic planning to explore other dimensions of strategic management, particularly the cultural dimension. It also explores the relationship between strategic management and concepts of mission, vision and quality. The research on the role of the governing body in strategic management makes an original contribution to the study of governance within educational institutions. As a company and a registered charity, Ruskin's governors are also company directors and charity trustees, so the governance
arrangements of the college are unique. The research on the impact of inspection on strategic management makes an original contribution to the study of the influence and power of the inspectorates in colleges, particularly the Adult Learning Inspectorate, on which little research has been undertaken previously.

The strengths of the research approach are the triangulation of methods and the respondent triangulation to help ensure validity. Involving all levels of staff and governors in the research enabled a full range of perspectives on strategy to be collected, which fitted with my view of strategy as perspective and with the culture of the college. This research approach enabled a micro perspective on strategy to be taken, in an in-depth study, involving delving into the black box and being in direct and close contact with the actors (Johnson et al, 2005). There were no restrictions placed on my research by governors or the Principal, and staff and governors responded positively to invitations to participate in the research.

There are also strengths in the research methods. The reliability of the strategy development questionnaire had been proven in its use in over 1000 organisations, including public sector organisations, since 1992 (Collier et al, 2001). Arguably this was the first use of the questionnaire in research within a college. Getting staff to complete the questionnaire at a staff conference produced a good response rate and there was a good response from governors who had been posted the questionnaire. The reliability of the governance healthcheck questionnaire had also been proven (LSDA, 2002). There were good response rates on both occasions it was used. The semi-structured interviews enabled an in-depth follow-up on issues which had arisen from the strategy development questionnaire and generated rich data on views, feelings and opinions about strategy from a range of perspectives. Observations of governing body meetings enabled me to collect rich detailed data in natural settings (Burgess, 1984) on events that are critical to strategy development (Johnson et al, 2005). The strength of the documentary analysis arose from the wide range of primary and secondary documents relating to strategy and associated concepts which were readily available and were used to triangulate with other methods on all the research questions.
There are some weaknesses in the research approach. The research took place over a period of eighteen months between September 2003 and February 2005 and, as discussed previously, this was a turbulent time for the college. Perspectives on strategy will have changed during this period, including my own perspective. The dilemmas I faced during this difficult period for the college, particularly the time between the failed inspection in November 2003 and the successful re-inspection in October 2004, arose from my conflicting roles as a researcher and a senior manager.

The most dramatic episode of this period occurred in October 2003 when the seven ALI inspectors provided feedback on their week-long inspection to the assembled staff of Ruskin and representatives of the LSC, in the symbolic environment of the Raphael Samuel Hall. This episode symbolised not only the ritual of inspection but also the culture of the college and the clash between this strong culture and the enforced choice of the inspectorate and the funding body. Each of the inspectors stood up and presented their findings. The last of the seven to present was the inspector of leadership and management. He briefly outlined the ALI's findings on strengths in this area. Then he reported on the finding of both the ALI and the LSC that the financial management of the college was unsatisfactory. Their view was that over the next three years the financial health of the college was due to further deteriorate as a result of very high teaching costs, rising running costs of premises and subsidised accommodation and catering. This inspector starkly warned his audience that unless the college resolved the financial situation it would not have to worry about resolving the inspectors' other findings. The assembled staff sat in stunned silence as the implications of these words sunk in. His words focused my thoughts as a senior manager, and although my research was far from my mind at that moment, they came to symbolise not only the clash between culture and enforced choice, but also my own conflict, between being a researcher within a research-friendly environment and the enforced choice associated with being a senior manager at a time of crisis.

As a researcher I wanted to collect my data as quickly as possible, analyse it and write it up. As a senior manager in a senior management team of two
people between August 2003 and April 2004 my first priority was to help draft the recovery plan and inspection action plan and start to implement them, in order to ensure the future of the college. This meant that often I felt guilty spending time as a researcher rather than as a senior manager. I felt that staff and governors might have questioned why I was using my own and their own precious time on research about the college, rather than devoting it to helping the college out of crisis. However being a researcher, with a research problem to solve, helped me through this difficult time as a senior manager.

Implications for practice and for future research

Staff and governors responded positively to invitations to participate in the research despite my concerns. One manager and one member of academic staff suggested that I disseminate the conclusions of the thesis to staff and governors generally, not just those involved in the research, at a staff conference or a seminar. Given the 'higher education culture' of the college, staff would probably welcome this and it would give an opportunity for a strategic conversation with a wider group about the strategy development process. Past research about the college has focused on its history (Pollins, 1984) rather than the present and its future direction. My own position on dissemination through a seminar is that this should not be a one-off but the starting point for setting up a 'futures group' (Davies and Ellison, 2003) in the college involving a cross-section of staff and governors. This group would consider strategic processes as well as strategic approaches (Davies, 2005). It could also identify research questions for further research, either to follow-up some of the research questions in this thesis, perhaps using different research methods, or to identify new research questions on developing strategy and strategic leadership. This would enable the creation of further opportunities for other researchers to conduct research in a unique adult education college. An example of a research question to follow up is on the influence of external inspection and review on strategic management. New research questions arise from the shift in the most recent literature on schools from seeing strategy as a management function to viewing it as a leadership process (Davies and Ellison, 2003; Davies, 2004; Dimmock and Walker, 2004; Davies and Davies, 2005).
Arguably the most interesting of these would be the research question, "Is Ruskin a strategically focused college?" Ideally this research would take place as part of a wider research project on developing strategy and strategic leadership in colleges, which would mirror the project recently undertaken in schools (Davies and Davies, 2005).
STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire considers the process by which strategy is developed within organisations. It is designed to discover your perceptions of how strategic decisions are made in Ruskin College. Strategic decisions are those which are characterised by a large commitment of resources and deal with issues of substantial importance to the organisation usually with longer rather than just short-term impact or significance; they usually involve more than one function and involve significant change.

The following two pages comprise a number of statements. When considering these statements please:

- assume each applies to Ruskin College as a whole, and respond to the statements as such
- think of the college as it exists at present, not as it has existed in the past or how you would like it to exist in the future
- evaluate each statement in terms of the extent to which you agree or disagree with it in relation to the college.

Thank you for your co-operation.

How to complete the questionnaire

- Please answer all the statements (it will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete)
- Give the answer that first occurs to you. Do not give an answer because you feel it is the right thing to say or you feel it is how things should be
- Respond to each of the statements by circling the appropriate number on a scale of 1 (you strongly disagree with the statement in relation to your organisation) to 7 (you strongly agree with the statement in relation to your organisation).

Your name:______________________________

Your area of work (e.g. academic, academic-related, clerical, domestic)
|   | We have definite and precise strategic objectives | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagrees |}

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<th>To keep in line with our business environment we make continual small-scale changes to strategy</th>
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<td>Our strategy is based on past experience</td>
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<td>The influence a group or individual can exert over the strategy we follow is enhanced by their control of resources critical to the college's activities</td>
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<td>The strategy we follow is directed by a vision of the future associated with the Principal (or another senior figure)</td>
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<td>We have strategy imposed on us by those external to this college.</td>
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<td>We evaluate potential strategic options against explicit strategic objectives</td>
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<td>We keep early commitment to a strategy tentative and subject to review</td>
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<td>Our college's history directs our search for solutions to strategic issues</td>
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<td>The information on which our strategy is developed often reflects the interests of certain groups</td>
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<td>Our strategy is closely associated with a particular individual</td>
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<td>Our freedom of strategic choice is severely restricted by our business environment</td>
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<td>We have precise procedures for achieving strategic objectives</td>
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<td>Our strategies emerge gradually as we respond to the need to change</td>
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<td>There are beliefs and assumptions about the way to do things which are specific to this college</td>
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<td>Our strategy develops through a process of bargaining and negotiation between groups or individuals</td>
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<td>The Principal determines our strategic direction</td>
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<td>We are not able to influence our business environment; we can only buffer ourselves from it</td>
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<td>We have well-defined procedures to search for solutions to strategic problems</td>
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<td>We tend to develop strategy by experimenting and trying new approaches</td>
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<td>The strategy we follow is dictated by our culture</td>
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<td>Our strategy is a compromise which accommodates the conflicting interests of powerful groups and individuals</td>
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<td>Our strategic direction is determined by powerful individuals or groups</td>
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<td>Barriers exist in our business environment which significantly restrict the strategies we can follow</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Our strategy is made explicit in the form of precise plans</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>Our strategy develops through a process of ongoing adjustment</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>The strategies we follow develop from 'the way we do things around here'</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>The decision to adopt a strategy is influenced by the power of the group sponsoring it</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Our Principal tends to impose strategic decisions</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>Many of the strategic changes which have taken place have been forced on us by those outside the college</td>
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<td>31.</td>
<td>We make strategic decisions based on a systematic analysis of our business environment</td>
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<td>32.</td>
<td>Our strategy is continually adjusted as changes occur in the external environment</td>
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<td>There is resistance to any strategic change which does not sit well with our culture</td>
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<td>34.</td>
<td>Our strategies often have to be changed because certain groups block their implementation</td>
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<td>35.</td>
<td>A senior figure's vision is our strategy</td>
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<td>36.</td>
<td>Forces outside this college determine our strategic direction</td>
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(Adapted from Bailey and Avery, 1998, pp.197-199)
Strategy development profile

(Bailey and Avery, 1998, p.201)
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What do you think are the potential consequences of the process you describe for strategy development in the college?

2. Are there aspects of the college that make the process the way it is? In what ways do influences internal to the college promote the strategy development process in the form you describe?
   e.g. structure, management systems and the personality and behaviours of colleagues.

3. What impact do influences external to the college have on the strategy development process?
   e.g. nature of the education market, speed of change within the education system, government legislation.

4. What does such a profile suggest about your role within the strategy development process? Are there certain individuals or activities that are more effective than others in gaining influence over strategic direction?

5. How might the culture of the college contribute to strategic management?

6. Can you describe the relationship between vision, mission and strategic management?

7. What has been the experience of the college in carrying out strategic planning?

8. What is the role of the Governing Executive in strategic management?

9. Can you describe the relationship between quality and strategic management?

10. What influence has external inspection and review had on strategic management?

11. Is there anything you would like to add?
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198


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