The Use of the Case Method in Large and Diverse Undergraduate Business Programmes: Problems and Issues

A Report to The European Case Clearing House and The Foundation for Management Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The case method in business and management education is generally considered to have been developed as an executive education technology in the United States in the early years of the twentieth century. Much of the literature on the case method reflects these origins and is therefore often assumed to be culturally and institutionally specific. However, cases are used today in a wide variety of contexts, including undergraduate business education. Over the last two decades the number of undergraduate students entering higher education in Britain has increased dramatically, creating a significant change in the university institutional environment. The increase has been particularly pronounced in the field of business education. The aim of the research reported in this document is to explore the use of case-based teaching methods on undergraduate business programmes in the context of significantly increasing student numbers; in other words to explore how the process of teaching and learning via the case method is affected by its context. In this report we discuss key themes in the current context of UK higher education, explore the use of cases in large and diverse undergraduate business education programmes, and examine how the changing institutional context of these programmes has affected the use of the business case as a pedagogical technology.

The report is organised in five parts. After an introduction where we reprise and discuss the details of the research proposal, we explore the concept of ‘massification’ in higher education. We argue that massification encompasses not only an increase in student numbers but also a broad set of interconnected changes that have taken place in UK higher education since 1980. Next we explore the evolution of the nature and purpose of the case method in business education. We then use data gathered from a series of semi-structured interviews with staff and students involved with business modules at a number of universities to explore the perceived impact of massification on case study teaching and learning. We find that massification is significantly affecting both teaching practice and pedagogical intent; and that it also helps to explain and illuminate shifts in student expectations, behaviour and experiences. We conclude with a discussion of the key themes that have surfaced and suggest some future avenues for research.

The main conclusions from both the literature we surveyed and from our primary research is that massification is a pervasive phenomenon which is having a far-reaching
impact on teaching and learning at both old and new universities. Our data suggest a set of strong tensions in the use of case studies in a mass higher education context. Pressure to reduce costs, tighter enforcement of copyright laws, increased internal and external monitoring, coupled with increasing complexity in the management and delivery of large course and changes in student and expectations have led staff to abandon, curtail, modify or develop their use of cases. The first and second strategies, that of shifting wholly or partially from traditional uses of cases to mini-cases, “vignettes” and other short classroom exercises, can be seen as a falling back strategy in the face of the pressures of massification. However a number of academics in our sample, whilst recognising the reality of a resource-constrained environment, retained a strong commitment to case pedagogy. The move to less ambiguous, more structured (and some would argue less challenging) learning technologies is being resisted for a variety of different motives and in a variety of different ways.

Case studies by their very nature accommodate different interpretations, different ways of framing of problems and the application of different theoretical lenses; so although they offer a highly valuable learning opportunity, they also create complexity and diversity which is potentially costly and difficult to manage. Cases are rich sources of detailed data that represent organisational complexity but also bound it. One of the results of massification has been a more diverse student body, composed of individuals whose life experiences and cultural values differ significantly from each other. Case studies lend themselves to multiple readings, with different readers adopting a different perspective and gaining different insights. The case medium, according to this reading, is perceived as having a good fit with the new audience and as being in accord with the private inclinations of some academics who value the notion of a ‘liberal education’ over vocational training. Conversely, it also remains attractive to academics who remain committed to strong vocational values in business education, and who see cases as providing a uniform benchmark learning experience for diverse groups of students.

In summary, therefore, we find that the changing context of higher education is having a profound effect on the use of the case method of teaching and learning in undergraduate business education but that the effects are by no means linear or uni-directional. Although it is inappropriate to generalise from a small number of research sites our data suggests that massification may influence not only the extent and form of case teaching
but also its perceived pedagogical purpose. We find that the case method in practice has evolved in ways that, paradoxically, both resist and accommodate the “McDonaldization” of higher education, that both standardise and customise student experience and that both diminish and bolster professional autonomy.

Almost all of the existing research into case study teaching focuses on postgraduate students and we suggest that the use of cases as a vehicle for undergraduate learning is likely to be a fruitful area for future research. We close by suggesting a number of ways in which the project might be extended so as to broaden and deepen our understanding of case-based teaching and learning at the undergraduate level.
INTRODUCTION

Background and Aims of the Project

This is the report of a research project proposed to the European Case Clearing House (ECCH) and the Foundation for Management Education (FME) and accepted in October 1998. The aims of the report are to provide a full account of the research undertaken as part of the project, and in so doing to recap the original aims of the project, to outline how and where circumstances dictated amendments to the original project proposal, to discuss our literature review, methodology, findings and conclusions, to provide an account of publications arising from the research, and to suggest areas for further research.

The very first project we proposed outlined a three-year investigation, to be pursued primarily through the appointment of a doctoral student, into how the case method of teaching and learning on business and management undergraduate programmes was affected by its context: specifically, by the context of the increasing size of such programmes, and the increasing diversity of the student body. The research proposed was to include both exploratory qualitative research and a follow-up quantitative study. Upon advice from the funders, who felt the original proposal was too ambitious, the proposal was simplified and amended to become an eighteen month study of the implications of a context of “massification” for the use of the case method on undergraduate business education programmes. The accepted proposal is outlined in more detail below.

Business cases have been used as a vehicle for teaching and learning since the early part of the twentieth century. The case method has been used to develop both cognitive (knowledge retention, knowledge application, disciplined problem solving) and affective (communication, group working) skills, and is related to approaches to learning and development such as problem-based learning. However, there is little rigorous research on the use of the case method in business and management education. The paucity of this research is particularly marked in the area of undergraduate teaching and learning. We found no reference to any published research on the use of cases in undergraduate business education in the United Kingdom. Much of what has been written on the case method in business and
management education has emerged from Harvard Business School, and may be somewhat institutionally and culturally specific.

Many UK undergraduate business degrees contain final year courses in strategic management or other core subjects which use case studies as the primary vehicle for teaching and/or assessment. In common with other educational systems, the UK higher education sector has been transformed during the 1980s and 1990s by a process of "massification". Some of the implications of such a transformation include a drive towards modularization, a sharp reduction of resources per student, an increase in the diversity of the student body, larger classes, larger course teams, changes in teaching technologies, methods, materials and so on. We argued in our research proposal that there was an urgent need to explore, in a rigorous and systematic way, the teaching and learning issues and challenges presented to both business faculty and undergraduate students by the widespread use of the case method in this context.

We considered that the number and diversity of students on business undergraduate programmes presented some interesting avenues for research, particularly concerning how the process of teaching and learning via the case method is affected by its context, and the implications for course delivery and design. We therefore proposed a study which:

- investigated the implications of “massification” for the design, delivery and management of undergraduate business education programmes, and the use of case method in this context
- investigated students’ experiences as well as teaching practices.

The questions for investigation were therefore:

- How pedagogical strategies (including course design, delivery and management issues) have been affected by increasing student numbers, and the implications for the use of the case method to deliver required learning outcomes.
- How students’ learning via case studies is affected by increased student numbers and associated contextual issues.

We anticipated that exploring these questions would give rise to a number of possible implications for practice:
Reflection on the specific role of the case method in undergraduate business and management education.

Reflection on how and whether case study methods might ensure consistency of delivery by large teaching teams.

Reflection on the advantages case study methods deliver over alternative approaches in these contexts.

We argued in our proposal that the use of the case method in undergraduate business education is largely under-researched, and that the links between the context and the process of learning through case studies are poorly understood. We therefore considered it essential that the data collection be focused on exploratory research, with qualitative data gathered from a small number of research sites being analysed to generate “grounded” theory. This would involve the researchers interviewing a number of small groups of students and academics about their experiences of, and approaches to, the case method in teaching and learning. We proposed to identify and approach a small number of partner institutions which would allow us to compare and contrast staff and student experience in a range of different educational and organisational contexts.

Organization of the Project and the Project Team

Following some changes in personnel on the project team, necessitated by the shift in emphasis of the amended project and other changes at Bristol Business School (BBS), the core project team was confirmed as Charles Booth, Stuart Bowie and Judith Jordan. All are principal lecturers in the School of Strategy and International Business in BBS and have extensive teaching experience, particularly in using cases. Judith Jordan and Charles Booth are also active researchers in the field of strategic management, with experience of both qualitative and quantitative research studies, and with funded research contract work. Following a number of delays, primarily caused by unanticipated procedural issues within the university, Ann Rippin was appointed to the position of research associate on the project. All members of the project team have been involved in the key activities of the project, including liaison with the funders at progress meetings, collection and analysis of key literatures, setting up and running interviews, and the production of the final report. Our original proposal involved the buying out of existing staff time for the project, but out-turn
salary costs were considerably higher than budgeted in the proposal, so this was not possible. Some teaching relief was sought and received from BBS for a related teaching and learning research project. In general, despite these difficulties, the team worked very well as a collective, and this report reflects the overall equality of input.

**Modifications to the Research Design**

The project suffered an overall delay of approximately eight months, some of which was due to the difficulties in recruiting Dr. Rippin alluded to above. An extension of the project deadline of some six months to December 2000 was sought and agreed at a progress meeting with the funders in April 2000. At the time of writing the project is essentially complete, although two further interviews agreed with institutions have yet to be carried out. In addition, some work on publication and dissemination of the research remains, but it was always anticipated that publication activities would extend past the delivery of this final report. Publications achieved to date are listed later in the report, and include one refereed journal article published and one conference paper presented so far, with two other conference papers accepted and two under review by referees, as well as numerous seminar presentations achieved or in the pipeline.

Apart from project slippage, the only other area where we have been forced to depart from our original proposal was in the choice and type of research site. We found obtaining access to institutions surprisingly difficult, particularly where student interviews were concerned. Where student interviews were arranged, low take-up by potential interviewees, despite offers of payment in some cases, meant that we were not able to interview as many students as we originally hoped. Our original proposal also included interviews at a Dutch institution: negotiations for access were protracted, and by the time it was evident that they were not to be successful, it was too late to make other arrangements. Despite these difficulties, we were successful in arranging interviews with students at three institutions, and with staff at eight institutions. We consider that the data gathered is robust and is more than sufficient for an exploratory study of this type.
The Organization of the Report

This report is organized in five substantive sections. This introduction briefly reprises the background to the research proposal, sets out the context, organization and major aims and objectives of the study, discusses the reasons for and implications of some departures from the original research design, and outlines the structure of the report. The next section is a review of the diffuse and complex massification literature, and in addition presents some secondary data on the institutional context of UK higher education. In our review of this literature, we argue that although the quantitative approach to massification can be conceptually distinguished from other changes in the institutional context, in practice the effects of increasing student numbers are hard to separate from those of these other contextual changes. We argue that a broader qualitative approach to massification is not only desirable but necessary in seeking to understand the use of the case method in this context. We develop a conceptual framework to make sense of the massification phenomenon, which we use later on in the report to help structure our discussion of our findings.

The third major section in the report outlines the evolution and development of the case method of teaching and learning. This is not a review of the case method literature per se, but rather seeks to provide an account of how the case method has developed over time; we pay particular attention to the evolution of answers to the questions of what constitutes a case and how cases should be used. We argue that the institutional and cultural specificity we alluded to in our proposal is on closer examination somewhat of a chimaera, and that what emerges is a realization that the case method is, and has always been, a far less monolithic and more protean educational technology than it at first appears, or that it is accused of being by its critics. At the end of the section, we develop a typology which is derived from a more recently emerging constructivist approach to teaching and learning and which we, again, find helpful in analysing our findings later in the report.

The fourth section of the report contains the substantive findings of our research. We show how the issues identified in our review of the institutional context have impacted case-based teaching and learning in the institutions studied, both from a teachers’ and learners’ perspective. We then discuss our findings regarding use and experience of the case method more generally, in the light of the typology developed
in the earlier section. Finally, in our conclusions, we bring together a summary of our findings in tabular form and briefly outline what we see as being the main conclusions of the research. We then discuss what we regard as the major possibilities and necessities for further research in this area. Following the conclusion we provide an extensive bibliography and a number of appendices, including, *inter alia*, a brief account of the research methodology employed in the study, the interview schedules and questions, a list of institutions visited, a list of publications and other dissemination activities, and an outline of product and process development opportunities that the research suggests ECCH might wish to consider.
THE MASSIFICATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRITAIN

Introduction
The number of students studying for a first degree in Britain has grown significantly in recent years, moving Britain, some would argue, from a system of elite to mass higher education. Sceptics point out, however, that only around a quarter of all school leavers go into higher education and that Britain still retains many features of the former elite systems. In addition, the impact of increasing numbers has had a differential impact on different types of institutions and on different disciplines:

[...his idea of an elite-mass paradigm shift has become the standard account of how higher education systems develop. In one sense it is an inadequate framework for interpreting the evolution of the British system, because it tends to mask the subtleties which characterise the experience of British universities and colleges in the 1990s. It imposes a linear regularity on developments which are neither linear, nor regular. (Scott, 1995: 1)]

Figure 1: Themes in the Massification of Higher Education

We introduce this section of the report by discussing the extent to which Britain has moved towards a mass higher education system and explore some of the implications of the recent expansion in student numbers for teachers and learners. We argue that massification refers not simply to a quantitative expansion in student numbers but to a series of inter-connected changes in the UK higher education sector. The key
elements of massification are outlined in Figure 1. We start by considering the extent to which the move to mass higher education is reflected in quantitative measures such as module or institution size (the white boxes in Figure 1). We then discuss a series of inter-related changes that have accompanied the expansion in undergraduate student numbers (the grey boxes in Figure 1). These complex and inter-related changes together comprise our understanding of the concept of massification. We conclude the section with a speculative discussion on where these changes might be leading undergraduate education in the twenty first century.

**Massification**

At its simplest, massification of higher education can be defined as a quantitative expansion in student numbers but this straightforward definition masks a considerable degree of complexity. We can identify the expansion in student numbers at:

- the macro level - changes in the absolute number of undergraduate students, or in the proportion of a particular age group engaged in university education.
- the institutional level - changes in the number and average size of universities.
- the discipline level - increases in the number of undergraduate students reading for degrees in, for example, business or medicine at a national level.
- the faculty or departmental level - increases in the number of undergraduate students reading for degrees in particular disciplines in individual faculties.
- the module level - the number of students registered for a particular module at a particular institution.
- the class level - an increase in the average size of seminars or lectures.

An overall increase in the number of students entering higher education is a necessary but not sufficient condition for quantitative expansion at other levels of analysis. In addition, whereas much of the debate concerning massification is focussed at the macro level, the teaching and learning impacts are likely to be primarily, though not exclusively, a function of module and class size. While the effect of class size on performance at pre-university level has been studied extensively, far fewer studies have been undertaken for university and college class size.
Participation and Student Numbers in Higher Education

While there is general agreement that higher education in the UK has moved to a mass system (see, for example, Wright, 1996; Wagner, 1995; Tight, 1996) there are some major restrictions on the data which can be assembled to support this claim. The data collected on students in UK higher education prior to the establishment of the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) in 1994 are rather patchy and the definitions and categories applied by HESA since its establishment make detailed comparison over time difficult. Nonetheless, it is possible to obtain a reasonably comprehensive picture of the size and nature of the changes that have taken place in higher education by piecing together data from a variety of different sources. In this report we focus on the changes that have taken place in the post-war period, placing particular emphasis on the changes that have taken place from the late 1980s onwards.

Fulton (1991), in his analysis of historical changes in UK higher education, reports that the participation rate first started to increase sharply in the 1960s, rising from approximately 7% at the beginning of the decade to 14% by the end. In the 1970s, however, the rate ceased to grow and, indeed, fell back slightly to 12.5%. It was not until 1988 that the proportion of 18 to 23 year olds entering full-time higher education began to approach the 15% figure, usually taken to mark the threshold of mass higher education. Britain, at this point, lagged behind most other industrialised countries (Teichler, 1996), where open access and more general courses resulted in a larger proportion of the age group entering higher education. Britain, nonetheless, did have extraordinarily high student completion rates by international standards. McLean (1990) argues that these high completion rates prevailed not only because of the elitist and specialist nature of British higher education but also because of the autonomy of the higher education system in the UK where academics’ control over student entry, course content and graduation was much greater than in other countries.

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1 The standard measure of participation adopted in respect to British higher education is the proportion of home domiciled entrants aged under 21 to full-time and sandwich undergraduate course of higher or further education expressed as a proportion of the average 18 to 19 population.

2 The adoption of a 15% participation rate as marking the transition from an elite to a mass system of higher education follows the seminal work by Trow (1973) and is commonly used by other researchers (see, for example, Parry, 1997)
From 1988 onwards the expansion was much more rapid. Smithers & Robinson (1995) identify a participation rate of 32% by 1994. More recent data, provided in Table 1, shows that the participation rate has stabilised somewhat in recent years and, if anything, has shown some slight decline. The participation rate in higher education of those from unskilled social backgrounds remains at between 12 and 14 % whereas the figure is in excess of 70% for professional classes.

Table 1
Participation Rates in British Higher Education 1991/2 to 1998/9

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled non-manual</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled manual</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly Skilled</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All social classes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Social Trends, 2000

The change in the participation rate is mirrored in the absolute number of students admitted to undergraduate degree programmes. Wagner (1995) shows that the large growth in student numbers in Britain began in the second half of the 1980s and reports a near doubling of student numbers in the 1990s. Table 2 indicates the number of students on courses of higher education (excluding the Open University) in the UK in 1988 and 1992. The table demonstrates there was a significant expansion (more than 50%) in both undergraduate and postgraduate numbers during this period, with more than a quarter of a million extra students engaged in first degree programmes.
Table 2

Students on courses of higher education in the UK (excluding the O.U.) by mode and level of study, 1988 & 1992 (thousands)

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First degree</td>
<td>469.6</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>502.6</td>
<td>702.0</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>769.2</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>134.6</td>
<td>104.9</td>
<td>106.7</td>
<td>211.6</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other H.E.</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>207.8</td>
<td>302.1</td>
<td>147.6</td>
<td>205.0</td>
<td>352.6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>636.7</td>
<td>302.6</td>
<td>939.3</td>
<td>954.4</td>
<td>378.9</td>
<td>1333.3</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fulton 1991

Table 3, drawn from more recent HESA data, shows that the expansion in the number of students on full-time degree programmes has continued in the 1990s albeit at a diminishing rate of expansion. Growth, however, has been distributed rather unevenly across discipline areas. Parry (1997) reports that three fields dominated undergraduate recruitment at first degree level in the 1990s: business and administration, engineering and technology and social science.

Table 3

Number of full-time undergraduate degree students in the UK

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of students on</td>
<td>832799</td>
<td>859389</td>
<td>917425</td>
<td>945132</td>
<td>949991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>programmes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from previous year</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HESA

Data compiled from HESA reports for the period 1994 –1999 support this assertion, as Table 4 illustrates. Business and Administration, in particular, accounted for more undergraduate students than any other discipline category. In addition, the field of
Business and Administration has shown year on year growth throughout the period whereas areas like Engineering and Technology have seen some reductions in absolute student numbers.

Table 4

Full-time Undergraduate Degree Students in Great Britain by Subject of Study

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business and Administrative Science</td>
<td>112505</td>
<td>116036</td>
<td>119241</td>
<td>120538</td>
<td>122439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3%)</td>
<td>(2.8%)</td>
<td>(1.1%)</td>
<td>(1.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine and Dentistry</td>
<td>26544</td>
<td>26840</td>
<td>27707</td>
<td>28615</td>
<td>29079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.1%)</td>
<td>(3.2%)</td>
<td>(3.2%)</td>
<td>(1.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Science</td>
<td>51282</td>
<td>51439</td>
<td>51031</td>
<td>49985</td>
<td>49360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.3%)</td>
<td>(-0.8%)</td>
<td>(2.0%)</td>
<td>(-1.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and Technology</td>
<td>96118</td>
<td>95112</td>
<td>90930</td>
<td>87583</td>
<td>84420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-1.0%)</td>
<td>(-4.4%)</td>
<td>(3.7%)</td>
<td>(-3.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, Economic and Political Studies</td>
<td>77488</td>
<td>77810</td>
<td>77666</td>
<td>78119</td>
<td>79502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.4%)</td>
<td>(-0.2%)</td>
<td>(0.6%)</td>
<td>(1.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>32847</td>
<td>33239</td>
<td>33594</td>
<td>34147</td>
<td>33089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.2%)</td>
<td>(1.1%)</td>
<td>(1.6%)</td>
<td>(-3.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures in brackets indicate change from previous year.
Source: HESA

Changes in the Number and Size of Universities

Institutional change has accompanied the increase in student numbers. Tight (1996) points to episodes of expansion and stasis in the number of institutions granted university status in the post-war period. The first major expansion was in the 1950s and 1960s when the number of universities trebled. Long established university colleges in places such as Nottingham and Exeter were chartered, seven new campus universities were created and a number of Colleges of Advanced Technology were upgraded. This growth was followed by a period of consolidation from 1969-92 during which time only London Business School and Buckingham were granted university status. A further doubling in the number of universities took place in 1992 and 1993 when former polytechnics and a few major colleges were re-designated as universities. The period since 1993 has been one of stasis, albeit with a few additional colleges seeking and receiving university status. The main feature of this
period has been the big increase in the size, rather than the number, of universities. Scott (1997) points out that universities with more than 10,000 students used to be rare, and those that were large were usually divided into smaller sub-units on the basis of London or Oxbridge style colleges. Tables 5a and 5b indicates the number of universities with more than 10,000 and 20,000 students in the years 1994 –1999. The majority of these ‘newly large’ institutions are the so-called ‘new universities’, that is, former Polytechnics that acquired university status as a result of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act.

### Table 5a

**Number of universities with more than 10,000 students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No. of Institutions</th>
<th>No. of institutions with 10,000+ students</th>
<th>No. of institutions with 10,000+ students designated ‘new’ universities</th>
<th>Column C as a % of column B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994/5</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/9</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source HESA

### Table 5b

**Number of universities with more than 20,000 students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of institutions with 20,000+ students</th>
<th>No. of institutions with 20,000+ students designated ‘new’ universities</th>
<th>Column B as a % of Col A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994/5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HESA

**Changes in Module, Class and Team Size**

National statistics are not collected at the module or class level but anecdotal evidence and personal experience suggests that there has been a significant increase in both module and class size in many institutions, particularly in the ‘new’ universities. The
data that does exist on module size has been collected as part of empirical investigations into the relationship between class size and student performance and commonly relates to a single institution. Lindsay & Paton-Saltzberg (1987) analyse time series data for the modular degree programme offered at Oxford Polytechnic from 1980 onwards. They find that:

The tendency is for a statistical excess of small modules in 1981/2 and 1982/3 to be transformed into a statistical excess of large modules in 1983/4 and 1984/5. (Lindsay & Paton-Saltzberg, 1987:220).

Gibbs, Lucas & Simonite (1996) in a follow up study (based on the modular degree programme at the same institution before and after its conversion to university status) found the same trend. They reported that the modular course had increased in size from about 2500 students in 1984 to 6500 in 1994. Whereas in 1984/5 the largest module enrolled 196 students and only 64 modules enrolled more than 70 students, in 1993/4 the largest module enrolled 462 students and 196 modules enrolled more than 70 students. They concluded that:

[to]here had been a disproportionate increase in the number of large modules over the study period (Gibbs, Lucas & Simonite, 1996:226)

Data collected as part of this study appears to confirm the trend to larger modules. For example, at Bristol Business School (BBS) the final year strategic management course on the undergraduate modular programme now involves approximately 600 students from six degree programmes and from eight nationalities, up from approximately 100 students six years ago. Table 6 shows student numbers and current module sizes at this institution.

| Table 6 |
| Size of Modules in One Institution |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Numbers 1998/9*</th>
<th>Student numbers 1999/00*</th>
<th>Student Numbers 2000/01**</th>
<th>Module size 1999/2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>600+ 300- 200- 100- &gt;100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11670</td>
<td>14550</td>
<td>15500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*=actual, **=estimate  
Source: Bristol Business School
As module size has increased so have the size of the teaching teams delivering large modules, although little hard data are available to verify this assertion. Although the management and business literature contains a number of studies on team size and team performance, there appears to be little research on teaching team size in higher education.

Diversity
As the student body has expanded so it has become increasingly diverse, with students exhibiting significant differences in educational background, language skills, industry experience, age and other characteristics. The growing diversity in the undergraduate student population is acknowledged by many commentators (see, for example, Daniel, 1993; Huisman, 1998; Richardson, 1995) but few have attempted to systematically measure or document this change. Those studies that do draw on empirical data tend to focus on systemic, programmatic and structural diversity\(^3\) between institutions (see for example, Fairweather, 2000; Huismann, 2000; Neave, 2000) rather than to report differences in the student constituency. The absence of hard data also reflects the difficulty of agreeing and operationalizing appropriate measures. A recent study by UCAS (1999), however, does shed some light on the changing composition of UK undergraduates. The research examined changes in the age, sex, social class, ethnic origin, main entry qualifications and selected subject areas of students accepted on to HND and degree programmes in the period 1994-1998. The report found that there were indications that participation had widened over the period in question, evidenced by the increase in accepted applicants from minority ethnic and socio-economic groups to degree courses and in the movement towards those offering GNVQ qualifications for entry to both degree and HND programmes. The report, concluded, however, on a note of caution. Detailed analysis of the figures for the final year of the study, 1997/8, revealed a large decrease in accepted applicants within the age, socio-economic and ethnic groupings that were the primary focus of initiatives to widen participation.

\(^3\) Goedegebuure et al (1996) define these terms as follows;

- **Systemic diversity** refers to the different types of institutions to be found within the higher education system.
- **Programmatic diversity** refers differences in programs and services provided by different institutions within a system.
- **Structural diversity** refers to institutional differences that exist due to historical and legal foundations of institutions or differences in the division of authority within institutions.
Although the report’s authors were reluctant to attribute causality, they suggested that cutbacks in funding probably played a significant role.

Connor (1999) makes a similar point. While she argues that it is no longer possible to talk of a typical graduate, pointing out that around 25% of all first degree students are now over 25 years old, she also reminds us that extent of widening access can be overstated. She points out that whilst participation by ethnic minorities has been growing and, at the time she wrote her paper, stood at around one in eight UK first degree entrants, ethnic minority students were concentrated at only a dozen or so universities, mainly the new universities in London and other cities. As Windolf (1985) explains, expanding access to universities is socially controlled by institutional differentiation so that more prestigious institutions are likely to remain the cultural possession of traditionally advantaged groups.

Universities have also become more international in character (Kitzinger, 1991). Political developments, technological change and the globalisation of markets and production have led universities to adopt an international as well as a national/regional stance. Seidel (1991) explains that the internationalisation of universities have been furthered by innovative exchange programmes which promote the mobility of students and scholars and flexibility in academic programmes and institutions. Most studies in this area discuss the challenges cultural diversity creates for teachers and learners, few, if any, document the evolution or nature of this change. Perry & Fraser (1993) suggest that multicultural education is not simply a matter of adding new material to the curriculum but of “fundamentally re-visioning” the relationship of education to a democratic society. hooks (1993:93), drawing on her experiences as a teacher in a multi-cultural environment, suggests that:

*As the classroom becomes more diverse, teachers are faced with the way the politics of domination like racism or sexism are reproduced in the educational setting*

and that students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds

*may not feel at all safe in what appears to be a neutral setting. And that it is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or absence of student engagement.*
Biggs (1998) explains that students from different cultural backgrounds are socialised in ways that mean that generalisations about effective teaching and learning methods are very precarious.

The Changing Context of Higher Education

Massification refers not simply to a quantitative expansion in student numbers but to a series of inter-connected changes in the UK university sector. This broader conceptualisation of massification can perhaps be referred to as Massification with a capital M to distinguish it from the narrower purely quantitative interpretation (massification with a small m). Although it is conceptually possible to distinguish between massification and Massification, pragmatically it is difficult to disentangle the effects of increasing student numbers from those of other changes in the institutional context of higher education. Taken together these contextual changes, which are outlined in the next section, have had a profound effect on staff and student approaches to teaching and learning.

Credentials, Employment and Consumerism

One of the first ramifications of the move to a mass system of higher education has been a dramatic increase in the number of graduates entering the job market. In the past, it has been taken as axiomatic that higher education confers benefits on both the individual and the nation. The massification of higher education has, however, called this assumption into question and created the prospect of what Robertson (2000) labels “credential saturation”. Teichler (1999:72) notes that:

substantial graduate unemployment is reported in many relatively rich, and in many developing, countries. In addition, employment problems are visible in terms of the transition from higher education to employment as a complicated and protracted period, in the frequent perception of mismatch between graduate competences and work assignments and in the spread of shaky employment conditions.

Nowotny, Scott & Gibbons (2001) find that whilst mass higher education fulfils an important function in opening access routes of social mobility to a widening segment of the population, the conditions under which social mobility can be achieved have undergone significant change. The links between higher education and employment
have become volatile and unpredictable and society’s notion of what constitutes graduate employment is beginning to change. This view is supported by Stringfield’s (1995) empirical work on the average incomes of graduate and non-graduate males in the U.S. between 1949 and 1994. He finds that a college education is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for economic wellbeing and that the link between educational attainment and income levels became more tenuous from 1970 onwards. Zemsky (1998: 88) extends the debate, arguing that once the market for college graduates becomes saturated in a locality “the boundary between massification and post massification is crossed leading to a restratification of both educational attainment and economic advantage”. Pitcher & Purcell (1998) also concur with the view that massification inevitably erodes the traditional links between university education and ‘elite’ job, causing society to revise its notion of what constitutes ‘graduate’ employment. Drawing on extensive UK survey data, they question whether there is still a ‘graduate labour market’ and find that non-traditional graduates are more likely than other graduates to report difficulties in the transition from education to employment.

Scott (1997: 39) points out that the changing nature of the graduate labour market both “strengthens and weakens the functionalism of the system and the instrumentalism of students”. On the one hand, as the occupational benefits conferred on graduates diminishes so the contest for competitive advantage is sharpened. On the other, as the rewards to investment in higher education diminish and become more uncertain so university education takes on the character of consumption rather than investment activity. Massification creates a scramble for reputational advantage as individuals seek to secure or preserve individual competitive positions and universities move to gain reputation by supplying new awards and expend more effort trying to secure advantageous ratings in league tables. Students compete to gain places at institutions which are deemed to have excellent reputations and view the attainment of a first or upper second award as key to occupational success. This process leads to ‘credential inflation’; students seek to gain personal competitive advantage in the labour market by acquiring new credentials. This demand fuels the supply of new (higher or differentiated) awards, which, in turn, stimulate students to acquire yet more qualifications. Dore (1977) predicts that we will be struck by ‘diploma disease’ and Collins (1979) suggests that credential inflation will become a
cause for political concern. Robertson (2000) argues that the new credentials will not necessarily be vocational in the narrow sense of the term. Academic credentials will continue to outweigh vocational credentials for as long as employers continue to offer better wage returns to the former. Henkel & Kogan (1999) disagree. They see the type of provision changing with greater emphasis being placed on transferable skills, continuing learning, competence-based qualifications, and portable academic credits.

Robertson (2000: 80) takes up the theme of students as consumers and points out that:

> participation in higher education, while no longer a luxury for the 1960s generation, was still a novelty to be enjoyed. Its consumption involved access to conventional pleasures of youth, and universities organized, and tacitly presented themselves, as modest extensions of the recreation industry.

He argues that massification, whilst delivering greater student choice and autonomy, also changes student priorities. The move to a mass education system, because of the pressure it places on economic resources, means that universities cannot be sustained as “middle class academic playpens” Robertson (2000:81). The emphasis in the future will be on higher education as a route to personal prosperity more closely integrated with employment rather than as a social rite of passage. In the same vein, Watson (2000:13) points out that the traditional notion of student life as “a gift of an interval” is now a thing of the past.

**Competition and Funding Pressures**

The shift in emphasis from university education as investment activity to university education as a consumption activity is one element in a series of changes that, taken together, constitute a move to a market-based approach. In the UK, this transformation from an autonomous public funded system to a quasi-market system has been relatively swift and dramatic. Williams (1997: 177) notes that “within ten years, students have been metamorphosed from apprentices to customers, and their teachers from master craftsman to merchants”. This transformation is commonly attributed to the return of the Conservative party to government in 1979. Mrs Thatcher’s government was committed to a market-based ideology and sought to introduce radical reform. Higher education was perceived as inefficient and a prime candidate for institutional change. The case for a market-based approach to higher education was based on three key propositions:
that efficiency is increased when governments buy academic services from producers, or subsidise students to buy them, rather than supplying them directly or indirectly

- that as enrolments rise the private sector must relieve governments of some of the cost burdens if acceptable quality is to be maintained

- that many of the benefits of higher education accrue to the private individual so criteria of both efficiency and equity are served if students or their families make some contribution to the costs of obtaining the benefits.

But, as a number of commentators have pointed out (see, for example, Breneman 1981; Dill 1997) higher education systems also have characteristics which predispose them to ‘market failure’ and, therefore, require some continuing form of public policy intervention.

The Conservative government’s period of office was characterised by a series of cost cutting initiatives designed to reduce ‘waste’. In the period 1981-1993 student numbers rose from 640,000 full-time equivalents to 1,128,800 but there was a less than proportionate rise in teaching-related expenditure from £3,080 million to £4,570 million at 1985 prices (Ghosh & Rodgers, 1999). Costs per student fell sharply during this period even though the total income of higher education institutions from government sources increased as a result of the rapid increase in numbers. At the same time private sector contributions to higher education income rose from 10% in 1980 to 20% in 1990 (Williams 1996:180). From 1995 onwards, the government continued the reductions on funding per student but also put a cap on further expansion in numbers. In response the universities sought funds from elsewhere and sparked the debate on the introduction of tuition fees. It was against this background that the Dearing Committee was set up in February 1996 with a remit to make recommendations on how the purpose, shape, structure, size and funding of the higher education system should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom over the next twenty years. The Dearing Committee concluded that it was unlikely that significant increases in the funding of higher education could come from either the government (regardless of political persuasion) or employers, so that the only realistic source was students and their families. The committee’s analysis was accepted by government and student loans and tuition fees were subsequently introduced. An
active debate is now underway on universities’ pricing policies and the possible introduction of ‘top up fees’ by leading institutions.

The abolition of student maintenance grants and the introduction of loans and tuition fees, as we have already noted in the section on diversity, has disadvantaged certain groups. Egerton & Halsey (1993) suggest that although government policy claims to be aimed at increasing participation from under-represented groups, funding pressures exacerbate relative class inequalities of access and lower the average quality of higher education. Blackburn & Jarman (1993) find that class inequalities have not improved, although there has been a decline in gender inequalities over time. Daniels (1993) notes that part-time study is an integral part of the development of mass higher education but that current funding and admission schemes are placing part-time students at a disadvantage and are constraining diversity.

**Table 7**

The Self Reported Financial Circumstances of Students at the University of Brighton, 1992-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of second year</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students reporting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>debt in excess of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£1,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of second year</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students with student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of second year</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>46 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students in regular</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employment during</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>term time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 39 % of which were working more than 15 hours per week

Cutbacks in funding mean that students face heavy debt burdens and often attempt to combine part-time paid employment with their undergraduate studies. Watson (2000: 13) cites serial studies on the financial circumstances of students at the University of Brighton. His findings, outlined in Table 7, demonstrate not only that resistance to debt has been eroded but also that there has been a significant increase in the amount
of paid employment undertaken during term time. Ford, Bosworth & Wilson (1995) in a study of 1059 randomly sampled respondents found that around 30% of undergraduates now take term-time employment, although a lower percentage are employed at any one time. Comparing the situation in 1993 with the position in 1988, they reported an increase in the percentage contribution of term-time employment to total income. Preliminary evidence suggested that, whereas not all employment was problematic, when employment involved higher hours, several days per week, split shifts or requests for overtime, the effects were not necessarily benign. Humphrey et al (1998:238) found that university students experience “above average stress levels” and conclude that “the popular notion of university students enjoying a relaxed, stress-free lifestyle is likely to be wide of the mark.” The increased incidence of students engaging in part-time paid employment means not only that students face competing demands on their time but also that their focus changes. Ritzer, citing a study by Levine (1993) of undergraduates at 30 campuses in the United States points out that:

Higher education is not the center of most students’ lives, it is not necessarily even their most important activity. Going to school [college], like going to McDonald’s, Disney World or the mall, is just one part of a student’s life (Ritzer, 1998:153)

The Changing Curriculum: Modularization and Vocationalism

As market forces permeate higher education universities are required to make efficiency gains and to produce measurable and predictable outputs in order to deliver ‘value for money’. The drive to cut cost manifests itself through increased class sizes, reduced contact time, the substitution of technological for human capital and the increased use of part-time or casual staff. These changes are driving, and being driven by, changes in the structure and content of undergraduate awards. Massification has gone hand in hand with the modularization and semesterization of the curriculum, the introduction of more inter-disciplinary, vocational orientated awards, the move towards credit-based systems and IT-based approaches to teaching and learning. Trowler (1998) citing Robertson (1994) finds that by the early 1990s about 80% of universities had developed or were committed to developing modular programmes and around 65% of universities had or planned to adopt a two-semester structure. By 1993, 70% of universities allowed credits for work-based and other forms of experiential learning and 85% had introduced or planned to introduce credit
accumulation and transfer schemes. In addition, combined degrees (those in which two or more disciplines are studied) were becoming standard with more (40.3%) higher education students in 1994 taking combined degrees than any other degree type (HESA data).

Modularization and semesterization, although often treated as co-terminous, are strictly speaking separate phenomena. Morris (2000) defines modularization as the process by which educational awards are broken up into component parts of more or less standard size. These parts may then be assessed separately and independently so that students can study individual modules in a variety of different sequences. In Britain there appears to have been two waves of enthusiasm for modularity. The first, in the 1960s, was motivated by the idea of breaking out of disciplinary restrictions and resulted in the introduction of courses with names such as ‘Modern Studies’ and ‘American Studies’. The second wave, in the 1980s and 1990s, was associated with the move to mass higher education, cuts in funding and managerial initiatives to finding more economical and efficient delivery mechanisms (Trowler, 1998). The claim, made at the time (Wagner 1995), was that a standardised credit framework would facilitate the move to a mass system by making the boundaries of higher education more permeable thus broadening and diversifying the student body. Moreover, this could be done without commensurate increases in resources because a modularised system permitted economies of scale to be realised and made the higher education ‘diet’ more digestible by new types of students. Not all would agree that these benefits have been realised (see, for example, Morris, 2000).

The impact of these changes in the structure of the curriculum are subtle and potentially far-reaching. Duke (1993) claims that the move to credit-based awards brings with it important changes in the nature of the student experience of higher education, changing its role in the wider community from what he calls a “finishing school” to a “service station” model. Allen & Layer (1995:25) argue that modularization and credit frameworks:

*undermine the central assumption of much of the UK higher education system, namely that learning best takes place within one institutions, over a fixed and limited period of time, according to rules best determined by academic staff.*
Trowler (1998: 6) argues that “the distinctions between academic, experiential and other forms of learning blur. Control over curriculum is conditioned by consumer choice rather than producer control”. On a more positive note Schuller (1990), commenting on the Australian and New Zealand experience of massification, concludes that universities have become more open, flexible and resourceful.

The massification of higher education has also resulted in universities altering their philosophical purpose, with more emphasis placed on vocational training and work-related skills and less on education for its own sake. This represents a move away from the liberal ideal of higher education towards an economic ideology where it is important for universities to contribute directly to wealth creation and improved economic performance. A recent CVCP⁴ paper (1999: para. 14) on “Higher Education in the 21st Century” observed that:

The expansion of public funding has not taken place on the basis of cultivating young minds for their own sake. Rather, it has taken place on the basis of promoting societal, and not individual values. Universities have been given a mission... [which] is quite clear, it is to aid economic competitiveness and promote social inclusion.

This same emphasis is also apparent in the rhetoric on key skills. The Dearing Report, published in 1997, proposed that the four key skills of communication, numeracy, use of information technology and learning how to learn should be incorporated into the undergraduate curriculum. This raises the question of whether traditional subject departments offer the best context for the delivery of skills training and, indeed, whether opportunities for skills acquisition are best arranged inside or outside the curriculum. The skills agenda also places emphasis on a different type of knowledge. Put crudely it shifts the emphasis from understanding to skill, from ‘knowing that’ to ‘knowing how’ and to the application of knowledge in a social context rather than knowledge for knowledge’s sake. Scott (1997: 41) goes further and suggests that massification is contributing to “a decay in traditional ‘scientific’ culture” and is feeding “a growing scepticism about the claims of universalism made on behalf of cognitive rationality”. Although he does not go as far as suggesting a causal link between massification and the advance of post-modernist thinking, he suggests that there are obvious affinities between them.

⁴ Now re-badged as Universities UK.
Not only is curriculum content changing but so is the mode of delivery and the approach to teaching and learning. Scott (1997) states that:

'[t]he tangible effects of [this] labour intensification have been the sharp rise in staff-student ratios and often enforced moves towards student-directed learning and self-assessment; its intangible effects probably include an attenuation of personal relationships between students and teachers and among academic colleagues and their substitution by bureaucratic systems of counselling, guidance, quality assurance and so on, leading arguably to an erosion of the idea of an academic community.

These pressures are also evident in the use of new technology to support teaching and learning. Students increasingly have access to sophisticated search engines, fast delivery systems and a plethora of material that is subject to no quality control. Bridges (2000: 42) argues that:

this will totally undermine the continuing dominance of a curriculum which provides for the transmission of knowledge and demands its replacement by a curriculum which supports its distillation, analysis, ordering and manipulation.

The advent of web-based learning may also disrupt the conventional linear pattern of representation, which is closely associated with the technology of books and essays. Linear representations might be replaced by representations which allow multiple connections and layering of content. Croy (1998: 317), however, feels that concerns about the development of undergraduate distance learning are premature. He points out that:

It is faculty who bear primary responsibility for the impact of distance technology, and there is currently a wide gulf between faculty attitudes to this technology.

Managerialism, Audit and Inspection

The move to mass higher education has also signalled a changing relationship between the state and universities, that has caused some commentators (see, for example, Tapper & Salter, 1995; Peters, 1992) to doubt the aptness of describing British universities as autonomous institutions. Although the British system, because of its unique historical legacy, has become the particular focus of debate, similar concerns have been voiced in other countries (Trow, 1987; McInnis, 1995; Tam, 1999). Autonomy refers to the right to self-government and, as Eustace (1994) points out, in the British system much independence has, in the past, been vested in dons who controlled what was taught and researched. The changing context of higher
education, particularly funding cuts, have forced universities to exercise greater control over their financial and human resources. This has led to more formalised management structures, the introduction of more sophisticated management information systems and a greater emphasis on institutional leadership. Newby (1999: 267) notes that:

*the notion of a university as a group of self regulating and self managing scholars has long since gone.*

and argues that vice-chancellors, who have recently gained increased management control, will be reluctant to relinquish their authority.

Parker & Jary (1994) also highlight the way in which changes in the funding regime for higher education have reduced autonomy, but their focus is on the diminution in institutional rather than personal academic independence. They argue that the Universities Grants Committee acted as a buffer between the state and the universities, keeping the former at arms’ length. The subsequent removal of this buffer has opened universities to the demands of the state and of state-operated markets. Moves away from the previous block grant system and the separation of teaching and research funding has allowed greater centralised control of the operation of both parts of the system. These changes together amount to a substantial organisational shift which, according to Parker & Jary (1995), has increased power of institutional managers and has introduced pervasive managerialist cultures and systems. In their opinion, it has also diminished the role of academics who now have less command over decisions and who have seen the domain of ‘academic judgement’ significantly reduced.

This trend to managerialism and centralisation has been accompanied by the imposition of more formal quality control and external appraisal systems and increased reliance by institutions on bureaucratic structures and processes to standardise, measure, evaluate and control academic labour. The internal regulation systems operated by the universities in the period prior to 1992 have been replaced by externally dictated mechanisms such as the Research Assessment Exercise, Teaching Quality Assessments and Quality Assessment Audits. As a by-product of these changes greater emphasis has been attached to visible and measured outputs, performance measurement and to non-peer scrutiny and vetting, leading some writers
to use Foucault’s metaphor (after Bentham) of the panopticon as an appropriate descriptor of the current system (see, for example, Boje, 1996; Bryman, Haslam & Webb, 1994; Shore & Roberts, 1995). Puxty, Sikka & Wilmott (1994) feel that these changes in the organisation of academic labour are best understood as part of a broader process of commodification, in which the sellers of labour lose control over the conditions of work. Looking specifically at academic accounting labour, they argue that the work of accounting academics has been progressively shaped and intensified by the operation of market mechanisms that have weakened academic control over the content and organisation of teaching and research activities.

Puxty et al’s work is in the ‘labour process’ tradition which Dearlove (1997) argues has brought three key insights to bear on the changing context of higher education. First, the labour process perspective emphasises the point that academic work has much in common with other forms of paid work; it is not a special case. Depending on the balance of power, university managers may directly control the work of academics. Secondly, the Marxist political economy perspective implies that in order to understand what is happening to the organisation of academic work inside universities it is important to situate universities in their wider context. Wilmott (1995:1005) asserts that “the key to understanding change in the organisation and control of academic work lies in the analysis of the trajectory of the distinctive organisation and dynamics of the capitalist society in which it is embedded”. Thirdly, interest in the changing conditions of work highlights changes towards the proletarianisation of academic labour, a trend which more conservative observers describe as ‘de-professionalisation’ but which both groups see as intimately related to the rise of managerialism and the fall of collegiality.

The theme of commodification of labour is present not only in the debate on academic autonomy but also in discussions of the changing terms and conditions of academic work. Halsey (1992:125) in his study of the British academic profession was in no doubt that there is a trend “towards more proletarianised intellectual labour” in that “prestige, salaries, autonomy and resources have been much humbled”. In the early 1980s most academics had formal or informal tenure but by 1996 some 41% of all British academics were on fixed term contracts. Williams (1992:54) comments that the “emergence of an intellectual proletariat has been one of the effects of the funding
changes in the 1980s”. Barnes & O’Hara (1999) report the findings of their study into the experiences of academics on short term contracts and find that temporary employees’ contractual status affects their ability to perform effectively and reduces their level of commitment to the organisation. They suggest that most universities have not fully recognised the implications of a large temporary work force and that this may have a direct impact on the quality of teaching.

It is perhaps not surprising that this climate of change has led to concerns about academic workload and morale. Nixon (1996) suggests that higher education may be facing a crisis of self-identity as academics question the values on which any claim to professionalism might be based. Baron (2000), drawing on empirical work undertaken at two institutions of higher education, found morale to be low but, nonetheless, that her respondents were firmly committed to teaching. Gappa & Leslie (1995:20) refer to casual staff as “invisible faculty” who are “excluded from collegial mechanisms within their universities” whilst their poor conditions sustain the better conditions of permanent faculty. Dearlove (1997:65) suggests that:

> there are now real divisions of interest within the academic community with a small elite of highly paid core luminaries escaping managerial control and the process of proletarianisation.

He goes on to argue, however, that collegiality has always been an elitist ideal for the good times and that there was no need for organisational leadership when there were no hard choices on the table. Rather than decry managerialism, he suggests that:

> a robust managerialism could well involve academic organisation by experts geared to the interests of the institution as a whole and keenly attuned to the need for change in response to environmental threats and opportunities (Dearlove, 1997:66)

Contextual changes have also prompted a strong debate on quality standards in higher education and falling academic standards (Trow, 1987; Baron, 2000; Holmes, 1993). In the UK, Court (1998:127) using degree classifications as a proxy for quality found that:

> degree classes were better at the old universities although there was a significant difference between the Russell and 94 groups on one hand, and the other old universities on the other. This evidence of a trend in graduate quality, or at least in the grading of undergraduates, linked to particular types of institutions, appears to support a model of institution-related degree standards.
He also notes that staff-student ratios are:

*lower in the old sector than the new; with the implication that the greater the number of staff to students, the better will be the quality of education and service provided for those students. In the new universities, there were more than twice the number of students per member of staff than in the Russell Group.* (Court: 1998: 126)

**Undergraduate Education in the Twenty First Century**

There is an emerging consensus that higher education in Britain has been transformed from a pre-Fordist craft process into a Fordist mass production operation, at least in big universities and for undergraduate teaching, but there is considerably less agreement on how universities are likely to develop in the twenty first century. Two linked strands appear in the literature, differing mainly in their conception of academic knowledge. The first, based on the work of Weber and the re-working of Weber’s ideas by Ritzer in his McDonaldization thesis (1996a, 1996b, 1998), sees higher education as developing in the modernist mould. In this approach, knowledge becomes commodified. Higher education, it is argued, will be increasingly regarded as if it had:

*some inert material essence or as if its production processes could be readily broken down into a set of fixed, measurable and assessable procedures which admit the title ‘good’ (or even best practice), or as if its outputs should be predictable, standardisable and quantifiable.* (Hartley 1995: 419).

The second approach, also in the post-Fordist tradition, sees knowledge on the other hand as becoming more elusive, contested and chaotic. From this perspective the future character and shape of universities is far more problematic. On the one hand, the move towards a society which is less based on gender and class-based stratification and more based on credentials and codified knowledge enhances the role and status of universities. On the other, new kinds of knowledge institutions are likely to emerge that are not characterised by the same patterns of academic and professional socialisation. It is by no means certain that universities, at least as currently structured, will be best able to generate and manipulate new forms of socially distributed knowledge. Knowledge will no longer be the privileged domain of academics and there is no assurance that reductionist approaches will continue to be considered effective. As Scott (1997:42) puts it “universities in this new mass age
are less able to guarantee students access to a privileged body of knowledge, because such a body of knowledge no longer exists.” Since education will be everywhere and everything will be educational, in a sense nothing will be educational.

Taking the McDonaldization thesis first, fast food, as epitomised by McDonald’s, is the metaphor Ritzer (1996a, 1996b, 1998) uses to explore the continuing rationalisation of modern society. The principal dimensions at the heart of McDonaldization are efficiency, quantification and calculability, predictability and control (often through the substitution of non-human for human technology). Ritzer shares postmodernists’ (see, for example, Baudrillard 1968 and 1970, Featherstone 1991) focal concern with consumerism. Universities, he argues, are perceived increasingly as means of educational consumption. Students consume educational services and eventually receive the ‘goods’, namely degrees or other credentials. Universities as they are currently structured, however, offer an outmoded and inefficient means of consumption and will be forced to adapt to new realities. Students want the educational equivalent of the ‘big value meal’ and will look around for universities that can supply them with appropriate solutions.

This consumerist pressure, together with the resource constraints placed on supply, will result in a variety of educational innovations. Firstly, new kinds of universities may emerge along the lines of today’s McDonald’s Hamburger University or Disney University. Ritzer explains that these ‘universities’ already represent a kind of pastiche and unlike traditional universities offer their graduates virtually guaranteed jobs and careers in thriving industries. Jarvis (2000) concurs and points out that because higher education has failed to respond rapidly to the changing demand of society, new educational institutions are already a reality. Secondly, universities of the future will need to operate in locations, and at times, convenient to their customers. Although universities, in Ritzer’s opinion, will continue to have central campuses in order to attract large numbers of students, these campuses will become more like shopping malls or theme parks. In addition, there will be far more satellite colleges offering ‘drop by’ facilities, located in convenient and attractive venues such as shopping malls or business areas. Universities will not only make it easier for students to take courses by making credit transfer and access to educational material easier, they will also place great emphasis on positive outcomes:
Thus, we can expect universities to continue grade inflation by limiting even further poor grades. Similarly steps will be taken to reduce the number of students who drop out or flunk out. Overall, the objective will be to eliminate as many barriers as possible to obtaining degrees. (Ritzer, 1996b: 191).

In fact, this process may already be occurring (Livingstone, 1999) in a process which has been labelled the ‘dumbing down’ of higher education.

New technology also has a big role to play in the McDonaldized world. The development of information and communications technology and the advent of the Internet means that it may become unnecessary for students to ‘go’ to university at all. The nature of time and space associated with education may be altered dramatically. Students will be able to access courses and on-line tutors at any time of the day or night. Current technologies, and others that are likely to follow, reduce the need for teachers and reduce the costs of education. Plater (1998:27) sums it up by saying:

Technology will change forever the dominant model of synchronous, time-linked interaction that has made teaching and learning complementary and interdependent. Learning will no longer depend on a faculty member’s teaching. Although the centuries-old model of teacher-student-classroom will not disappear, it will no longer dominate.

Courses, presented by eminent professors in the field, can be beamed from central studios, with low paid, (and de-skilled) faculty members delivering scripted classes to those students who prefer face-to-face contact. The prospect is of faculty composed of a few core superstars, supported by a large periphery of de-professionalised teaching assistants and co-ordinated by powerful corporate managers. Schuller (1990) elaborates this theme arguing that the re-division of academic labour is already occurring and that the notion of academic community is disappearing. However, Prichard & Wilmott (1997) question the inevitability of the process and point to some of the contradictions and struggles that make the broad shift to a ‘McUniversity’ unstable and partial. Drawing on discussions with nearly 40 senior post-holders in universities, they conclude that management knowledge and practices, which provide resources through which the life of the university is constructed and ‘done’ in new ways, at best only partially reconstitutes and displaces existing knowledge practices. Bridges (2000) acknowledges that there are strong pressures driving changes in the nature, structure and organisation of knowledge in universities but finds that the way in which the current dynamics of the Research Assessment Exercise, the Quality
Assurance Agency subject review process and the Higher Education Funding Council’s strategy for teaching and learning are working preserves the ‘subject’ as a form of academic and organisational identity.

The notions of commodification and control, evident in the McDonaldization thesis, resonate with the claims made by other scholars that knowledge has changed its status and entered the domain of the market (see, for example, Castells, 1989, Jameson, 1991, Lyotard, 1984). Scott (1998), while acknowledging that he is in danger of making sweeping generalisations, identifies four key attributes of what he labels the ‘post-Fordist’ as opposed to ‘post-industrialist’ perspective. These are:

- acceleration – exponential growth in goods, services, data and images is accompanied by volatility and impermanence.
- risk – the ‘new economy’ will be increasingly undermined by the accumulation of unintended risks.
- complexity, non-linearity and circularity – more complex, open and fluid accounts of economic, social and technical change will supersede rationalistic, mechanistic models of human behaviour
- reflexivity – knowledge will be democratised in the sense that ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ of enquiry become jumbled up. Values and institutions are freed from the fixities or givens of tradition and must be constructed and re-constructed frequently, in the light of interactions between expert systems and the environment.

For Scott (1997: 35), it is the last of these attributes which is most important. He argue that participation is becoming:

> a key component in the manufacturing of social, and personal, identities...Higher education is no longer – so much – about sustaining, and modifying, the division of graduate labour or forming, and legitimising social elites; it is now concerned with the wholesale construction of our social personalities.

As the basis of a professional society becomes contested so does the role of the university. Nonetheless, universities become vital economic sectors in their own right: not simply as producers of human intellectual capital, contributing to local, regional or national economies, but as part of the ‘entertainment-learning-leisure-
heritage complex’, producing symbolic goods. From this perspective, the future shape and organisation of undergraduate education is by no means clear. Universities, or at least some universities, may move towards what Hedlund (1986, 1994) has termed ‘heterarchies’ or network forms of organisation. Heterarchies are heterodox, heterogeneous and non-uniform. As Scott (1997) puts it, mass higher education in Britain cannot be expected to be “a regular or predictable formation across time and cultures.” Although it is unlikely to persist in an elite form, elite forms may persist within it. Perhaps the best that can be said the future is likely to contain elements of familiarity as well as radical change.
THE EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASE METHOD IN BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Introduction

Case teaching has histories in several fields of professional education, emerging in law in the 1870s, and in medicine around the turn of the century. (Doyle, 1990).

The origins of the case method in business and management education were in the United States where the use of the case as a problem-based pedagogy, centred on the real life experiences of prominent local businessmen, was developed before World War I at both Harvard and Northwestern Universities. Schlossman, Gleeson, Sedlak & Grayson Allen (1994, 13) comment that “there exists much heroic lore surrounding the ‘invention’ of the case method at Harvard”, and the production of a number of publications about the case method from Harvard Business School has tended to make the School synonymous with the method (Andrews, 1953; Barnes, Christensen & Hansen, 1994; McNair & Hersum, 1954). Much of the literature on case teaching focuses on its objectives (for example, Jennings, 1996) and its uses, methods and potential drawbacks (for example, Dooley & Skinner, 1977; Osigweh, 1989; Romm & Mahler, 1991) in management education and in other disciplines. There are, however, few discussions of case teaching in the context of increasing student diversity or student numbers, or of the use of the case method on undergraduate programmes generally. In short, the links between the process of case teaching, and its context, are not well developed.

Nevertheless, we found it both useful and important to develop a fairly detailed understanding of the evolution and development of the case method. As we did so, what emerged was a realization that the case method is, and has always been, a far less monolithic and more protean educational technology than it at first appears. In this part of the report, we trace the evolution of the method, exploring in detail questions of the case concept, case formats, and pedagogical intent in the case method. We then go on to trace developments such as student-written cases and constructivist approaches to teaching and learning with cases. We conclude by outlining a simple model which we believe captures a major and emerging divide in perspectives on the case method.
Early History

The case method in business and management owes its origin to its adoption by the Harvard Business School, *circa* 1908, following the success of the case method from the more established and successful Harvard Law School. At the time the Law School was “by far the most serious competitor which the new Business School had to face”. (Copeland 1954: 25). Similar concerns influenced other fledgling business schools trying to establish themselves at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Northwestern University the case was intended to demonstrate that the Business School could produce work distinguished from the narrow technical concerns of the commercial colleges which were flourishing at the time, and which was based on empirical (therefore “scientific”) research. Sedlak & Schlossman (1991) comment that the School needed to speak the language of positivist empiricism in order to support the drawing of broad, empirically derived, business principles. At the same time, the School had to gain credibility with the local business community which may have been politically vital for the School in the wider university:

> *The early business schools hoped that developing a distinctive, powerful empirically grounded pedagogy would enable them to cement their links to the business community, differentiate themselves clearly from trade schools, focus their programs on managerial decision making and achieve academic parity with university-based law and medical schools.* (Sedlak & Schlossman, 1991: 23)

At Harvard, the use of cases in the Business School was initially limited to commercial law. The aspiration that other courses adopt cases was at first difficult to realise, the School being constrained by lack of suitable material and by resistance by faculty members. Wider use of the case method developed only slowly. In 1912 the newly created Business Policy course drew on the experience of fifteen businessmen providing written accounts and assisting with classroom discussion of “*a problem from his own desk*” (Copeland, 1954: 26) representing the first real business cases used at the Harvard Business School. Real developments in the case method occurred in 1920 following experiments using the Bureau of Business Research, a statistical research centre established in 1911, to produce written cases researched in the field. By 1924 the Bureaux was employing 24 MBA graduates to produce written cases as the basis for research and for teaching (Copeland, 1954).
The second world war acted as a catalyst for further change. Faculty members who had worked in the public service during the war were convinced the existing functional based approaches failed to capture the integrated complexity of organisational life. The war also changed the nature of the student body because war service meant students were older, more experienced and more independent. Both students and faculty members, therefore, saw the benefit of moving to a more student-focused discussion approach based on cases. Harvard Business School, like its ‘sister’ Law School, had adopted the Socratic method of enquiry. Business students, like law students, were examined on the “quality of their analysis, the scope of their proposals and action plans, and their sensitivity to the managerial challenges inherent in their proposals” (Barnes, Christensen & Hansen, 1994:45). They were required to defend their arguments in the face of robust questioning from their professors. The feasibility and success of the new pedagogy was also linked to the opening in 1953 of new purpose built teaching rooms which provided a supportive physical setting. It is interesting to note, in terms of the current concerns with the increase in student numbers, that large numbers were always central to the Harvard approach. Economy in the use of faculty time was sought by teaching groups of 80 to 100 students. Between 1955 and 1965, in a series of summer seminars, the discussion method was developed and spread through the participation of Deans and faculty from schools across America (Towl, 1969).

**Defining the Case Study**

Asking the straightforward question “What is a case study?” is problematic. Barnes, Christensen & Hansen (1994:43) comment on the evolving definition of case studies which have been marked by both “continuity” and “change”: continuity in the basic concept of what constitutes a case set against changes in form and intended classroom use. A useful distinction can be made between three different aspects of the case study; the case concept, the case format and the intended pedagogical use. We review each in turn.

*The Case Concept*

There is broad agreement that cases, irrespective of the form taken or the intended pedagogical use, should be derived from the experience of managers in genuine organisations. However, the ‘facts’ presented in the case, although realistic and based
in experience, may not be complete, indeed the benefits of partial information and corresponding ambiguity are prized as an accurate reflection of the issues faced in practice. Barnes, Christensen & Hansen (1994: 44) define the case as:

... a partial, historical, clinical study of a situation which has confronted a practising administrator or managerial group. Presented in a narrative form to encourage student involvement, it provides data - substantive and process - essential to analysis of a specific situation, for the framing of alternative action programs, and for their implementation, recognising the complexity and ambiguity of the practical world.

There appears to be broad agreement amongst writers about what constitutes a ‘good’ case. Cases need to simulate real life problems, focus on important business issues and, above all, capture student interest. McNair (1971:1-2) emphasises the need for a plot structure so that the case is not just a “photographic slice of life”. He asserts that a case is really a “distinct literary form” with a distinct anatomy combining the four intertwining structures of time, plot, narration and exposition. It is also argued that characteristics such as verisimilitude, relevance, timeliness and familiarity encourage student involvement and help them to engage more deeply with the material (see, for example, Prostano & Prostano, 1982; Roselle 1996). In addition, by freeing students from the constraints of their personal experience, cases allow sensitive issues to be explored in a safe environment. Roselle (1996) suggests that the process of teaching through cases adds variety and interest and helps to bring disparate groups together, providing a focus for student-centred learning. In short the case, like a good detective story, stimulates enquiry and the pursuit of knowledge.

Whilst there is a great deal of consensus about the characteristics of a good case, there is also a recognition that cases vary with respect to their content and their pedagogic intent. McNair (1971) distinguishes between cases which focus on ‘issues for analysis’ and those which focus on ‘decisions for review’. Heath (1997), on the other hand, suggests a typology based on six categories of cases ranging from short incident cases at one end of the spectrum to complex decision cases at the other. Leenders & Erskine (1989) suggest that cases differ along three dimensions of difficulty; the analytical task facing the student, the concepts or techniques being addressed and the volume and clarity of the case material.
Cases can be used to develop and practice problem solving, analysis and evaluation skills in an objective way, or to develop conceptual skills in critical thinking and reflection. Academic theory may (or may not) be utilised in the process and the explanations or conclusions can be drawn, extended and tested through group discussion. At times students may expect the information, like real life, to be partial, contradictory or ambiguous and for there to be alternatives rather than right answers (Maltby & Andrusyszyn, 1990; Prostano & Prostano, 1982; Richardson, 1994; Rosenbloom, 1995).

Case Format

It is evident that material which falls within the broad definition of a case may take many different forms and may draw on a wider range of media than the printed word. The form of cases has adapted, over time, to take advantage of different technologies, changing national and institutional contexts and the needs of new student groups. The text-based case, with its associated numerical data, is very strongly embedded in business and management pedagogy but this format has not always dominated business and management education. As Towl (1969:8) points out, “[t]he written case which has come to symbolise the case method actually appeared rather late in [the] process”. During the initial phase of development at Harvard, cases comprised:

....just about anything the new faculty could find to provide a basis for provocative classroom discussion: a legal document, a business report, or a business problem with which the teacher was familiar. (Barnes, Christensen & Hansen, 1994: 43).

In recent years the term ‘case’ is commonly taken to refer to a written narrative which usually also contains some financial or numerical data. Jennings (1996), for example, takes this view of ‘the case’ and considers video material, presentations by guest speakers, newspaper or journal articles, and seminars on current or company topics to be complementary alternatives to, rather than part of, case studies. In contrast, Richardson (1994: 3) adopts a broader definition and conceives of case studies as a “model of real life”. He takes cases to include IT simulations, video accounts, role play exercises and myriad other formats, ranging from half page vignettes to fifty page narratives. Barkman (1998) also admits a range of formats for the ‘case’ and discusses the use of live consulting as a basis for case teaching in accountancy education. Jobst & McNinch (1994) explore the differences that arise from using the
same case in different formats and find boundaries between text and technology-based cases to be fluid. Wolfe (1998) argues that the medium used to present a case does not change the method, rather that new technologies, like video and computer-based presentation, make cases accessible to a wider audience.

Pedagogic Intent and Cases in Use
Barnes, Christensen & Hansen (1994) suggest that there are two main uses for case-based teaching; the problem-solving or decision-making mode associated with the development of professional expertise and with disciplines such as law, medicine and business, and the critical thinking and cognitive skills mode more usually associated with the liberal arts. From the outset Harvard Business School was dedicated to the former approach: “...the university proposes to supply, in the end, the leaders in business.” (Dean Eliott, speaking in May 1908, quoted in Barnes, Christensen & Hansen, 1994: 39).

The education provided was described as “practical” and “professional” and the method action orientated. Dewey, whose Pragmatist philosophy was influential in informing the Harvard approach, noted that “it asks not how a man may be trained to know but how a man may be trained to act” (quoted in Barnes, Christensen & Hansen, 1994: 41.). Gragg (1940: 8) argued that “the work of a graduate school of business ... must be aimed at fitting students for administrative positions of importance”, administration being defined as being “the process by which organisations initiate and adapt to change” (Towl, 1969: 1). Harvard Business School, from its inception, sought to train the higher echelons, the chief executive officers in waiting. This broad intent has endured and is still evident in much of the current advice on case teaching, albeit in an evolved form.

Barnes, Christensen & Hansen (1994: 47) identify five fundamental principles underlying the traditional case method. These are:

- Primacy of situation analysis
- Imperative of relating analysis to action
- Necessity of student involvement
- Non-traditional instructor role
- Balance of substantive and process teaching objectives; the development of an administrative point of view

The emphasis in the Harvard approach is on decision making, action learning and conflict resolution. While it is generally acknowledged that there is no single right answer, the expectation is that students will provide their own ‘right’ answers based on a thorough analysis of the case, refined through discussion and debate. Essential elements of the genre are also confirmed by other scholars. Prostano & Prostano (1982) suggest that the purpose of the case approach is to develop and strengthen the individual’s capabilities in analysis, problem solving, decision making, formulating policy formulation and strategic implementation. Roselle (1996) argues that the essence of the approach is to present opportunities to practice decision making and problem solving solutions before applying these strategies in an actual work environment. Mintzberg, in Quinn, Mintzberg & Ghoshal (1988), proposes that cases introduce practice into the classroom, tap a wide variety of experience and involve students in analysis and decision making. This emphasis on ‘practice’ is also a feature of much standard advice on case analysis in textbooks (see, for example, Bower, Christensen, Pearson & Andrews, 1991; David, 1986, Stahl & Grigsby, 1992).

In short, what appears to emerge from the literature is some consensus on the pedagogical intent of the traditional (Harvard-type) case method although the dominance of this approach is starting to be contested as the ‘technology’ of the case and perceptions of its purpose begin to change.

**Criticism of the Case Method**

Argyris (1980) criticises the case method and identifies some of its limitations. He suggests that the case method may unintentionally inhibit double loop learning. He identifies six approaches to running case sessions and suggests that the behavioural strategies, in which faculty dominate the proceedings, produce outcomes that prevent the achievement of the espoused pedagogical intent. The consequence of the faculty-dominated approach is that students adopt behaviours which prevent open discussion of assumptions and goals, creating learners more dependant on, than independent of, the tutor. The traditional case approach also encourages students to engage in ‘game playing’ and ‘camouflage’ activity which can inhibit the transfer of classroom learning to practice. As Argyris (1980: 297) comments “*the problem was not that the executives did not learn new ideas, the problem was that they rarely used them*.”
Revans’ (1998:92-93) concerns are not so much with the case process as with the veracity of the case accounts. Contrasting case studies with action learning narratives, his focus lies with the case users’ separation from the truthfulness of the ‘facts’ and with the presentation of the ‘facts’ in the case. Cases are contrasted with “action learning narratives” which are produced “painfully from the here and now of the realities that the participant has been involved...”. Mintzberg (1998) is similarly concerned with the consequences of separating the process of management action from direct experience. Mintzberg’s primary concern is not directly with the case method, but with the system of management education that produces professional managers “committed not to particular industries or companies but to management itself as a means of personal advancement”. His contention is that management theory cannot usefully be understood by inexperienced students and he is critical of the role played by case studies in fostering a belief in the effectiveness of conclusions which are not deeply rooted in personal experience. His worry is that the case method develops and reinforces a belief that deep understanding, useful insights and sound proposals can be derived from pages of written and numerical data. Mintzberg’s view is that the process produces students who are ‘glib’ and ‘quick-witted’ but distanced from the essential realities of business life.

More Recent Developments and Departures
Although what is labelled as the ‘Harvard’ approach still dominates much of the literature, the case approach has continuously evolved over time. Moreover, our understanding of what constitutes the “Harvard method” is by no means clear cut. The literature emanating from Harvard itself makes few claims to a standardised and consistent approach and different commentators display different understandings of what constitutes the ‘traditional’ case method. This section outlines some of the recent developments that have taken place in case teaching and suggests that change has occurred not only in case concept and format but also in pedagogical intent.

The Case in Other Disciplines
Case studies are now used in a variety of different educational disciplines. One thing that struck us forcibly was the extent to which the method has travelled from its original disciplinary base. It is clear that business education itself borrowed the case from medicine and law, but other disciplines have in turn borrowed the method. It is
inevitable that in this borrowing and re-borrowing the method itself has evolved in order to meet the new disciplinary contexts and demands. In fact, we consider that the method in some of its new contexts has been developed in ways from which business educators could profitably learn. Without any pretence at comprehensiveness, we note the adoption of some variant of the case method in disciplines as diverse as accounting (Dittenhofer, 1991; Greenawalt, 1994; Magee Greenstein & Hall, 1996) and information systems education (Barkman, 1998), psychology (Block, 1996; McBurney, 1995; Sudzina, 1997), physical education (Bolt, 1998; Collier & O'Sullivan, 1997), biological and physical science education (Herreid, 1994), library and information sciences (Jones & Jordan, 1988; Prostano & Prostano, 1982; Roselle, 1996), nursing education (Lowenstein & Sowell, 1992; Maltby & Andrusyszyn, 1990; Yoder, 1990), and politics and public administration (Rosenbloom, 1995; Stenzel & Feeney, 1970). One particularly fertile discipline has been that of teacher training and education (Broudy, 1990; Colbert, Trimble, & Desberg, 1996; Harrington, 1995; Harrington, Quinn-Leering & Hodson, 1996; Levin, 1995; Lundeberg & Scheurmann, 1997; Merseth, 1991 and 1996; Moje & Wade, 1997; Powell, 2000).
Student-Written Cases

A number of authors explore the benefits of student written cases. Magee Greenstein & Hall, 1996 (1996) and Greenawalt (1994) assert that the process of case writing, based on participants’ own experience, extends the benefits derived from case analysis alone, particularly in the development of higher order cognitive skills. Using Bloom’s taxonomy, Magee Greenstein & Hall (1996) assert that case writing requires students to develop an enhanced capacity in synthesis and evaluation. Ross & Wright (2000) report a similarly powerful effect in cognitive development. Viewed from a constructivist perspective, the process of case writing is credited with changing the students’ conceptual maps, and helping students to adapt to new social contexts. It is claimed that student-written cases also make material appear more relevant, familiar and timely, particularly when regular information updates are added and post-case outcomes explored (see, for example, Greenawalt, 1994). Magee Greenstein & Hall (1996) suggest that student engagement in case writing improves communication between group members while Ross & Wright (2000) point to the benefits of using case writing exercises with groups from diverse professional backgrounds, who can share their varied experience.

An Increasing Emphasis on Theory

The evolving history of the case discussion method is intertwined with the development of a body of theoretical knowledge in the field of business and management. At the beginning of the century the academic content of the new business courses was limited:

Courses in accounting, finance, commercial geography, law and the emerging field of industrial management provided the base ... but in many respects there just wasn’t much to be taught in business education in the early twentieth century. (Barnes, Christensen & Hansen, 1994:39)

The case discussion method did not exclude academic theory but it was not considered to be the prime focus of the exercise. As a distinct body of theory emerged in the field of business and management, the role of the case study as an aid to analysis and understanding became more prevalent. An enduring premise of the case method seems to be that no theory is sufficiently encompassing to capture the full complexity of business practice. Theoretical knowledge is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for understanding such complexity. Dean Merry, writing in the
introduction to Towl (1969: xi) argues that “research developments and theoretical constructs do not replace the cases; they become grist for the case discussion as they are drawn on for analysis or the solution of a problem”. The role of theory is emphasised by Mintzberg (1988) emphasising the rich learning potential in the connection of “neat theory” to “messy problems”. Gemelli (1996), on the other hand, emphasises a more separate relationship between theory and case, arguing that a fundamental difference between European and US models of management education in the first half of the twentieth century was between the inductive, case-based, US approach and the deductive, theory-based, European approach.

An Explicit Focus on Critical Thinking
The development of ‘critical thinking’ skills as a separate and discernibly different outcome from the established intentions of the case method is noted by Barnes et al (1994). Kimmel (1995) points out the importance of critical thinking skills to students as a precursor to the traditional capstone courses in final year studies and he suggests that a capacity for the reflective disposition required is produced by maturity and by levels of attained education.

Drawing on Habermas, Mingers (2000) suggests that there are four foci of a critical thinking approach which he lists as rhetoric, tradition, authority and objectivity. For Mingers, using cases to develop ‘critical thinking’ involves questioning the language used, the form of argument presented, the underlying assumptions and the dominant privileged position implied in the text. It also requires the acceptance of plurality and the recognition that information and knowledge are not value free but are partial and power-based. Kimmel (1995), takes a slightly different approach. He identifies three main key elements of critical thinking in the affective, cognitive and behavioural domains: a disposition towards critical thinking, higher-order thinking skills, and strategic problem solving abilities.

The current emphasis being placed on the development of ‘critical thinking’ skills, in part, may have arisen because of the changes that have taken place in the external environment. Harrington et al (1996) and Kimmel (1995) argue that the working environment of students is increasingly complex, turbulent and difficult to predict and, to deal with this context, students need more than a repertoire of case-specific
solutions. Cases, because they simulate ‘real world’ complexity, provide students with an opportunity to evaluate theories, tools and techniques and to develop their critical thinking skills in a manageable context. The aim is to use cases to develop critical and reflective abilities and independence of thought (Kimmel, 1995; Harrington et al, 1996; Bolt, 1996; Griffith, 1999).

Although the ‘Harvard’ and the ‘critical’ approaches to cases differ with respect to their pedagogic intent, there is common agreement that that cases are experiential, active learning technologies. However, while the traditional Harvard approach emphasises analysis, argument and the defence of a position, critical thinking approaches emphasise the existence of different perspectives and acknowledge multiple explanations of events. The role of the student is that of the reflective enquirer (Grossman, 1994; Griffith, 1999; Harrington, 1995). The role of the teacher is also different in these two approaches. For those adopting a critical standpoint, the teacher is a facilitator not an inquisitor and an ‘answer bearer’.


[u]se models of thinking that inhibit their ability to grasp complex ideas and make it impossible for them to think critically about the ideas they are learning.

Grossman also suggests that students cannot be taught about uncertainty unless they are ready to accept it; and, again following Perry, suggests that the students need to pass through a number of different stages before they are ready to think critically about their discipline. At each stage they have a greater ability to deal with uncertainty. Grossman stresses the importance of helping students towards a deep re-acculturation so that they can think things that would be unthinkable in their usual context and argues that the approach works best when disciplinary conventions are explicit, there is good social support, and an appropriate meta-cognitive framework has been developed.
Towards a Conceptual Framework

Business cases have been used to develop both cognitive (knowledge retention, knowledge application, disciplined problem solving) and affective (communication, group working) skills (Smith, 1987) and are an essential component of approaches such as problem-based learning. Commentators therefore insist that while preparing the case is a necessary prerequisite, the real learning takes place in the classroom (Jones & Jordan, 1988; Levin, 1995; Lowenstein & Sowell, 1992; Maltby & Andrusyszyn, 1990; O’Cinneide, 1997; Read & Kleiner, 1996; Roselle, 1996).

Our brief survey of the literature on cases and case teaching, however, reveals an emerging duality in definitions of cases and the way that they are used. Definitions of cases are linked to what cases are to be used for - form is inextricably, but not fixedly, linked to function in the use and definition of cases. This can be seen in the shift in the nature and use of cases over time, a shift which encompasses both the context in which they are written and the way they are used in a mass system. Two main classifications of cases and their uses seem to have emerged, which we loosely term ‘skills development’ and ‘conceptual development’ (see Figure 2). These two approaches overlap, particularly in the consensus that cases are experiential, active learning technologies.

As we have pointed out above, a standard and longstanding definition of a case study is that it simulates a real incident or problem which the student is asked to ‘solve’ in the safe environment of the classroom:

*A case study describes a particular problem or incident based on a real life situation. It consists of an event, the persons involved, and other impacting factors and it often has an institutional focus. The problem presented in the case study is meant to be analysed and, if possible, solved. * (Roselle, 1996, 30)

We label this approach to the case method Mode One. The emphasis here is on decision making, action planning or conflict resolution. While it is acknowledged that there is no single right answer, the expectation is that students will provide their own answer based on a thorough analysis of the case which they will then be able to defend against challenge; or that they will at least be able to design an action plan which will solve the problem (Jennings, 1997; Maltby & Andrusyszyn, 1990; Richardson, 1994). Good Mode One cases are characterised by verisimilitude,
relevance, timeliness, and familiarity; a compelling narrative; and some kind of affective hook that will capture the students’ imagination (Jennings, 1997; O’Cinneide, 1997; Towl, 1969).

Thus the case can be seen as a *proxy for experience* which will prepare students for their future work, a model which has its roots in the Harvard tradition, where there was an expectation that graduates would go on to become captains of industry in a business world characterised by some continuity and certainty. The famous explication that the case method had to be invented ‘because wisdom can’t be told’ (Gragg, 1940) paradoxically suggests that there is a universal wisdom (in terms of analytical process rather than academic content) which could indeed be identified and learnt. The method sought to produce graduates who could fit into top strategy jobs in elite institutions: in effect, CEOs in waiting, or, more recently, management consultants who could ‘fix’ ailing corporations. Thus the case was long, complex and number driven, and students were invited to provide workable solutions and to be resilient in their presentation of their action plan to colleagues. The appeal of this approach for professional training and vocational programmes is understandable and this use of the case method has become a staple in science, law, medicine, accounting, social work, and teacher-training as well as business education. (Herreid, 1994; Maltby & Andrusyszyn, 1990; Roselle, 1996).
At first sight, the alternative definition of a case (which we label *Mode Two*) is more cerebral and abstract. It concerns using cases to apply, critique and develop theory, tools and techniques against a background of complexity and ambiguity provided by the case: a constructivist, sensemaking activity (Jennings, 1997; Lowenstein & Sowell, 1992; Moje & Wade, 1997; Richardson, 1994). The incomplete information in the case (frequently a source of student complaint in our interviews) simulates the kind of work environment which graduating students are likely to encounter (Jennings, 1997; Jones & Jordan, 1998; Richardson, 1994). Students are expected to develop critical thinking skills rather than accumulating repertoires of case-specific solutions that may subsequently be applied to business problems (Abell, 1997, Jones & Jordan, 1988).

Here, case learning is a constructivist activity: every discussion will be different but equally valid, and this implies that the skill in case teaching (in an ideal world of
motivated, participative students) is that of group facilitator rather than discipline expert. Constructivist approaches in education theory emphasise the construction of knowledge rather than its discovery:

*Constructivism starts with the view that knowledge must be constructed within the cognitive structure of every individual, so that it is fundamentally personal, while being dependent on experiences in the learning environment and on social interactions.* (Bostock, 1998, 225)

This constructivist view of cases and case teaching sits in uneasy tension with the mass experience. More than most, the case as learning technology reflects its situated, contextualised function (Moje & Wade, 1997). The case can be used as a diagnostic tool to explore the context of a particular programme in an institution, and by extension, of the wider context in which that programme and institution operates. Since the case method was first devised, and particularly in the last two decades, this context has altered to one of fewer certainties. Strategy is less top-down and hierarchical and more participative and emergent. People are increasingly being required to think and act strategically at lower levels of organisations (see, for example, Richardson, 1994). This implies a use of cases which tends towards a liberal rather than a vocational education. Students are required to develop the skills of critical thinking which will equip them for the knowledge economy. A lack of certainty combined with an appreciation of the complexity of organisations and their environment has outdated the “CEO in waiting” model. This suggests that the conceptual approach is a way of using cases reflecting a philosophy of management education which has shifted since the inception of the case at Harvard and elsewhere.
MASSIFICATION AND THE USE OF CASE STUDIES - FINDINGS

Introduction
The impact that increased student numbers has had on the way that cases are taught in undergraduate business education is, like massification itself, far from straightforward. The first part of this section will consider what staff and students say about increased student numbers, diversity and other contextual issues. We organise our discussion of the findings in this part with reference to the conceptual framework (see Figure 1, page 12) we developed for making sense of the massification phenomenon. We collapse the categories relating to institutional and module, etc, size into one, and diversity and participation into another. The other contextual factors are dealt with separately as in the diagram, which is reproduced here for ease of reference. The second part of the section is organised with reference to our dichotomy between Mode One and Mode Two approaches to case teaching, and presents a picture of the way cases are used in the massified, modularised system as both a response to its standardising pressures and a way of resisting them.

Figure 1: Themes in the Massification of Higher Education

Massification: Teachers’ and Learners’ Experiences
Increasing numbers of students

The impact of class, module and institution size on students’ teaching/learning experiences was unexpected. Interviews suggested that many students experienced the effects of mass higher education not, as one might expect, in terms of an increase in the numbers of students in a particular class but rather in terms of the transient and fragmented nature of the student cohort. Some students did comment adversely on literal, physical overcrowding and how this impacted on the tutor’s ability to manage the classroom process:

Sometimes the tables are so full you have climb over them to get to the back just to sit down. It’s difficult then for tutors trying to work round small groups saying, “Read it, go through it, and I’ll come and see you as groups”, because there isn’t room for the tutor to come round so they have to stand at the front and talk, and lean over and talk to a group and lean over and talk to another group. You’re not going to do a lot of work that way.

Another student added:

It might be the class sizes because they are huge. And also because we get left on our own for ages. For about an hour we get left on our own. Half an hour the tutor speaks, then for an hour we get left on our own. Then, for about half an hour, to pull it all together... It’s very difficult when the tutor’s moving around for you all to keep talking about the same thing, especially if half the people in the group haven’t read the case study and half the people have. You don’t really understand what the question’s about...

But the majority of students were more concerned with the potential embarrassment of looking stupid in front of strangers rather than having problems in finding a desk. Many students expressed their unwillingness to speak in front of ‘strangers’ and their overwhelming concern was not to “embarrass themselves in public”. Some did find that the large groups gave them the opportunity to hide and to “free ride”:

I just think, “Oh, somebody else will say it,” or, you know, I don’t know, just because it is such a huge group and I’m just shy.

And:

Big groups mean you can be lazy, though, because you think someone else is going to say it.

Only one student in the interview groups claimed to see anything potentially useful in large groups:
The only thing I would say is, if you’ve got a really small group, like five people turn up to a tutorial, you sometimes think, well, what are you going to get out if it? Because there aren’t many people to contribute.

In general, however, students felt that the size of modules compromised their ability to grasp a difficult subject:

Strat. Man. is huge. I think you learn a lot more if you’re in a smaller group.

But others found it genuinely intimidating, regardless of the subject:

It’s a lot easier to ask questions that you think might be stupid if it’s a smaller group because you feel less embarrassed and if there are only seven or eight people there.

A common finding from staff, however, was that whilst the number of students on modules has increased very significantly the number of students in case study sessions has not. This has been both because of rooming constraints, but also through a deliberate policy of holding numbers in each seminar group static while expanding the numbers of groups, rather than moving to larger classes as frequently happened in the US experience of a transition to a mass system:

I wouldn’t say the numbers [have increased] because we’ve always been quite strict about our seminar size. We’ve always kept our seminar size down to twenty and that’s expensive. So we have a large number of seminar groups and if you do that, then the numbers are not much of a problem.

Once a critical mass is reached the actual number of students becomes less important:

… there are increasing difficulties with the number of teaching staff involved and marking, and administrative running problems, but actually, in terms of the course, I don’t frankly see that seven hundred is going to be a lot different from five hundred and fifty. We’re just going to have more workshops. And there may be all manner of logistic problems in rooms and all that, but actually in terms of the course, we’ll still deliver our lectures, maybe we’ll have to have three now instead of two, or one as it used to be, but we’ll still have a lecture and there’ll be a series of workshops. And really, as far as any one student is concerned, they go to the lecture and it’s a big lecture, and they go to a workshop and there’s thirty in it, or there should be, and that’s it. That’s their experience of the course, rather than the administrative issues. And whether that’s happening three times or thirty times is almost irrelevant to them, I think.

Another perspective reported by some staff was that although class sizes had increased in theory, widespread student absenteeism and “tourism” behaviours (see the discussion below under “Competition and Funding Pressures”) meant that actual numbers in classes were in reality little different from previous years’.
Other than the issue of class size, the increase in student numbers was felt to have a number of effects, however. One was the increasing anonymity experienced by students described below. Another was the need to manage the increasing number of seminars, and the possible need for part-time staff to run them, both of which raise issues of consistency. This is discussed in the section on increasing managerialism. Finally there was the intensification of work. This was seen in pressures to reduce contact time often with the explicit intention of increasing time available for research. It was also seen in increasing amounts of marking. One tutor had calculated that she spent the equivalent of three full weekends on marking for the strategy module alone. This in turn led to pressures to reduce the number of assignments on the module, and thus to reduce students’ opportunities to receive formative feedback and advice.

Marking is a problem and there are pressures on us not to do so much in terms of setting assignments. This assignment I’ve got here, it’s the last year we’ll do that, that’s coming out now. I’ve been told I’ve got to take it out. I can only have one assessment for each [module].

One tutor described the move away from individual to group assessment, “...we’d lose about two hundred-odd individual essays, and we’d inherit instead about twenty-four group reports which would be easier”. Whilst staff could see the logic of reducing assessment to reduce workloads, there was some concern about the effect on students, “I am a bit worried, though, that with just one piece of assessed course work and one exam, it’s a bit sudden death for them”.

This reduction in contact time, both as a result of pragmatic concerns about volumes of work, and as a result of managerial pressure, has had two effects. The first is that there has been a loss of intimacy (Wagner, 1995; Scott, 1995), the growing sense of anonymity staff and students experience in a large organisation:

I try to learn their names. I’ve got photographs of all of them. I take a polaroid at the beginning of each group and write their names on. But I’m quite incapable of learning them. I just can’t learn a hundred and twenty names. I can get a number of them, but I just can’t connect them up now quick enough to the face.

Students felt this acutely:
No disrespect to him, but I don’t think our strategy tutor would be able to name anybody in the class. We’ve been turning up for eleven weeks to two hour seminars… But if he was asked to describe Jodie, he wouldn’t know which one was Jodie… when he’s had us for eleven weeks. That’s twenty-two hours. He’s never bothered to find out our names. That’s just not him, that’s across the board.

The massified modular system has led to a breakdown in cohort identity. Direct entrants to the final year (former HND students) commented unfavourably on this. In the HND class students knew each other and the lecturer knew their names. In a mass system there was almost total anonymity to the point where:

I see tutors now and I’m like… they won’t know who I am. Why should I even say hello? And they don’t. They don’t even look at you. You could be some sort of vague person they pass in the street. They don’t even know if you’re in their tutorial.

And another commented:

I find it difficult because you don’t honestly know bar the pictures [of staff] on the wall who are the students and who are the lecturers.

Thus a picture emerges of a student body which is increasingly alienated from itself, the teaching staff and the institution. This will be seen to be important with regard to case teaching where group dynamics are vital to class discussion and group learning.

The second effect was that reduced contact time led to reduced coverage of the subject in terms of breadth rather than depth:

I think the way it’s had an impact is that we don’t cover as much. There’s a lot of talk about dumbing down, which annoys me… What I’ve always tried to do there is to accept the fact that we are not covering as much as we used to, so we’re taking things out. But the attempt is to reach the same level in terms of analysis and depth and process on a narrower front. I’m not saying we do it, but that’s the way I’ve played it.

On the other hand, some tutors felt that improved teaching materials had in some way compensated for this reduced scope. Commenting that the quality of work produced by students had improved concurrently with the introduction of larger numbers, one tutor reported that students could deal with:

... a lot more theory. A lot more knowledge of the subject area. Improved capacity to compare and contrast different perspectives within the subject … and to be able to locate them in some sort of map. And they couldn’t have done that ten years ago, they just learned the word. Because there wasn’t the same material, of course.
Students picked up on these pressures, along with other organisational politics issues:

Every teaching team, the strategy team, the organisation team, the marketing team, were told they have to cut their contact times down to two hours a week. The strategy team refused to do it and they still give three hours. I think you get... the other lecturers’ backs up, because you do get snide comments sometimes from other lecturers about Strategy.

Students in new universities frequently voiced criticisms of institutional policies to reduce contact time in order to free staff time for research. One student was vociferous in her opinion that tutors’ jobs were to teach and that hiring researchers rather than teachers would be detrimental to the student experience in the future.

**Student Diversity and Participation**

It did not appear from the interviews that students had given much thought to diversity in their groups. European exchange students provided the most immediately apparent source of difference:

_I think probably the smaller groups are better. If you’ve got foreign students there obviously you can create a different discussion. They will speak out a lot more in a smaller group whereas because maybe they’re worried about their English and things like that, in a larger group, they won’t. It can be quite quiet._

A group of European exchange students interviewed stated that a cohesive seminar group increased their self-confidence and that when this group began to disintegrate they felt inhibited. Being with people they did not know made them less participative, although they attributed this to not having English as their first language. They said that it would be better to have discussions with people they knew, because they could then venture more personal opinions and make more contributions. A German exchange student expressed surprise that his British counterparts showed no curiosity about him, which he charitably attributed to British reserve. One of the British students, however, thought that the lack of interest in exchange students could be put down to what she termed “xenophobia”. Another student did feel that there were occasional incidents of racism in the groups which she was unwilling to tolerate:

_...they put their ideas into it as well, which is actually very good, as there are different cultures in there. And I think it’s really good. You just have to be very careful what you say so that you don’t offend people. But I’ve had a go at somebody in my group for being racist because I think that’s way out of order._
The situation may not be helped by the perception of foreign students tending to sit together, something which took on significance in the small group work which was characteristic of almost all the case study sessions we encountered. Part of the reason for this was the language barrier. While some of the students spoke beautiful English, others struggled and sat with people from their own country in order to provide or receive translation services for what was very often difficult material. A Spanish student described the situation:

"I am with a Spanish boy and he is coming from Spain, I think, and we try to go together to the same group. It is in one way good for us because if I can’t understand something and he can explain that to me. But it is bad because sometimes we are talking in Spanish and we discuss in Spanish, and we don’t learn English."

This leads to frustration on the part of students who are intellectually able but linguistically disadvantaged. Two European exchange students commented:

Student one:
"...we couldn’t use the same words that English people use and sometimes we want to speak to say something but we can’t express ourselves. And it’s a big handicap for us because we can’t say what we want to say and then the English people speak quickly and we don’t want to interrupt them, because we can’t understand when they are speaking and we say it’s okay. I have that idea but I can’t explain it. So we let them talk and then go to explain what we are saying in the group. We let them talk because we can’t – it’s too difficult for us."

Student two:
"It is difficult before, because we think in our mother language and then you have to think of the right words and then you take your time and then someone has already come up with that point."

Interestingly, some of the home students seemed to feel that they had to make a choice between helping out the foreign students or disregarding them in an effort to do as well as they could in pursuit of high marks:

"I don’t know. On the other side of the coin we do International Business, and have been to France, and I’ve been the foreign dense one that doesn’t speak any of the languages, and doing group work where everyone has to speak and they’re like the Germans who are like amazingly intelligent and speak every language under the sun and understand everything and are a real benefit. Or they’re like me, don’t understand anything and so therefore you just carry them and don’t care and do all the work because then you’ll get a better mark, or you help them and they help and improve their English. So you’ve got to decide whether to be nasty and get your better mark, or be kinder and let them improve their English..."
The mature students we interviewed saw this as less of a dilemma and said that they always helped the exchange students. Mature students themselves were comparatively rare in the institutions we surveyed. What mature students there were were not always welcomed by the younger ones:

Mature students are robots. There’s not many. There tend to be modules where there are more than others. For example, Emerging Markets. And they tend to ask more questions and to complain more, as well, actually, they complain to the tutors about things. There are a few in our French group and they are more opinionated and arrogant. They look down on you and they don’t talk to you, and they don’t want to work with you, I find, in my French group.

The mature students interviewed, however, did not appear to experience any of this hostility and felt that they were accepted by their peers, although they commented that they were uncertain that the age difference was apparent. Staff, on the other hand, welcomed diversity in terms of maturity:

... the evidence is that the part timers clearly have things that the full timers don’t bring to the classes. The maturity of the part timers, and this isn’t solely a function of age. A part timer irrespective of whether they are older, if they are working they have experiences that they bring. They bring a maturity, and even if they are lowly in an organisation, they’re in the organisation and you’re talking about things that they’ve experienced, even if not directly, they’ve seen it happen.

The link between student numbers and cohort diversity was a recurrent theme in staff interviews, and it was often diversity rather than numbers that made organisation and management of case study sessions more challenging for staff. One lecturer commented:

We’ve got a large module … composed … of students who will have had significantly diverse experiences before coming on the course.

This diversity led to a situation which one lecturer characterised as dual speed teaching in mixed ability groups, perhaps reflecting the language difficulties described above or the differing levels of prior knowledge resulting from various forms of direct entry into the final year:

...in terms of managing the group, you’re talking about managing different speeds of people, … and trying to keep those people who might be struggling up to speed without slowing down quicker students … and that’s a juggling act to keep everybody satisfied.
Certainly diversity appeared to be increasing, to the point where one lecturer said, “when I talk about home students I talk about European. I don’t think of the Europeans as any different to the UK”. The economic underpinnings of massification and diversity were in evidence again, however, when the same lecturer was asked to comment on mature students:

As course leader, I used to positively discourage mature students. I didn’t discourage them, I just told them why it was so hard... We do have mature students and we support them just as much as we can, but we don’t go out [to recruit them]. Some universities go out to take in mature students, we just don’t. It’s hard to say without sounding arrogant, but we don’t need to go. We decided that was not one of our targets. In the past, the one we have had have struggled quite heavily and yet one or two, once they got through the initial barrier of realising this is a hard time, do really well and enjoy the course.

The implication appears to be that because mature students attract no special funding but do require potentially costly support they are not high on the list of priorities for universities that have reasonably high application rates. This is despite the fact that staff appreciate the extra dimension that such students can bring to class room discussion.

In all our discussions with staff there was no evidence that the increasing diversity of the student body had occasioned any institutional staff development activities. Staff were either developing their own techniques for dealing with variations in ability or levels of comprehension or were proceeding as normal.

**Credentials, Employment and Consumerism**

Interviews with teaching staff reflected an awareness of growing consumerism and the effect it has on students. One tutor referred to “the overall societal effect of the decline of deference and the empowerment of the consumer” which he saw as a two-edged sword, “I think those are fine general words, but they do kick you”. Tutors have always been aware that students are concerned about getting a good degree, but the interviews revealed a sense that this was intensifying:

We see undergraduates, for example, who... and this probably quite justified... they are much more demanding about where what you’re teaching fits into the hurdles they have to pass. So you get quizzed quite a lot about what sort of things will be in the examination and how does this contribute to it. Actually, I rather welcome that...
Whilst tutors could appreciate the potential this kind of consumerism had for sharpening up their own teaching, concern was voiced about the dash for the 2:1, the “credential inflation” identified by Robertson (2000):

_I feel so bad for my students. I really feel enormous sympathy for them. They’re under so much pressure: peer pressure, parental pressure, pressure to get a job, and the job market’s so desperately competitive. And this desperation for a 2:1 because of all these pressures really curtails their enjoyment of the university experience on a social level. And that, hand in hand with all the other problems they have about financing their education and having to work full time, a lot of them, so the old student spirit of breaking out of old ways of thinking and changing the world – the whole world can be different because we want it to be that way – it’s just completely gone because they’re so focused on that 2:1. And I really feel for them. I think it’s a great, great pity._

Another tutor felt that the situation required some sort of collective professional response:

_I feel that as a body, lecturers should be managing this perception – “I’ve got a student loan to pay for this. I want a 2:1”. I think we’re in great danger of letting that happen, whereas we need to be voicing to them, “Yes, you’re our customer. You are paying through the nose. You’re getting an awful lot of debt to be here. But our role is to facilitate your learning. And if you can’t be bothered to learn, then you’ve got a lot of debt for nothing.” Whereas actually I think we’re in danger of being in a position where it’s “I’ve got all this debt. I want a 2:1 out of here, thank you very much.”_

Interviews with students, however, revealed their absolute certainty about the value of the 2:1 against a background of grade inflation:

_It seems that most job applications ask for a minimum of a 2:1 - if you want to get any kind of decent job that is. And I think there seems to be so many students churned out of universities these days that a degree isn’t held in the high regard it once was, so I think you have to get at least a 2:1 to say, “I am of some intelligence”._

The 2:1 alone was not enough to secure a worthwhile “graduate” job. Some students suspected that employers in a post-massified context knew the real value of a degree, “_I think people in industry have been through the degree programme and know how easy it is. And I think that’s what’s devaluing the degrees._” They understood that in order to get what they considered to be a really good job they would have to gain extra qualifications:

_I was just thinking, you know, when you look at more and more job applications, if you want a decent job now they’re looking for MBAs rather than degrees. A degree will get you a simple back office job. But if you want to get a front line job you want an MBA._
Mature students did not feel this pressure, and expressed a combination of weariness and astonishment that so many students felt this way. One in particular was critical of the role of recruiters in whipping up the anxiety levels:

*It’s like the be-all and end-all. “If I don’t get a 2:1 I don’t know what I’m going to do...” To me, too many organisations put too much emphasis on it, because if you get a 2:1 or a first you’re absolutely wonderful. Whereas if you get a 2:2 or a third, well...*

She described her younger contemporaries as feeling “worthless” if they got a 2:2. Mature students tended to feel that getting any degree was worthwhile regardless of classification, and, indeed, that being at university at all was an achievement. The pressure to get the 2:1 was perceived to come from corporate recruiters, who were explicit about it in their literature, and go as far as screening out 2:2s in on-line recruitment (at least this was the received wisdom), and also from friends and families.

One student who described her mother as highly supportive commented:

*I really want this 2:1. I think as well, I know this university is a good university, especially its Business School, but my sister went to Edinburgh and she got a 2:1, and my mother said, “You’re really going to have to get a 2:1, not being a snob, but because it’s not an old, traditional university. It’s not one of the top whatever. You’ll really have to push yourself because anything other than a 2:1 might not be worth [having]”.*

Students readily made the link between their degrees and future earning power. In the following quotation there is an undertone of resignation to the process of “purchasing” a degree as a hedge against future financial constraints rather than as something they really want to do:

*I don’t know about the mix of students as well, because, obviously, something like Oxford and Cambridge as well, because you have to get really good grades to go there, and most people actually, really, really want to go to university. But I find that most people who come to university these days are just like, ‘Well, I’ll go to university,’ because, in a sense, that’s what they’re told they have to do by, I don’t know, society or whatever, but they’re convinced, that they need to go to university just because of that reason, and so, in a sense, they don’t want to go there.*

The process appears inevitable to students who are then under self-generated pressure to obtain the 2:1 degree which will represent their “return on investment”. Some students described taking the process further and turning themselves into commodities, as this conversation reveals:
Interviewer: So, is it pushing it too far to say you have to package yourself as a...
Student one: …commodity… yeah.
Student two: Definitely.
Student three: So, we’re not consumers now. We’re products.
Student one: Yes, it’s got to that stage.

The data revealed some elements of consumerism in the sense of exchanging money for an educational experience:

...there’s the argument that even if you haven’t made the effort to read the case studies or something you’ve applied to come to university and have been accepted and your local authority’s paying for you to be at university so you still have the right to sit in the room and listen. Whereas some tutors say, “Right well, if you haven’t done the work you’re not allowed in here” ... And you feel like saying, “Part of the money paid to my department is being paid to you, paying your wage. I’m allowed to sit here.” But a lot of them just want to throw you out.

Students felt that this would become more acute as more students paid fees:

...even more so, though, if you’re going to pay for a degree, you’ve got to know, and you don’t just sign up and send away ten grand for nothing. You’ve got to know what you need to get out of it. You wouldn’t just hand that over for nothing, would you?

Others felt that it was difficult to consider yourself a real consumer if you had no real ability to choose:

Student one
When I think how the teacher’s doing or why we’re doing this or why we’re doing that, I normally don’t think that I’m paying for it and I should get my value for my money. I don’t think that’s something to keep in mind when programming lectures and tutorials. It’s not such a big factor.

Student two
Then again, we don’t really know if we’re getting value for money, do we? Because no-one here has done a degree elsewhere so we can’t compare it to other areas, to anywhere else, to other courses.

It was striking that students did not equate growing levels of debt with consumerism. In fact, it was evident that there had been such a complete normalisation of debt since the introduction of student loans:

I think, on the whole, we students are a lot wealthier than in the past. I have two brothers who are thirty, so they had their education about eight years ago – they’ve finished – and they were at the stage where you did have beans on toast, sort of thing, and, you know, you did go out to the pub, but we could out somewhere, you know, to a wine bar and get a glass of wine that costs us £2.50. I think we’re much more well off.
It soon became apparent in the interview that this ‘wealth’ was financed by debt and overdraft facilities which were seen as a normal part of student life, encouraged by government policy:

*There is a lot of encouragement to increase debt because the Government says, ‘It’s easy to be a student and part of your budget – of course you can get a loan’ – and therefore increasing debt. That’s just starting, let alone overdrafts.*

This sophistication was undercut however, by the naivety displayed about how the system works. One student reported her shock when her first student loan statement came through and she discovered that she would have to pay interest on it.

Mature students, again, were an exception. They saw their investment in terms of time rather than money: “I think there’s a mixture of being a consumer and not being a consumer, because obviously you think to yourself, ‘I’ve taken time out,’ and it’s more on time”, although they described childcare costs and travel expenses being a drain on their budgets.

Thus we see the erosion of resistance to student debt described by Watson (2000) clearly demonstrated. More surprising was the finding from the interviews that fewer students choose to work in their final year in order to concentrate their efforts on their academic work, and presumably to maximise their chances of attaining the vital 2:1. Whilst our samples were largely self-selecting and may only have captured the more assiduous students in the total population, this does suggest an element of investment in future earning power.

**Competition and Funding Pressures**

Funding cutbacks combined with tighter enforcement of copyright laws - clearly an indirect product of increasing student numbers - impose significant constraints on the way academics are able to organise their teaching and on their choice of pedagogical approaches. Institutions balk at spending money on purchasing Harvard-type cases for undergraduate students when lower cost alternatives are available. Adopting standard texts which include case study sections or creating vignettes from newspaper cuttings or secondary sources are seen as cheaper solutions. One institution developed what might be called “dense vignettes” – these were based on published case studies, shortened by
removing some of the narrative material, but retaining and updating the numerical information in the case.

Copyright is seen as a major issue, with institutions unwilling to become test cases:

*These cases that are used in class, there are some areas of the copyright law that were advice and still untested and we’re not particularly keen on being guinea pigs! As far as examinations are concerned, we are assuming we’ve got free rein. Most of my colleagues have assumed that for assignments – although they ask for the case back in.*

Consequently there is a move to use material in the public domain such as company reports and accounts, and web sites, as a basis for case studies. On the other hand, violation of copyright becomes less likely as access to photocopying and the necessary administrative support becomes more difficult:

... we are very constrained... even if you’re only at a hundred students it’s feasible to tell them to go and pick up a Xerox. A hundred copies of the case every week handed out by the undergraduate admin lady – okay but not with the costs. The opportunities for complete breakdown of the system and everybody complaining that they didn’t get there and the office was shut... And also, our very lovely admin lady is so overworked that you just couldn’t put that workload on her. So for all sorts of practical reasons, you have to find a text which contains the cases you want to use. I think that’s a bare minimum.

This is often not considered a satisfactory solution.:

*to make the thing at all viable, you wanted something that packaged it, and so that’s why we plumped on the book, and that, in a sense, constrains the choice of cases. So, without generating the material in some way, you end up picking the ones in the book. And they’re not ideal in any respect.*

Although they did not necessarily understand the constraints on case selection, students were critical of the consequences:

*You do find that the case studies we use are all based back in the 1970s. It would be nice to use some fairly up to date case studies. We did the Rockware one and that was in the 1970s, we did Swatch in our assessment and that was the 1980s, and we’ve just done Burton Group, but we only did up to the 1980s.*

Several tutors mentioned the trade-off between finding a good selection of cases and an acceptable text:

*I think it’s a crap textbook, and that’s another problem, but it’s got a very good case selection in it. And you know what it’s like, we want them to buy a book so that they’ve got the book with the cases in. Otherwise it’s a nightmare.*
One solution would be to ask the students to buy two books: a strategy text and a text containing good cases, but this was seen as unacceptable given the high price of books:

If we could get them to buy two books that would actually be all right because then we might in fact have a free rein to look at other casebooks. But you really can’t. They’re so hard up a lot of them anyway. I mean, this [points to textbook] costs nearly thirty quid.

Students also see the merits of this solution:

...they [cases] seem to be limited by the fact that you’ve got Johnson and Scholes, but they are all outdated. I don’t see why we can’t use Johnson and Scholes for the theory base, but why can’t they bring in case studies from somewhere else?

It is not clear, however, whom this student thought was likely to bear the cost of the case material. Another strategy is for institutions to get students to buy the text with the cases they want to use and to make sure that there are multiple copies of the preferred, and by implication, better, strategy text in the library. Students complain, however, that the books are seldom in the library, and journal articles have often been removed from the volumes on the shelves. Lecturers also alluded to the increasing incidence of theft and vandalism of library material, or other disruptive behaviour such as students removing material from the shelves and caching it elsewhere in the library where it would only be available to themselves. This is not necessarily a result of mass numbers, but higher numbers would seem to imply greater competition for resources.

The constrained choice of text book also impacts on the lecture programme which generally complements the case sessions:

We do try, because they’ve paid money for the [textbook], we really try hard for every lecture every week to put at least one chapter reading from it as a key reading for the lecture. And probably for about fifty percent of the lectures we can do that, but not for all of them. So it’s difficult. We haven’t cracked that one. But we are constrained.

And another tutor commented on the detrimental effect of having to anchor the taught part of the module to the textbook:

... I think that the logic of the lecture programme is now less strong than it was before because it’s been, well, contaminated is too strong a word, but it’s been shifted, changed by the textbook. On the other hand, it’s difficult to see what other options there are given copyright, given student numbers, given staff numbers. You need that kind of programmed approach.
This results in confusion amongst students, who, as will be seen in the section on case teaching, sometimes find it difficult to see the links between the lecture programme, the cases and the textbook.

In addition, tutors at one institution said that although they were happy using cases in textbooks for class discussion, they could not use them for any assessed work or examinations, as they believed that pirate copies of case teaching notes were in wide circulation in the student body. They also alluded to increasing evidence of students selling essays and case analysis material to students in succeeding cohorts. These phenomena were driving them away from published cases (whether stand alone or in textbooks) and towards cases and vignettes developed by the teaching team.

The move from grants to loans has also had an impact as more students supplement their incomes through part-time work, and face conflicting demands on their time. There are three main implications resulting from this time pressure. The first is that there is evidence that staff are now beginning to take a pragmatic line on time tabling:

*We try, to some extent, to be rather pragmatic, including the course leaders. The time tabling is such that it tries to recognise that students are possibly working part time and, therefore, the course may have a [free] day or something like that.*

The second implication is that students have limited time to prepare thoroughly for case classes, and the third is that they do not attend the classes with the same students each time.

The issue of preparation was a real concern to staff:

*… the combination of large numbers and ignorant students – ignorant of the case, is very dispiriting. It’s a real problem.*

The general consensus was that preparation was vital to the success of the class and thus to the learning experience. One tutor described her plea to students at least to read the case:

*What I say to my students at the beginning of the year is that, “I know you’re under a lot of pressure. I know there’s a lot of reading. I know there’ll be times of the year when you can’t do additional reading of theory, when you’ve got assignments due in, for example, but all I ask of you … is that you read the case. If you don’t do anything else, just please read the case … If you come and you haven’t read the case we haven’t got a chance, not a cat in hell’s chance; there’s no tutorial”.*
Another tutor felt that the problems were not so much with lack of preparation as with varying levels of preparedness. He argued that tutors tended to direct their approach towards the under-prepared so those who had prepared thoroughly were actually disadvantaged.

Several tutors felt that groups themselves were an effective way of ensuring preparation and that group members put pressure on their peers to prepare. One tutor felt that most of the participants had read the case:

> Not necessarily ten out of ten, but eight or nine out of ten, and you know, and they know, and they have groans and sighs and raised eyebrows about the ones who they’re always dragging along. But they do make sure – there’s quite an interesting group discipline... they won’t shoulder the burden for the stragglers, the no-shows...

In contrast to the begging approach described above, other tutors relied on naming and shaming to ensure that preparation was done:

> The miscreants are those who arrive for the part-time class not having read the case study. Early on in the year, when they’ve not got the culture, there’s usually a reasonable proportion of those. At the beginning of the semester in year one or two, we decamped those people in another classroom, so the students who had read the case study worked on the case in the normal way, and those who hadn’t, the first part of the work was sitting reading it. It’s like the dunce’s cap and you put them in the corner – [actually] it’s not as bad as that. But I would never throw part-timers out of a classroom.

Other tutors disliked the shaming approach, whether by themselves or group members, “they shamed their other team members into doing something, but it’s not the best way to get over that. It isn’t very nice”. One tutor reported that he punished lack of preparation by not asking offenders to participate in the session, although he commented wryly that he was not convinced that this constituted any kind of punishment at all.

Dealing with the lack of preparation was a problem. One tutor, who used cases in the context of lectures, felt that it was easy to socialise students into dependency:

> They’d got used to the lecturer’s response being – oh well, let me talk you through it. Until recently I used to do that. Now I refuse to do it. Why should we have our lecture disrupted by their idleness? It [handling non-preparation] does require something that more senior lecturers can do more easily, but in my view, it has to be done.
Another described the feeling of having transgressed in some way in an attempt to deal with lack of preparation:

*This morning was dreadful. In the end, I thought that the only sensible thing to do was just to say, “Just take twenty minutes and read the case, and I’ll come back.” And I gave them much more input in terms of dragging them through this than I would or should have done. I don’t know if it’s the right thing to do or not. I was annoyed with them.*

A similar level of irritation is seen in this comment:

*…in general, I would rather have a smaller number of people there who have read the case and made an attempt to understand it, than a great mass of people who come in there hoping that by some peculiar intellectual osmosis they’re going to actually learn something without having to put any effort into it.*

Lack of funding is seen to contribute to the problem of under preparation and the attendant lack of participation:

*There’s all sorts of techniques for making … groups work, but then, I think that comes down to resources. You don’t have additional staff, you don’t have additional rooms. You know, all the things that you might struggle to do to really, really, really turn it round – when you’ve got quite heavy loads and lots of groups – you’re unlikely to initiate those. So I don’t know. Perhaps we shouldn’t say that… But I think it’s true.*

The tutor’s hesitance to voice concerns about the detrimental impact of reduced resources is also instructive.

Students share the concern about preparation, and, when asked what advice they would give to final-year students at the beginning of the programme, the pre-finals groups spontaneously and unanimously recommended thorough presentation. One student described the effects of attending unprepared:

*…you end up spending fifteen or twenty minutes of the tutorial reading it and doing it there and then … and those who have read it are left waiting while you read it and go through the questions to try to work out some answers.*

Another commented:

*S sometimes it’s a bit worrying when if you have prepared something and someone else in the group hasn’t prepared, you are kind of teaching them, telling them, to inform them of what’s happening, and they don’t contribute much to anything. So it would be nice if everyone could prepare.*
This could be interpreted as an unexpected bonus of the massified system: a new variant on the monitoring system with better prepared students spontaneously teaching their peers, an *ad hoc* variant of what Tang (1993) calls “spontaneous collaborative learning”.

Despite wide agreement that preparation is vital, students cited time pressures as the reason that they failed to prepare:

*It’s just such a massive amount of preparation to do – like reading the chapter, then doing the case study, then doing the questions… I just go, “That’s it. Just want to go to sleep.”*

Another echoed the good intentions: “*It’s true, we realise the preparation is very important, but to be honest, we don’t do it all the time.”*

The final way in which time pressures affect classes is that deadlines for assignments on other modules and the demands of part-time jobs again mean that group membership can vary week by week, as students attend sessions which best fit their time table. The prevalence of “switching” in some institutions stems from the fact that mass module delivery involves a large number of repeat seminars. The “tourist” selects the session which best suits his or her agenda on a week by week basis. In week 1 the student attends seminar A, in week 2 seminar C and so on. In contrast, the “migrant” moves from his or her scheduled class to one that more closely meets his or her requirements, for example, to a session led by a tutor with a preferred teaching style. “Beachcombers” tend to appear just before case-based assignments are due to be submitted; attending multiple case study sessions to pick up titbits from different tutors that they hope will obtain them a higher grade. Other students just stay away, except for sessions relating to an assignment. Although these movements can be significantly reduced by strict policing of attendance, this tends not to happen. The completion of registers is time-consuming and a low priority, tutors in the main preferring students to attend outside the scheduled slot than not at all.

Although tighter controls of group attendance can go some way towards reducing these behaviours, student consumers still find ways to receive their case sessions from their preferred vendors as this quotation illustrates:

*I am quite geared towards finding myself the best tutor that I feel can give me the most. I have already swapped Strategy once, because I literally went up to the*
tutor and said, “I like you”. I was there because the very first Strategy tutorial I actually missed my Strategy tutorial, so I had gone to another tutorial, and I liked it so much that I went up to him at the end of the class and said, “I found this very interesting; I like your style of teaching. I would really appreciate it if I could move.” And I was able to move, but I feel it is just a personal thing. I know you’re not really allowed to swap tutors just purely for that reason, but I’m at university for myself and my degree, and why should I be disadvantaged by having somebody that I don’t believe is the best tutor for me?

The same student also reported only being prepared to work with the ‘right’ people in her tutorial groups, so that a kind of micro-migration can occur within ostensibly stable groups.

An issue faced in one institution was the difficulty of setting any kind of group work which requires preparation outside the session. Students are highly resistant to this:

   Student one
   Nobody could meet at the same time.

   Student two
   The thing is, that would put pressure on those who perhaps can’t attend for various reasons and they feel they are letting the group down, and we have enough pressure to attend our lecture, get our assignments done and the rest of it. It’s a good idea in theory, but this is what it all comes down to.

Another student described the “nightmare” of trying to get people together to do group assignments within the modular timetable framework. Large modular degree frameworks mean that students find it very difficult to find space in their time tables to meet other group members. In smaller schemes, less thoroughly modular schemes, however, this appears to be less of a problem:

   Staff member one
   Nobody’s complained to me, “Oh, we’re having to spend time outside class working on this.” There’s never been anything like that.

   Staff member two
   I’d agree with that. I’ve never had a complaint.

Funding, then, can be seen to have an impact on the use of cases. The pre-requisites of an effective session such as the provision of a compelling case and adequate time for preparation are declining as institutions seek to cut costs and students experience conflicting demands on their time.
The Changing Curriculum: Modularization and Vocationalism

Modularization in itself does not necessarily increase class sizes, but it is part of a process of increasing institutional efficiency and as such tends to produce larger classes as students combine modules from a number of disciplines. This also emphasises issues of diversity and lack of group identity, as a group of students in a seminar may come from a number of different awards or, indeed, faculties. One tutor experienced a single seminar group which included students from four different awards within the business faculty, one award from the computer studies faculty and one award from the languages faculty. As we have seen, this diversity and fragmentation leads to an alienation from the learning process, a reluctance to contribute in class, and increased absenteeism and group tourism.

Modularization also tends to imply reduced contact time, the substitution of technology for human work and the increased use of casual and part time staff. These issues were matters of concern for those we interviewed. Surprisingly, given the amount of institutional emphasis on the use of information technology in curriculum delivery staff had little to comment on. What comments there were tended to be about students’ adept use of technology, and the influence of making lecture notes available on the internet or intranet leading to reduced attendance at lectures. There was little evidence that people were experimenting with technology in case teaching other than directing students to web-based material, or using video clips.

Vocationalism has impacted on the case method in an interesting way, with some tutors seeing it as a preparation for dealing with problems in the real world of work, and others seeing the preparation for work as lying in the acquisition of enhanced analytical skills. This tension is at the heart of the Mode One and Two model (see Figure 2) and is discussed more fully in the next major part of this section. One rather extreme example of a tutor comment is the following:

I’ve said in jest to some of my colleagues that we’d be better getting them a couple of gross of cans of baked beans and say, “Go down to the market, and the one who sells them quickest with the biggest profit gets the most marks.” Because people lack that hands-on....

This particular tutor was obviously greatly concerned about what he saw as the university’s failure to equip its graduates for their working lives:
Sometimes I see some of these young people, nice young people, going out. They’ve done well in their degree, you know, and I think, “Daniel, you’re going into the lions’ den. They’ll eat you.” Okay, that’s life; it’s competitive and it’s rough… But I’m not sure that the more sensitive souls are prepared for what’s going to hit them

When pressed on this issue, students found it difficult to see immediately how case sessions will prepare them for their working lives.

**Managerialism, audit and inspection**

Many of the points relevant under this heading have been discussed above and in the anxieties expressed concerning copyright issues and the consequent use of textbooks. A number of other themes also emerged from the interviews concerning consistency and inspection. The first was implicit in the need to ensure consistency across expanded teaching teams. A representative comment regarding a growing managerial role for module leaders, and increasing pressure to standardise was:

> I don’t want to be managerial as module leader but unfortunately, I do find myself being pushed down that route. The number of students taking this module (300 plus), plus the numbers of tutors involved in delivery means I need to package the material so everyone has a sense of what we are doing … if tutors move away from the scheduled activities the students get worried and ask me in my role as module leader to intervene.

Another tutor was concerned about the increasing demands on part timers resulting from the quality assurance procedures:

> There is a requirement for consistency, I don’t think there’s any choice, and I think that, certainly in QAA terms, it’s an expectation, and you have show you meet that. There’s no question…. Undoubtedly, the massification of student numbers is paralleled by the massification of staff numbers, and a lot of those are part-time staff. Now, contacting them on a regular basis – how does the organisation pay them? Does it pay them to come to meetings? Or does it just pay them for class contact hours? If it doesn’t pay them to come to meetings, it’s goodwill, and actually, I think it’s an abuse of their time. I think it’s exploitative. So I think that there’s a whole lot of organisational issues that are not addressed. Even coming to exam boards. These things that are formal parts of the structures are very important.

One tutor, however, expressed doubts as to whether the homogenising effects of standardisation was desirable:

> Because we’ve got a big module, increasing numbers of teaching staff… there is a question – should all sessions be the same? And I don’t think we’ve adequately
solved that… We just accept that people have different styles and to some degree the students self-select…

The alternative, adopted by one institution, was to keep the size of the teaching team stable, but to increase the number of seminars each tutor ran. While this would obviously reduce the tourism and migration behaviours described above, it places a strain on the individuals faced with an increased number of repeat case sessions.

The question of teaching teams illustrates one of the ironies of massification and modularization as ways of maximising income for institutions. The structures needed to maintain them incur masked costs. Sometimes the costs can be defrayed to the students. This was seen in an interview with a module leader who stated that changes in budgeting systems meant that case purchase was much more closely monitored by departmental managers and this had emphasised already existing funding pressures, so that, in effect, the costs of using cases were passed on to students by requiring the purchase of a set textbook. Other costs more directly associated with ensuring consistency, or eliminating variance, were described by an interviewee:

As a tutor, I prepare the schedule of tasks with the agreement of the team, but I also provide class notes. So there’s guidance notes for each of these seminar weeks in detail. It’s the same with the assignments. There’s a script marking criteria which are detailed in about eight pages.

And another described the process for marking:

It had been traditionally a bit more, “Well, we all know what we’re doing, don’t we?” kind of thing. Now what we produced very early last year was a set of criteria which everything is assessed by. And the students have the criteria. They’re on the course website and everything. And we’ve got criteria for marking essays, criteria for group work… criteria for workshops.

This clarity is important to ensure that teaching is consistent in a massified system so that no student is disadvantaged by the luck of the draw with their tutor. However, the bureaucracy created by these quality control procedures and the resources they consume are seldom calculated. Whilst they protect the universities against litigious students they also threaten to curtail professional autonomy of staff teaching on modules and to offer the possibility of increased managerial intervention. This can be seen as symptomatic of a much wider political imperative for accountability:
I think everyone in the profession, whatever institution you teach in, right from primary school right the way through to director of studies for PhD students, we’re all subject to quite striking increases in accountability.

Unfortunately, students do not always seem to be experiencing consistency in larger teaching teams as can be seen from this interchange from a student interview:

Student one
It’s quite worrying when there’s a lot of lecturers marking the same assignment. Are they all marking differently?

Student two
Each of them have separate notes that they share with their groups.

Student three
We are quite lucky really, because I think we have got the best seminar tutor in terms of notes I’ve seen from other people on the course. We get more in-depth information.

Another student raised the issue of comparability of degrees and degree classifications across institutions:

I have a friend who goes to Leeds, and she does exactly the same course, with the same pathway and everything, and this unit, but theirs is marked... the one I was telling you about when we all went away and looked at the different companies. We must have spent at least four to six hours solidly together researching it and pulling it together, on top of the two hours that we were actually in the seminar presenting it... Yes, it was fun, yes, we did learn a lot from it, and yes, it was really worthwhile, but we didn’t get graded on that at all whereas they got forty percent of their marks from exactly the same exercise. Where’s the consistency? She’s going to come out with a BA (Hons) in Business Studies Degree, as I am, and she’s going to have that unit on that CV as I am, but it’s marked vastly differently. So I might come out with a worse grade than her because of the way that hers have been assessed in comparison to mine.

This is in addition to the familiar student complaint that despite reassurance to the contrary, tutors give conflicting advice and have conflicting criteria with regard to marking assignments. The formality of marking criteria which is designed to ensure consistency in a mass context combined with the loss of intimacy that that context implies leads to feelings of alienation from the process rather than to reassurance. Quality in this light is diminished rather than increased.

Increased numbers have had a variety of impacts on the way that staff and students experience the case study. Although actual seminar and workshop group sizes have not
altered appreciably, students particularly experience increased alienation and anonymity in their relationships to staff and institutions. This, combined with shifting populations in groups and seas of faces in lectures, as well as occasional physical overcrowding in allotted seminar rooms, has contributed to a loss of the feelings of safety essential for more than surface learning to take place (Jones & Jordan, 1988; Lowenstein & Sowell, 1992; Maltby & Andrusyszyn, 1990; Moje & Wade, 1997). Large numbers in the context of decreasing or at best constant resources have meant that tutors have felt constrained in their choice of cases. It is no longer feasible to supply eight or nine sets of cases to five or six hundred students, or more. This has led to increased emphasis on the use of a purchased text with all the problems of timeliness, relevance and familiarity that this implies. Teachers also have to tailor their courses to textbooks which several considered inadequate to teach the subject. Other tutors produced their own cases, developing what we have called a “dense vignette”, as a way of responding to student needs. Tutors also reported a move to reducing the scope if not the depth of material covered in strategy courses. The reduction in the number of cases covered and the related opportunity to explore wider or sometimes less well-known aspects of strategy and strategic management threatens to reduce students’ appreciation of a complex and potentially fascinating subject. The adoption of a highly organised programme of tutorial sessions with clearly defined frameworks is done with the best of intentions: to ensure the consistency and integrity of the student experience. It also results in some instances in a decline in professional autonomy amongst teaching staff who experience pressure to produce and present a McDonaldized product time after time to a shifting population of consumers, under the watchful eye of their managers.

Larger module sizes have also led to a reduction in marked work. For better or worse assessment is a strong motivator of students and so the reduction in marked assignment work has had two consequences. The first is that students have not received as much formative advice as they would have done in previous years. The second, related, point is that they have had less incentive to engage in the case process. This has had an impact both on the level of classroom discussion that some are capable of sustaining, and on their ability to “do” a case. The examination case risks becoming the only opportunity they have to demonstrate that they have mastered the case method and thus that they have grasped the complex, multi-faceted but highly integrative nature of the subject.
Assessment is vital to attaining the 2:1 degree classification which is largely perceived by students as the price of admission to a worthwhile job. This has made the very idea of experimentation and playfulness alien to many students. Their main requirement for teaching staff is that the sessions should be highly structured and unambiguous and that their classroom experience should culminate in a good set of notes from which to revise for the examination. Allied to this, they have, or are willing to devote, less time to preparation and this compromises the chances of success for the case session. One tutor also commented that he had less time for case selection and preparation (another commented that his not having prepared the case gave an edge of excitement to his sessions, but this was not a commonly experienced phenomenon). Again, time constraints impinge on tutors’ ability to work with cases in the way that they would judge to be most effective.

Finally, diversity is a feature of a mass system. Many members of staff had experienced diverse groups and welcomed them. Students seemed less convinced, although they could appreciate the potential benefits of more voices giving more opinions on the case itself. It appeared, however, that the increase in the number of students whose first language was not English was another factor compromising the success of the case method. The method depends on participation for its success, and a proportion of European exchange students involved in classes found it difficult to comprehend the material and frame their contributions. Staff were sympathetic to this, but there appeared to be little systematic response to the phenomenon.

On a positive note, asking for feedback very often elicits negative comments. Tutors often report that student feedback groups or liaison committees easily turn into moaning shops, and there may have been an element of this in our groups. Certainly several took the opportunity to voice their concerns and frustrations. They also appreciated, however, that there were benefits to case sessions and that even if they would have preferred to have been taught the case rather than having been asked to “discover” it, the more reflective method had its advantages. These two approaches to the case form the basis of the next section.
**Massification, Cases and Case Teaching**

Having considered the wider context of teaching in the massified system, we can now turn specifically to look at the effects that system is having on the use of the case. In this section a contrast will be made between the received idea of what a case is and how it should be taught, which might be thought of as the ‘stereotypical’ Harvard method; and that which we perceive as emerging in a massified system. The first of these is termed Mode One, and the second Mode Two. The contrast is seen clearly in Figure 2, discussed briefly in the previous section, and included again here for ease of reference.:

**Figure 2: Cases as Skills Development and Conceptual Development**

As with most dualised models, very few pure examples appear to exist at either end of the continuum, and in fact it was difficult to find convincing depictions of the monolithic Harvard model in the literature we reviewed. However, the model acts as an organising principle for our data.
View of Education

An obvious place to start to examine the Mode One view of the purpose of education is Gragg’s frequently cited paper, “Because Wisdom Can’t Be Told” (1940). This paper makes it clear that business education is a period of preparation for high office in a large corporation, based on the close study of the real life experience of real executives. Thus:

If the hearts of the young men entering a graduate school of business administration could be clearly read, it is likely there would be found in many a cherished hope that upon graduation they would find positions of authority and power awaiting them. This is a carefully guarded hope, because for some reason there is a general feeling that it is an unseemly one for young men to harbor. Yet, although the students who possess this hope may be said to be unrealistic under conditions as they exist, they cannot be said to be other than logical. For if a young man is to occupy a humble position in the business hierarchy more or less permanently, he can make better use of two years of his time than spending it at a school of business administration. (Gragg, 1940: 8)

Gragg further argues that there is a collective wisdom about business administration but one that is impossible to transmit directly to the individual student, and thus, because wisdom cannot be told, the case study method has had to be invented. Gragg’s portrayal of business education is also one of rugged individualism in which each student is responsible for his own transition to dependable self-reliance.

This view is contrasted with the Mode Two view of education as a collective experience, where business education in particular owes some allegiance to the liberal tradition. Through its insistence on developing critical thinking in students it questions the notion that there is any truth to be told at all, arguing that truth is a cultural construct to be examined along with any other piece of data (Mingers, 2000). Our data revealed the transition to Mode Two thinking:

I think my perspective is that, well, my commitment is to business education as liberal education. I think there ought to be more theory, more philosophy, more history and less functional stuff around it. So that’s my paradigm, as it were. I think that’s a different paradigm from a number of other perspectives which prize basically transferring various vocational skills... It also comes back to the difference between strategy courses being something about getting them to think strategically, and the strategy courses being something about teaching them strategic tools and techniques. Thinking strategically is a much more liberal sense, whereas tools and techniques is much more vocational.

This problematization of the status of knowledge can be seen in the following comment from a tutor:
from a teaching perspective, it’s much more entertaining, more challenging and feels more worthwhile, to use a case as a medium to raise issues and explore ideas and draw input from multiple, different ways of looking at problems and assessing them.

But, as the tutor continued, “students find that really scary”.

**Attitude to Theory**

Theory is seen as important in both modes, but typically in Mode One theory is allowed to emerge from a student’s careful examination of a number of cases. In this mode the course is constructed of cases as the primary source with any theoretical underpinnings emerging as the student works through a programme of investigation. In Mode Two theory itself is called into question. Part of the aim of getting students to think for themselves is to get them to examine and evaluate theory, thus:

... in one sense they feel the models are there for them to be learned, which they are, and on the other hand they do realise that it's not something that’s not entirely relevant, which is, I suppose, a definition of theory – not entirely relevant but generalisable. The more generalisable the theory is, the less applicable it is to all the subtleties of practice. And they find this... What the course is trying to do is to give the students the ability to immerse themselves in a particular subject and, at the same time, to detach themselves from it to think – “what are the limitations of the subject?”

And:

... we deliberately stepped away from using the linear model which is a very nice, contained box ticking model. I deliberately stepped outside of that and went... for a model that throws them into the mess that is Strategy, where there are loads of competing voices and there are loads of competing views and they don’t... you can’t synthesise.

This complexity and ambiguity in the approach to theory will obviously have an impact on the choice of cases made by tutors and this will be discussed below.

**Role of the teacher**

As we have seen, in Mode One the tutor is the expert guiding the novice through the intricacies of the case. In this model expertise lies in the skilful orchestration of the class, sometimes to the point of combativeness:

*Some of the best cases are those where consensus among the participants is gradually developed in the classroom, to the point where there is a strong movement in a certain direction – followed by new questions which fundamentally*
challenge such a consensus. Just as in a rodeo when the bulls are running full speed toward the exit gate, only to find that it is slammed shut in their face, the sense of disorientation and frustration forces reconsideration and eventually learning. Often, of course, participants will continue to batter their heads against the concrete wall, and display an unwillingness to reconsider positions, even when confronted with new ideas and arguments. But this kind of persistence, while good in some ways, is usually then challenged by other participants who have shifted their opinions. (Abell, 1997: 5)

We have here the image of the case teacher as a bull fighter or rodeo cowboy. More usual is the journeyman and master model, famously critiqued by Argyris (1980). Hazard (1999) develops this theme suggesting that it is the role of the case study to give the student skills which will be vital when the acquired theoretical tools fail.

One interviewee stated:

_I like to get disagreement in the room. I think that’s a very important part of that. I am perfectly happy for that disagreement to be with me. I don’t mind that. I’m not threatened by that. I would prefer it if the students would disagree amongst themselves and I can step back a little bit. It is undoubtedly true that in the last half of the case study session the less you are talking the better it’s gone. I don’t agree with John Heath about that – that is a criterion of success throughout it. I think that’s an abrogation of the responsibilities. Let’s not forget that there is a difference between us and the students, we are paid to know, they are paid to learn._

In contrast, other teachers of undergraduates see themselves much more as facilitators of the student’s own learning, and in some cases, co-inquirers into the case with their students. Once more, this model is not entirely pure as seen in the following quotation:

_You are strictly a facilitator during that period, they work in groups and you go around making sure that they understand, particularly some of the foreign groups, see what they’re doing and make sure that they’re not just talking about football! They don’t tend to, actually, they’re a pretty good group._

Another tutor raised the thorny issue of the loss of power in a classroom where students become empowered, which leads to a certain unpredictability in sessions:

_Part of the idea is that they go and develop that [their presentations] themselves. It’s not something that we intervene in – there’s no class time given to that really. It’s something they do completely on their own. So you can’t anticipate whether it’s going to go well or badly. You just have to wait for the day._
On the other hand, sometimes the application of critical thinking to a case could produce unexpected results. Describing a student’s sideways look at a particular case one tutor commented:

Now that was interpretation. Now that was to my mind a really imaginative look at it – to say, “I’m not going to take this at face value. I’m going to look underneath it and look at people’s motives and I know that people can be really rotten.” And that’s really pleasing when that happens.

He added sadly:

You can’t criticise people for being conventional thinkers. The whole education system, the whole way that life is conducted up to that stage is to try to make them conform, isn’t it? And there is no reward for unconventional nonconformism. And really, that’s what we need.

Another tutor described his style in terms which bring to mind the conductor of an orchestra:

I mean, if something’s going well, you can get out of the bloody way, you can get back against the wall and disappear and shrink into the wall and just let... your presence is like a good waiter: you’re there but you’re not there. You’re present but you’re not intrusive and it can happen. You just let it happen for a while. And then other times it’s very important to be back out in the middle commanding attention again. And I use body posture a lot. So, you know, I’m now big, blowing myself up and this is because I want to get hold of you all and now I’m going to do something here, and now I’m not going to do something here - you’re going to do something... There’s all that stuff.

Students are less convinced of the benefits of this approach. One tutor described her experience of drawing out students’ opinions through the sustained use of questioning:

I had the surliness and the discomfort and the eyes cast to the ceiling sometimes. One memorable tutorial when one student cried out in desperation, “For God’s sake, please just tell us the answer.”

Indeed, several students voiced disapproval bordering on anger at being asked to discover the case for themselves rather than being taught what it meant:

I don’t know, a lot of time it’s just getting into groups, talk about it for half and hour, flip chart out, write a few buzz words on the flip chart, session over, and walk away – thinking, “I could have done that in half an hour at home”

And:

It’s a bit too ethereal, because you know each group gets a different thing to focus on and it’s not very clearly defined. It is just they can just put down a few ideas and the teacher will go round and add in the rest and if all the groups had
more similar things to focus on and they had a problem to resolve within the case study then, I think, there would be more incentive to go deeper into it and extract things which other groups have not extracted and to find specific problems that have been presented, not just scribbling down a few things just to get away with it...

This nostalgia for the Mode One approach in which there is a problem to solve or a conflict to manage, is reflected in the clear student opinion that the sign of good case session is having a clear sense of notes to take away:

*We are quite lucky really because I think we have got the best seminar tutor in terms of notes I’ve seen from other people on the course. We get more in-depth information.*

And even the brainstorming might be tolerated if it led to a good set of notes:

*I don’t know about anyone else and their tutorials, but we tend to do the old brainstorming with big sheets of paper and big writing which is great, but unless somebody, if you sit there, which is difficult to brainstorm, when you’re trying to copy it down, when we don’t actually have anything to take away with you.*

One student recounted her experience of what she considered to be a good tutorial:

*...she actually went through synthesis at the very end relating how you would get that synthesis and each group was separated off with a different sort of topic head and she actually came up with four different topics from the book and synthesis between those and you actually went away with four different sets of notes relating to each case of how you would probably prepare for your exam. I thought that was brilliant, really, really good...*

Some students did see the purpose of the method:

*...at the end of the day, it’s pointless going in there, where you’ve got that case study, and the tutor’s sat there saying, “Well, it’s this and it’s that and it’s whatever.’ We don’t need that. Because, at the end of the day, they’re doing the work for us. The whole point of it is to go in there and recognise certain things and use your own brain. And using certain knowledge and certain memories you’ve had of certain theories of that subject and bringing that out into the open*

Other students liked the relaxed atmosphere in the facilitative sessions:

*I have to say, I do like the kind of relaxed working in groups and walking round because you really get to talk to the tutor about anything you want to – any aspect you don’t understand... it’s not kind of putting our hand up in front of [the class] You just kind of grab them and say, “Can I just ask you about...” I think that’s quite good.*
But in general, students were seeking more rather than less structure in tutorials, possibly in response to the difficult and fragmented nature of the course content. Students said that they would welcome more summarising by the tutor in the course of the session, more explicit links to the lecture programme and more working through models. One student went as far as to suggest that digests of the case should be produced, but did concede that it might have detrimental effects:

*It might be quite a good idea to give us a twenty page case to read and then perhaps to have some kind of summary under headings, but not actually to tell us that we are going to get that in the tutorials because then nobody would do the twenty page reading. But in some way have something like that that you could then look at to pull points out from.*

From the interviews and from our own experience it appears that whilst the majority of tutors seek to move to a more facilitative model and many can relate instances of when a session really worked and the students seemed to form a spontaneous learning community, it is more often the case that students reject moves to make them more independent. Thus:

*In a tutorial, a rally, back and forth me and them discussion, doesn’t happen very often, but when it does it’s really exciting.*

This will be seen again in the section on what constitutes a good case.

**Experience**

In Mode One, there is an assumption that the case can be used as a proxy for experience, what Maltby & Andrusyszyn (1990: 415) call a “vicarious learning technique” (see also Stahl & Grigsby, 1992; Thompson & Strickland, 1995). Because students cannot have experienced an exhaustive range of organisations and the problems they face, they can build up a quasi-experiential database on which they can draw when they go out into the world to consult or to manage.

Mode Two thinking rejects this and argues two things. The first is that students have more experience than they think, and second that the experience of “doing the case” in itself constitutes experience. This means that group discussion becomes very important. The case can form the basis of discussion (O’Cinneide, 1997) and it can push students to deepen their understanding beyond their initial thinking (Lowenstein & Sowell, 1992). Some writers point out that this can be difficult with large numbers (Read & Kleiner,
1996) and that students can become sidetracked in discussion (Maltby & Andrusyszyn, 1990). However, others insist that discussion itself promotes learning and Levin (1995) suggests that this is through the creation of “critical cognitive conflicts”. Walker & Warhurst (2000) describes their practice as being:

... underpinned by values of collaboration, and the construction of individual and collective knowledge between teacher and student, and student and student in a “culture of educational conversation”. (Walker & Warhurst, 2000, quoting Rowland, 1993.)

Jones & Jordan (1998) sound a note of caution when they suggest that just participating is not enough and that the contribution needs to be sensible as well.

Nevertheless, most of the tutors interviewed were convinced that small group discussion of the case was a valuable part of the process as seen by the fact that all but one of the institutions visited structured case sessions around small group discussion followed by a synthesising plenary discussion. The quality of the large group discussion could be monitored by the tutor (see Barnes, 1997), and some tutors relished the task of taking students ideas and working with it:

What I find is that a tiny bit of contribution creates a huge scope for me to develop ideas. So I need very little actually from them, and it creates a virtuous circle. So one person just says a little thing, and I can make a lot of it. So then the next person feels more confident to say a bit bigger thing, and then sometimes students will get a bit carried away and will start saying completely facetious things which is irritating. But that doesn’t happen very often. Yes, little contributions... a little bit goes a long way.

This raises the issue of quiet or silent groups. We have already seen that some exchange students find it difficult to contribute in a foreign language. A tutor also commented that some exchange students come from learning traditions which make it difficult culturally to engage in class discussions; this is borne out by the literature (Bocker, 1987; Jones & Jordan, 1988; Marcic & Pendergast, 1994; Newman, 1997). If tutors dislike silent groups, students also dislike being in them. One of the strongest themes from our interviews was that the impact of massification was felt less in terms of student numbers in classrooms, but rather in terms of the transient, fragmented nature of their cohort that made students unwilling to contribute. We have already seen that many students experience feelings of anonymity and alienation and these spill over into the case session. Students expressed unwillingness to speak in front of strangers: their overwhelming
concern was not to ‘embarrass’ themselves in public. Some found that large groups gave them opportunities to hide:

*I just think, “Oh, somebody else will say it,’ or, you know, I don’t know, just because it is such a huge group and I’m just shy.*

*It’s a lot easier to ask questions that you think might be stupid if it’s a smaller group because you feel less embarrassed and if there are only seven or eight people there.*

This was exacerbated by group switching and migration behaviours amongst students which meant that the membership of groups changed on a weekly basis. As a result of these behaviours, tutors and students find themselves faced with different individuals in the seminar each week. A number of interviewees admitted to lacking the self-confidence to put their own opinions forward even when they had extensively prepared the case.

*Student one*
If I’m in a big group I will not contribute at all.

*Student two*
It’s really interesting. This year I haven’t got any like it, but in the past years I’ve had tutorials where it’s like, “What do you think?” and I just can’t speak. Put under pressure I go bright red and say, “I don’t know” when I know perfectly well.

This reluctance to contribute stands in contrast to approaches to case teaching developed in the postgraduate arena which typically require students to adopt the role of a self-assured senior manager or consultant.

Some tutors responded to non-participation and non-contribution by moving towards a case discussion process which we label Mode Two. Students responded well to this. One commented:

*I remember doing this revision case study, and we did it and split up into quite big groups and we had a big poster and like little post-its and things. And we actually set out our own little plan, and like each group ended up getting really competitive and so it made us think, and well, you know we did interact with each other, and I really enjoyed that. I know it’s a sad thing to say, but I did really; I thought, I came out thinking: I learned something there, because, I don’t know why, it was just fun.*

However, subsequent cohorts who experienced this technique were less enthusiastic, possibly because of familiarity breeding contempt. It might be that in the fragmented,
modularised system tutors have to develop a range of techniques to maintain students interests. As we shall see in the session on what constitutes a good case, students themselves claim to have short attention spans. It is also possible that the relationships needed for good group skills are never established. While overheard conversations about the previous evening’s entertainment or football scores or some forms of gossip might look like “social loafing” (Jones & Jordan, 1988; Michaelson & McCord, 2000), it is possible that this represents an attempt to get to know people in a diffuse and isolated modular structure as a precursor to be able to work with them. Several students commented that as they did manage to get to know people they could begin to work to strengths and to assign tasks in group work according to preferences. This is only possible after social interaction at some level. It is possible that one of the unforeseen consequences of floating group membership is an early and extensive training in group work skills. This in turn might develop into sophisticated team working expertise which could be valuable in students’ subsequent working lives.

The final element under this heading is the low value that students place on small group work and the premium they place on the plenary at the end led by the tutor. A common view expressed by tutors is that students consistently undervalue their own and their peers’ contributions and over-value those of teaching staff. Although tutors generally resist the role of expert in case teaching, students place just such expectations on them. Silent groups in particular or groups where a good deal of social loafing goes on may lead students to devalue their class room experience. Jordan & Jones comment that what students perceive as a valueless session:

... may lead students and tutors to suppose that they have wasted their time in a group activity which they could have spent more profitably making notes in the library or attending a lecture. The message needs to be conveyed that they are learning quite different skills in groups which they could not learn at all in the traditional classroom. (Jordan & Jones, 1988: 7)

Consequently the pure Mode Two notion that the case only exists in discussion and that it is recreated anew and imbued with situated understanding and learning in each class discussion has got some way to go before it finds currency with the majority of students.
Features of a Good Case

If the point of the Mode One use of cases is for the student to develop a repertoire of case examples from which to draw in future work assignments, then the hallmarks of a good case are clear. Cases need to be up-to-date, relevant, familiar (or at least potentially within the student’s experience unless for some very specific point), context-specific, convincing, narrative and numerical. The Mode Two approach to the case demands something quite different in a case. In this mode they should be complex, ambiguous and must stimulate investigation and discovery. While many of the staff we interviewed were using cases as a vehicle for sensemaking, a point that will be considered below, students were very clear about what they liked and disliked in cases, and what they liked mapped on to Mode One requirements.

Students liked cases that were up-to-date. The time lag between the preparation of the case and its appearance as a stand-alone example or in a text book is obviously problematic (see Jennings, 1997), but timeliness is considered by writers on cases to be important (O’Cinneide, 1998; Richardson, 1994). Students tended to agree. When asked what was important in a case, one response was:

*I think the timing as well. If you look at one from twenty years ago, sort of thing, it would be of no real relevance. If you use ones which are more recent, sort of thing, you can relate to them, understand what was happening.*

One student conceded that there might be some value in “classic” cases:

*...it doesn’t necessarily have to mean that it happened last month or last year. I think certain case studies, you know, hold over time such as the Honda one or Canon, cases like that. There’s no point in using up-to-date examples just for the sake of it.*

In general, though newer cases were preferred. One student suggested that old cases made it difficult to do a pure case analysis in the sense of sticking to what is in the text:

*I think the only limitation is when we’re discussing them, like for instance Virgin is a good example of when you know that things have happened since and obviously even now they’re getting dated. And as a result that puts a whole new slant on the way you’re looking at things because you’re not able to analyse it as at that point... You’re saying, “Well, hang on a minute, we know they went off and did this.” So it kind of taints your thinking.*

Two preferred options to ensure timeliness were for staff to produce vignettes from *The Economist* or trade journals, or for students to research and produce their own:
Student one
you had to go out and find it yourself. Because you’d chosen the case, you were more interested in it, rather than just being presented with one that was set in the 1970s that you didn’t really care about.

Student two
We could choose something that was quite current. We looked at Asda/Walmart, which is really interesting because there’s stuff there going on at that particular company which makes it much more interesting. The only rough bit was the amount of time it took out of our week.

Students were also concerned that cases should be relevant and disliked anything they saw as padding, although this student could appreciate that part of the skill that she was supposed to acquire was in handling large volumes of information:

... you’ve got Virgin and there was quite a lot of information in it that wasn’t relevant at all, so it was good to pick out that information, but then confusing at the same time, because it wasn’t as specialised as some of the others were.

Familiarity was also valued highly by students. They liked cases where they already knew the company or its products. For example:

Burtons wasn’t too bad because we’d heard of them and we’ve been there. But with Rockware and Derwent Valley Foods we didn’t. I didn’t find them very interesting anyway. Rockware was about glass containers, it’s not something very interesting.

Familiarity and timeliness come together in this quotation about a staff written case:

... oh, yes, B. wrote the British Airways one and that was interesting because it was British Airways, which we know about and it went right the way through from the start of British Airways to what it is now. We could identify with that. It brought in Virgin as a competitor and its something that was far more interesting than ... glass containers.

Familiarity with the case company gave the following student confidence to contribute to the case discussion, but she was also aware that it might cloud her judgement. Contrasting a case on Virgin with a case from a different module, she said:

... whereas with Virgin, because you do have a bit more knowledge it makes you feel a bit more confident. It’s maybe too much knowledge, because if you know about them already, you have all this information to apply to it, whereas on the other hand, the other ones, it’s much more to the point.

Some anonymised cases gave rise to some suspicion that they were made up to demonstrate a particular learning point, and this was not welcomed. Cases had to be
convincing: “If you just made up an example it would be too easy and you wouldn’t always believe it was the case.” Verisimilitude is a quality strongly recommended in the literature (Abell, 1997; Bocker, 1987; Gragg, 1953; Greenawalt, 1994; Humphrey & Scapens, 1996; Jennings, 1997; Jones & Jordan, 1988; Lukkat & Kasenen, 1995; Maltby & Andrusyszyn, 1990; O’Cinneide, 1998; Roselle, 1996). Student feedback bears this out.

Students also appreciated a strong narrative structure. Mode One treatments of the case go so far as to suggest that good cases contain elements of detective novels: there is a solution to the case to uncover (Berger, 1983; McNair, 1971). Wheelen & Hunger suggest:

Studies... show that the case method emphasizes the manager’s world, improves communication skills, offers the rewards of solving a mystery, possesses the quality of illustration, and establishes concrete reference points for connecting theory and practice. (Wheelen & Hunger, 1995: 399)

Discussing why some students do the reading for the strategy module but not necessarily for others one suggested:

... because it’s in the textbook, yet, it’s not, it’s an actual story, so to speak, I don’t know, it doesn’t seem that hard going to read. It’s an easy read.

And another commented: “I read it [the Strategy case] as if it is a story. Like ... Virgin. I read it and I think, ‘Yes, it’s very interesting.’” This sheds some light on why students so often want to know what happened after the case:

I think it’s nice, though, to have a case that you see the strategy that they are obviously pursuing or whatever. I think it’s nice to see how it’s ended up or how they have changed tack or anything like that. I think if it was just left open there wouldn’t be so much interest. I didn’t think you would feel so much, you know, so happy, that you have done such a good job. I mean, it’s nice to see what happened.

What she was searching for, as her colleague pointed out, was closure.

Also allied to the pull of the narrative is the preference students expressed for a protagonist with whom they could identify. Richard Branson was frequently cited as an example, with some even stating that they would like to be like him. One student commented on the CEO in another case:
I suppose, yes, you thought, ‘I wish I could be a bit like him’. He’s not really ruthless. He’s a bit like someone’s uncle at the end of the day. And I enjoyed that.

Several writers comment that students seek affective hooks in cases (Abell, 1997; Jennings, 1997; McNair, 1940; Moje & Wade, 1997; O’Cinneide, 1997; Richardson, 1994). The hook can come from a number of sources such as the familiarity of the case, the narrative thrust, some kind of dilemma, and some sort of novelty. Our interviews bore this out. Another variation, which combines timeliness and immediacy, is the “living case” in which a guest speaker comes in to present their experience. Students responded well to this, but in a massified system unless the guest was prepared to make multiple visits or to present to large audiences this is no longer an option. The nearest approximation was a video case. This appealed to students if used well: as one commented, “We’re TV junkies”. On the other hand, an illustrative video about chaos theory had proved mystifying, suggesting that videos needed to be chosen with care and with clear learning outcomes in view.

Structurally, students liked cases that tied in with the lecture programme, and ones which had a clear point of view, by which they appeared to mean one that directed you to the point of the case fairly quickly. What they did not like, but was a major feature of both Mode One and Mode Two cases, was numerical data. Some students reported literally not seeing the tables in cases:

Student one
I don’t think – this is really bad – I’ve ever used any of the charts and the figures and the little extra bits they put in. I tend not to read those.

Student two
I always think, “Great, I can miss this bit.” It’s like, “Great, this is really only half a page.”

And some expressed doubt that they would be able to make much sense of them:

Well, the statistics, I mean, the figures, there were two figures which showed exactly the same numbers, with different headings that weren’t that useful. If you’re not aware of the statistics used in that industry all the time, they are not really relevant. You can’t pick them up that quickly.

This is in stark contrast to some of the literature which suggests that the real story in the case is in the numbers (see, for example, Wolfe, 1998). Students’ habit of ignoring
numerical information in cases was also a consistent cause of complaint in tutor interviews.

One interesting theme to emerge from the interviews was a dislike of cases as pathologising organisations, that is, suggesting that there is always a problem to fix. One student commented that he had been criticised on placement for always seeing the negative in organisations which he linked back to the case method:

... I think a lot if it you feel is all so negative and you’ve always got to look at what’s gone wrong instead of what’s going right. Sometimes you just think – let’s find something that’s going right. All these models, they seem to look at what they’re not doing right, where they’re going wrong... When I went into my placement, I found I was looking at things negatively all the time and being picked up by my managers saying, “You’ve got this negative attitude. Why don’t you look at it from this perspective? “ My year in industry I started looking at things more positively, then you come back into a theory strategy environment, and suddenly it was – “Right, what’s going on that’s wrong? Where have you gone wrong?”

Other students, however, felt that cases presented companies in too positive a light.

Student one
...the thing is, though, all the cases we have done so far, they all seem to have quite a happy ending. They all seem to be a success. And maybe it would be good to have a disaster and see how someone coped with that.

Student two
But no-one seems to write about them.

Student three
But maybe it would be interesting to see how a company had totally failed, though.

Again, it appears that students want novelty and variety in cases and case presentation.

Whereas students liked Mode One type cases, some tutors were much clearer that they wanted cases which tended more towards Mode Two. They wanted cases reflecting what they saw as the complexity of that students were likely to face in strategic decision making. Much of the literature considers cases and complexity (Barnes, 1997; Jennings, 1997; Hazard, 1999; Moje & Wade, 1997; Lowenstein & Sowell, 1992; Richardson, 1994; Wright & Ross, 2000).
Staff saw it as part of their role to prepare students for complex ambiguous organisations:

... the approach we take and the emphasis we place on confronting ... the management of ambiguity, that’s the key phrase. If you compared us with other institutions, you out here with perhaps a rather less competence in finance, or perhaps not so good in this, not so good in that, but the one thing that we hope students will walk away with is that they are not frightened by the complexities of management. That they understand that polyphony within an organisation is not something that is just there to be squashed or rendered out by some research methodology, but it is part of the problem and part of the solution as well.

And he argued that tutors needed a substantial case to be able to do this:

If you take that huge Canon case study, I have to say at the beginning, this is a 45 page case study and they all groan. I need you to understand why I am giving you this huge case study. It is because the most difficult part of Strategy is in finding a tree in this wood. Once you say that, okay, they still resent having to read 45 pages of rubbish, but at least they understand why they are doing it.

Another tutor at a different institution made a similar point:

I would like to have cases which had more detail in them. They have to cut through some of the stuff that they didn’t require to get to the actual point of the analysis, and also to carry out analysis in-depth, rather than just be able to make generalised statements, which you have to do sometimes in these books because the case is so thin you’re only making general comments. It’s the difference between having a case that supports a framework, actually allowing you to get to use the framework to some purpose and find the weaknesses of the framework, or pull something out of the case material that other people wouldn’t see by just first chance reading. The old highlighter syndrome. In the old days, you’d highlight a case study and you wouldn’t have too much highlighter, nowadays the case studies have been shrunk so much, you almost highlight the lot because it’s all up front, it’s out there, it’s too readily accessible possibly.

And later in the interview:

I suppose the thing is, previously one of the things about business policy was not only the fact that we were talking about the subject of strategy, it was we were having these transferable skills of analysis. Being able to look at material, get to the key issues very rapidly and be able to justify and support your proposals. With thin cases, it’s very difficult to do this. You can identify them very rapidly, but it doesn’t leave much to be able to pull out the issues because they are virtually standing there in front of you. I’m being a little hard because some of the cases still need a little bit of digging into. But by and large, what we’re seeing is, cases in here are what I call illustrative cases, what I call a cameo case, which we do write here ourselves. If you have a lecture and you say five
force analysis, it’s all there, you can read it in half an hour in a seminar and by the end of the seminar, you’ve pulled out the main points and it allows you to push them a little bit to test them about their understanding of the main points, but little more than that. It doesn’t present them with something which means they actually have to try and understand the context, look a little bit beyond the questions.

One of the tutors made the direct contrast with what students were looking for and what tutors wanted:

I wonder if what they like the best are the simpler ones. The ones where it’s obvious and there’s an immediate... The ones where you have to dig a lot deeper and work a lot harder, they don’t really reveal very much until later on in the process so, it’s not... I suspect that’s what it is. So the ones which from a teaching perspective as the tutor, you say, “That’s a really good case,” and what you mean by it is it’s rich and there are lots of issues and it teaches well in terms of allowing you to achieve the things that you really want to achieve, it illustrates, you can use jolly good concepts for that. That’s what you mean. It’s a really good case. I don’t think they mean good like that at all. So I think their perspective on it would be is it a good read? Can they see immediately something in it?

It would appear that whereas tutors are trying to get students to engage with complexity and ambiguity, students prefer the comfort of a much simpler case bearing many of the characteristics of Mode One cases. This tutor perspective was not universal however. Some tutors expressed a strong and enduring belief in, and commitment to, business education as a vocational education. Working with students with perhaps lower entry points than in some of the other institutions, cases were seen as a means of allowing students practice in business analysis techniques. In this case, tutors had developed a very different approach to cases which meant emphasising numerical information and simplifying narrative complexity.

**Preparation for Future Work**

Mode One is quite clear that it is preparing students for senior positions in large organisations. The model, which comes from the use of cases on MBAs and other executive development programmes, is that of training the next CEO, or of the CEO in waiting. As such it is the role of the case to put the student in the situation of being the CEO and having to make a decision (Abell, 1997; Jennings, 1997; Read & Kleiner, 1996). Smith (1987) states the case and then critiques it, but this is quite rare in the literature. Mode Two thinking sees things differently. It is about equipping students for
work in contingent, protean, complex and ambiguous organisations. As we have seen, tutors seek cases which give an insight into this world. Furthermore, they challenge the notion that strategy is the preserve of a few at the top of an organisation’s hierarchy. Strategy is made and implemented throughout organisations and as such people at any level are likely to be involved in its formulation and implementation:

I think the rationale for training people who are going to go out into industry is that, okay, they may not be senior managers in the next three or four years, but they will all in the main go into managerial jobs, and that’s sustained by our first destination statistics. They’re going to take responsibility earlier and quicker than I think has historically been the case. Increasingly they are going to be involved in the implementation of strategy however it has come about. They’re almost certainly going to be in functional jobs and there’s any enormous pressure for, I think, for people to be able to step out of, [outside] of their functions and be able to integrate what they’re doing in some wider context and strategy is tremendous in that.

The literature bears this out (Hazard, 1999; Jones & Jordan, 1998; Levin, 1995; Lowenstein & Sowell, 1992; MacFarlane & Perkins, 1990; Richardson, 1994), suggesting that students at entry levels in organisations are likely to contribute to strategy formulation and implementation and that case simulation can help to prepare them for such a role.

**Aims of Case Teaching**

In Mode One the aim of the case session is to solve a puzzle, make a recommendation or a decision or resolve a conflict (see for example, Bocker, 1987; Jennings, 1997; Jones & Jordan, 1988; Lowenstein & Sowell, 1992; Maltby & Andrusyszyn, 1990; Richardson, 1994; Roselle, 1994). As such, although writers are keen to point out that the case is capable of sustaining many right answers, there is an implicit aim to come up with a right answer (see for example, Abell, 1997; Argyris, 1980; Grossman, 1994; Hazard, 1999; Jennings, 1997, and Roselle, 1996). Mode Two thinking, however, sees the purpose of the case session in terms of exploring and critiquing theory, sensemaking, developing critical ability, developing theory, and developing affective skills. It also case sessions as providing an opportunity for strategy to function as an integrator, bringing together thinking from all other parts of the business education programme (Bransford, Franks, Vye & Sherwood, 1989). One tutor described the process in the following way:
... case studies are complex and making sense of them is managing complexity in some way. The case studies bring together a diverse range of information about a whole range of different functions in an organisation. So it is about thinking like an accountant, if you like, to make sense of the numbers. Thinking as an OB person to make sense of some of the dynamics of an organisation. Thinking as a strategist to think about the relationship between an organisation and its environment. But one of the problems is that the students feel uncomfortable about that, particularly in certain respects like thinking as an accountant.

Some students appreciated this:

... it integrates other modules. You know, if you look at a certain case it’s going to have things about leadership or... all different things in it, and it sort of like brings it all together really nicely, I think.

But others showed a marked preference for the Mode One model:

...you have a problem to solve and you have to go away in groups and do it, and that’s quite valuable, that’s quite a valuable way of doing and learning your lecture material. It seems to sink in a lot more.

And:

I think it would be useful if... take like the Southwest Airline where the case study finished in 1991, and then maybe for the lesson, because even at the end of the case study raise questions about the future. And you could have spent an hour of that case study thinking strategically how we would have planned the next ten years, and then maybe at the end, say, “Well, this is what they actually did.” And then maybe draw parallels between how people have strategically planned out what’s happened to Southwest and how successful it’s been to them. Be quite good. Because at the moment all we seem to do is to retrack what’s happened in the past. It’s not really asking us to think forward, which is what really, Strategic [sic] is all about.

Later in the interview he returned to the theme, with ideas about the best way to structure a case class:

Put more objectives with it, so there’s like deliverables half way through the lesson, then you consolidate the knowledge with the lecturer feeding back and then you look perhaps at how the company implemented strategy over that time. So more objective-driven tutorials as opposed to what’s currently there where you sit around and don’t really do anything for two hours.

Other students, however could see that the cases helped them to think differently:

It’s kind of hard to get into the way of thinking because a lot of the things that I come across, I would never have thought of that. It’s a very different way of thinking.
One student who was interviewed individually produced a stream of reasons for using the case which encapsulates much of what other students said: cases illustrate theory; cases help make theory stick; cases help you break down theory into smaller more memorable sections. Cases tie theory to real life; there is more immediacy than reading accounts in books; they allow people to participate more in class because they can give examples from the case. Cases also improve understanding because they allow the individual to apply theory to a real life situation, they allow you to test theory:

_You can just parrot a theory in an essay but you need to understand it thoroughly to do a case._

Finally the detail in the case allows a deeper level of analysis. There was a certain amount of instrumentality in what students saw the cases as being for: making theory stick so that they could remember it in sufficient detail to pass their examinations. However, they also understood that cases were being used to help them to understand the complexity and ambiguity of the world. At the very least:

_they do sort of teach you to think for yourself a bit. Think for yourself, improvise._

In summary, an interesting development appears to be taking place. Some tutors are using the case as a way of resisting standardisation and homogenisation, rather than to develop immediately apparent transferable skills. They are using it to help students learn to deal with complexity and ambiguity, and to help them reject tidy answers to the questions posed by cases. Students, even if they have not directly experienced Mode One teaching, appear paradoxically nostalgic for this older and more certain model.
CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions from the Research

Our data suggest a set of strong tensions in the use of case studies in a mass higher education context. Pressure to reduce costs, tighter enforcement of copyright laws, increased external monitoring, coupled with increasing complexity in the management and delivery of large course and changes in student and expectations have led staff to abandon, curtail modify or develop their use of cases. A summary of some of the ways in which the changing institutional context is affecting the use of cases on UK undergraduate business programmes is provided in Figure 3.

We can, perhaps, think of the first strategy, that of shifting from traditional uses of cases to mini-cases and other shorter exercises, as a ‘falling back’ strategy in the face of the pressures of massification. However, the prevalence of the second and third options suggests that a number of academics in our sample, whilst recognising the reality of a resource constrained environment, retain a strong commitment to case pedagogy. The move to less ambiguous, more structured (and some would argue less challenging) learning technologies is being resisted for a variety of different motives and in a variety of different ways.

Case studies by their very nature accommodate different interpretations, different ways of framing of problems and the application of different theoretical lenses so, although they offer a highly valuable learning opportunity, they also create complexity and diversity which is potentially costly and difficult to manage. Cases are rich sources of detailed data that represent organisational complexity but also bound it. Their properties of verisimilitude, immediacy and ambiguity allow tutors both to engage students and to tap into and use students’ diverse experience and interpretations. As previously discussed, massification has resulted in a more diverse student body, composed of individuals whose life experience and cultural values differ significantly from each other. Case studies lend themselves to multiple readings, with different reader adopting a different perspective and gaining different insights. The case medium is perceived as having a good fit with the new audience and as being in accord with the private
## Figure 3: Massification and the Case Method – A Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increasing Class, Module and Institution Size</th>
<th>Increasing Student Diversity and Changes in Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy #1: THE CASE AS ILLUSTRATION.</strong> Tutors shift from Harvard-style cases to “Vignettes”, video-cases, etc</td>
<td>Different levels of knowledge, experience and engagement favour replacement of long cases by vignettes as latter are short, non-complex, standardised and are usually based on very familiar organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing student numbers in class inhibit contribution, allow free-riding and therefore encourage non-preparation and non-participation, thereby diminishing seminar quality and increasing the demands of supporting students who don’t/can’t keep up. Costs of policing this behaviour favour replacement of long cases by vignettes and other short exercises as they can be easily prepared or read in class, or the material readily learnt and understood by non-attenders.</td>
<td>Different levels of student knowledge, experience and engagement significantly increase risks of “traditional” case teaching. Cultural differences mean that some students are extremely uncomfortable with individualised and potentially adversarial style of Mode One. Emphasis on student as “CEO-in-waiting” may not fit with diverse expectations of students or with the changing nature of the “graduate” job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased costs of policing non-preparation, and demands of greater student support outside class significantly increase costs and risks of case teaching (in whichever mode). May result in fewer cases being used, with cases being used repeatedly over several sessions. Combined with other pressures (notably those of funding, modularization, and diversity of course teams) tutors may adopt integrated textbooks with learning material, cases and vignettes combined, thereby decreasing autonomy and increasing standardisation.</td>
<td>Student diversity seen as potentially a rich source of group learning. Cases provide “bounded complexity” which can be made sense of from a diversity of perspectives. Fit with changing and increasingly diverse nature of employment. Collaborative nature of Mode Two may suit students from particular cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased costs of policing non-preparation and non-attendance, and demands of greater student support outside class significantly increase costs and risks of case teaching. Students interviewed disliked potentially adversarial style of Mode One and suggested they would be less likely to contribute in this process given large fragmented groups. May result in fewer cases being used, or adoption of integrated textbook, but textbook cases often chosen to illustrate particular theoretical points or areas in the syllabus – shortage of suitable “integrative” cases in textbooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increasing Size and Shifting Membership of Teaching Teams</strong></td>
<td>Purely illustrative vignettes and other simplified and standardised material reduce dangers of incompatible staff approaches to case-teaching and diminish uncertainties and anxieties of some staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competition and Funding Pressures</strong></td>
<td>Vignettes are cheap to provide. Purchased videos can be expensive, but may be used indefinitely. Less preparation required by students, so more suited to a milieu where working students have less time for academic work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credentials, Employment and Consumerism</strong></td>
<td>Students seem to prefer shorter and simpler cases and would support this shift, providing vignettes were engaging and were perceived to add sufficient value to taught material or theoretical reading material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modularization and Vocationalism</td>
<td>Modularization effects entwined with size effects: small modules become less economic. Development of “super-modules” (800 students plus) at some institutions (see increasing size effects, above). One-semester modules with large numbers of students may use vignettes and mini-cases because of insufficient space in programme for traditional cases. Disconnection of module from award degrades cohort identity and can lead to fragmentation of groups (see comments above under class size).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerialism, Audit and Inspection</td>
<td>Copyright issues re sourcing of vignettes. Shift may be perceived by stakeholders as diminution of quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
inclinations of many academics who value the notion of a ‘liberal education’ over vocational training.

Faced with both student and managerial pressure to move to alternative learning technologies, we noted a number of different ways in which staff shore up case-based learning. The rationale for using cases appears to have undergone a subtle shift. Whilst cases are employed to develop conceptual (Mode Two) rather than business skills their use is often rationalised in terms of developing transferable skills or promoting critical thinking as an essential pre-requisite for employment in a knowledge intensive society. We also identified a variety of strategies employed by academic staff to deal with time poor students and lack of case preparation. Some adopted a punitive strategy, asking students who had failed to prepare to leave the class. Others adopted a more facilitative approach, using small group exercises to encourage discussion and attempting to engender a feeling of mutual support and trust within the classroom.

In summary, therefore, we find that the changing context of higher education is having a profound effect on the use of the case method of teaching and learning in undergraduate business education but that the effects are by no means linear or unidirectional. We find that, the case method has evolved in ways that, paradoxically, both resist and accommodate the McDonaldization of higher education, that standardise and customise student experience and that diminish and bolster professional autonomy. Although it is inappropriate to generalise from a small number of research sites our data does suggest that massification may influence not only the extent and form of case teaching but also its perceived pedagogical purpose. Most of the existing research into case study teaching focuses on postgraduate students and we suggest that the use of cases as a vehicle for undergraduate learning is likely to be a fruitful area for future research.

**Areas for Further Research**
This exploratory study has revealed a number of avenues for further research which include the following:
• Extension of the existing study. Our research has revealed a paucity of research on the use of cases with undergraduate students. Much of the advice offered to staff and students on using cases has emerged from the ‘Harvard’ tradition and fits uneasily with the new context of mass undergraduate higher education. There is an urgent need to explore the teaching and learning issues and challenges in a more systematic and rigorous way. In general we feel that the existing study could be both deepened and broadened. It could be broadened by means of a large scale quantitative survey of a much larger sample of staff and students involved with case-based learning. It could be deepened by, for example, a longer term ethnographic study in one institution involving observation of a large number of case sessions and the tracking of one student cohort through a case-based module.

• The impact of new information and communication technology on the use of cases with undergraduate and postgraduate students. Our study has alluded to the widespread uncertainty regarding the potential effects of new technology on the teaching and learning experiences of both staff and student. Not only do web-based technologies offer low cost delivery channels, they have subtle and potential far-reaching pedagogical implications. However, it is far from clear that either students or staff welcome the implications of these technologies. Our understanding of the possibilities these technologies present for case-based teaching is in its infancy and requires further detailed study.

• Dealing with diversity. One of the key challenges facing teaching staff in the massified system of higher education is dealing with widening access. The student body has become increasingly diverse, with students exhibiting significant differences in educational background, language skills, work experience, age and so on. Cases, by their very nature, are multi-faceted and multi-layered and potentially provide a very valuable means of drawing out, and making use of, diverse student experience. However, we know very little about ‘best practice’ in this context. This is a fruitful area for future research and one which is likely to yield valuable results.
• Delivering case teaching with large teaching teams. Massification has not only increased module and class size, it has also resulted in an increase in the size of teaching teams. Although there is much research on team size and performance in the general business literature, there are few, if any, studies, exploring the impact of increases in team size in the context of teachers in higher education.

• Using case-based teaching with foreign students. Massification has gone hand in hand with internationalisation of many programmes. Our study has revealed some specific problems faced by foreign students, which are particularly pronounced in case-based classes which place an emphasis on group work and active participation. There is scope for an in-depth ethnographic study which explores the experiences of this particular group of students.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS AND INSTITUTIONAL VISITS

Interviews:

Bristol Business School (staff and students)
Sheffield Business School (staff and students)
Newcastle Business School (staff and students)
Greenwich Business School (staff)
Bath School of Management (staff)
Canterbury Business School (staff)
Cardiff Business School (staff)
Lancashire Business School (staff)

August/September 1999

Semi-structured interviews with six module leaders (year two and final year) at Bristol Business School (BBS), University of the West of England.

April 2000

Semi-structured focus group interviews with three groups of final year students at BBS (average group size: 6-8 students)

Semi-structured focus group interviews with three groups of year one and year two students at Sheffield Business School (SBS), Sheffield Hallam University (average group size 6-8 students).

Semi-structured interviews with three module leaders at SBS.

May 2000

Semi-structured interviews with six individual members of BBS staff teaching on Strategic Management final year module, followed up with focus group with same staff to discuss interim findings

October 2000

Semi-structured interview with one module leader at the Management School, University of Bath.

December 2000

Semi-structured focus group interviews with four groups of students at Newcastle Business School (NBS), University of Northumbria at Newcastle (average group size: 6-8 students).

Semi-structured interviews with two module leaders at NBS.
Semi-structured interviews with two module leaders at Greenwich Business School, University of Greenwich.

Semi-structured focus group interviews with five groups of final year students (new intake) at BBS (average group size: 6-8 students).

January 2001

Semi-structured interviews with two module leaders at Canterbury Business School, University of Kent.

March 2001

Remaining visits agreed (unable to be accommodated within planned schedule) at Cardiff Business School and Lancashire Business School.
APPENDIX B: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Research Methodology
Because there is little or no literature available on the specific use of the case method in large undergraduate programmes, the methodology adopted for this project was that of an exploratory study, with qualitative data gathered from a relatively small number of research sites being analysed to generate grounded theory. However, as we indicate in this report, there exists a large, if rather diffuse, literature on the massification of higher education; and there is also a body of literature on the case method generally, even if it is not specifically focussed on the application of case-based teaching and learning in an undergraduate context. We decided therefore that our approach should not be a purely inductive study, but rather one where insights were generated in parallel by the empirical data and the themes emerging from the two bodies of literature. As our empirical data, and our understanding of these literatures, developed over time, we cycled iteratively between data and literatures in order to build and refine our conceptual frameworks and in so doing to structure our data. Both the different literatures, and the data, were independently studied and analysed in depth by different members of the team so as to enhance the validity and reliability of the theory generation process.

As far as the literature was concerned, we already had access to a substantial number of books and papers concerning the case method. Detailed searches were made on both electronic and paper-based research databases and indexes, and citations in papers followed up. The main benefit of this approach was to identify the burgeoning literature on cases in disciplines other than business and management, although some new papers on the case method in business education were obtained. The new and existing material was circulated around the team and the literature analysed by different team members. Our approach to the massification literature was rather different. As well as utilising traditional search means such as indexes and citation networks, we identified a large number of education journals we thought likely to include relevant material. These contents of these journals were searched back to the 1980s for theoretical and empirical studies relating to massification and other changing issues in the UK higher education context. We allowed the network of
studies to grow backwards and forwards in time to try to ensure comprehensive coverage. Again, key studies were read and analysed by different members of the project team.

In order to gain an understanding of the quantitative aspects of massification, we purchased statistical data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) which we subsequently analysed and which we reproduce, in part, in Section B of this report.

The primary data was generated by a series of interviews with staff and students at a number of UK business schools (see Appendix A). In addition, when Dr Rippin was appointed to the project post, she spent a number of weeks observing and participating in case study sessions at BBS in order to gain experience of different case teaching styles and student behaviours. The interviews were of two types. Student interviews were organized as semi-structured focus groups. Although attendance at a small number of focus groups was very low, in general the group size was between five and ten students. All the focus groups were recorded either on video or audio tape, and except in the case of one institution where the recording was of low quality, full transcripts were made of the recordings. In that case detailed notes were made by both members of the project team present at the interview. All student interviews except those at BBS in December 2000, which were carried out by Dr Rippin on her own, were conducted by two members of the project team. Staff interviews were semi-structured interviews with one or sometimes two staff from the institution concerned. All staff interviews except those at Sheffield Business School and the August/September 1999 BBS interviews were recorded on audio tape, and a full transcript of the recordings prepared. In both of these cases, detailed notes were again taken by the interviewers. All the staff interviews, except those at BBS in August/September 1999 (Mr Booth) and May 2000 (Dr Rippin), involved at least two members of the project team.

An interview schedule was prepared for both types of interviews (see below), although in general we were prepared to allow interviewees to pursue issues of interest as they arose rather than requiring an absolute adherence to the questions on our schedule. We were more ready to intervene in student interviews and in general followed a tighter interview schedule in the focus groups. Interviewees were not
advised of the questions in advance. In the case of students they were told that the purpose of the interview was to explore their experience of teaching and learning via case studies. Tutors were generally given a more specific definition of the aims of the project in advance of the interview.

We are very grateful to all the staff and students who gave up time to help us with the project.

**Interview Schedules**

**Staff Interview Questions**

Start off with some general questions about the modules – size, level, size of team, textbook used, etc. and the programme. How long have they been there/taught the course, etc.

1. What are the main teaching/learning objectives of the module? How does the use of case studies contribute to the achievement of these objectives?
2. Do you have any particular pedagogy of case study teaching - i.e. any that is different from any other method of teaching? What, in your opinion, are the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach?
3. What, for you, are the key challenges of teaching this module? How similar/different is the teaching and learning approach adopted on this module from other modules that you deliver?
4. What issues are presented by increasing student numbers on the module? What other changes in the institution have affected teaching and learning and what have been the implications?
5. How do you anticipate the content and delivery of this module changing over time? How, if at all, do you envisage your use of case studies changing?
6. What do you think students get out of case study sessions?
7. Any other comments?
Interview Schedule for Student Focus Groups

What do you feel about the use of case studies as a teaching and learning tool?

Prompts

- Differences from other tools/activities
- Types of skills/development
- Complexity
- Preparation
- Class contribution
- Links to theory/experience
- Case studies as assessment vehicles

Why do you think the tutors use case studies on this course?

Prompts

- Differences from other tools/activities
- Links to learning outcomes
- Types of skills/development
- Links to theory/experience
- Case studies as assessment vehicles
- On some courses tutors deliberately don’t use cases, why might this be the case?

What do you think about the type of case study used? Have you used other types on different courses, and how do those different types compare?

Prompts

- Explicit comparison to shorter illustrative cases (“vignettes”)
- Use of cases on other courses
- Link back to purposes/outcomes
- Link back to types of skills/development
- Length
- Complexity

Do different tutors (on the same module) use case studies in different ways? What recommendations would you make to tutors using cases about maximising student learning? What could students do to maximise their own learning from case studies?
Prompts

☐ Explore what different ways are – what actually happens in case sessions?

☐ Links to theory

☐ Extent of direction, etc - should tutors “teach the case”?

☐ If preparation (or any other behavioural change) is an issue, how can tutors help ensure this happens?

☐ What advice would they give a student starting this course next September?

Over the past few years, [name of institution] and the UK higher education system generally have seen a big growth in student numbers and in the diversity of the student body. Has that affected your student career and your experience in any way? Do you think that has any implications for how teaching and learning takes place?

Prompts

☐ Class sizes – implications

☐ Teaching teams – implications

☐ Teaching materials – implications

☐ Diverse student experience – implications
APPENDIX C: DISSEMINATION AND PUBLICATION OF THE RESEARCH

Electronic Mail List
As outlined in our original proposal, an electronic mailing list was established to facilitate international communication and discussion of research on the case method generally and of the funded projects in particular. The list is called Case-Teaching. It was originally hosted by the Mailbase service at the University of Newcastle but has since migrated to the Jiscmail provider upon the demise of Mailbase. Case-Teaching has the potential to be used in a number of ways, including:

- Acting as a forum for scholarly debate and discussion, and for exchanging information about a topic or issue concerning the use of the case method
- Acting as a forum for research students, management educators and other scholars to raise questions about any relevant topic or issue
- Circulating relevant conference, workshop, or seminar information, or information as to forthcoming books, articles, reports or other publications
- Circulating calls for papers for conferences, seminars or edited books
- Circulating bibliographies and other scholarly documents to subscribers
- Acting as a forum for book and journal reviews

The list is unmoderated and open to self-subscription. The list’s webpage is at http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/case-teaching/. Messages to the network are archived for a period of two years and are available in a fully searchable form at this website.

The Case-Teaching list has the potential to play a valuable role in raising the profile of case-based teaching and learning in front of a broader audience; in linking interested scholars and practitioners and in strengthening scholarly ties; and in disseminating information useful to members of the management education community. Although the list has a relatively large membership (see below), email traffic on the list has been low and the list has not lived up to its full potential. We think that the list could become a more useful resource to subscribers, current and potential, and propose:

- Continuing to keep the list running instead of terminating it at the end of the project as originally planned
- Using the list for dissemination of the research projects’ findings
- Seeking ways to increase participation of interested scholars in the list and of adding value for list members.

Table 8: Case-Teaching List Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Subscribers as at February 2001</th>
<th>192</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Countries represented</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number (and Percentage) of Subscribers with an education address (edu, ac, etc.)</td>
<td>107 (56%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Publication and Dissemination Outcomes as of February 2001
The research project has presented a number of publication and dissemination opportunities:

**Refereed Journal Paper**

**Conference Paper**

(This paper was jointly awarded “Best Paper in the Teaching & Learning Stream of BAM 2000” prize, sponsored by the Learning and Teaching Support Network)

A number of other papers are in preparation or awaiting referee decisions:
*Cultures of Learning Conference, University of Bristol, 19-22 April 2001*. Title: “A complex case: Using the case study method to explore uncertainty and ambiguity in undergraduate business studies education”. – Status: Accepted.


Findings from the research are to be presented at the next South West Regional Learning and Teaching Support Network Seminar (University of Glamorgan) at a date to be arranged. Interim findings from the research were presented at an internal Bristol Business School seminar on 27 October 2000, and another seminar is scheduled for May 2001.

The team will continue actively to seek publication and dissemination opportunities for the research in refereed journals and at relevant seminars and conferences. We would actively seek the opportunity to be involved in future seminars organised by ECCH, and consider there to be significant potential (briefly discussed at an earlier progress meeting) for a seminar event or events where all the funded research projects present papers based on their research. We would be keen to explore with the funders and the other project teams the possibility of applying for funding for an ESRC seminar series, or similar. Last but not least, as indicated in our conclusion to the report, we should like to explore the possibility of obtaining funding for a further research project in and through which this study can be extended and developed.
APPENDIX D: POTENTIAL FOR NEW CASE PUBLISHING OPPORTUNITIES SUGGESTED BY THE RESEARCH

We consider that the research suggests that there may be new product and process development opportunities that might allow ECCH and other case providers to more closely tailor their services to the needs of their users teaching on large undergraduate programmes. We stress that these suggestions have not been fully worked through, but they may provide food for thought. These possibilities include, in outline form, the following:

- A major bar to case purchase by undergraduate tutors is cost. ECCH should give thought to the possibility of extending its site licensing system or of selling certain “classic” cases to tutors on large undergraduate programmes at significantly reduced cost.

- Another issue causing concern is the limitations represented by textbook cases. ECCH should consider the possibility of offering undergraduate tutors rights to distribute a set of cases from a limited menu of “classic” cases. Such cases could be made available to tutors on CD-roms in .pdf format at very low cost. If priced competitively, these would provide a real alternative to tutors being forced to adopt the cases in standard textbooks.

- We consider that there are opportunities for ECCH to enter what must be an expanding market for vignettes or mini-cases. These could include half-length or quarter-length versions of popular cases, where the numerical data was left intact but the narrative simplified or streamlined.

- Both students and to a lesser extent tutors complain of cases being outdated. It may be possible to offer an updating service, whereby at least financial and summary data could be regularly updated for users.

- Although we have some reservations about the added value represented by the emerging generation of interactive electronic and multimedia cases, we agree such cases should be subject to continued research and development. They would require to be made available at very low prices to be attractive to undergraduate tutors, however.

- Cases and teaching notes should where possible recognise the new “skills agenda” in undergraduate education. Teaching notes could reflect this by emphasising
skills development as well as content issues. Links could, for example, be more actively developed with the new QAA subject benchmarks in business and management.

- ECCH should consider broadening its provision of workshops for undergraduate tutors using cases. Our impression is that the current workshop is very much targeted at novice case teachers. Our impression is that experienced case tutors would welcome the opportunity to attend seminars to exchange information, discuss research on the use of the case method, and update and refresh advanced case teaching skills.

We are happy to discuss any of these suggestions in more detail if that would be helpful.