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# **Student Assessment in Neoliberalised Universities: Issues of Discipline and Governmentality**

Rille Raaper  
MA, BA

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
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School of Education  
College of Social Sciences  
University of Glasgow

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# Abstract

Extensive research has been done on learning-oriented assessment practices in higher education. Keywords such as formative assessment, peer-assessment and feedback dominate the scholarly discourses of assessment. This research, however, argues that not enough attention has been paid to the relationship between assessment policy, power in assessment and the effects of assessment policy and practice on academic and student subjectivities. This is particularly the case in neoliberalised universities where institutional policies are constantly reshaped and developed for the sake of quality assurance and accountability.

Guided by Michel Foucault's work on discipline and governmentality, this doctoral research explores the ways in which assessment policies have been constructed in two European universities with different historical, political and social backgrounds: the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University. Furthermore, the study explores assessment as an institutional technology that can act on academics and students and shape their experience of their work and studies. In addition to policy analysis, the study involves interviews and focus groups with academics, graduate teaching assistants, students and assessment policy makers in both universities, as well as expert conversations with leading authors in the field. The analytic framework for the study is derived from Fairclough's approach to discourse analysis. By exploring various discourses, the study traces the ways that assessment policies shape academics and students, and how they are negotiated and resisted by the participants.

The research findings demonstrate that assessment policy and practice draw on wider higher education policy discourses such as the discourses of neoliberalism. The study argues that student assessment is highly complex in neoliberalised universities: it not only operates as a disciplinary technology through which the assessor dominates over the assessed, but can become a neoliberal technology of government that relies on a high number of (ambiguous) regulations and self-governance of academics and students. The issues of governmentality are particularly characteristic to a highly neoliberalised policy context in the University of Glasgow that shapes complex academic and student subjectivities. Both students and academics feel constrained and controlled in assessment processes, and they tend to accept rather than actively resist the institutional assessment

policy and practice developments. However, some evidence of covert resistance was found. This can be conceptualised as a Foucauldian understanding of a subject who is not passively created through power relations but who has opportunities to create him/herself to some extent.

As the study captured an early stage of neoliberalisation in Tallinn University, assessment can also be seen as operating, in this context, as a more traditional technology of discipline: little regulated, designed by academics and experienced by students as a subjective process. The findings demonstrate that a more traditional operation of assessment in Tallinn offers significant opportunities for individual pro-activeness and resistance, such as academics managing their practices and students manoeuvring within these practice contexts.

These findings lead to the conclusion that assessment in higher education is not only an educational process but an institutional technology related to the issues of discipline and governmentality. Furthermore, they demonstrate that subjectification of academics and students through assessment policy and practice is complex and context-specific in which neoliberal policies tend to have a more constraining effect than that of the traditional understanding of assessment as the domain of the teacher.

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# Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name \_\_\_\_\_

# Key concepts

This thesis applies Foucauldian terminology, and the key concepts are defined based on his theorisation.

## **Assessment**

*Student assessment* in this research is understood as a technology underpinned by disciplinary power. Foucault (1975, p. 190) argued in his *Discipline and Punish* that assessment renders each student ‘a describable and analysable object’ while also distributing them normatively in a given population. However, the study also suggests that assessment can operate as a neoliberal technology of government that not only disciplines individuals but makes them govern themselves. Other assessment-related concepts such as *marking* and *grading* refer to more specific processes of assessment (i.e. coming up with a grade), and these are used rarely in this research. However, the research participants often used these concepts interchangeably when reflecting on assessment.

## **Discourse**

*Discourse* is understood as a social practice that constitutes knowledge and meanings and that shapes academic and student subjectivities. Foucault defined discourse in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* as ‘a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation’ (Foucault, 1969, p. 131). Foucault (1972, p. 232) also argued that discourse should be understood as ‘a space of positions and of differentiated functioning for the subjects’. Thus, a Foucauldian approach to discourse could be understood as a postmodern concern with how language produces not only meanings but also particular subjects (Graham, 2011).

## **Government, governmentality, governance**

*Government* in this research is understood in its broad sense as technologies directing human behaviour. Foucault defined government as ‘the conduct of others’ conduct’ (Gordon, 2002, p. xxix) and its purposes as increasing the welfare of the population and ensuring governable subjects (Foucault, 1978). *Governmentality*, however, reflects a ‘distinctive mentality of rule’ characteristic to modern liberal politics (Besley and Peters, 2007, p. 136). Foucault (1982a, p. 225) argued that governmentality includes an ‘encounter’ between the techniques of domination of others and those of the self. *Governance* in this

research is used rarely and only with its overarching meaning, reflecting processes and agents related to governing the state, institution, population and individuals.

### **Neoliberalism, neoliberal rationality**

*Neoliberalism* is a specific mode of government that is rooted in economic discourses of competition (Foucault, 2004). As I have argued elsewhere (Raaper, 2015), I understand neoliberalism operating based on dual forces: on the one hand, free choice and market, and on the other hand, scrutiny and increasing regulations. Neoliberalism as a mode of government is underpinned by a *neoliberal rationality*. Neoliberal rationality could be seen as an ‘anonymous hand’/discursive practices that organise and unite everything at a given period (Foucault, 1969, p. 211) and that promote an entrepreneurial and self-interested mindset.

### **Power**

*Power* in this research is understood as form(s) of relations. Power relations exist ‘in the whole network of social’ (Foucault, 1982b, p. 345). As regards various forms of power, sovereign power, discipline and biopower are the most visible in Foucault’s work. *Sovereign power* refers to a mode of power (domination) where authorities (i.e. assessor, regulations) try to control people (Fendler, 2010). Foucault (1975, p. 170) explained *discipline* as a specific technique of power that ‘makes’ individuals by approaching them both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. Disciplinary power is organised around norms and surveillance (Foucault, 1973). *Biopower* for Foucault is related to modern societies: it refers to a mode of power that shapes how people think of themselves in terms of demographic factors such as births, deaths, health etc (Fendler, 2010).

### **Resistance**

As power for Foucault is productive rather than negative, it also provides opportunities for resistance. *Resistance* is here understood in its broad sense, including various overt and covert forms of negotiating and responding to power relations. Resistance can take place as the techniques of the self that help individuals to influence ‘a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality’ (Foucault, 1982a, p. 225). However, the study also argues that resistance can take place in more covert forms such as flexing and ignoring policy.

### **Subject, subjectivity, subjectification**

The *subject* in this research is understood as having two meanings: 'subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1982b, p. 331). According to Ball (2012, cited in Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p. 87), *subjectivity* is 'a process of becoming' that is related to 'what we do' rather than 'what we are'. I would therefore argue that *subjectivity* is a condition that can vary in different situations, particularly as the subject for Foucault (1984a) is not a substance but rather a form that can differ in various situations depending on a type of relationship the subject establishes to oneself.

*Subjectification* is a never-ending process of 'becoming a subject within a discursive power/knowledge production': a process, through which subject positions are created, negotiated, accepted and transformed (Lehn-Christiansen, 2011, p. 312).

### **Technique, technology**

*Technologies/techniques* for Foucault refer to domination but also to the technologies/techniques of the self that allow individuals to shape their own bodies and thoughts (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000). Foucault often uses words technology and technique interchangeably (Willcocks, 2006). O'Farrell (2007), however, argues that Foucault sometimes writes about *techniques* in their more specific and localised function, and technologies as collections of these techniques. This thesis also addresses technologies as a more general term (i.e. assessment) and refers to techniques as more specific examples (i.e. techniques of assessment).

# Introduction

In a global neoliberal economic and policy environment, universities increasingly emphasise strategic planning, performance indicators, audits and quality assurance when organising educational processes and academic work (Olssen and Peters, 2005). As neoliberalism has affected the context in which universities function, Clegg and Smith (2010) note that teaching, learning and assessment are often shaped via centrally set institutional policies and managerialist practices. Scholarly work on assessment indicates that recent changes in assessment policy and practice have included: a shift towards making all required course work formally assessed (Boud and Molloy, 2013), increased marking loads (Bailey and Garner, 2010), and student retention, completion and employability targets becoming part of assessment functions in a target driven environment (Clouder and Hughes, 2012). In addition, the government of assessment is surrounded by discourses of administration that prescribe rules and replace academic freedom with detailed authoritative directives such as ‘staff will follow’ (Evans, 2011, p. 218). From this perspective, student assessment has turned into a technology that can disempower academics and students.

Guided by Michel Foucault’s work on discipline, governmentality and subject, this doctoral research explores assessment policy and practice in two European universities: the Universities of Glasgow and Tallinn. I was originally interested in how assessment policies and practices were constructed in these institutions given their different historical, political and social background. I was hoping to support practice development in these universities. However, my reading of neoliberalisation of higher education and also of Foucault’s work led me to question more political aspects evident in assessment: the extent to which assessment might operate as part of the technologies of discipline and governmentality that shape the subjectivities of academics and students. Foucault’s theorisation of assessment as a disciplinary technology is not new. In his *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains the examination as follows:

The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them (Foucault, 1975, p. 182).

Foucault's theorisation of governmentality - 'a distinctive mentality of rule' characteristic to modern liberal politics (Besley and Peters, 2007, p. 136) - however, enables the exploration of a more complex context of assessment, particularly in terms of diffuse power operating in neoliberal policy contexts.

Drawing on Foucauldian theorisation, this research is concerned with academic and student subjectivities and subjectification processes. Foucault makes it possible to understand subjectification - an ongoing process of becoming a subject - as being inevitable in human society. As subjects we are shaped by societal forces, but we can also create ourselves through forms of resistance. The study therefore poses the following research questions:

1. How are the assessment policy discourses constructed in the two universities?
2. How do the assessment policies act on academics and students in the two universities?
3. How do academics and students negotiate and respond to the assessment policies in the two universities?

My theoretical explorations of Foucault's work led to an empirical journey of discourse analysis. The empirical part of this research was carried out during the academic year 2013/2014, and it includes discourse analysis of assessment policies, interviews and focus groups with academics, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), students and experts in the two universities and across the disciplinary areas of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Science and Engineering and Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences. The qualitative study involves 9 policy documents, 26 academics, 9 GTAs, 15 students and 4 policymakers from the two universities. Discourse analysis applied in this study is guided by Foucault's (1969, 1970) and Fairclough's (1992, 2001a) approaches.

## ***Research journey***

I would describe my three years of PhD study as an exciting process, in some sense as an intellectual liberation. Let me reflect on my journey.

I began with a clear interest in assessment pedagogy and practice. It is something that my Master's dissertation focused on (see Raaper, 2011), and I was thereby used to these

scholarly discourses of assessment. I started my research with an argument that assessment practices in higher education have not altered significantly in accordance with social constructivist understandings of student learning or formative assessment (Shay, 2008). Furthermore, in order to improve practices, I considered it necessary to explore macro and micro level factors affecting assessment. This is also a reason why I found grounded theory - particularly Charmaz's (2004) constructivist grounded theory - to be a suitable methodological framework to apply: one that would help me to explore various factors and to develop assessment theories further.

However, I realised early in my studies that assessment is surrounded by various subjects, functions and policies, and it would be impossible to approach assessment as a coherent concept. From my theoretical explorations, it became evident that assessment is clearly related to power that operates between and within these various elements. Furthermore, my work as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Glasgow provided me with very practical experiences of teaching and assessment as well as created opportunities to gain insight into increasing casualisation of academic work (see Chapter 11 for further reflection). This all made me increasingly explore the structural contexts of higher education. I became fascinated by the work of Ball (2000, 2008, 2012, 2015a, 2015b), Marginson (2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2011a, 2011b, 2013), Olssen (2005, 2009) and Peters (2005, 2012). Being influenced by these authors, the neoliberal socio-economic conditions of higher education seemed to be too important to ignore.

After the first six months of exploration, I felt I had lost my 'shelter': grounded theory was not helping me anymore. It might have been also caused by my experience of living and studying in a new country and the intellectual and social liberation I was going through. I enjoyed reading, attending various seminars and meeting new people. My understanding of the world was affected, particularly coming from a post-soviet country where Europeanisation and neoliberal ways of thinking are re-organising society: making people work hard but not encouraging them to think or question much. This also affected my relationship with my own research. I remember saying to my supervisors, 'I feel I don't have a home; I don't know whose side I am on, and the things I want to say make me feel uncomfortable'.

Soon after, I found myself reading Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and also his later work on the techniques of the self. During these three months of just reading



Foucault's work, I realised that I had found my scholarly home: one that helps me with my work but also supports my own intellectual development. I became interested in Foucault's concepts of rationality, subject, discipline and governmentality. Foucault allowed me to become more critical, and he also kept me excited about my research. It seems that it was necessary for me to lose the 'shelter' in order to find the theoretical and methodological grounding that makes me feel comfortable and suits me and my work the best.

I have been able to reflect on my research journey and findings through various conferences, blog posts and more recently, by publishing an article in the *Critical Studies in Education* (see Raaper, 2015). These opportunities have developed me as a researcher and made me more confident in questioning the political aspects in student assessment such as discipline and governmentality.

## ***Thesis structure***

This thesis is divided into five interrelated parts that can be read together and separately.

*Part I* explores key aspects of Foucault's work as they relate to this thesis. Guided by Foucault's work and the work of his followers, the chapters introduce Foucault's legacy and discuss a Foucauldian theorisation of the subject. Chapter 1 begins with an insight into Foucault's philosophical background. It discusses his analytical methods of archaeology and genealogy and demonstrates a shift from one to another – from 'a differential analysis of the modalities of discourse' (Foucault, 1969, p. 156) to 'an analysis of descent' (Foucault, 1977a, p. 148). Chapter 2 creates a theoretical framework from a discussion of Foucault's key concepts such as rationality, subject, discipline and governmentality that facilitates an understanding of subjectification processes in this research.

*Part II* expands the theory by drawing on the work of various international scholars (i.e. Ball, Peters, Olssen) who research the neoliberalisation of (higher) education, academic work and studies. It also links this theoretical analysis with that of student assessment. Chapter 3 explores the shift from a liberal university model towards neoliberal modes of governing universities in which global policy influences, diffused networks of power and New Public Management are characteristic. The ways in which academics and students are potentially being subjectified but also their opportunities for resistance are explored in

Chapter 4. The operation of student assessment in a neoliberal higher education context is the focus of Chapter 5.

*Part III* introduces the methodological framework. As this research is underpinned by a Foucauldian theorisation of the subject, the methodological strategy is also informed by Foucault's philosophical and theoretical understandings. The Foucauldian framework developed for this research is rooted in a postmodern paradigmatic context, and it utilises qualitative research methods. However, as Foucault's methodological choices were diverse, and one cannot speak of a coherent Foucauldian paradigm (Diaz-Bone *et al.*, 2008), the empirical part of the research gains support from further frameworks such as a critical education policy orientation (Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004; Simons, Olssen and Peters, 2009a) and Fairclough's (1992, 2001a, 2003) approach to discourse analysis. Chapter 6 introduces these methodological choices, the participants and the process of data collection. Chapter 7 creates an analytic framework for discourse analysis.

*Part IV* presents and analyses the research findings. The separate chapters are dedicated to policy, academic, GTA and student discourses. Each chapter introduces the research participants and discusses the key findings. The overall aim is to trace the ways assessment policy and practice in the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University are experienced by the academics, GTAs and students, how they shape their subjectivities and are negotiated by the participants. Chapter 8 focuses on the assessment policy discourses in the two universities and draws attention to assessment policy as an interdiscursive construct that can relate to various neoliberal discourses. Chapters 9 to 12 explore the ways institutional assessment policy and practice are experienced by particular participant groups, and how the policy might shape the subjectivities of the participants.

*Part V* discusses and summarises the key findings. It revisits the research questions posed in this introduction, and it provides concluding remarks on the study.

# **PART I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

# Chapter 1: Foucault's legacy: contribution and critique

It is difficult to define who Foucault was, whether he was a philosopher, a theorist, a historian or a critic. He seemed to struggle during his career not to be 'a something' (Ball, 2013, p. 2); Foucault avoided using classifications and resisted being classified by others. In many of his interviews and essays, Foucault denied being a philosopher or a theorist (Foucault 1980a), nor did he want to be called a writer or a prophet (Foucault, 1997a), describing himself as an experimenter (Foucault 1980a). Foucault (1980b, p. 237) stated: 'I'm not interested in constructing a new schema or in validating one that already exists'. He argued in one of his interviews that his books are simply 'philosophical fragments put to work in a historical field of problems' and not complete philosophy or studies of history (Foucault, 1980b, p. 224). This chapter explores these 'fragments' in Foucault's work; it traces Foucault's philosophical background and the methods he developed, but also notes limitations of his work.

## ***Philosophical and theoretical background***

Foucault described his style as transformative, saying, 'I write a book only because I still don't know what to think about this thing I want so much to think about, so that the book transforms me and transforms what I think' (Foucault, 1980a, pp. 239-240). He therefore allowed himself to transform and change his thinking over time, and this can be exemplified by the development of one of his key concepts: that of the subject. At the beginning of his work, he described a subject as being created by social forces, but he seems to have shifted his position in his later work by arguing that subjects can be also active in shaping and negotiating their own identities and modes of being (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000).

Foucault (1997a, p. 131) described his work as situated 'at the intersection of different currents and different problems'. He described those 'currents' and 'problems' as placed in phenomenology, Marxism and the history of sciences (Foucault, 1997a, p. 131). He also stated that his university education trained him in Hegelianism (Foucault, 1980a). Phenomenology emphasises embodied, experiential meanings in order to describe the

phenomenon as it is lived by the subjects (Finlay, 2009). On the contrary, Hegelianism focuses on history and logic, where ‘the rational is the real’, and ‘the truth is the Whole’ (Rossi, 2013). Foucault (1980a) said that he found ways to escape such dominant philosophical views by following the work of Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Those thinkers invited him to question ‘the category of the subject, its supremacy, its foundational function’ (Foucault, 1980a, p. 247). If phenomenology tried to evoke the meaning of everyday experience in order to rediscover and analyse the subject as being responsible for the experience, Nietzsche, Bataille and Blanchot helped Foucault to develop the practice of desubjectivation: the process that Foucault described as ‘wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution’ (Foucault, 1980a, p. 241). Contrary to phenomenological understanding, Foucault approached the personal experience as something that cannot be fully narrated and explored (Foucault, 1980a). Furthermore, Foucault (1969) argued that Nietzsche influenced him in his genealogical method. Foucault was, above all, interested in analysing the fundamental question of ‘who we are today, in our present actuality’ (Foucault, 1997a, p. 130).

It is argued that Foucault can be classified with the group of French thinkers that includes Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Chloe Kristeva and Jacques Lacan, who aimed to move structuralist and/or Marxist ideas forward (Walshaw, 2007). As Foucault was also a member of the French Communist Party during the Cold War years, his early thinking was influenced by Marxist ideology (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000). However, he rejected the overall essentialist focus of Marxism (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000), and contrary to Marxist class analysis, he argued that power is complex and diffuse, existing everywhere: among the wealthy but also among the disenfranchised (O’Neill 1986, cited in Agger, 1991, p. 117). In addition, he was critical of certain philosophers. Walshaw (2007, p. 6) argues that Foucault’s criticism was targeted towards ‘Aristotle for his essentialism, Descartes for his Cogito, Kant for his humanism, Hegel for his notion of progress and totality, and Habermas for his utopianism’.

Even if Foucault did not like to be classified, it has been said that he was a poststructuralist and a postmodernist (Agger, 1991). Agger (1991) describes poststructuralism as a theory of knowledge and language and postmodernism as a theory of society, culture and history. According to Allan (2013), Foucault’s early stage work can be viewed as structuralist, since he was interested in structures and the ways discourses produce particular truths.

Foucault called this earlier work on the historic periods an archaeology. He defined archaeology as ‘a differential analysis of the modalities of discourse’ (Foucault, 1969, p. 155). He explained its aim as

...to define discourses in their specificity; to show in what way the set of rules that they put into operation is irreducible to any other; to follow them the whole length of their exterior ridges, in order to underline them the better (Foucault, 1969, p. 155).

Foucault’s archaeological method was designed to uncover the underpinning rules and rationalities of a specific discourse, the rules that made it possible for the discourse to evolve. Archaeology helps to resist ideas of linear progression and continuous history, and it enables the abandonment of the ‘history of ideas [...] its postulates and procedures’ to practise a ‘quite different history [to] what men have said’ (Foucault, 1969, p. 154). It enables a focus on processes as unique and discontinuous acts. Jansen (2008) argues that archaeology makes it possible to individualise, describe and compare discursive formations.

Foucault’s later work in the 1970s and early 1980s, however, investigated how systems of knowledge and power work together and influence individuals in modern society (McNicol Jardine, 2005). He uncovered the ways in which knowledge and power are interrelated, creating individuals as objects and subjects controlled by others and by themselves (Allan, 2013). This is what Foucault (1977a, p. 148) called genealogy, ‘an analysis of descent’:

Genealogy, that is, a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, and so on, without having to make reference to a subject that is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history (Foucault, 1976, p. 118).

He described genealogy as being ‘gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary’, operating ‘on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times’ (Foucault, 1977a, p. 139). Foucault’s genealogical method reflects the influences of Nietzsche and his denial of historical continuity and the autonomous subject, especially as the key argument in Foucault’s genealogy is the rejection of a metahistorical focus on significations, teleology and the search of ‘origins’ (Foucault, 1977a, p. 140). On the contrary, Foucault’s genealogy aims to ‘record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality’ (Foucault, 1977a, p. 139). A genealogist does not pretend ‘to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things’; s/he might find that behind the things

there is 'not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms' (Foucault, 1977a, p. 146). Like archaeology, the genealogical method<sup>1</sup> was designed as a historical method but one that approached history from the perspective of discontinuity. This perspective suggests that humanity does not progress from 'combat to combat' towards universal reciprocity but rather creates its system over and over again (Foucault, 1977a, p. 151). Therefore, the true history for Foucault (1977a, p. 155) is made up of 'countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference', and genealogy as a method helps to discover it.

Many aspects of Foucault's work have been criticised: concepts he created, methods he practised and even the way he reasoned. In terms of methodological critique, Townley (2008) argues that Foucault's work reflects an apparent denial of truth and objectivity. I would argue that Foucault developed his analytical methods of archaeology and genealogy with the deliberate aim of distancing himself from Hegelianism and its focus on objectivity. Instead of seeing his deviation from traditional understanding of truth and objectivity as being a weakness, Foucault's approach to truth as being plural, subjective and contextual should be seen as essential to his theory of the subject.

Foucault was also accused of 'having a sloppy method' (Agger, 1991, p. 124) that does not fit the dominant ways of studying the social sciences or history. More specifically, historians rejected his work as being too philosophical, philosophers as lacking formal rigour and sociologists disliked its literary and poetic quality (Walshaw, 2007). Foucault was particularly aware of his conflicting relationship with historians. He argued that traditional historians prefer to focus on long periods, trying to reveal the stable underlying tendencies that gather force and prove continuity, while he wanted to approach history from a perspective of discontinuities: to investigate and speak about 'series, divisions, limits, differences of level, shifts, chronological specificities, particular forms of rehandling and possible types of relation' (Foucault, 1969, p. 11).

Furthermore, feminists (i.e. Fraser, 1989; Hartsock, 1990, cited in Armstrong, no date [n.d.]) have criticised his view of subjectivity as being constructed by power and his failure to introduce the norms that have informed his own critical analysis. However, Armstrong also argues that there are feminists like Butler (1990, cited in Armstrong, n.d.) who see

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<sup>1</sup> Visker (2008) describes Foucault's book *The Order of Things* representing the archaeological method and *Discipline and Punish* the genealogical method. Foucault's later genealogical work can be seen as aligning with postmodernism, although he did not agree with being called either a structuralist or a postmodernist.

Foucault's work as a resource 'to think beyond the strictures of identity politics'. Similarly, Parkins (1993), explains that Foucault's work supports feminist analysis of sexuality and identity as being socially and discursively constructed. In line with Agger (1991), I would suggest that any 'sloppiness' of Foucault's methods becomes secondary compared to Foucault's extensive philosophical and theoretical interpretation of the data that explores both macro- and micro-level phenomena relevant to various academic communities: historians, social scientists, feminists etc.

Foucault has been also criticised for his political views. For example, it has been said that Foucault's later work on the self privileged a small group of bohemian elite and their experiences, and so is not applicable to wider society (Bevir, 1999). From Bevir's (1999, p. 77) perspective, however, Foucault's work on 'aesthetics of existence' (the questions of self in Ancient Greece) should not be seen as an art form available to the privileged but as individual agency that can be developed in order to 'produce ourselves through our conduct'. The ways in which Ancient Greek writings influenced Foucault in his understating of the self will be explored in the next chapter.

In addition, Behrent (2009) critiques Foucault for his so-called antihumanist views that endorsed economic (neo)liberalism. Behrent (2009, p. 541) argues that despite the common understanding of Foucault as being 'the man of the left', Foucault's later work seemed to favour neoliberal rationality. Behrent (2009, p. 546) sees Foucault's views matching with the ideology of economic liberalism, which according to him, helped Foucault 'to free French intellectual life from the headlock of revolutionary leftism' but at the same time also to ensure his antihumanist philosophical views. A recently published book *Critiquer Foucault: Les années 1980 et la tentation néolibérale*<sup>2</sup> by Daniel Zamora (2014) has caused significant discussion around Foucault's viewpoint on neoliberalism. In one of his interviews, Zamora (2014) argues that Foucault was highly attracted to economic liberalism, neoliberalism in particular, as he saw it being a 'much less bureaucratic' and 'much less disciplinarian' form of politics than that of post-welfare state. My own reading of Foucault's work does not align with this critique. I agree that Foucault could be described as anti-state in his views, but I would argue that his work still addressed the most disadvantaged groups in society (i.e. mad, homosexuals, prisoners). I would also suggest that his writing style was highly complex, and he often proposed ideas while still

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<sup>2</sup> English translation will be published in the late 2015: *Criticizing Foucault: The 1980s and the neoliberal temptation*.



developing them. He therefore allowed himself to question the benefits of neoliberalism on power relations and subjectification processes.

## **Conclusion**

Foucault's legacy is significant in contemporary social sciences research. His work evolved during his career, starting with a focus on discourse through archaeological explorations and expanded to genealogical studies on prisons, madness, sexuality etc. This broad methodological and theoretical spectrum has received critique from historians and feminists along others, but it has also enabled his work to become widespread across disciplines. Furthermore, his work could be seen an important asset to postmodern and poststructuralist research traditions.

Many (academic) communities - both virtual and physical - demonstrate the widespread legacy of Foucault. The journal *Foucault Studies*<sup>3</sup> is devoted to presenting academic work that applies Foucauldian ideas in a wide range of disciplinary areas: humanities, social sciences, education, and medicine. Regularly updated online space *Michel.Foucault.com*<sup>4</sup> is another example of contemporary engagement with Foucault's work, not to mention various reading groups and conferences across the world. Applying Foucauldian theories into social science research is not unique therefore, and the community of social scientists applying Foucault's theoretical and methodological approaches is vastly growing. This PhD research makes use of these resources, and will explore not only Foucault's writings but also those of the contemporary application to researchers in the field.

In order to investigate Foucault's legacy further and to demonstrate the applicability of his theories to this study, the next chapter will introduce Foucault's key concepts such as rationality, subject, discipline and governmentality. These concepts are important in understanding a Foucauldian theorisation of the subject: the ways in which individuals both are made subjects and make themselves subjects.

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<sup>3</sup> The open-access journal *Foucault Studies* is published twice a year and is available at: <http://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/foucault-studies/issue/view/577/showToc>

<sup>4</sup> The site dedicated to Foucault is available at: <http://www.michel-foucault.com/>

## **Chapter 2: Foucauldian theorisation of the subject**

Foucault (1982b, p. 326) argued that the objective of his scholarly work was ‘to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects’. Becoming a subject (subjectification) can be understood as the process through which subject positions are created, accepted, negotiated and transformed (Lehn-Christiansen, 2011). The concepts of the subject and subjectification in Foucault’s work are linked with a number of theoretical developments in his writing, particularly with concepts such as rationality, discourse, discipline, and governmentality.

For Foucault, there are no ‘universal necessities in human nature’, only various technologies through which the individual subject is created or creates him/herself (Besley and Peters, 2007, p. 6). Subjectification is therefore an inevitable process taking place in all parts of human life. In the ‘middle period’ of his investigations, Foucault focused on the management of populations by modern nation states, which he called biopower (Ball, 2013). In his later work, however, Foucault investigated the ways human beings evolve as subjects (Foucault, 1982b), and how individuals can develop what he called practices of the self in order to achieve new kinds of existence (Allan, 2013).

In order to proceed with the analysis of the subject, the chapter explains these theoretical developments characteristic to Foucault’s work, paying particular attention to rationality, power, discipline and governmentality.

### ***Exploring the concept of rationality***

Foucault (1980b, p. 230) sees all practices as existing in specific ‘regime[s] of rationality’. Practice for Foucault has a broad meaning. He differentiates between discursive and non-discursive practices (O’Farrell, 2007). Discursive practices tend to be related to Foucault’s archaeological work that explored discourse and its formation. Foucault (1969) explains non-discursive practices, however, as both processes and establishments such as political events, economic practices and institutions.

Townley (2008, p. 1) argues that Foucault's work provides 'an entrée into the analysis of rationality' that makes it possible to approach rationality as a process which not only shapes practices (both discursive and non-discursive) but structures identities. Furthermore, Townley (2008, p. 3) explains that Foucault's work allows one 'to engage with rationality in a theoretically fruitful and ethically engaged manner' and to explore how rationality shapes identities but also how it offers individuals opportunities to negotiate their experiences of dominant rationality.

In his *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault critiqued Enlightenment as a form of rationality that constituted modern Western thought in terms of how the mad were positioned and confined (McNay, 1994). Similarly to his first encounters with a question of rationality, Foucault sees all other forms of rationalities embedded within social relations and therefore operating in networks of power (McNay, 1994). Dean (2013) brings examples of various forms of rationalities such as aesthetic, juridical, economic, modern and political. From this perspective, neoliberalism could be also seen as a rationality that shapes societal life and individuals. 'Rationality' as expressed through systems of knowledge (but also through practices) is not therefore pure reasoning but is 'at once a product of power relations and also instrumental in sustaining these relations' (McNay, 1994, p. 27). Foucault approached rationality as being diffuse and relativist. All rationalities are contextually and historically variable and are discursive providing knowledge that guides, advises and informs our being in the world (Campbell, 2010). The formation of subjects takes place within a plurality of societal rationalities that have their own regimes of truth and discursive practices. The subject is therefore a social being fundamentally constituted by the dominant rationality that shapes his/her way of thinking, behaving and being. Foucault emphasises that while he was exploring aspects of subjectification, he was not assessing

...things in terms of an absolute against which they could be evaluated as constituting more or less perfect forms of rationality but, rather, examining how forms of rationality inscribe themselves in practices or systems of practices, and what role they play within them... (Foucault, 1980b, pp. 229-230)

Foucault explains that as people we are always influenced by the 'specific ground of historical rationality' (Foucault, 1988, p. 405), especially as rationalities operate in networks of power and through various practices. Foucault's concept of rationality and its operation is related to his concept of episteme. Episteme is

...something like a world-view, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape – a great body of legislation written once and for all by some anonymous hand (Foucault, 1969, p. 11).

This ‘anonymous hand’ involves discursive practices that give rise to systems and to the set of relations that unite everything at a given period (Foucault, 1969, p. 211). Discourse can be seen as the organising principle of a dominant episteme (and rationality), allowing us to make sense of things (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000). It is that which constrains or enables thinking, speaking and writing (Ball, 2013) and constructs meaningful practice (Hall, 2001). Almost as a Kuhnian paradigm or a Humboldtian worldview, Foucault’s episteme includes an underpinning system of knowledge and reasoning that shapes societal rationality (and its practices) at specific moments of history. Episteme could be seen as organising and uniting discourses characteristic to a specific rationality (i.e. neoliberalism).

Foucault’s concept of rationality is, then, linked to types of discourse. Foucault (1974) defines discourse as a representation of a specific rationality. He uses discourse to refer to taken-for-granted rules that influence what is possible to think, speak and do at a particular time of history (Walshaw, 2007). Discourses should be considered as ‘discontinuous practices’ which can be juxtaposed with each other but may exclude each other (Foucault, 1970, p. 67). Foucault sees verbal discourse as a central method through which people come to know themselves and also become visible to others (Fejes, 2013). Discourse, from a Foucauldian perspective, is located in social fields and, thereby, in collectives (Diaz-Bone *et al.*, 2008). Foucault sees discourse as ‘visible’ representations of dominant rationalities and for him this is also the entrée into analysing the ways subjects are formed in specific contexts.

In his investigations of rationalities, Foucault focused on power relations to understand how subjects are shaped by but also resist particular forms of power.

### ***Exploring the concept of power and the subject***

For Foucault, the question of the subject needs to be located within the network of social practices and values that characterise a culture at a particular time (Besley and Peters, 2007). From his perspective, power relations exist ‘in the whole network of the social’

(Foucault, 1982b, p. 345): all human relationships are underpinned by relationships of power (Foucault, 1983a). This also means that discursive practices are characterised by power (Powers, 2007). However, Dean (2013, p. 63) describes the Foucauldian understanding of power as ‘a game of freedom’ in which power can be exercised only so far as the subjects are free: free to choose actions within a field of possibilities. Furthermore, this power that acts on subjects can be ‘at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous’ (Foucault and Deleuze, 1977, p. 213).

Foucault’s concept of power is not necessarily negative but can be productive even if sometimes risky or dangerous (Foucault, 1983a). Power can be ‘formative or productive, malleable, multiple, proliferative, and conflictual’ (Butler, 1997, p. 99). All social life can be seen as a web of power relations influenced by micropolitics rather than by physical force (Powers, 2007). Foucault therefore helps us to rethink the traditional understandings of power (in which power only presses on the subject from the outside) towards an understanding of power as something that forms the subject by ‘providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire’ (Butler, 1997, p. 2): power is what subjects depend on for their existence. Foucault’s approach to power helps us to understand that there might be opportunities for individual empowerment to respond to the power acting on subjects (Patrick, 2013). However, empowerment might require enough courage to question the prevailing ‘truths’ and to cope with the possible ‘punishment’ that follows the actions against the dominant rationality.

Above all, power relations are a network of interacting forces that create tensions among, within and between individuals and/or groups (Powers, 2007), and we tolerate this power only because it is mostly hidden (Allan, 2013). Therefore, Foucault sees societal rationalities functioning through discourse and power mechanisms which are often diffuse and hidden. However, this contextual surrounding in terms of rationality, discourse and power is clearly linked to Foucault’s work on the subject, and is thereby important for understanding how the subject is created or creates themselves. As McNicol Jardine (2005, p. 78) states: ‘becoming a human being is a delicate and mysterious pursuit. We aren’t born human beings. We learn to be a human being.’

### *Techniques of domination and of the self*

Foucault explained that the main focus of his work was the subject itself, but the ways he approached the issue changed during his lifetime through a process that Foucault called 'autocritique' (Foucault, 1997b, p. 153). In his autocritique, he explained that his earlier work relied on the techniques of domination as the key techniques forming subjects. His later work demonstrates the ways that subjects can be influenced by other techniques which seem to allow them to perform by their own means: 'the techniques of technology of the self' (Foucault, 1997b, pp.153-154). Foucault's later work approaches the concept of the subject as having two meanings: 'subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1982b, p. 331). These two aspects can be distinguished by the techniques of domination and the techniques of the self (Foucault, 1997b). These two techniques produce effects that constitute the self in terms of both defining the subject and also influencing its conduct (Besley and Peters, 2007). However, it is also important to note that the subject from a Foucauldian perspective is not created in its totality; rather, the subject is in a constant process of being produced (Butler, 1997).

Techniques of domination refer to the potential power of rationalities to shape human beings. No subject exists prior to power (Butler, 1997); subjects are formed by the system of knowledge and power relations they are born into and raised within (McNicol Jardine, 2005). Butler (1997, p. 74) explains vividly that 'the walls of society' force an internalisation of norms set by society. The individual is constantly shaped by different forces (McNay, 1994). Human contact is mediated by language, conversations and norms that are social in character (Butler, 2005). Therefore, every individual is influenced far more by social structures than they probably imagine (Olssen, 2005). Through this process of subjectification, individuals come to occupy spaces in the social hierarchy and come to know and accept their place (Graham, 2011).

While Foucault's earlier work on subjectification tends to treat humans as passive subjects, it clarifies the ways that individuals depend on contexts and how their behaviour is shaped by the dominant societal rationality. During his career, Foucault expanded the concept of the subject by looking into the techniques of the self which support understanding of subjectification processes. Techniques of the self help individuals to influence

...a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality... (Foucault, 1982a, p. 225)

In his analysis of the techniques of the self, Foucault was influenced by the notion of 'the care of the self' in Greek and Roman philosophy, developing his concept of the ethics of the individual through which the individual can 'come to know himself as well as take care of himself' (Besley and Peters, 2007, p. 89). Related to this, he dedicated the whole year of 1983 to his work on the ancient notion of *parrhesia* (Gros, 2010): 'a form of Socratic self-examination' as Ball (2015a, p. 7) explains it. Foucault defined *parrhesia* as a 'certain way of speaking'; a way of telling the truth that opens up a risk 'by the very fact that one tells the truth' (Foucault, 2010, p. 66). It is a form of criticism that is targeted either towards oneself or others but where the speaker is always less powerful than the listener in the dialogue (Besley and Peters, 2007). Thus, *parrhesia* can help subjects to recognise how they are constituted by the dominant rationality and to transform and free themselves to some extent: to become ethical subjects who take risks and respond to these societal forces. By using risky and challenging technique of *parrhesia* one can become a 'truthful man', the person who has courage to tell the truth (Foucault, 2010, p. 66) and thereby to act against the dominant 'regimes of truth', and if necessary, also to face punishment. Therefore, the *parrhesiastes* is an individual who has the courage to tell the truth despite the fact that s/he might be putting one's life at risk for that truth (Besley and Peters, 2007).

However, Foucault does not see the techniques of the self or the process of becoming an ethical subject - 'the truthful man' (Foucault, 2010, p. 66) - as being a simple task. He emphasises two conditions of the process: firstly, that 'one cannot take care of oneself without knowing oneself' and secondly, that 'one cannot attend to oneself, take care of oneself, without a relationship to another person' (Foucault, 2010, pp. 43-44). The question of ethics is always related to the question of 'what binds me to another and in what way this obligation suggests that the "I" is invariably implicated in the "we"' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. 107). 'I' is social in its very essence and therefore all reflection needs to start with the presumption of a constitutive sociality' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013). It is therefore dominant rationality along with its social relations that constitutes subjects and needs to be questioned by the individuals in the process of becoming ethical subjects.

Thought and critique can be seen as the key processes that help to transform one's subjectivity (McNicol Jardine, 2005; Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000) towards more

ethical being as a subject. Reading and writing in a Foucauldian sense are part of ‘arts of the self’ (Besley and Peters, 2007, p. 14). In one of his essays, Foucault (2000a) analysed ‘self-writing’ as an opportunity to work on oneself and to develop the art of living. He also viewed writing as ‘a personal exercise, done by and for oneself’ that can help to ‘show oneself’ and to make one ‘appear in the other’s present’ (Foucault, 2000a, pp. 212, 216). Foucault’s techniques of the self and the concept of the ethical subject stand for the understanding that even if human beings are influenced by techniques of domination, we are not simply helpless and ‘can choose to respond to, or resist, these practices’ (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000, p. 128).

As Foucault (1997b) argued in his later work, the work on the subject and subjectification processes in Western civilisation requires an exploration of the interaction between techniques of domination and the self.

### ***Exploring discipline and the techniques of normalisation***

The techniques of domination and the self that shape subjects in the context of dominant rationality are often put into practice through discipline and governmentality. Foucault’s concept of discipline explores techniques of domination and disciplinary power in relation to subjectification. Discipline was an important concept in Foucault’s middle stage work, where he approached discipline in relation to processes of normalisation, panopticism, examination, punishment and reward. Prior to 1978 and Foucault’s interest in governmentality, he tended to approach all power relations as being underpinned by either coercion characteristic to medieval monarchy or as Taylor (2009) argues, the ideas of norm and normalisation. While Foucault shifted his focus from sovereign power and discipline to governmentality in his later work, he retained a stress on the importance of discipline in organising the rationalities and shaping desired subjects.

Foucault (1975) defines discipline as a specific technique of power that shapes individuals by approaching them both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. Above all, the discipline is organised around the norms which define what ‘normal’ behaviour is and what one must do or not (Foucault, 1973). The norm itself establishes the ‘normal’, and subjects are ‘brought and bring themselves into conformity with some pre-existing standard’ (Taylor, 2009, p. 50). Therefore, subjects can be measured in terms of their



distance from the norm and further disciplinary techniques can be used to homogenise and normalise individuals (Allan, 2013). Dean (2013) argues that in disciplinary power, the norm is central to defining the conduct needed in various practices (i.e. schooling, work, military training). The norm thereby not only helps to distinguish ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ but also to sanction and reduce the possibilities for resistance demonstrated by people and populations (Taylor, 2009).

However, in order to practise discipline and its power of normalising individuals, one needs specific agents and techniques (i.e. examination<sup>5</sup>). These agents tend to demonstrate how sovereign power in terms of obedience to the central authority figure characteristic to Middle Ages (Foucault, 1975) can be still incorporated into power relations in contemporary societies. Foucault (1975, p. 304) argues that ‘judges of normality’ are present everywhere: the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the social-worker-judge. However, he does not see judges having only a role of judging and punishing for not meeting a norm; he sees them as having a crucial therapeutic role. Foucault gives an example:

If one said to a judge, ‘Your job is to state what the law is, and if necessary to determine the penalty, but the rest is not your concern’, he would feel very frustrated (Foucault, 1984b, p. 402).

I suspect it would be similar with teachers as the ‘judges of normality’. This is because ‘the judge’ tends to find their therapeutic role very gratifying: ‘it’s a moral and theoretical justification for [them]’ (Foucault, 1984b, p. 402). However, discipline that functions through overall normalisation processes and the role of ‘the judge’ (Foucault, 1975) might be diffuse and hidden in contemporary societies. McNay (1994) argues that control in modern societies is achieved not through direct repression but rather through invisible processes of normalisation. Foucault’s concept of ‘dispositif’ (often translated as ‘apparatus’) tends to explain this complexity around discipline. Foucault (1977b, p. 194) argued that ‘dispositif’ is ‘the system of relations’ established between heterogeneous elements such as discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulations, administrative measures, scientific statements etc. Dean (2013, p. 50) interprets ‘dispositif’ as ‘a network of relations between elements that responds to an emergency and that organizes, enables, orients, fixes and blocks relations of force’. Thus, power acting on subjects is exercised at

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<sup>5</sup> Examinations in education systems are the most ritualised mechanism of discipline, combining the techniques of observation and normalising judgement (Foucault, 1975).

times in very visible ways emanating from the judges, at other times it is diffuse working through processes such as normalising discourses.

The function of judges is closely linked to the concept of panopticism that Foucault borrowed from Bentham and his architectural masterpiece of a panoptic prison in eighteenth century: architecture that was based on spatial unities that made it possible to see and recognise everything that takes place in the prison (Foucault, 1975). Foucault (2007, cited in Dean, 2013, p. 111) described the panopticon as ‘the oldest dream of the oldest sovereign [...] The central point of the panopticon still functions, as it were, as a perfect sovereign’, enabling an exercise of sovereignty over ‘the fine grain of individual behaviours’. Foucault developed this idea further by applying panopticism to his concept of discipline. Foucault’s vision of panoptical society highlighted how a small number of people can have control over a large group of subjects via self-surveillance and the normalising discourse (Hope, 2013). The outcome of the panoptic-disciplinary society was the creation of ‘docile bodies’: the body that can be easily ‘subjected, used, transformed and improved’, and that thereby becomes skilful in increasing its own self-control (Foucault, 1975, p. 136). The example of panoptic society also demonstrates how disciplinary power can act on subjects in highly diffused ways making subjects self-governing: to become the ‘instruments’ of disciplinary power as Foucault explained it (1975, p. 170).

The idea of self-governance is particularly evident in Foucault’s work on governmentality. His conceptualisation of governmentality refers to both ‘a form of power’ and a ‘critical reflection on the exercise of power’ and shifts his focus from biopolitics to governmental reason (Dean, 2013, p. 42). Foucault’s work on power therefore draws on three key interrelated areas: sovereignty (in terms of clear coercion), discipline (in terms of norms) and governmentality (in terms of governmental reasoning). The exploration of governmentality below enables to draw attention to neoliberalism as currently dominant rationality that operates based on highly diffuse power: instead of clear sovereignty and the judges of normality, it increasingly enforces self-governance.

## ***Exploring neoliberal governmentality***

Dean (2013, p. 67) argues that governmentality in Foucault's work '[asserts] the pre-eminence of government over discipline and sovereignty'. The concept of governmentality also acts as an entree to the discussion of ethics and the techniques of the self which in turn enables a shift from 'conventional conceptions of power' to 'an ethical problematic of how to practise games between liberties with the minimum of domination' (Dean, 2013, p. 68). Foucault sees governmentality as the 'the conduct of conduct', which brings together the government of others but also the government of oneself (Hamann, 2009, p. 38). It reflects a 'distinctive mentality of rule' characteristic to modern liberal politics (Besley and Peters, 2007, p. 136) that shapes active individuals undertaking a journey of becoming a subject.

Besley and Peters (2007, p. 22) argue that governmentality draws on various 'calculations, programmes, policies, strategies, reflection and tactics' that shape 'the conduct of conduct'. Governmentality may not directly shape the behaviour of any particular individual but intervenes at the general level of a population (Dean, 2013). Furthermore, governmentality is time- and context-specific, and it includes 'historically specific relations of power, practices of subjectification and technologies through which the "conduct of conduct" is regulated' (Bansel, 2014, p. 18). Foucault, for example, mostly approached the concept of governmentality in connection with the (neo)liberal rationality. At both the micro and macro level, neoliberalism aims to establish 'a set of truths about the world and [...] a way of looking at the world' (Chopra, 2003, p. 432). While neoliberal rationality is very closely linked to economic and market forces, it has come to guide societal functioning and the new mode of government.

Neoliberal governmentality is 'the introduction of economy into political practice' (Foucault, 1978, p. 207): that is the art of governing, where power is diffuse, constantly balancing between maximum and minimum, and where the minimum is seen as being the ideal way of governing populations (Foucault, 2004). The question of how to govern less and the problem of frugality are related to liberalism (Foucault, 2004), but neoliberalism also raises questions about the role of the state in shaping self-governance. Self-governance is often enforced through the reduction of state responsibility for providing social benefits or for regulating economy, and neoliberal governmentality tries to reduce aspects of social reality to 'mathematical equations of the free market' (Chopra, 2003, p. 432). As a result of the dominant desire for efficiency, governmentality underpinned by

economic forces is applied to the social sphere (Lemke, 2001), making economic activity a core element of social and political relations (Read, 2009). Hamann argues:

...the traditional distinctions between the public and the private on the one hand, and the political and the personal on the other have been gradually blurred, reversed, or removed altogether (Hamann, 2009, p. 39).

States, businesses and individuals are now all governed by neoliberal logic (Read, 2009); the infusion of market values into most aspects of social life has taken place (Hamann, 2009). Neoliberalism operates on desires, interests and aspirations (Read, 2009); people tend to voluntarily work harder, faster and better as it has become a part of their sense of personal worth and their estimation of the worth of others (Ball, 2013). They are therefore active in constructing themselves.

Neoliberalism enforces self-government through which individuals learn to 'refashion' themselves as the 'entrepreneurs' who apply 'certain management, economic and, actuarial techniques to themselves' (Besley and Peters, 2007, p. 164). As 'entrepreneurs of the self' (Dilts, 2011, p. 139), individuals become shaped as 'homo economicus, a historically specific form of subjectivity constituted as a free and autonomous "atom" of self-interest' (Hamann, 2009, p. 37). 'Homo economicus or "economic man" is not a natural being [...] but instead a form of subjectivity that must be brought into being and maintained through social mechanisms of subjectification' (Hamann, 2009, p. 42). The crucial condition for neoliberal subject is its freedom: 'homo economicus is the person who must be left alone' (Foucault, 2004, p. 270). As Hamann (2009) states, the neoliberal subject is his/her own capital, producer and source of earnings, and each individual's social conditions are seen as the effects of his/her own choices. Neoliberal subjects may not realise that their actions and choices are shaped by neoliberal techniques of government. However, by seeing individuals as active, neoliberal rationality might open up new and complex ways for subjects to express themselves and to respond to and react against the societal rationality. As Ball (2013, p. 126) argues: 'If power acts upon us in and through our subjectivity, then that is where our resistance and struggle to be free should be focused'. Therefore, the neoliberal rationality that makes subjects active in economic sense might also provide us with necessary conditions for the techniques of the self, ethical subjectivity and for the overall resistance towards the power that acts upon us. Foucault argues that this requires work on the self and courage to become a 'truthful man' (Foucault, 2010).

## ***Conclusion***

Foucault's work on governmentality and the techniques of the self enables us to understand subjectification in neoliberalised universities as not only a passive process exercised through disciplinary power but also as an active response through which academics and students negotiate their behaviour and being in the universities. Even if the aims of neoliberal rationality and governmentality are economic rather than humanist, they can still change the understanding of individuals and their ways of acting. According to Dilts (2011, pp. 143-144), Foucault himself found neoliberal rationality interesting and this is mainly because 'it pays attention to the subject as a subject and not simply as an object of power/knowledge'. Dean (2013) explains that the concept of governmentality is a gateway to Foucault's work on ethics and the techniques of the self.

Above all, Foucault's work opens up a space for us to think differently (Walshaw, 2008), to free our mind from typical ways of thinking. As Ball (2013, p. 7) states: 'He unclutters my mind, enables me to think differently, in new spaces and to escape from the analytic clichés which are so prevalent in contemporary sociological work'. I agree with Ball (2013) and Walshaw (2008) that Foucault's theories enable us to ask questions that many other theories tend to silence. It creates a link between macro-processes and very individual processes of subject formation. Foucauldian theorisation in this PhD research makes it possible to trace the ways assessment operates as part of the technologies of discipline and governmentality in neoliberalised universities. Furthermore, it enables us to link this understanding with that of subjectification: to question how power that operates through assessment policy and practice acts on academics and students and how it is negotiated. Part II of this thesis will continue analysing Foucault's key concepts and will explore his theoretical ideas in the context of higher education.

## **PART II: HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT**

## **Chapter 3: The neoliberalisation of higher education: transformed policy-making and the birth of the ‘entrepreneurial’ university**

This chapter explores issues related to the neoliberalisation of higher education and European universities. The chapter starts by uncovering key aspects related to transformed higher education policy development, and it provides particular examples from the UK and Estonian contexts. It then moves towards an exploration of New Public Management that operates at institutional levels and shapes universities as entrepreneurial institutions. By drawing attention to diffuse policy development and New Public Management, the chapter demonstrates the ubiquity of governmentality in higher education.

### ***A shift from liberal traditions to neoliberal higher education in Europe***

Higher education as a distinct social institution has its origins in the Middle Ages when the first universities in Bologna and Paris were founded (Barnett, 1990). Moss (2012) argues that higher education from its institutionalised starting point until post-World War II was one of the most stable societal institutions, comparable with the Roman church. With its stability, the university provided space for social and intellectual interaction between scholars and students (Moss, 2012). However, Marginson (2011a) emphasises that medieval universities were also highly selective and elite. These were privileged spaces in which to study and work (Lewis, 2008).

Higher education institutions today are more clearly rooted in ‘the ideals, institutions and vocabulary of modernism’ (Bloland, 1995, p. 521). Universities established in the UK from the late nineteenth century onwards were created on the initiative of local business and political elite, characterised by strong academic independence, high levels of management autonomy (Radice, 2013), and a ‘place-bound identity [and] locality’ (Marginson, 2011b, p. 413). Many UK universities established during the Victorian era (e.g. Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham) were so called ‘civic’ universities initiated by local philanthropists, politicians and businessmen (Macfarlane, 2005, p. 166). These universities were essentially self-governing institutions (Barnett, 2005) with a focus on local

communities. Furthermore, modernist universities approached knowledge as being important for solving societal problems, and science and scientific methods were practised as tools to guide societal progress (Bloland, 1995). This idea evolved into what Doherty (2007, p. 271) calls ‘the post-1945 settlement in education’ that promoted an understanding of education as contributing ‘to the construction of a better society’. This understanding was based on political consensus that education was ‘a public and social good and important contributor to the post-war project of national renewal’ (Doherty, 2007, p. 271).

### ***Neoliberalisation of liberal higher education***

European higher education can also be described by its connection to a liberal tradition that focuses on education as a way to develop students’ thinking and decision-making skills (Moss, 2012). Recent economic and political reforms, however, have attempted to reshape this understanding of higher education.

The main aim of liberal higher education has been ‘a lessening of the taken-for-grantedness of the individual’s hold on the world’ (Barnett, 1990, p. 23). From this perspective, universities can be understood as ‘the protector[s] and promoter[s] of democratic values’ (Giroux, 2009, p. 458), serving universal interests of learning, knowledge gathering, truth-seeking and critical reasoning (Barnett, 2005). Liberal ideas of higher education are underpinned by the work of nineteenth century scholars such as John Henry Newman (1801-1890). Newman argued that intellectual engagement and expansion of the mind are the main aims of university education (Newman, 1976, cited in Barnett, 1990, p. 20). Similarly, Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) spoke about universities having a major role in building a more humane society through a focus on knowledge and truth (Barnett, 1990).

Neoliberal reforms taking place in Western societies tend to reorganise the public sector areas such as higher education. In the UK, this reshaping can be seen in relation to a wider policy shift from understanding education as part of a Keynesian welfare state towards a new settlement based on neoliberalism (Marginson, 2013; Naidoo, 2008). During the 1980s, neoliberalism emerged as a distinctive political and economic rationality in Western public policy; citizens were positioned as individual consumers, welfare rights as consumer rights, and commercialisation, corporatisation and privatisation as common practices for reorganising the public sector (Peters, 2012). The elections of the Thatcher and Reagan governments in the early 1980s are said to be responsible for the new societal period



dominated by neoliberal market orientation, globalisation, the ideology of free trade and the reduction of governmental and welfare systems (Peters, 2012; Radice, 2013).

However, these political developments were drawn from earlier management and economic theories: the Austrian and Chicago schools of economic thought and the Virginia school of public choice (Doherty, 2007). Neoliberalism as a political discourse is underpinned by specific economic theories from the writings of Hayek on neoliberalism, Friedman on monetarist economics, Buchanan on Public Choice Theory and by the later publications of Agency Theory and Cost-Transaction Economics (Olssen, 2009; Olssen and Peters, 2005). While classical liberal theories conceptualised state power as being negative in terms of constraining market forces and the individual as someone who needed to be freed from state intervention (framed by the so-called 'invisible hand theory'), neoliberalism has come to represent a positive conception of the state and its role in creating markets by shaping the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for the market (Olssen, 2009). Furthermore, in contrast with classical liberalism that understood human nature as being autonomous and acting based on freedom, neoliberal theories approach individuals as 'rational utility maximisers' who need to be conditioned by state interventions (Olssen, 2009, p. 445). Olssen (2009, p. 435) argues that the 'end goals' of neoliberalism - freedom, choice, consumer sovereignty, competition, individual initiative, compliance and obedience - are 'constructions of the state acting now on its positive role through the development of techniques of auditing, accounting and management'.

Neoliberalism as an applicable form of governmentality is characterised by an extension of market mechanisms from the economic to the political and social forms of human activity (Olssen, 2009). This shift marked the end of the post-war consensus of understanding education as a public good, and it promoted an approach to education as a key contributor to economic growth (Doherty, 2007). While the global credit crisis and recession in 2007 to 2009 called neoliberal rationality into question, it still remains the dominant political approach globally (Radice, 2013).

### ***Marketisation and commodification of higher education***

Neoliberalism has reoriented the liberal university into an entrepreneurial university that tends to exist 'for-itself' (Barnett, 2011, p. 443), shaped by processes of marketisation and commodification. According to Canaan and Schumar (2008), marketisation refers to the process that includes state intervention through market principles and disciplinary

mechanisms that aim to make non-market institutions (such as universities) more efficient. The drive towards marketisation of universities relies on the assumption that competition within and between universities creates more efficient and better functioning institutions (Naidoo and Williams, 2015).

Closely related to the concept of marketisation, commodification reflects the process that turns social/public goods into commodities (Canaan and Schumar, 2008; Naidoo, 2008). Marketisation of universities in terms of needing to generate surplus incomes has led higher education to become more open to the process of commodification. Naidoo and Williams (2015, p. 212) argue that education 'has developed into a product and process specifically for its "exchange" rather than for its intrinsic "use" value'. As a result of marketisation and commodification, the social and cultural objectives of higher education and traditional understanding of higher education as 'public good' becomes secondary (Naidoo, 2008, p. 87). As university subject areas are valued by the contribution they make to the economy, the sciences and technological subjects receive more financial support from government than humanities and social sciences (Barnett, 1990). In addition to changed disciplinary priorities, universities need to promise that their programmes enhance the students' employability (Cippitani and Gatt, 2009). According to Peters and Olssen (2005, p. 41), the focus on 'marketisation of university knowledges' might turn the university into just another corporation. It could be argued that recent policy developments have led to the weakening of the boundaries between higher education and the private sector (Naidoo and Williams, 2015).

It is evident that neoliberalisation of higher education has reshaped the former understanding of universities as places for learning and democratic empowerment. Higher education is now increasingly related to economic processes characteristic to the private sector. This thesis argues that neoliberalisation of higher education sector has become possible through transformed education policy development.

### ***Transformed higher education policy contexts***

It could be argued that governments have developed various techniques to shape and organise the higher education sectors such as the introduction of performance indicators, student satisfaction surveys, and student complaints mechanisms (Naidoo and Williams,

2015). These techniques are often based on New Public Management logic which focuses on developing strategic goals and ensuring their achievement through outcomes and indicator measures (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009). However, this new mode of government takes place in global and diffuse higher education policy contexts which will be explored first before continuing with a more detailed analysis of New Public Management techniques.

Radice (2013) argues that neoliberalism has spread across the globe through the work of global organisations: the IMF, the World Bank, the OECD, and the European Union among others. While the nation-state remains important in terms of developing politics and policies, it is now much more strongly shaped by international organisations: this means that ‘the global eye’ in education policy assists ‘the national eye’ in its localised techniques of government (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009, p. 214). Perhaps the most visible example is related to global rankings of universities. National ranking of universities was first practised in the USA in 1920s; global rankings on a world-wide scale have been present since 2003 (Marginson, 2009a). Global university rankings make it possible to ‘summarise the whole university world in a single table’ and to normalise higher education as a market of competing institutions in which performance reflects quality and equates with market power (Marginson, 2009a, p. 590). Furthermore, rankings create a disciplinary system in which the nation-states and the universities focus on the key question: ‘How can our university/nation perform better?’ (Marginson, 2009a, p. 591). Thus, the global education policy context turns into a ‘numbers approach within nations’ that becomes a way for nations to measure and compare their educational performance globally against others (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009, p. 213).

### ***European policy context***

In addition to ‘the global eye’ (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009, p. 214) in higher education policy development, it could be argued that the European Union with its policy networks and mechanisms has a significant impact on national higher education sectors. Simons, Olssen and Peters (2009a, p. 43) argue that governments and states are now being shaped by ‘new patterns and networks of governance’. There has been a shift from central government towards ‘polycentric governance’ through which policies are created by multiple agencies, sites and discourses (Ball and Exley, 2010, p. 151). Ball (2010, p. 155) also argues that tasks and services states used to undertake are now being practised by ‘various "others" in various kinds of relationship among themselves and to the state and to

the remaining more traditional organisations of the public sector'. These new types of policy relationships create 'fuzzy divides' between the public, the private and the third sectors while producing new forms of educational markets, hierarchies and heterarchies (Ball, 2010, p. 155). Perhaps the most visible policy network in the European higher education context can be seen in relation to various European institutions that all aim to shape the organisation and operation of universities: the European University Association, European Association of Institutions of Higher Education, Education International, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and European Students' Union along with others (Vukasovic, 2013). For example, the European cooperation in quality assurance has been directly related to the Bologna Process that called upon European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA), national quality assurance agencies (QAA) and higher education institutions to work together to ensure higher education quality (Vukasovic, 2013). Local quality assurance in terms of monitoring, controlling and auditing higher education is not located in any particular institution but is coordinated by the QAAs. The national institutions operate as part of the umbrella organisation - the ENQA - that is one of the key actors in Bologna dynamics today (Furlong, 2005).

In terms of other types of European influences, there are often benefits such as European funding, access to networks or prestige involved that help to justify and encourage nation-states and institutions to participate in European policy developments (Vukasovic, 2013). European funding as a reward might be related to Ball's argument that 'money buys voice' in current times (Ball, 2010, p. 161), and thereby makes European Union policy developments and networks particularly influential in shaping national and institutional contexts of higher education.

### ***Neoliberal higher education context in the UK***

Ball and Exley (2010) argue that the rise of policy networks has become characteristic to education policy development in the UK. Higher education in the UK includes about 160 universities and higher education institutions (British Council, n.d.) of which 19 institutions are based in Scotland (Universities Scotland, n.d.) (see Appendix 1). Various increasingly entrepreneurial organisations (i.e. think tanks, research councils, funding bodies) shape higher education policy contexts and development. Some of these organisations are described in Table 1 (see Appendix 2 for further reference).

**Table 1. Organisations shaping higher education policy context in the UK**

Type	Organisation
Think tanks, non-profit membership organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ National Centre for Universities and Businesses (NCUB), 2013</li> <li>▪ Million+, 2007</li> <li>▪ Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), 2002</li> <li>▪ Universities UK</li> <li>▪ Universities Scotland</li> <li>▪ Universities Wales</li> </ul>
Funding councils, governmental bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), 1992</li> <li>▪ Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC), 2005</li> <li>▪ Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), 1992</li> </ul>
Research councils, governmental bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC )</li> <li>▪ Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)</li> <li>▪ Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)</li> <li>▪ Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)</li> <li>▪ Medical Research Council (MRC)</li> <li>▪ Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)</li> <li>▪ Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)</li> </ul>

For example, the National Centre for Universities and Businesses (NCUB), an independent and non-profit organisation launched in 2013, brings together UK universities and businesses with an aim to ‘influence government and solve the country’s challenges’ (NCUB, n.d. a). The Board of Directors includes people from various entrepreneurial backgrounds, including business elite such as Sir Roger Bone, former President of Boeing UK from 2005-2014, and Sam Laidlaw, a former CEO of Centrica, Britain’s largest energy provider, along with members of the academic professoriate (i.e. Professor Anton Muscatelli, the Principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of Glasgow) (NCUB, n.d. b). Another example, a university think tank Million+ was launched in 2007, and it involves a number of post-1992 universities – former polytechnics - from England and Scotland that also aim ‘to develop and shape public policy and funding regimes on a non-party basis’ (Million+, 2015a). Some of the publications that Million+ has produced and that clearly reflect neoliberal discourses include ‘*A Manifesto for Universities*’ (2015), ‘*Research Report: The Innovation Challenge: A new approach to research funding*’ (2014),

and ‘*Research Report: Smarter Regions Smarter Britain: Boosting regional growth through universities*’ (2014) (Million+, 2015b).

There are other types of UK organisations that aim to influence higher education governance. For example, the funding councils such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council tend to shape higher education policy contexts by research funding and its allocation. The HEFCE website demonstrates a clear link with neoliberal understanding of education. For example, HEFCE’s overall aim is formulated as follows: ‘to create and sustain the conditions for a world-leading system of higher education which transforms lives, strengthens the economy, and enriches society’ (HEFCE, n.d.). Their recent strategy is called a ‘business plan’ - ‘*HEFCE Business Plan 2015-2020*’ (HEFCE, n.d.). There are many other influential organisations such as various research councils (i.e. ESRC, AHRC), Universities UK, Universities Scotland and Universities Wales that all shape the field and increase the idea of diffuse and relational higher education policy making in the UK.

### ***Neoliberalisation of Estonian higher education context***

Compared to the UK, policy networks and diffuseness of policy-making are not fundamental to higher education context in Estonia. There are 25 universities and higher education institutions in Estonia (see Appendix 1), and national higher education policy development could be described by relatively traditional processes in which the Ministry of Education and Research has a central role in policy development but also in directly managing 11 other ‘state agencies, foundations and institutions’ (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, n.d.). Some examples of these additional bodies are: Foundation Archimedes that coordinates and implements various international and national education programmes; the Estonian Research Council that provides funding for research; and the Information Technology Foundation for Education. While policy-making in Estonian higher education might appear to be highly centralised and coordinated, Kroos (2013, p. 38) argues that ‘the fragmentation of Estonian HE&R [higher education and research] policy is almost overwhelming’, especially when taking into account the small size of the country and student numbers (see Appendix 1). The fragmentation of policy might be also caused by a relatively high number of small-size higher education institutions in Estonia. Furthermore, Kasemets, Senior Adviser from the OECD (2006, cited in Kroos, 2013, p. 48) has stated that the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research differs from other

ministries in Estonia by its policy development practice which tends to develop a separate strategy for every educational sector and process.

Wider European and neoliberal influences, however, are still evident in the higher education policy context in Estonia. Jaakson and Reino (2013, p. 219) argue that the overall aim of educational policy-making in Estonia is ‘to increase the competitiveness of the Estonian economy through up-to-date education and cutting edge research’. Similarly, Laar (1996, cited in Kroos, 2013, p. 51) explains that higher education policy is part of the overall neoliberal agenda that is characteristic of the post-communist era. The government has been looking for ways to promote the relevance of higher education and research to the economy and setting priority areas such as biotechnology, energy technology and information sciences (Kroos, 2013).

Furthermore, a strong European influence appears to be particularly characteristic to higher education policies in Estonia. According to Saar and Mõttus (2013a, p. 9), following Estonian independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, there have been significant reforms aiming to integrate higher education in Estonia ‘into European models and practices of education and research’. It is therefore unsurprising that the government and higher education institutions have been participating in European networks and policy developments. For example, Estonia joined the Bologna Process in 1999 which resulted in large scale structural changes: new study programmes were developed, a new credits accumulation system applied, an accreditation system introduced, and the autonomy of universities increased (Espenberg *et al.*, 2013). Since 2002/2003, a ‘3+2’ study model in terms of two-cycle (bachelor-master) followed by doctoral studies was introduced (Unt and Lindemann, 2013; Espenberg *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, Jaakson and Reino (2013, p. 230) argue that higher education research funding in Estonia is highly dependent on foreign funding which tends to be related to ‘active and successful participation in EU research, technology development and framework programmes’. It is therefore evident that higher education systems and policy development in Estonia are shaped by EU policies. Also, the quality and success of higher education in Estonia are mostly assessed by international evaluators (Saar and Mõttus, 2013b).

Both the UK and Estonian higher education systems are influenced by global and European policy developments. Neoliberalisation tends to be more evident in the UK context where various networks of (increasingly entrepreneurial) organisations shape the

educational policy-making. While fragmentation characterises higher education in Estonia, European policy influences still transform curricula, research priorities and internationalisation of the sector. It could therefore be expected that the universities in both countries and beyond have changed and will continue to change the ways they operate and are governed as they adopt characteristics common to New Public Management and the entrepreneurial university.

### ***New Public Management and the entrepreneurial university***

Doherty (2007, p. 275) states that neoliberal developments have resulted in a new form of public sector governance - New Public Management (NPM) - that has replaced 'a public service ethos to one of private management'. Simons, Olssen and Peters (2009a) argue that NPM includes institutional techniques such as performance agreements, written contracts, short-term employment contracts, accountability, and client culture. Radice (2013, p. 408) describes NPM as 'a combination of Stalinist hierarchical control and the so called free market' in which a shift from professional to executive power, a focus on performance targets and the use of financial incentives have taken place. Olssen argues that the dominance of NPM has caused a fundamental shift in the ways universities reason about their existence:

The traditional professional culture of open intellectual enquiry and debate has been replaced with an institutional stress on performativity, as evidenced by the emergence of an emphasis on measured outputs: on strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures, and academic audits (Olssen, 2009, p. 436).

Marginson provides a more detailed overview of NPM techniques as they are practised in higher education institutions:

In higher education, the NPM is associated with reforms that render institutions as quasi-business firms (corporatisation), including CEO-style executive leadership; goal-driven production, output measurement and performance management; cost unbundling, shadow pricing and simulated 'bottom lines' in non-revenue areas; customer focus and continuous self-evaluation (Marginson, 2013, p. 355).

Entrepreneurial universities practise techniques that on the one hand, help to manage universities as entities (i.e. CEO-style leadership, customer focus), and on the other, make



academics and students manage themselves (i.e. performance management, continuous self-evaluation).

As the techniques of neoliberal government are complex and diffuse, the most visible techniques of government can be seen in bureaucratic technologies of performance-orientation and standardisation of practice. According to Ball (2013, p. 137), performativity can be seen as a key mechanism of neoliberal governmentality, which involves 'comparisons, judgements, and self-management'. It is 'a powerful and insidious policy technology' (Ball, 2012, p. 19) that is based on a belief that 'experience is nothing, productivity is everything' and where the previous year's outcomes are seen as a benchmark for further improvement (Ball, 2013, p. 136). Trust in professional integrity and peer-regulation has been replaced with performance indicators (Lynch, 2006). As a result, standards and criteria have become crucial in framing what is 'normal' (Engebretsen *et al.*, 2012, p. 408) and desirable to achieve and practise. Techniques of measuring and auditing these performances and standards are seen as necessary for ensuring 'stable uniform entities' that can be continuously compared to each other and evaluated (Davies and Bansel, 2010, p. 14). According to Engebretsen *et al.* (2012, p. 408), performance-orientation, standards and criteria function 'as a kind of panoptical tower'.

As a result of neoliberal policy developments, universities today exist in a context where market-driven demands and accountability are fundamental organising principles (Jankowski and Provezis, 2014). The understanding of education as being another market category has become dominant in policy and public discourses (Lynch, 2006). Universities experience enormous pressure from governmental agencies to improve their 'educational products', to respond to markets and to increase their competitiveness (Jankowski and Provezis, 2014, p. 477). It is argued that universities are now like machines where the factory model is applied: 'get students in and out as fast as possible' (Moss, 2012, p. 85). The purpose of the university has changed from educating the elites to 'the provision of marketable skills and research outputs to the knowledge economy' (Radice, 2013, p. 408). Marginson also argues that competition is central to contemporary higher education:

...competition for status and resources in research and scholarship; competition between institutions to attract students; competition between students to gain the most sought-after places in institutions; competition in international student markets and for corporate-financed consultancy work; and the often compelling contest between institutional 'brands' for ranking and prestige (Marginson, 2013, p. 357).

Some educational institutions even become ‘whatever it seems necessary’ in order to flourish in the market (Ball, 2000, p. 10). Ball (2000) goes further, arguing that educational values are diminished and any university which can select its ‘clients’ will do so, either formally or informally. A new type of university, an ‘entrepreneurial university’ has emerged – the university that no longer provides guidance for ‘a better future through its privileged understanding of the processes that underlie our existence’ but rather has to deal with the present in order to maximise its existing resources (Allen, 2011, p. 369).

The ‘entrepreneurial university’ is underpinned by three major principles: firstly, all educational products are defined in terms of their monetary and exchange value; secondly, the competitive relationships among individuals and institutions have increased; and thirdly, the liberal subject has been shaped to become a neoliberal subject (Davies and Bansel, 2010). This also means that institutional leaders may pursue economic aspirations rather than the idea of the public good in higher education; similarly, academics may not be driven by mission but rather by career choices and pay incentives (Marginson, 2009b). Furthermore, while a modernist university was a relatively stable entity, the entrepreneurial university tends to be accompanied by risks, including ‘the possible dissolution of the university itself’ (Allen, 2011, p. 370). Marginson (2011b) argues that if universities do not stand for anything deeper or more collective than self-interest, they are vulnerable and their roles could be picked up elsewhere. From his perspective, universities need ‘a foundational purpose’ that is more than marketing process or survival of the university for its own sake (Marginson, 2011b, p. 413).

However, the change from modernist to neoliberal universities has not taken place easily. As Allen (2011, p. 369) argues, the ‘relics’ of the modernist traditions still remain. Bloland (1995) notes that higher education institutions often improve curricula and apply reforms in order to keep doing what the modernist university was doing before – to educate middle-class professionals. Furthermore, Marginson (2009c, p. 16) argues that mainstream universities can assume some of the features of ‘capitalist firms’, but they will continue to produce both public and private goods, since the knowledge contents of studying will always be public goods in their essence.

Marginson (2013, p. 364) also argues that elite universities are already ‘partly beyond economics’ as they are focused on research and profile building rather than increasing student population, as it is research that drives their prestige and ‘brand power’. It therefore

looks as an increasing number of for-profit international students enrolled in universities provide ‘supplementary revenues’ to sustain non-profit operation of the universities (Marginson, 2009c, p. 8) in terms of their modernist and liberal traditions. However, Giroux’s vivid analysis of the neoliberalisation of higher education institutions in the USA could be a warning that worse for European universities might be to come:

Anyone who spends any time on a college campus in the United States these days cannot miss how higher education is changing. Strapped for money and increasingly defined through the language of corporate culture, many universities seem less interested in higher learning than in becoming licensed storefronts for brand-name corporations – selling off space, buildings, and endowed chairs to rich corporate donors. University bookstores are now managed by big corporate conglomerates such as Barnes and Noble, while companies such as Sodexo-Marriott (also a large investor in the U.S. private prison industry) run a large percentage of college dining halls, and MacDonald’s and Starbucks occupy prominent locations on the student commands. Student IDs are now adorned with MasterCard and VISA logos, providing students who may have few assets with an instant line of credit and an identity as full-time consumers (Giroux, 2009, p. 459).

## ***Conclusion***

The chapter has demonstrated that neoliberalism shapes higher education policy development and creates entrepreneurial universities through various policy networks and managerialist techniques. It also confirms a Foucauldian understanding of neoliberal governmentality as being highly complex and diffuse, making it difficult to trace power relations and hierarchical dynamics in policy development. Universities appear to operate in a complex context where forces acting on the institutions are highly political and economic, aiming to maximise market value of universities.

It could be expected that the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University - the research sites in this PhD project – are going through (some) similar changes in terms of being shaped by various national, European and global organisations, taking part in policy networks and applying techniques characteristic to New Public Management. Research findings presented in Part IV aim to highlight these possible relations between the theoretical and empirical evidence. In order to understand how neoliberalisation acts at the subject level, the next chapter will explore the aspects of neoliberalism in relation to the work and studies of academics and students.

## Chapter 4: Transformed subjectivities: academics and students

Recent scholarly work has drawn attention to the ways that neoliberal reforms have shaped the work and subjectivities of academics and students. Cribb and Gewirts (2013, p. 339), for example, argue that UK universities are ‘being hollowed out’ with ‘potentially devastating consequences’ for both the civic function of universities and for academic work. Furthermore, Hey (2001, p. 68) explains that the new ‘knowledge economy’ is creating ‘new divisions of labour and fractured identities’, while Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter (2009, p. 363) emphasise that neoliberal agendas have limited ‘the agency of groups and of individuals’ in higher education through growing systems of accountability.

The analysis in this chapter is based on a Foucauldian understanding of the subject (see Chapter 2) as a way of exploring ‘the multiple actions of power’ (Muckelbauer, 2000, p. 85) and its effects on individual academics and students. I argue that neoliberal governmentality attempts to create new forms of academic and student subjectivity: ‘there is no individual, no self, that is ontologically prior to power’ (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p. 87). Power acting on academics and students through neoliberal techniques of government constitutes their subjectivity. However, academic and student subjectivities can be seen as ‘site[s] of struggle and resistance’ in which resistance is reflected in various forms of uncertainties, discomforts and refusals (Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p. 85).

Foucault’s theorisation of discipline, governmentality, technologies of the self and *parrhesia* holds significant potential for understanding academic and student subjectivities in neoliberal academia. This chapter explores evidence of power and resistance in academic and student experiences, while also recognising that disciplinary technologies acting on individuals in a postmodern society are diffuse and do not rely on sovereignty but rather on the aspects of compliance of which subjects are not necessarily aware (Lawson *et al.*, 2004). The chapter starts by introducing key processes related to academic subjectification and resistance, and it will continue with an exploration of students as subjects shaped by increasingly dominant client culture.

## ***Neoliberalisation of academic subjects***

*...power has shifted from academics to managers; it has also shifted to stakeholders and the community, and in large part neoliberal reforms in the higher education sector were part and parcel with anti-intellectual sentiment present in the wider community (Olssen, 2014, [interview]).*

Archer (2008) describes the field of higher education as constantly shifting and evolving. Meanings associated with academic work and being an academic are always in process: 'professional identities are being undone and redone' (Hey, 2001, p. 75). Tamboukou (2012, p 860) describes current neoliberal times in academia as being 'dark times' where 'bureaucratisation and marketisation of academic life' cause a situation in which 'there is less and less meaning and essence in what we say, write and do in our everyday lives'. This means less 'truth-telling' in a Foucauldian sense. This idea of 'dark times' makes Tamboukou (2012) (but also myself) question the role of the academic and their opportunities for resistance, particularly as academics tend to be 'entangled in a network of power relations wherein the freedom to tell the truth is interwoven with the risk of being exposed to "the powerful other"' (Tamboukou, 2012, p. 860). Thus, the section below focuses on the processes shaping academic work and subjectivities in this anti-intellectual present as described by Olssen (2014, [interview]) at the opening of this section. It explores the tensions between teaching and research activities and the consequences of New Public Management in academia, and it analyses the ways academics tend to experience and respond to the neoliberal policy developments.

### ***The researcher academic***

Universities operate in highly competitive higher education markets in which neoliberal concerns in terms of rankings and productivity are common. Consequently, their understanding of the academics they need becomes fashioned accordingly (Morrissey, 2013, 2015). The most visible change in academic work is seen in relation to a tension between teaching and research positions. Scott (2005) explains that higher education policy and institutional culture encourage a separation of teaching and research roles, and Fitzmaurice (2013) provides an example of academic career progress that operates based on research excellence rather than on how good academics are at teaching. An ideal academic in a neoliberal sense is a leader rather than a follower, and is likely to do little teaching in order to focus on research grants and research outcomes that are most valued in higher education market (Thornton, 2013). Despite the increasing focus on teaching excellence in many universities in the UK and internationally, research output is

considered to be the most influential factor (Morrissey, 2013a). Furthermore, while choosing one's own research area used to be part of academic freedom, it has now turned into part of market imperatives (Thornton, 2013). Research funding agencies, businesses and policy priorities shape the research choices of academics, and academics' research excellence is evaluated based on where their research is published, how often it is cited and what it is worth in terms of the Research Excellence Framework (REF)<sup>6</sup> (Gill, 2010).

Like Cribb and Gewirtz (2013, p. 342), I would argue that academic work in entrepreneurial universities is being shaped by 'the institutional obsession with reputation'. The neoliberal academic needs to be productive and to promote not only his/her own reputation but the reputation of the university. Thornton (2013, p. 132) argues that the 'ideal' academic is required to be 'single-minded and ruthless to the pursuit of excellence'. Furthermore, s/he needs to constantly demonstrate his/her value for the university (Barnett and Middlehurst, 1993). Academics are expected to become 'academic entrepreneurs' who are valuable for financial reasons: the money and prestige they can bring into the university (Giroux, 2009, p. 459).

However, according to Cribb and Gewirtz (2013), it is not only managers but also academics themselves who have started to speak about academic value in terms of institutional drivers such as how many 4\* publications or prestigious research grants they have. Therefore, it might not only be the policy discourse that shapes the understanding of 'ideal' academic but perhaps also the everyday discourses of the academics. This relates to Foucault's point that power operates through complex system of relations that not only includes very visible regulations and administrative measures (such as the REF) but also discourses (Foucault, 1977b) that act on academic subjectivity. By internalising dominant neoliberal policy discourses, academics might enforce the power acting on them and voluntarily work towards becoming excellent researchers who strive for reputation.

### ***The managed and performing academic***

The historically dominant idea of academics being a high status group with autonomy and academic power (Barnett and Middlehurst, 1993) has changed in neoliberal contexts now that universities are 'governed by performance' (Parker, 2005, p. 151). Fanghanel (2012, p. 15) applies the term 'managed academic' to capture the ways in which managing academic

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<sup>6</sup> The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions (REF, 2014).

work and performance (such as research) has become dominant over the past three decades. Management tends to shape the idea of the 'normative optimal performing subject' (Morrissey, 2013, p. 799) based on institutional aims and aspirations and through complex audit culture systems (Church, 2008). This idea of managing academics tends to reflect the techniques of New Public Management (NPM) highlighted in the previous chapter.

Performativity acts on academic subjectivity through such mechanisms as performance targets, benchmarks and rankings. Neoliberalism therefore reorganises academic life based on market logic (Harland *et al.*, 2010). By encouraging individuals to accept the organisational goals as their own goals, academics commit to the performance culture created in and by the institution (Feldges *et al.*, 2015). Performativity 'works best when we come to want for ourselves what is wanted from us, when our moral sense of our desires and ourselves are aligned with its pleasures' (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p. 89); ratings, rankings and competitive relations can therefore 'engender individual feelings of pride, guilt, shame and envy' (Ball, 2000, p. 4). Thus, performativity includes an emotional dimension in addition to the illusion of rationality and objectivity that reporting and measuring reflect (Ball, 2000). It enables to praise individual achievements. Therefore, not all academics struggle with the culture of performativity: some align comfortably with neoliberalism and experience it as rewarding. Radice (2013) argues that positive performance evaluations can ensure a successful academic career that might lead to recruitment to the level of senior management. These are academics who 'flourish in the new environment' (Peters and Olssen, 2005, p. 46).

According to Ball (2000), performativity also includes the risk of sacrificing academic commitment and authenticity for the sake of performance and productivity. He describes a situation in which academics apply for research grants in which they have no academic interest but which look good from a performance perspective (Ball, 2000). Gonzales, Martinez and Ordu (2013) argue that academics who are successful in winning research grants tend to move further away from their former teaching responsibilities. In addition, Hey (2001, p. 75) emphasises that those who 'manage' research tend to have even more prestigious position in neoliberal academia than those who 'do' research. The ideal academic in performance culture is therefore 'a technopreneur', a researcher who produces academic capital (Thornton, 2013, p. 127). Those who do not perform in an institutionally desired way and/or do not agree with neoliberal policies may become less secure in academia.

The agency of academics is conditioned via ‘regimes of performance’, related to the production of the normalised self in a Foucauldian sense (Morrissey, 2015, p. 614). Through performativity, academics may become neoliberal subjects whose ‘self-identity and self-definition have become colonised by institutional performance ideologies’ (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013, p. 345). In a Foucauldian sense, performativity operates as part of the techniques of domination (Foucault, 1997b) that shape conditions for academic work and academic subjectivities. Ball (2000) argues that academics need to ‘fabricate’ themselves (Ball, 2000, p. 15), and gives an example that he feels reformed as ‘a neoliberal academic subject’ (Ball, 2012, p. 17).

### ***Transformed academic communities***

As individuals, academics act and make meaning of policy not just individually but as part of academic cultures and communities: this is done through discursive practices. The ways academics relate to each other in entrepreneurial universities, however, have become less collegial and more competitive as a result of NPM. Olssen (2009) argues that the shift from flat structures and collegial governance towards hierarchical and performance-related models have taken place. ‘Authentic social relations’ tend to be replaced by judgemental relations in which individuals are valued and positioned based on their productivity (Ball, 2000, p. 6). Academic communities, collegial bodies and practices have therefore been weakened (Ordorika and Lloyd, 2015). Davies (2005, p. 6) describes encountering academics who sound ‘monstrous in their will to survive’. Academics are encouraged to compete with each other for resources within and between institutions which results in reduced solidarity and collegiality (Radice, 2013). The assumption that the successful academic should be ‘doing better than everyone else’ is prevailing (Davies and Bansel, 2005, p. 55). Academic relationships are thereby based on contracts aiming at profit generation rather than collegiality and knowledge creation for its own sake (Ball, 2012).

Changing physical structures of academic work have also contributed to the weakening of communities and collegiality. For example, Barnett (2008) argues that the trend towards open-plan offices increases the visibility of academic work. Gill (2010, p. 237) argues that academic work in contemporary universities appears like ‘academia without walls’. These ideas referring to social and physical surveillance reflect a Foucauldian understanding of a panoptic system in which performativity reshapes the mode of government. Academics experience a sense of surveillance through performance techniques; there is a sense that others are watching and one must constantly watch oneself (Gonzales, Martinez and Ordu,



2013). Furthermore, academics no longer trust their colleagues; each becomes ‘one of the multiple eyes spying each other’ (Davies, 2005, p. 10).

Academia seems to have turned into a ‘toxic’ environment (Gill, 2010, p. 238). Academic life has changed fundamentally in terms of involving new and unwanted tasks and becoming less satisfying (El-Khawas, 2008). Gonzales, Martinez and Ordo (2013) argue that academics tend to experience pressures in relation to high workload, sense of surveillance and blurring borders between work and private life. Workload pressures and a sense of being underrated create the experience of stress (Fanghanel, 2012). Furthermore, Davies and Bansel (2005) argue that it is characteristic to a neoliberal subject to explain one’s lack of time as a personal failure resulting in negative judgement on the self. Therefore, stress in academia might be also constructed as an issue for individuals to solve themselves which often results in further health and well-being problems (Davies and Bansel, 2005). Furthermore, Gill (2010) argues that while there are institutional training courses on topics such as ‘time management’, ‘speed reading’ or ‘prioritising goals’, these tend to approach academic workload as an individual problem, something technical that can be fixed via training. However, according to Giroux (2009, p. 474), these struggles and stresses that academics increasingly experience offer a potential for turning the university into ‘a vibrant critical site of learning and unconditional site of pedagogical and political resistance’.

### ***Forms of resistance in neoliberal academia***

Ball (2012, pp. 19-20) argues that academics as neoliberal subjects tend to be ‘produced rather than oppressed [and] animated rather than constrained’. This understanding of academics as being produced raises a question of possibilities for policy negotiation and resistance in academia. Foucault (1997b) speaks about the techniques of domination and the self acting together on subject formation. While the aspects of domination via such technologies as performativity are highly emphasised in scholarly publications, the aspects of resistance in neoliberal university contexts tend not be much written about (yet). This perhaps reflects academics’ experiences of neoliberal policy developments and their experience of covert forms of struggle such as uncertainties and discomforts (Ball and Olmedo, 2013). Ball (2012, p. 20) argues that many academics experience ‘a growing sense of ontological insecurity; both a loss of a sense of meaning in what we do and of what is important in what we do’.

Davies and Bansel (2005) question the reasons as to why academics might have complied with neoliberal policy developments instead of demonstrating overt resistance. They suggest that it has been a gradual adaptation for the sake of survival (Davies and Bansel, 2005). Radice (2013) explains that academic adaptation is related to the overall societal shift from collective to an individualistic understanding of citizenship. Individualisation, competition but also increasing exhaustion makes resistance unlikely to occur (Gill, 2010). Furthermore, those who act against neoliberal developments are often marginalised and thereby silenced by those who embrace it (Harland *et al.*, 2010). As a result, academics start governing themselves in a manner that is a more efficient exercise of power than any traditional top-down control would ever be (Gill, 2010).

However, there are scholars who draw attention to some forms of resistance in academia. Peters and Olssen (2005, p. 47) argue that ‘pockets of freedom, or what seems like freedom’ will continue to exist in neoliberal academia. Particularly as neoliberal logic is not totalising and resistance can help to ‘destabilise and confuse and potentially subvert the norms of this logic by drawing on the conflicting discourses, meanings and practices that exist in social organisations’ (Lucas, 2014, p. 218). According to Hey (2001, p. 76), there are academics who refuse to accept neoliberal reforms, finding their ‘exit strategy’ either through early retirement, psychological withdrawal, internal intellectual exile or other forms of distancing. However, he also argues that most of these ‘exit strategies’ are open to the privileged who do not have to worry about their loss, or to those who are desperate (Hey, 2001, p. 76) and perhaps do not care about their loss anymore. I would also argue that recent academic strikes (mostly related to pay negotiation) organised by the University and College Union (UCU)<sup>7</sup> in the UK during 2013-2015 could be interpreted as an academic response to neoliberal higher education reforms. The UCU states that one of its key campaigning areas is targeted ‘to control workloads and tackle performance management strategies and occupational stress and bullying in the sector’ (UCU, n.d. b). Furthermore, recent media coverage has made academic experiences of neoliberalism more visible. Articles entitled ‘*Whose side are you on? You may have little choice*’ (Reisz, 2015), ‘*Age of ‘catastrophe’? It is already here*’ (King, 2013), and ‘*Academics under pressure to bump up student grades, Guardian survey shows*’ (Shaw and Ratcliffe, 2015) are only a few examples of critique presented in newspapers. These examples might not

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<sup>7</sup> The UCU is ‘the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK’ (UCU, n.d. a).

reflect the complex techniques of the self in a Foucauldian sense, but they demonstrate how academics negotiate and respond to the neoliberalisation of higher education in the UK.

Freedom to act and to refuse, to practise the techniques of the self in a Foucauldian sense, requires an agent who has the capacity, resources and will to act (Marginson, 2011a) but who is also ready to 'risk [oneself] precisely at moments of unknowingness, when [his/her] willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes [his/her] chance of becoming human' (Butler, 2005, p. 136). Overt resistance therefore includes a process of resisting oneself: 'confronting oneself at the centre of our discomforts' (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p. 93) in order to recognise and respond to often diffuse and internalised technologies of neoliberal government acting on the self as subject. It might therefore be more common for academic subjects to adapt rather than resist such technologies as performativity.

## ***Customerisation and the student subjectivity***

Neoliberal reforms that shape universities and academic subjectivities have also acted on students. Patsarika (2014, p. 527) argues that 'the portrait' of students has been 'coloured' by neoliberal developments. One of the most significant changes is related to positioning students as consumers of higher education (Naidoo and Williams, 2015). This re-conceptualisation at the policy level tends to reflect a neoliberal assumption that if students act as consumers, they will pressure universities to develop high quality courses and have a positive impact on the practices and work of academics (Naidoo and Williams, 2015). This section focuses on students and the ways neoliberalisation of higher education and policy discourses (particularly customerisation) act on students and how students might respond to these developments.

### ***Students as consumers***

Thornton (2013, p. 131) argues that while higher education turns into a (global) commodity, students are being increasingly positioned as 'customers who purchase a product from service providers'. They are approached as clients who can choose their higher education institutions based on league tables that measure teaching and research quality in various institutions (Pritchard, 2005). The National Survey of Student

Engagement in the USA and the National Student Survey (NSS) in the UK both evaluate the experiences of final-year undergraduate students and make the evaluations publicly available with an aim to inform the choices of potential applicants (Naidoo and Williams, 2015). The focus on student experience and satisfaction has become increasingly dominant, and Sabri (2011, p. 657) argues that the phrase ‘the student experience’ itself has ‘acquired the aura of a sacred utterance’ in higher education policy in the UK over the last decade. Understanding students as customers has led universities to position themselves as knowledge suppliers to students (Svensson and Wood, 2007). This shift in positioning has also caused changes of emphasis in terms of what content and approaches are valued in degree programmes. Pitman (2000) explains that universities are already reshaping their courses in line with what consumers want instead of what universities think should be taught.

Sax (2004) argues that positioning students as customers has been applied more as a metaphoric description than a literal statement. In contrast, Svensson and Wood (2007) are more radical in stating that marketing metaphors are inappropriate for describing students as they might cause misunderstandings of student-university relationships. From their point of view, the student-university relationship is not just a purchase of a product in neoliberal terms but involves various forms of interaction that are uncommon in typical marketing relationships (Svensson and Wood, 2007). This argument draws on the idea that education entails more than ‘packaging and delivering knowledge to passive consumers’; students need to be active in taking part in educational processes (Franz, 1998, p. 64). Education in neoliberal universities, however, is reconceptualised as a commercial transaction in which the pedagogic relationship between student and academic is transformed: academics are the ‘commodity producers’ and students the ‘consumers’ (Naidoo, 2005, p. 29).

I do not agree that educational process could become a complete commercial transaction: learning and teaching include cognitive processes that might not fit with the economic model highlighted by Naidoo (2005). However, neoliberalism can certainly transform the ways academics, institutions and students interact at the institutional level. By being positioned as customers (through such technologies as the NSS), student beliefs about the utility of degree programmes can change, as well as the way in which universities interact with student-consumers as learners.

### *Student-consumer as a learner and a citizen*

While it is evident that policy discourses tend to position students as customers, it is still unclear how this positioning might affect students' understanding of education and their relationship with learning. Svensson and Wood (2007, p. 20) argue that in some places, students are challenging such things as the format of exams that they do not think is 'in their personal best interests': 'the role of the customer is reinforced in them, and they act out that role when they engage with universities on issues that have not met their expectations'. This positioning of students as consumers negatively affects pedagogic understanding of students as developing critical thinkers and as taking part in knowledge creation (Canaan and Shumar, 2008). Naidoo and Williams (2015, p. 209) also argue that while students might feel more empowered as a result of 'consumer mechanisms', they may become passive and instrumental learners while excluding themselves from 'powerful knowledge in the longer term'. Neoliberal reforms encourage a one-sided relationship of institutional obligations towards students in terms of providing them with a good experience, without expecting students to be active learners (Sabri, 2010).

Universities not only provide knowledge to students, but they also shape students' 'identities, values, and sense of what it means to become citizens of the world' (Giroux, 2009, p. 460). The ways neoliberal universities influence student identities and values, however, has changed fundamentally. According to Hay and Kapitzke (2009, p. 155), education now needs to develop 'entrepreneurial citizens' for the competitive global economy. Neoliberal policy discourses of client culture tend to position students as instrumental learners driven by entrepreneurial mindsets. While the liberal academic model aimed to develop students as persons or citizens, the neoliberal model focuses on students as consumers and potential workers (Manuel and Llamas, 2006). In the current economic context, job prospects are often restricted if someone does not have a university degree. Degrees move from being desirable to being a necessity in many fields (Svensson and Wood, 2007). Students (as customers), according to Naidoo and Williams (2015, p. 213), have been turned into 'private investors seeking a financial return in the form of enhanced employability skills'. It could therefore be argued that students in neoliberal universities are subjectified in a complex way. On the one hand, neoliberal policy discourses and technologies (i.e. the NSS) shape student understandings of themselves as receivers and customers who drive the national higher education market and competition between the universities. On the other hand, neoliberalism positions students as self-interested and active entrepreneurial subjects who prepare for their employability and competitiveness at

the labour market. These dual forces acting on students encourage them to become instrumental learners with highly pragmatic focus and aspirations.

There is some evidence of student resistance to neoliberalisation of higher education. For example, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), a radical student network founded in the UK in 2010, has organised various student demonstrations to ‘fight for free, democratic education and universal grants, funded by the taxation of the rich and business’ (NCAFC, 2015). One of the biggest events organised by the NCAFC was the demonstration of 10 000 students in London in 2014, marching for free education in England (NCAFC, 2015). Furthermore, the media has covered worldwide student demonstrations against neoliberalisation of higher education. The Guardian (see GuardianWitness, 2015), for example, dedicated an interactive page on student demonstrations to gather photos from demonstrations across the world. I would therefore argue that neoliberalisation of student subjectivity has not taken place easily, but like academics, some students respond to and resist the changes. These responses might demonstrate students’ attitude against becoming consumer-students and entrepreneurial citizens.

### ***Competitive student relations***

In addition to understanding students as customers and entrepreneurs, student relations appear to be competitive in neoliberal university contexts. As neoliberalism relies on individualism, it can encourage detachment of the student from his/her friends, teachers and social environment (Patsarika, 2014). Patsarika (2014, p. 534) argues that by encouraging students to take responsibility for their future lives, rather than ‘experiencing and enjoying learning as an ongoing process of personal development and identification with others’, it becomes difficult for students to understand the value of their relations with each other. Even if there is an atmosphere of solidarity at the beginning of the course, soon afterwards students learn that they are competitors for grades (Manual and Llamas, 2006). Social relations in neoliberal times can be understood as ‘ephemeral constructs’ that do not encourage feelings of personal or collective belonging (Patsarika, 2014, p. 529), particularly in educational environments where good grades can ensure access to scholarships and postgraduate education.

The culture of individualism creates an understanding in which students see themselves as responsible for their own success and failure, especially in terms of available rewards such

as scholarships and qualifications (Manuel and Llamas, 2006). This tends to demonstrate once again the complex subjectivity of neoliberal students who are not only seen as passive, instrumental receivers of education but who are also active agents in leading their own future. While academic rewards and punishments remind students 'who is who in the university world' (Manuel and Llamas, 2006, p. 678), they have also turned into rituals that shape students' desire to become 'the good student' (Grant, 1997, p. 106). In a Foucauldian sense, rewards and punishments create a surveillance system for (self-)disciplining students and shaping their belief that success or failure lies with them (Grant, 1997). In addition, Pulfrey and Butera (2013) argue that with a shift in focus from educational process to the outcome, students have started to accept cheating as a possible way to enhance achievement. Hay and Kapitzke (2009) argue that there is a widespread concern about students becoming highly competitive, reward-oriented and perhaps dishonest.

From a neoliberal perspective, an important role of educational institutions is to create 'rational autonomous persons' and to produce 'bodies and minds that are self-governing' (Roth, 1992, p. 692). It could be argued that by making students act as customers and self-interested individual entrepreneurs, students become active in governing themselves: they take responsibility for their educational choices, achievement and employability desires. Students compare 'the market and shop around to ensure they receive the best value-for-money [in terms of education]' (Williams, 2013, cited in Naidoo and Williams, 2015, p. 211). They also accept student debt as a normal part of investment in their future (Naidoo and Williams, 2015). It is therefore unsurprising that they act as individuals rather than collegial communities: neoliberal expectations and technologies tend to make them highly focused on oneself.

Positioning student subjectivity becomes even more complex at postgraduate research (PGR) levels, where many students begin to take on undergraduate teaching duties (see Muzaka, 2009; Park, 2002; Park, 2004; Park and Ramos, 2002). While offering teaching opportunities to PGR students is not in itself new, Park and Ramos (2002, p. 47) argue that PGR students are now often positioned as 'academic workhorses' who are needed to cope with increased teaching loads in contemporary universities. Park (2002) argues that in the UK context, the high number of student teachers has been caused by growing numbers of students, resource constraints and pressure on academic staff. PGR students with teaching commitments occupy a position of a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA): any postgraduate student who teaches part-time, on a paid basis, whilst also being a research

student at the university (usually obtaining a PhD, but in some cases also a MPhil or MRes) (Chadha, 2013; Park and Ramos, 2002,).

Park (2002, p. 51) describes GTAs as occupying an ambiguous role: they are neither ‘fish nor fowl’. GTAs tend to identify with two roles: that of student and teacher (Cho *et al.*, 2011). As teachers they struggle with heavy workloads, high responsibility and limited autonomy (Park and Ramos, 2002). Similarly, Muzaka (2009, p. 1) argues that GTAs are teachers, researchers, students and employees and tensions and conflicting rights and responsibilities are associated with these roles. Furthermore, Vander Kloet and Aspenlieder (2013, p. 294) argue that graduate students today do not only work on their research, but they work on ‘self-actualizing a career’ based on the logic of neoliberalism. It might be the case that being a GTA is also part of a career development and endorsement of one’s employability in a neoliberal sense.

## **Conclusion**

The subject from a Foucauldian perspective is in a constant process of being produced (Butler, 1997). Academics and students in neoliberalised universities are being shaped by policy discourses and techniques (i.e. REF, NSS) to act as self-interested and economy-minded subjects. These influences tend to be economic and technical rather than educational processes, illustrating Olssen’s (2014, [interview]) argument that it is a societal ‘anti-intellectual sentiment’ that guides universities in neoliberal times and makes academics feel powerless. However, the chapter has also demonstrated that an economic mindset is increasingly guiding not only institutional reforms but the work and choices of academics and students. Many students today invest in their education with an aim to maximise their future wealth (Harland *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, students might be increasingly reluctant to choose courses in traditional subject areas such as Philosophy because these courses tend not to secure jobs for graduates or tend not to lead to well-paid jobs (Peters and Olssen, 2005). Also, a bachelor’s degree is no longer enough to ensure career progress. Rather, one needs to constantly upgrade one’s skills to ensure competitiveness in the labour market (Svensson and Wood, 2007). Students have therefore started to demonstrate forms of self-government in terms of making choices about their education and job along with other decisions about their lifestyles, bodies, health etc (Peters, 2005). Similarly, academics are increasingly shaped by performance targets,



standardisation and such exercises as institutional research excellence that all affect their work and career development in academia.

However, the chapter makes it also possible to argue that neoliberal developments are negotiated by academics and students. Recent worldwide student demonstrations reflect the aspects of student resistance against neoliberalisation of higher education. Interestingly, Giroux (2009, p. 474) argues that students and academics should unionise in order to 'speak with a collective voice and the power of collective opposition' against the neoliberal policies of higher education. This might be an efficient solution, as the evidence of academic resistance (as presented in media), tends to take place in less overt forms of discomfort and uncertainties than that of students.

While being aware of wider higher education policy discourses that act on academics and students in neoliberal universities, the next chapter will question the role and possible effects of assessment within this complex neoliberal context.

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## Chapter 5: Assessment policy and practice

*...in some ways, assessment now I think is burdened with new kinds of expectations, new kinds of responsibilities, there is a degree of conformity about assessment that it's not simply something that is given to the students, it's something that has to be seen to be done. So now we have this enormously complex process of moderation, formality in terms of forms that have to be filled in, boxes that have to be ticked, certain language that has to be used, and this is talked about very often in terms of better feedback for students, more standardisation of feedback. (Ball, 2014, [interview])*

Understanding assessment as a way to empower students and support their learning has become prevalent in scholarly research on assessment. O'Neill and McMahon (2005), however, argue that this understanding of assessment is not only related to pedagogical advancements but also to the changing demographics of students and consumer-centred society. The latter has created a climate where the concept of student-centred learning (and assessment) is thriving.

In addition to the (policy) shift towards student-centred assessment, it is also known that assessment involves power and control (Barnett, 2007); it determines people's very futures (Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2000) and makes individuals visible for differentiation and judgement (Foucault, 1975). In order to understand the complexities around assessment in neoliberalised universities - the ways assessment has turned into a technical and highly formal process as argued above by Ball (2014, [interview]) - the chapter starts with a brief exploration of the historic and theoretical context of student assessment, and then continues by analysing power in assessment and the ways assessment can operate as part of the technologies of discipline and governmentality.

### ***Historical-theoretical development of assessment***

Gipps (1999) and Madaus and O'Dwyer (1999) explain that examinations as a policy mechanism were first introduced and practised in China under the Han dynasty (206 BC to AD 220) with the aim of selecting suitable candidates for government service. A similar competitive system was developed by the Jesuits in their seventeenth century schools, possibly inspired by Jesuit travellers' experiences in China (Gipps, 1999). In terms of

higher education, the University of Paris and the University of Bologna in the twelfth century are said to be the first universities to introduce examinations (Madaus and O'Dwyer, 1999). Assessment in medieval universities has been described as an aggressive process: candidates at the University of Cambridge, for example, had to swear before the examination that they would never exact revenge on their examiners (Kvale, 2007). Delandshere (2001) also argues that assessment in medieval universities was focused on educational purposes in which assessment was related to teaching. Performance was evaluated qualitatively using pass/fail options (Madaus and O'Dwyer, 1999). Furthermore, assessment did not have to accomplish large scale selections but rather shaped and encouraged a small number of elite populations studying in universities (Delandshere, 2001).

Industrialisation and the rise of capitalism required a change in assessment. The industrial capitalist economies needed trained workers, and education and assessment were seen as necessary for training and selecting people for work (Gipps, 1999). Furthermore, assessment became a way to support some level of social mobility, and therefore, the selection, certification and control aspects of assessment became crucial (Gipps, 1999). Exams were less related to educational and didactic purposes, becoming highly competitive and complex (Delandshere, 2001) and often practised in quantitative forms (Madaus and O'Dwyer, 1999). Industrial capitalism was committed to 'standardisation, uniformity, precision, clarity, quantification and rational tactics', and therefore, assessment had to become 'a political, administrative, and accountability technique' (Madaus and O'Dwyer, 1999, p. 692). Along with a technical understanding of assessment from industrial times onwards, assessment practices started emphasising efficiency, as Madaus and O'Dwyer (1999) argue:

...changes in assessment technology over the last two centuries – from oral to written, from qualitative to quantitative, from short answer to multiple choice – were all geared toward increasing efficiency and making the assessment system more manageable, standardised, easily administered, objective, reliable, comparable, and inexpensive, particularly as the number of examinees increased (Madaus and O'Dwyer, 1999, p. 689).

As a result, assessment came to be seen as a teacher-controlled activity: a necessary but never enjoyable educational experience (Crisp, 2012), serving the functions of student selection, discipline and control (Kvale, 2007). Assessment had a fundamental role in reproduction and social stratification. Those who were not successful in so-called objective

competition had little option but to accept their own failure and to agree with the legitimacy of the existing social order (Gipps, 1999). Thus, the ritual examinations in medieval universities were replaced by more bureaucratic forms in modern universities where grades came to play a crucial role (Kvale, 2007).

### ***Psychometric traditions in assessment***

In relation to the bureaucratisation of assessment techniques, widely used assessment methods such as examinations, tests and assignments were strongly related to psychological measurement theories (Boud, 2009). These theories could be seen to be rooted in cultural practices of academic disciplines (Boud, 2009), reflecting a transmissionist view of teaching and learning (Madaus and O'Dwyer, 1999). Psychometric theories, for example, were originally developed from work on intelligence testing (Gipps, 1999). Underpinned by 'an aura of objectivity', psychometric theories aimed to measure attributes that were believed to be fixed and quantifiable (Gipps, 1999, p. 367). These psychometric traditions in Psychology brought into assessment the notions of reliability and validity (Murphy, 2006) that were supposed to guarantee the objectivity of grades given. The use of objective tests for selecting students was seen as a scientific and progressive activity (Gipps, 1999), regarded as an equitable form of assessment.

It is often argued that psychometric aspects of assessment have not altered much and are still visible in contemporary practices. For example, Crossouard (2010, p. 250) argues that assessment as a 'power of measurement' is embedded into our educational systems. The purposes of assessment tend to be narrow, the methods used generate limited data, the process has a lack of active and equal participation, and secrecy, reward and punishment remain the key concepts (Delandshere, 2001). It usually takes place after learning has been completed, being timetabled for the end of courses and organised in 'specially designated examination sites' (Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2000, p. 108). Furthermore, assessment processes tend to reflect a clear pattern: teachers design the tasks; learners replicate the tasks; teachers judge, mark and grade (Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2001). Thus, the views and practices of assessment tend to rest on the assumption that knowledge is static, monolithic and universal (Delandshere, 2001). From this perspective, assessment could be described as a 'measurement-driven enterprise', being underpinned by a long dominant post-positivist paradigm that is concerned with measuring traits and abilities and the belief that reality is an objective entity that exists independently and can be measured with proper tools and procedures (Lynch, 2001, p. 362).

Also, the concept of feedback has origins in behavioural theories, aiming to provide information on observable performance (Boud and Molloy, 2013). Feedback became used as an informative tool for influencing what students should do; it became synonymous with ‘telling’ as a one-way transmission of information from a teacher to a student (Boud and Molloy, 2013, p. 701). It could be argued that assessment was seen as ‘a technology developed by technicians or measurement experts’, existing separately from teaching and learning processes (Delandshere, 2001, p. 115). However, according to Knight (2002), this kind of technical understanding of assessment has a fundamental problem: assessment is about judgement, and it can never be as exact and accurate as measurement.

### ***Recent critique and a shift in theories and practice***

Transformation of assessment practices has been slow (Boud and Falchikov, 2007), but a shift in practices is taking place towards more learning-oriented assessment. Holroyd (2000) describes an increased emphasis on learning enhancement purposes of assessment, criterion-referenced assessment, constructive feedback and the greater involvement of students in assessment. In the late 1980s, standardised testing came under criticism and learning-oriented aspects of assessment gained attention (Madaus and O’Dwyer, 1999). Therefore, the past 20 years have showed a tendency to apply a much wider range of assessment methods in a more formative way that would also involve students into assessment process (Ecclestone *et al.*, 2010). This has brought a significant emphasis on the integration of assessment, instruction and learning (Dochy *et al.*, 2007) and the importance of feedback in assessment (Boud and Molloy, 2013). One could question if this shift in assessment might have been enforced by a neoliberal understanding of students as customers and self-governing subjects. The aspects of neoliberal governmentality and the tension between assessment as a technical and educational process will be explored later in this chapter.

Gipps (1999) argues that assessment-related changes have been caused by a paradigmatic shift in assessment: a shift from testing and measurement towards the concept of assessment for learning (McDowell, 2012). This paradigm is described by a belief in the ‘construction of knowing in a socio-cultural context’ (Madaus and O’Dwyer, 1999, p. 689). More specifically, this underpinning constructivist paradigm views learning as ‘a process of personal knowledge construction and meaning making’ (Gipps, 1999, p. 374). Assessment therefore needs to be diverse in order to examine student learning in depth

(Gipps, 1999). Measurement and objective testing would not be suitable for assessing students' active engagement in complex tasks (Crossouard, 2010).

As a result of this paradigmatic shift, summative assessment is now often interpreted negatively because of its connection with psychometric and behaviourist traditions. Many authors (i.e. Pryor and Crossouard, 2010; Ecclestone *et al.*, 2010) argue that the primary purpose of summative assessment is to confirm and record student performance and achievement. It sums up what students achieve, and it provides this information in a way that is usable for selection purposes (i.e. continuing education and employment) (Sambell, McDowell and Montgomery 2013). In contrast, formative assessment is underpinned by constructivist paradigms: it emphasises learning and teaching and assessment experiences of teachers and students with the overall aim to improve student learning (Torrance, 2012). Formative assessment has been described as dialogic and conversational, helping to engage students in the improvement of their own performance (Yorke, 2008).

Summative and formative assessment are often presented in opposition in scholarly discourses, where formative assessment is regarded as good and summative assessment as bad. In contemporary assessment pedagogy, there are several other theoretical developments that have tried to integrate summative aspects into social constructivist ideas of assessment. The paradigmatic shift towards constructivism has brought along a wave of new theories of assessment in which dominant is the discourse of learning-oriented assessment. Alternative terms that are often used to refer to learning-oriented assessment are 'assessment for learning' and 'assessment as a tool for learning' (Sambell, McDowell and Montgomery, 2013, p. 4). Above all, learning-oriented assessment is about the well-planned assessment tasks that aim to promote future learning (Knight, 2006). Learning-oriented assessment is underpinned by a belief that feedback is a crucial element of assessment (Torrance, 2012). According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006, p. 199), feedback should be used to 'empower students as self-regulated learners'.

Furthermore, self- and peer-assessment have become an important element in learner-oriented assessment. According to Tan (2007), self-assessment aims to develop students' ability to assess their own learning in order to have skills which are necessary for evaluating their work and learning outside university context. Peer-assessment can take many forms, and it is often described as taking place in the context of a group work (Falchikov, 2007). The main aim of peer-assessment is seen as students' involvement in

providing feedback and/or grades to their peers based on the criteria that they might have been involved in determining (Falchikov, 2007). Thus, the value of self- and peer-assessment is seen related to encouraging students to internalise academic standards and to guide themselves in their studies (Gibbs, 2006).

However, authors like Torrance (2012) and Dochy (2009) argue that all assessment has a formative but not essentially a positive impact. Thus, attention should be paid to the learning environment as a whole in order to support learning-oriented practices (Knight, 2006). Boud and Molloy (2013) argue that teachers in contemporary university contexts need to become designers and sustainers of learning environments, creating conditions in which students can become active. Social constructivist influences on assessment expect university teachers to change their view of themselves as assessors in order to support student learning. They need to become co-responsible for students' progress and for finding ways to support their development (Steinberg, 2008). As the concept of student empowerment through assessment has become a commonplace in discourse and scholarship on assessment in higher education (Patton, 2012), it is widely believed that assessment can support student learning if practised in formative ways. However, assessment involves clear elements of power and control (Barnett, 2007). Furthermore, assessment is even said to be an arena in education where the power issues are most evident (Taras, 2008). The following sections will explore these power relations in assessment.

## ***Power in assessment***

Reynolds and Trehan (2000, p. 268) argue that power relations exist between universities and students, where academics are seen as 'custodians of institution's rules and practices'. The teacher is therefore 'an institutional agent invested with the authority to make judgements about learners' (Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2000, p. 108). Students, on the other hand, are subject to the application of the expert knowledge that the academic as an assessor represents (Barrow, 2006). This power relationship - what Foucault would term sovereign power - between the assessor and assessed is probably the most visible form of power. This is particularly the case if the assessor abuses power associated with assessment by penalising students, whom they dislike, setting difficult examinations to cause a high failure rate or even giving hints or setting too easy tasks (Bandaranayake, 2011).

However, assessment also involves wider and perhaps less evident power relations. According to Crossouard (2010), assessment not only reflects learning and its outcomes, but has a powerful impact on shaping the learning that takes place. Therefore, assessment has a significant impact on student learning by directing what is important and by shaping students' confidence for future tasks (Boud and Falchikov, 2007). Many students use assessment as a key indicator that guides them in deciding what and how to study (McDowell, 2012, Dochy *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, 'assessment frames what students do' (Boud, 2007, p. 21). A student who failed may learn that s/he needs to change his/her behaviour to succeed or that s/he is dumb and should give up; a student receiving a positive outcome might learn to value him/herself, or to recognise a strategy that works for pleasing the assessor (Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2000). Less visible disciplinary forms of power - that operate based on norms - are fundamentally integrated into assessment: grades influence students' relationship with their learning and shape their self-value.

Becker, Geer and Hughes (1968) argue that grades are the main institutional valuable in the university. They see grades just as money in wider society: a measure of personal worth, both to oneself and others (Becker, Geer and Hughes, 1968). But assessment also has a function of 'gate-keeping in terms of enabling or restricting entry into a professional career' (Harman and McDowell, 2011, p. 50), judging whether students are suitable for a job or a credential (Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2000). Becker, Geer and Hughes vividly explain:

...a person who cannot 'make his grades' must, like a person who cannot earn a living, have something wrong with him, there must be a reason for this failure, whatever it is, it cannot speak well of him (Becker, Geer and Hughes, 1968, p. 117).

As assessment affects individuals' careers and also their feeling of their worth to themselves and to others, it is no surprise that students experience it as being extremely significant (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000). It is therefore evident that power in assessment not only operates in sovereign forms between an assessor and assessed, but also exists in less visible forms where assessment practices set norms and expectations and thereby shape students' behaviour in higher education and beyond.

### ***Power acting on assessed and assessors***

In line with the evidence of various forms of power in assessment, Foucault (1975, p. 184) sees examination as 'a normalising glaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify,



to classify and to punish'; it makes individuals visible and helps to differentiate and judge them. As a result, examination transforms students' subjectivity: it makes a student 'a describable, analysable object' (Foucault, 1975, p. 190). Furthermore, examination makes it possible to describe groups and calculate 'the gaps between individuals, their distribution in a given "population"' (Foucault, 1975, p. 190). According to Foucault (1975, p. 170), assessment can be seen as related to disciplinary technologies: assessment 'makes' individuals by regarding them both as objects and instruments of its exercise. This is especially as assessment applies rewards and makes it possible to attain higher positions, but also applies punishments and includes a possible loss of position (Foucault, 1975). Assessment from a Foucauldian perspective transforms students from unruly bodies into docile subjects (Patton, 2012). Teachers themselves are also subject to power and those who seek to confront the dominant perspectives of assessment may experience resistance and obstruction (Tan, 2004). Guided by Foucault (1975), I would argue that assessment in its very essence is a disciplinary technology that involves norms, rewards, punishments and other control mechanisms.

Based on the analysis above, it seems naive to believe that constructivist assessment theories highlighted earlier in this chapter can completely transform disciplinary power relations in assessment. Gipps (1999), and Reynolds and Trehan (2000) argue that constructivist forms of assessment do not always alter power relations or domination in the classroom. They might create an illusion of equality, but the simple exchange of (sovereign) power relations (tutor - student) with another characteristic to peer-assessment (student - student) does not bring equality (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000). Tan (2004, p. 660) argues that both students and staff bring their 'learned notions of behaviour and power relations' into the assessment situation. Individuals have status differences in the learning environment based on who they are in wider society, their age, gender, race and class (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000).

Furthermore, even if students are involved in assessment, the academic's power still remains crucial as 'the role of the tutor as final arbiter of assessment is often unchallenged' (Taras, 2008, p. 83). For example, a student's self-awarded marks are often considered to be valid if they match with the teacher's judgement (Tan, 2004). It could be also argued that if teachers try to transform students' positions in assessment, they face a danger of disciplining learners into their way of thinking (Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2000). Furthermore, Tan (2004) argues that self-assessment practices can promote self-

governance: making observation, surveillance and examination of oneself an accepted practice. The paradox is that by providing students with more autonomy in assessment, more is known about how students view themselves, and they can be subject to greater control: students' participation in assessment process may discipline rather than empower students (Tan, 2004). An attempt to create 'conditions for empowerment' can be seen as an unequal exercise of power (Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2001, p. 301). It could be argued that even if assessment has gone through several conceptual and paradigmatic transformations based on the societal changes, assessment still includes elements such as control, selection and gate-keeping.

### ***Issues of neoliberal governmentality in assessment***

According to Ball *et al.* (2012, p. 531), neoliberal influences in education reflect 'the end of the half-hearted and mostly unrealised welfare experiment in education' by replacing the discourses of equity with the discourses of utility. I would also argue that the discourses of excellence have their impact on neoliberal idea of higher education. Universities are becoming increasingly regulated through centralised performance indicators (Clegg and Smith, 2010), and the notion of excellence is now surrounding everything, including academic performances (Evans, 2011). It is therefore unsurprising that university teaching and assessment are now an object of policy (Clegg and Smith, 2010). This section explores neoliberal influences on assessment, and the ways assessment has started to operate as part of the neoliberal technologies of government.

Leach, Neutze and Zepke (2001, p. 298) argue that society-at-large expects graduates to meet specific 'assumed standards of knowledge, skills, and attitudes' which assessment practices need to assure. Furthermore, Knight (2002) explains that high-stake summative assessment data, grades and degree classifications are often required but also manipulated by the stakeholders. Employers' roles in assessment have also increased. Employers see grades as important because grades provide information about achievement and help to choose applicants for employment (Yorke, 2008). They may screen job applicants based on their degree classification but also based on the academic status of universities attended (Knight, 2002). Therefore, an institutional need for transparency about what students learn and what qualities they have after graduation might be explained by the increased societal focus on student employability and the needs of the labour market (Jankowski and

Provezis, 2014). Yorke (2008) argues that higher education institutions are now supposed to emphasise the development of student employability, which also means that the range of student performances that need to be assessed has increased and assessment is not framed by clear disciplinary areas. This reflects a utilitarian understanding of assessment that transforms the purposes of assessment. It is often unclear if assessment is an educational process taking place in an interaction between a teacher and a student or if it is an institutional technology - a standardised and formalised process as argued by Ball (2014, [interview]) in the opening of this chapter - that serves wider societal needs such as the labour market. It is therefore unsurprising that policies in assessment intensify and draw on a utilitarian understanding of assessment. Evans (2011, p. 216) argues that the terms 'education', 'learning', 'teaching', 'knowledge' and 'critique' rarely appear in assessment policies. Assessment discussions are now commonly dominated by the certification function (Boud and Falchikov, 2007), and the primary focus in assessment documents is characterised by terms such as measurement, outcomes and integrity (Boud, 2007).

Within this complex utilitarian context, assessment seems to have become a 'technique and procedure designed to direct the conduct of men' (Foucault, 1982, cited in Jankowski and Provezis, 2014, p. 479). Assessment makes universities and individuals govern themselves (Jankowski and Provezis, 2014). Assessment itself is not a mechanism of neoliberal governmentality, but how it is used becomes part of neoliberal governmentality and its structure (Jankowski and Provezis, 2014). As neoliberal governmentality shapes institutions and its subjects, the relationship between different parties in assessment might be transformed. For example, the assessment policy instruments are often developed from the perspective of policymakers rather than from the standpoint of those implementing the policies (Geven and Attard, 2012). This means that 'the conduct of the action' is directed from above and aims to have a direct one-way influence (Evans, 2011, p. 218); academics and students are expected to obey the regulations and to practise assessment as an institutionally standardised process.

Furthermore, institutional assessment procedures often disempower individual academics and students: the academic is silenced and the student is positioned as a performer (Evans, 2011). On the other hand, there is still evidence of teachers, peers and learners being positioned as direct agents in assessment process (Black and Wiliam, 2009), particularly in recent assessment policy discourses that expect academics and students to be active in monitoring their practices. This idea of being regulated but also regulating oneself

describes a neoliberal mode of government in which the techniques of domination and the self meet: on the one hand, academics' and students' behaviour in assessment is highly regulated and controlled by policy mechanisms and performance indicators; on the other hand, these techniques make them also govern their actions. They therefore become neoliberal agents with self-interest rather than active learners and teachers in its pedagogical meaning. Students are transformed into performers, like actors on a stage who want to progress towards the achievement of an award, and who like the academics, have limited capacity to exercise power (Evans, 2011).

### ***Neoliberal governmentality as it is operationalised through assessment***

Assessment as a neoliberal technology of government has been shaped and put into place via several policy developments. For example, Crook, Gross and Dymott (2006) argue that there has been a greater proceduralisation of student assessment. Universities are expected to be more professional in their use of assessment (Murphy, 2006). Consistent, fair and reliable marking is seen as vital, although difficult to achieve in a context of diminishing resources (Price, 2005). In terms of reforms, the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) (2009) states that students should be assessed by published criteria, regulations and procedures that are applied consistently. Furthermore, the European working group on the Quality Assurance of Student Assessment (established in 2007) concluded that the European Higher Education Area requires European quality assurance tools overseeing student assessment in order 'to support greater transparency, accountability, and comparability and consistency, relating to assessment practices and outcomes' (ENQA, 2008, p. 4).

This standardisation priority has resulted in increased use of criteria and anonymised marking in assessment. Boud and Molloy (2013) argue that there has been a shift towards making all required course work formally assessed. As a result of growing student numbers, marking loads have increased and greater formality practised (Bailey & Garner, 2010). Formality here is understood in relation to utilitarian discourses that expect assessment to be standardised and monitored through institutional regulations and procedures (i.e. standardised feedback forms, moderation procedures, complaint procedures), making assessment operate as a centrally coordinated institutional technology. According to Bloxham, Boyd and Orr (2011), the importance of assessment criteria has gained significant attention, reflecting a situation where criterion rather than norm referencing is prevailing. This kind of priority for fair treatment is also described by anonymised marking

that aims to reduce possible bias in respect of gender, ethnicity and other demographic characteristics (Yorke, 2008). However, assessment procedures do not often take into account that ‘unfairness may arise from treating unequals equally as much as from treating equals unequally’ (Stowell, 2004, p. 497). In addition, Herrington and Herrington (2006) argue that university policies and accountability procedures often limit teachers’ choice in choosing appropriate forms of assessment and make them conform to set standards. Furthermore, the overall discourse of ‘standards’ can be seen as articulating ‘a particular version and vision of what schooling is and should be – more, higher, better!’ (Ball *et al.*, 2012, p. 514).

In addition to standardisation, universities increasingly use outcomes-based assessment data for a wide range of purposes: addressing accreditation requirements, determining student readiness for further studies, evaluating programs, informing strategic planning etc (Liu, 2011). Learning outcomes are supposed to provide necessary information to employers who can understand based on the outcomes whether the learning undertaken by potential employees has equipped them with desired knowledge, skills and understanding (Geven and Attard, 2012). Outcomes-orientation is also related to warranting. Knight (2007, p. 72) defines warranting as ‘all the high-stakes processes of producing grade point averages, classifications and awards’. Warrants can be seen as the products (i.e. mark, grade, class) that transform assessment judgments into summaries of achievement (Knight and Yorke, 2008). Regarding outcome-based curricula, warrants are crucial for confirming that standards have been met (Knight and Yorke, 2008). Furthermore, employers, managers and graduate schools need warrants in order to make their selections and further governance decisions (Knight and Yorke, 2008).

However, outcomes-orientation has also received criticism. Knight (2007) argues that the predominant view of learning objectives cannot capture the complex achievements through simplified language of objectives. As a result of this outcomes-orientation and the aim to replace implicit model of academic standards with a model based on explicit outcomes, universities have difficulties in establishing ‘a coherent philosophy of assessment’ (Stowell, 2004, p. 501).

It could be argued that learning-oriented assessment in neoliberal contexts is strongly related to the demands of quality assurance (Asghar, 2012, 206). At the policy level, the working group on the Quality Assurance of Student Assessment (ENQA, 2008) argued that

quality assurance frameworks in assessment need to be developed in a way that do not obstruct the innovative development of assessment and that assessment should be designed and applied in such a way that supports student learning. Furthermore, ENQA (2009, p. 17) states that student assessment is one of the most important elements of higher education, and it should be ‘undertaken by people who understand the role of assessment in the progression of students towards the achievement of the knowledge and skills associated with their intended qualification’. As the student population in higher education has become more diverse, many higher education institutions have recognised the need to support a more diverse student population, to avoid a high dropout rates and to encourage excellent student satisfaction with teaching and assessment processes in order to ensure an institutional success in the global higher education market. Cook (2012) argues that high dropout is often associated with poor teaching, and an assessment environment that does not meet students’ expectations or needs.

However, institutional policy and economic constraints do not encourage academics to feel able to design assessment that supports learning (Asghar, 2012). Increasing student numbers require assessment to be more efficient, where examinations and multiple-choice tests are often practised without consideration of the impact on learning (Joughin, 2010). It could therefore be argued that understanding of assessment as a student-centred and educational process becomes secondary to assessment as a technical process that enables to govern educational processes and outcomes but also to make academics and students govern themselves. External pressures may cause assessment to fulfil primarily summative functions (Maclellan, 2004). Black and McCormick (2010) argue that summative assessment continues to be prevalent in higher education. Despite several decades of scholarly debate about formative assessment, a behaviourist and objectives-oriented assessment still emerges in practice (Torrance, 2012).

## ***Conclusion***

The literature suggests that power is an essential part of student assessment. While the aspects of discipline are not new in a relationship of an assessor and assessed, the issues of governmentality are more recent and complex, often related to standardisation and regularisation of assessment. These processes tend to turn assessment a technical process that can be institutionally managed and controlled as any other technology in the university.

I would also argue that diffuse power (balancing between orders and flexibility) characteristic to governmentality has not removed the risks of domination in assessment; rather, it has increased the complexity in the ways assessment can act on academics and students. It is not only students who feel constrained by assessment but also academics whose practices are monitored and managed.

Many recent developments in assessment are underpinned by the discourses of utility and excellence, helping to control academics and students in order to achieve student and employer satisfaction. Furthermore, these developments are often phrased in slogans such as ‘better feedback for students’ as argued by Ball (2014, [interview]) at the beginning of this chapter. Assessment has therefore become a technical process that can act as part of neoliberal technologies that govern institutions and academic populations but also make individuals govern themselves; particularly through standardised assessment methods, feedback and learning outcomes.

This research aims to trace both: the traditional issues of discipline and neoliberal governmentality in assessment. The ways assessment is constructed and made to operate in the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University will be explored in Part IV after the methodological choices of this research have been introduced and explained in Part III.

## **PART III: METHODOLOGY**



## **Chapter 6: Applying a Foucauldian framework to empirical research: a case of critical education policy orientation**

According to Mason (2002), every empirical study should be based on a logical methodological strategy by which the researcher addresses research questions. When developing a strategy, one needs to be aware of different ways of approaching research questions and to question how the chosen strategy helps one to remain ontologically consistent (Mason, 2002). Ontological consistency means that the data derived from different sources are guided by ‘similar, complementary or comparable assumptions about the nature of social entities and phenomena’ (Mason, 2002, p. 35). Thus, any methodological strategy requires ‘skills, assumptions, enactments, and material practices that researchers-as-methodological-bricoleurs use when they move from a paradigm and a research design to the collection of empirical materials’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 379).

This research acknowledges that Foucault did not provide clear strategies to guide contemporary researchers in their methodological choices. Adopting a Foucauldian framework does not suggest adopting a specific methodology but rather an approach that focuses on a certain type of phenomena and research questions (Kendall and Wickham, 2007). Kendall and Wickham (2007, pp. 132-133) argue that a study guided by Foucault is most often problem-based and focused on ‘how-questions’, aiming to put ‘together the various pieces of the puzzle’ in order to understand the problem or issue under exploration. It is therefore the researcher’s responsibility to ensure that the methodological approach is well developed and appropriate. This chapter will introduce a Foucauldian framework that is underpinned by a critical education policy orientation and that applies qualitative research methods.

### ***Paradigmatic context and critical education policy orientation***

As argued earlier in this thesis, Foucault did not like to be classified with any paradigmatic school, and he tended to avoid discussing the issues of epistemology and ontology. However, his understanding of reality and truth becomes evident from his writing.

From a Foucauldian perspective, nothing exists ‘outside’ of society and mutually we in society have built up ‘our ivory tower of rationality’ (Hawes, 1993, p. 14). Reality is therefore contextual; it depends on time and place. Truth for Foucault (1976, p. 131) is also ‘a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint’. As Ball (2015, p. 4) interprets it: ‘nothing is true that is not the product of power’. Graham (2011, p. 666) argues that a Foucauldian research does not stand for the belief that truth does not exist; rather, it argues that ‘truth is always contingent and subject to scrutiny’. Furthermore, truth is understood as a ‘discursive construction’, where different regimes of knowledge decide what is regarded as true and false (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 13). According to Foucault, every society has its

...general politics of truth - that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 1976, p. 131).

Foucault’s understanding of truth has similarities with Bourdieu’s concept of doxa – ‘an unquestionable orthodoxy that operates as if it were the objective truth’ (Chopra, 2003, p. 419). Truth therefore does not require philosophical exploration grounded in particular paradigms but rather a historical and sociological approach.

In contemporary contexts, Foucault’s work can be still seen in relation to several paradigms that guide social science researchers in putting Foucauldian ideas into practice. His work today is most often described as being postmodern. Postmodern philosophy rejects totalising narratives and universal concepts, and emphasises ‘specific contextual power relations by observing the processes of meaning-making that function within specific situations’ (Powers, 2007, p. 24). While operating mainly in this postmodern paradigm, researchers applying Foucauldian theories seem to include additional elements from other paradigmatic schools, such as structuralism, critical theory and social constructivism. Structuralism focuses on the idea that ‘underneath the visible, directly accessible text, lays a slightly displaced invisible text that controls the questions and answers posed by the visible text’ (Andersen, 2003, p. 2). This structuralist influence might explain Foucault’s main interest in discourse and his decision to reject interpretivism and phenomenology. Linked to structuralism, critical theory analyses how ‘groups of people

exist in relation to the historically based dominant ideologies that structure their experience’ (Powers, 2007, p. 19).

The complex paradigmatic underpinning in Foucault’s work creates a specific type of interest in power and discourse. It emphasises discourse analysis as a methodological way to explore of how discourses (texts and talk) form the social world (Mason, 2002). A Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

The Foucauldian framework applied in this study relates to a broader methodological strategy: a strategy that combines Foucault’s theoretical concepts (i.e. subject, discipline, governmentality, discourse) with critical education policy orientation. Critical education policy orientation enables an exploration of subjectification processes in a policy context.

### ***Critical education policy orientation***

According to Ball (1997, p. 264), education policy research takes place in ‘a variety of stances, styles and preoccupations’. Critical education policy orientation in the UK, Australia and New Zealand in particular has been rooted in diverse research traditions. It includes critical ethnography of policy trajectories (i.e. Ball, Bowe, Whitty, Edwards, Gerwitz), various strands of cultural Marxism and critical theory (i.e. Prutiny, Ozga, Codd, Lingard), new versions of Marxist political theory (i.e. Dale), state-centred comparative approaches (i.e. Green, Neave), and elaborations of French poststructuralist perspectives along with combinations of Marxism and critical theory (i.e. Marshall, Peters, Pongratz, Linblad, Olssen, Usher, Edwards) (Simons, Olssen and Peters, 2009a). Critical education policy orientation is interested in power, politics and social regulation, confronting the crisis of the welfare state that emerged in the early 1980s (Simons, Olssen and Peters, 2009a). Studies in this field are driven by social and educational concerns posed by globalisation, neoliberalism and managerialism, often framed by state theory, critical discourse analysis, post-colonial theory, governmentality and feminist policy analysis (Simons, Olssen and Peters, 2009b).

Critical education policy orientation distances itself from policy research that aims to improve existing policies, to evaluate programmes or to develop further management procedures (Simon, Olssen & Peters, 2009a). Critical scholars explain education policy as ‘a general term’ that addresses themes of power, government, politics and policies shaping

education (Simons, Olssen and Peters, 2009a, p. 16): political, cultural and economic processes and meanings are embedded in policy texts waiting to be explored (Olssen, Codd, O'Neill, 2004). Ball (2008) explains that policy should be treated as a process that is ongoing, unstable and interactional rather than an instrumental product, an object or an outcome. He sees policies as discursive strategies in their various forms – texts, events, artefacts, practices – that shape wider social processes such as the purposes of schooling or the construction of 'the teacher' and 'the student' (Ball, 2015b, p. 3). Furthermore, policy is always in a process of 'becoming'; it is being reviewed and revised but also sometimes forgotten (Maguire, Braun and Ball, 2015, p. 487). This broad understanding of education policy as a discursive construction that includes power relations and shapes practices reflects my understanding of assessment policy and its operation in this research.

The ways policies are explored through critical education policy orientation, however, depend on theoretical choices. According to Ball (1997, p. 269), theory provides 'the possibility of a different language' from that of policymakers or of common practices, traditions or dogmas. This tends to be a reason why critical orientation often has a theoretical lens facilitating analysis (Simons, Olssen and Peters, 2009b). A critical policy orientation combined with a Foucauldian lens in this research can be seen as a type of 'Foucauldian curiosity' that is not so much knowledge-oriented than about 'care', demonstrating a concern for the present and a desire to 'live the present otherwise' (Foucault, 1980, cited in Simons, Olssen and Peters, 2009c, p. xi). This approach can help to reveal practices, techniques and problems that are taken for granted and that operate in a hidden way (Simons, Olssen and Peters, 2009b). It facilitates an understanding of how the interplay between discourse and material practices produces and organises culture, subjectivity and knowledge (Ball, 2015b). Foucault's earlier work helps to understand how 'policy does us' (Ball, 2015b, p. 2), and his later work raises the importance of human agency and enactment. Maguire, Braun and Ball (2015, p. 486) highlight the importance of policy enactment by defining it as 'a process of social, cultural and emotional construction and interpretation'. Therefore, policy analysis underpinned by a critical orientation and a Foucauldian theorisation offers an opportunity to explore not only the ways assessment policy acts on subjects but also how various subjects enact, respond to and resist the policy.

## ***Qualitative research approach***

According to Mason (2002), qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, flexible and fluid, mostly data-driven and context-sensitive. It thereby provides enough flexibility for working with complex Foucauldian concepts. Qualitative research has been criticised for subjectivity, for being difficult to replicate or to generalise, and possibly for lacking transparency (Bryman, 2004). However, it still offers researchers necessary procedural guidance to lead the research process. The stages outlined by Bryman (2004) guide this study:

1. formulating general research question(s)
2. selecting relevant site(s) and subjects
3. collecting relevant data
4. interpreting the data
5. conceptualising and theorising
6. writing up conclusions.

The rest of the chapter will introduce the procedures related to data collection and interpretation.

### ***Research context***

This research involves two universities - the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University - and a complex sample of policy documents, academics, students and experts. Foucault's concept of rationality is always contextual and related to local regimes of truth (Foucault, 1988), so involvement of different universities but also of documentary and human data was important for exploring local discourses of assessment policy and practice. Taking into account the scope of a PhD research, however, two universities with different historical, social and political background were chosen. These universities are not representative of the higher education sector in Europe, but they illustrate the processes in these specific institutions.

The University of Glasgow was founded in 1451, and it is the fourth oldest university in the English-speaking world. It has four colleges: the College of Arts; the College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences; the College of Science and Engineering and the College of Social Sciences. There are approximately 25 000 students studying at

undergraduate and postgraduate level from 120 countries worldwide (University of Glasgow, n.d. a). The university has about 7000 staff members, including 3000 academics (University of Glasgow, n.d. b)<sup>8</sup>. The university's mission is 'to undertake world leading research and to provide an intellectually stimulating learning environment that benefits culture, society and the economy' (University of Glasgow, 2010).

Tallinn University was founded in 2005 as a result of uniting several higher education institutions in Tallinn. It is the third biggest university in Estonia, and it is located in the capital, the largest city of Estonia. The university has 19 disciplinary-based institutes and four regional colleges. The main disciplinary areas are the Arts and Humanities, Health and Social Care, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences (Tallinn University, n.d. a). There are approximately 9500 students studying at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, of which 5.5% are full-time EU or international students. The university has 923 members of staff, including 453 academics (Tallinn University, 2014)<sup>9</sup>. The university's mission is 'to support the sustainable development of Estonia through high quality research and study, education of intellectuals, public discussions and promotion of academic partnership' (Tallinn University n.d. b).

### ***Policy documents***

Document analysis enables investigation of institutional perspectives on student assessment. In this research, policy documents are approached as discursive constructs that exist in diverse formats and in dynamic networks. Mason (2002) argues that documents are constructed in particular contexts by particular people, with purposes and consequences, and therefore they relate to some aspects of social world. Similarly, Prior (2008) explains that documents should not be seen as static things existing in another realm but as functioning in networks and influencing interactions and behaviours. Documents for analysis need to be chosen carefully and their relevance and quality assessed based on such criteria as authenticity, credibility and representativeness (Bryman, 2004). The researcher needs also to be able to seek out what is relevant from a mass, while recognising different textual genres that help to interpret documents (Mason, 2002).

This study involves institutional documents related to student assessment (see Table 2). All documents are seen as existing in networks, depending on each other and functioning

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<sup>8</sup> Figures are based on the data from March 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Figures are based on the data from December 2014.

together in order to create a specific regime of truth in assessment. The chosen documents are in digitalised format, and they are available in English on the websites of the two universities.

**Table 2. Sample of documents**

	<b>University of Glasgow</b>	<b>Tallinn University</b>
<b>Policy and regulatory documents</b>	Code of Assessment (2013-2014) Assessment Policy (2011)	Study Regulation (2012)
<b>Guidance documents</b>	Guide to the Code of Assessment (2013-2014) Guidance on Moderation and Second Marking (2011)	Exams and Pass-Fail Tests
<b>Strategic documents</b>	Learning and Teaching Strategy 2011-2015 (2011)	Internationalisation Strategy of Tallinn University 2008-2015 Research and Development Strategy for 2012-2016
	<i>For accessing the documents see Senate Office (n.d. a) and Senate Office (n.d. b).</i>	<i>For accessing the documents see Tallinn University (n.d. d) and Tallinn University Senate (2008, 2012, 2013).</i>

The policies and regulations represent the institutional discourses regarding the ways assessment practices are governed in the two universities. The guidance documents reflect the documents that academics and students rely on, and the strategic documents enable an exploration of wider policy discourses. In order to analyse the background of the documents, the study conducted interviews with policymakers from the two universities (introduced in more detail in next section).

***Participants: academics, graduate teaching assistant, students, experts***

This research includes the perspectives of academics, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and students from the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University. It also includes institutional policymakers who have been involved in developing assessment policies and regulations in these universities. In addition, conversations were carried out with internationally acknowledged academics who are active in researching neoliberalism in

higher education. Participants were selected for inclusion based on purposive sampling technique (Bryman, 2004; Cohen *et al.*, 2012).

According to Bryman (2004, pp. 333-334), purposive sampling aims to establish ‘a good correspondence between research questions and sampling’, reflecting a technique in which the researcher chooses to study people and documents that are particularly relevant to the research questions. Furthermore, purposive sampling aims to increase the variation in the sample and to include various sides of the research phenomenon (Gobo, 2007). The study applied snowball sampling as necessary during the research process to recruit new subjects based on the recommendation of existing participants (Gobo, 2007).

An invitation to interviews was sent via email to 18 academics in the University of Glasgow, of whom 10 academics agreed to take part in this research. Focus group participants – less experienced academics in Glasgow - were self-recruited via staff mailing lists. They tended to have less than 5 years of academic work experience, and they had recently studied on the two-year, university-wide Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice programme. This study was interested in exploring how work experience and institutional support might influence their understanding of assessment policy and practice. As there is no similar programme in Tallinn University, the study did not include separate focus groups with less experienced academics. The academics from Tallinn University were recruited via e-mail contact with 12 academics from different disciplines and with different academics position and experience<sup>10</sup>. Ten academics agreed to take part in the study. The interviews were conducted in Estonian and translated into English before analysis was carried out.

This research included GTAs only from the University of Glasgow. While PhD students in Tallinn University might have some teaching opportunities through apprenticeships and visiting lectures, there is no formalised role of a GTA in this university. The participants were self-recruited via GTA mailing lists but also by snowball sampling techniques; the mailing lists were not efficient in terms of recruiting participants, thus the snowballing turned into a main sampling technique. Several participants invited their fellow GTAs to take part in the focus group. Therefore, the sample is not representative and includes more participants from the Social Sciences and the Arts than other disciplinary areas. However,

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<sup>10</sup> The ETIS (Estonian Research Portal) was used to gather information about work experience of possible participants. Available at: <https://www.etis.ee/portal/portaal/isikud.aspx>



the rich data created through the focus groups and presented in Chapter 11 indicates that the sample was sufficient to provide meaningful insights into the ways participants experience the changing context of higher education, the assessment processes and their own positions as GTAs.

Table 3 describes a sample of academics and GTAs interviewed. A more detailed overview of participating academics and GTAs will be provided in Chapters 9 to 11.

**Table 3. Sample of academics and GTAs (figures)**

	<b>University of Glasgow</b>	<b>Tallinn University</b>
Number of interviewees	10 academics (interviews) 6 academics (2 focus groups) 9 GTAs (2 focus groups)	10 academics (interviews)
Discipline	Representation of different disciplines	
Position	Representation of university teachers, lecturers, professors ( <i>not applicable for GTAs</i> )	
Work Experience	Representation of different working experience	
Gender	Balance between male and female participants	

In terms of student recruitment, all 17 heads of studies listed at Tallinn University website and the student union were emailed about the focus groups and asked to forward the invitation to student mailing lists and/or to suggest possible research participants. The students were mostly selected by the limited number of heads of studies. Therefore, the sample cannot be seen being representative; rather, it includes more postgraduate students but also more students from the disciplinary areas of Education and Natural Sciences. It might be also the case that the students selected by the heads of studies were high performing students. In order to ensure the participation of all volunteers, two focus groups were held; one was significantly larger than the other and included students from various study levels. The student recruitment in Tallinn University took three weeks.

As there is a large number of degree programmes and programme leaders in the University of Glasgow, it was also more difficult to identify gatekeepers who could reach students from a variety of backgrounds. Furthermore, the ethical restrictions set by the College of

Social Sciences Ethics Committee did not allow me to use student mailing lists. Therefore, a number of alternative techniques were applied:

- an email was sent to 25 undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives (see SRC, n.d. a)
- an email was sent to 24 student clubs (see SRC, n.d. b)
- 60 posters were placed around the main campus
- an advertisement was sent to the Student Voice website<sup>11</sup>.

As these techniques resulted in no interest, an ethics amendment was submitted. It might have been that during the first recruitment period (February – June, 2014), students were highly focused on their studies and did not have time for additional commitments. However, it might also be the case that students in the University of Glasgow are used to receiving (financial) rewards for their participation. In contrast to other disciplinary areas (i.e. Psychology, Medicine), this research did not offer any payment or gift vouchers to participants. The second stage of sampling, however, included targeted sampling. The students from the Postgraduate Diploma in Education programme and the Fundamentals of Education course were contacted. As these students have a diverse educational background but also some interest in educational topics, they were considered to be a more diverse sample for this research than students from most other degree programmes/courses. The student recruitment in the University of Glasgow took significantly longer: ten months.

Table 4 provides an overview of students interviewed. A more detailed overview of student profiles will be provided in Chapter 12.

**Table 4. Sample of students (figures)**

	<b>University of Glasgow</b>	<b>Tallinn University</b>
Number of interviewees	5 students (1 UG and 1 PG focus group)	10 students (1 mixed and 1 PG focus group)
Discipline	Representation of different disciplines (less characteristic to Glasgow)	
Study level	Undergraduate, postgraduate	
Gender	Balance between male and female students	

<sup>11</sup> Student Voice is a university-wide forum that enables student interaction on various university-related topics.

The additional sample includes four institutional policymakers – three from Glasgow and one from Tallinn - who have been involved in developing assessment policies and regulations in their university. These policymakers were contacted and asked for an interview on assessment policy-making in their university (see Appendix 8). For their anonymity, the thesis does not provide any overview of their profiles. Their comments, however, will be presented in Chapter 8 on policy analysis.

Furthermore, the expert sample includes conversations with internationally acknowledged academics whose work has been significant in the field of education policy and neoliberalism (see Appendix 12). Five academics were contacted via email and three agreed to take part and to be named in this study (see Table 5). These academics were invited to have a face-to-face interview, Skype interview or an e-mail conversation depending on their availability. Their comments are seen as an entrance to discussing the research findings, and therefore their comments are mostly presented in Part IV and V of this thesis.

**Table 5. Sample of experts in higher education research**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Academic Unit</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Conversation form</b>
Prof Stephen J. Ball	Institution of Education	University of London UK	Skype interview
Professor Mark Olssen	School of Politics	University of Surrey, UK	Face-to-face interview
Prof Bronwyn Davies	Independent scholar	Australia	E-mail conversation

The core aim of complex sampling presented above is to maximise variation of discourses related to assessment policy and practice in the two universities.

## ***Data collection methods: interview and focus group***

Mason (2002, p. 52) argues that a ‘method’ in qualitative research means more than ‘a practical technique or procedure for gaining data’, and it includes a data generation process that is ‘intellectual, analytical and interpretive’. Furthermore, the integration of different methods can be often applied in order to explore different parts of phenomenon or to analyse something in greater depth (Mason, 2002). This section will introduce the data collection methods – interviews and focus groups – that were applied to interact with academics, GTAs, students and policymakers in this study.

### ***Interviews***

In this research, the interview method was applied to interact with academics and experts, and the method was mainly guided by Tanggaard’s (2007, 2009), Kvale’s (2006) and Brinkmann’s (2007) work. Tanggaard (2007, p. 160) describes interviews as ‘discourses crossing swords’: processes where negotiation of meaning takes place. Her approach is often described as a Foucault-inspired way of applying qualitative interviewing (Kvale, 2006). In order to balance Tanggaard’s view, the work of Kvale (2006) and Brinkmann (2007) was incorporated into my understanding of interview processes. Brinkmann (2007) argues that Roger’s humanistic perspective on interviews has been influential in suggesting a non-directive approach to interviewing that aims to capture people’s experiences, narratives, beliefs, attitudes. However, I agree with Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) that an interview is never a conversation between equal partners but involves a power asymmetry between researcher and participant: the researcher defines and controls the interview situation. Kvale (2006) argues that the interviewer upholds a monopoly of dialogue and interpretation. S/he defines the situation, chooses the topics of the conversation and controls the course of the interview (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In addition, as it is the interviewer who seeks understanding, the whole setting could be seen as serving the ‘interviewer’s knowledge interest’ (Kvale, 2006, p. 483). Thus, the idea of interview as dialogue is rather ‘an illusion of mutual interest in a conversation, which in actuality takes place for the purpose of just the one part – the interviewer’ (Kvale, 2006, p. 483).

However, as power is not static and fixed (particularly in a Foucauldian sense) it can shift between the interviewer and the interviewed (Alex and Hammarstrom, 2008). These shifts are often related to differences in age, gender, body, ethnicity, ideology and education that ascribe certain authority to participants (Alex and Hammarstrom, 2008). Furthermore,

Tanggaard (2009) argues that each interviewee creates a polyphonic multi-voiced knowledge about his/her personal and social life. The interviewer also creates knowledge about oneself: therefore, the interview situation can be seen as a Socratic dialogue, where questioning and justifying what both the interviewee and interviewer believe becomes essential (Brinkmann, 2007). Thus, an interview becomes polyphonic, and the language people use is not neutral but is embedded in social discourses that constantly cross each other (Tanggaard, 2009). From this perspective, the interview makes it possible to explore and analyse a variety of discourses that the participants apply when producing their narratives (Tanggaard, 2009).

Tanggaard's (2007, 2009) approach opposes the phenomenological and narrative approaches to interviewing. She argues that it is not the inner self of the interviewee that emerges in an interview situation but competing discourses: 'sometimes colliding and sometimes cross-fertilizing discourses in human interaction' (Tanggaard, 2007, p. 161). Each personal narrative produced in an interview should be seen in the 'wider structures of discourse and power' (Tanggaard, 2009, p. 1504).

I would therefore argue that the interview method in this study was approached as negotiation of meaning and power rather than a humanistic dialogue. I agree with Tanggaard (2007) that an interview represents a context of negotiating meaning and conflicting views. It enables exploration of different discourses that research participants are influenced by and which they express in the interview situations. However, this understanding of interviews also raises questions about the ethical representation of data that will be explored later in this chapter.

### ***Focus groups***

The focus group method was used with students, GTAs and early career academics. Guided by Morgan (1996) and Hollander (2004), I acknowledge that focus groups can be challenging and resource consuming, but they also create data that is both rich in qualitative information and social dynamics.

Focus groups, like other qualitative methods, are applied across a wide range of different disciplines (Morgan, 1996), particularly in the social sciences (Smithson, 2000). The focus group is approached as a unique method that is more than a sum of individual interviews. Morgan (1996, p. 130) defines the focus group as a research method 'that collects data

through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher'. He argues that the researcher guides discussion and the interaction is a source of data (Morgan, 1996). Thus, a researcher can be seen as a 'moderator', whose main role is to keep the participants focused on a particular topic (Frey and Fontana, 1993, p. 30). Furthermore, an effective moderator is somebody who creates an open and tolerant atmosphere for participants to share their views (Morgan and Krueger, 1993).

Hollander (2004) argues that focus groups should be seen not as instruments for collecting data about individual experiences, thoughts or feelings but as research sites making it possible to observe social interaction. Similarly, Albrecht, Johnson and Walther (1993, p. 51) explain focus groups as events that 'have a life of their own', occurring in circumstances, where the processes of interpersonal communication have key importance. From this perspective, the focus group method could be seen as a unique way of producing data that any other method would not be able to create: the social context encourages participants to query and explain themselves to each other (Morgan, 1996).

According to Hollander (2004), the social context in focus groups can be understood as relationships among the participants and between the participants and the moderator, as well as the larger social structures that influence discussion. Social interaction in focus groups can often include processes of domination, construction of the *Other*, tendencies toward normative discourse, and conflicts and arguments (Smithson, 2000). Furthermore, the relative positions of the participants in status hierarchies (i.e. gender, race, age, sexual identity, social class, professional status) have a crucial impact on focus group discussion (Hollander, 2004). For example, Litosseliti (2003) argues that women tend to interrupt conversation less than men in mixed-sex groups, and Hollander (2004) explains that the first person to speak at length after the introductory part of focus group sets the tone and direction for the focus group. However, common social processes such as conformity, groupthink or social desirability pressures should not be seen destructive in focus group; rather, these processes are data that reflect elements of everyday interactions (Hollander, 2004). It could be argued that the focus group method provides an insight not only into multiple and different views but also into group dynamics (Litosseliti, 2003).

Just as any other research method should be chosen, planned and applied carefully, the use of focus groups, their structure and formation needs to be well planned. It has been argued that focus groups should include people with certain common characteristics rather than

aiming for diversity (Litosseliti, 2003). This is seen as important for facilitating group discussion (Morgan, 1996, p. 143). However, even if the group is planned to be homogeneous, each focus group is still unique (Litosseliti, 2003). No matter how well the focus groups are planned and moderated, the data created cannot be seen generalisable or representative, but rather illustrating particular social phenomena (Litosseliti, 2003). Similarly, Smithson (2000, p. 112) argues that the data produced by the focus group method should not be seen as 'wrong or right' or 'accurate or inaccurate', but as 'products of those contexts'. The focus group method is a challenging and complex way of studying social phenomena. However, this social essence helps to create distinctive data: discourse that is underpinned by group dynamics, power relations and social norms. Furthermore, the method offers a supportive and social context for discussion that might be more familiar to students, GTAs and early career academics than that of individual interviews.

### ***Ethical processes***

Like Cohen *et al.* (2012), I believe that every researcher needs to take into account the effects of the research on participants and to develop their own personal code of ethical practice. This also means that ethical principles are not absolute, but they need to be interpreted in the light of a particular research context (Cohen, *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, Birch *et al.* (2012, p. 1) argue that qualitative research can often be described by fluidity and inductive uncertainty which do not align with static and highly formalised ethical principles. The researcher needs to remain reflexive and sensitive to ethical dilemmas, as unforeseen events can cause a high number of ethical questions (Brooks, *et al.*, 2014). The most common ethical processes concerning qualitative research are related to the principles of data protection, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity (Birch, *et al.*, 2012; Cohen, *et al.*, 2012; Ryen, 2011). When describing my own code of ethical practice, I would describe my role as a researcher as being to make the participants' voices heard without forcing data to fit with the theoretical framework: this reflects my approach to ethical representation of data. It has been challenging, as coming from a Foucauldian perspective, I am aware of my criticism of neoliberalism. In order to balance my own assumptions, I encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences and understanding of higher education, assessment policy and practice and their experiences of being assessor or assessed (see Appendices 8-11). I would also like to note that the interview/focus group questions did not introduce the theme of neoliberalism. In order to balance by own values and value positions (Brooks, *et al.*, 2014), I tried to remain as neutral as possible in the interview situations. Any reference to neoliberalism presented in Part IV has been brought

up by the participants themselves. Furthermore, in order to let the discourses ‘speak’ before proposing any conclusive statements, I will present a high number of participants’ quotes in Part IV.

In addition to careful data collection and ethical interpretation, care has been taken to ensure the voluntary participation of interviewees and to protect their anonymity; pseudonyms have been selected randomly, reflecting only the participants’ sex. The academics received a transcript of their interview, and they were given an opportunity to remove or correct any parts of the transcript. I decided not to send the focus group transcript to the participants, as this might have provided them with a written evidence of what other participants said during the discussion. The study therefore applied ethical practice when engaging with participants: research participants were informed about the nature of the research, and they were provided with a right to withdraw at any time (Ryen, 2011).

The methodological framework and ethical practice were approved by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee, and the plain language statement (see Appendix 3) and consent form (see Appendix 4) were used to inform participants about their rights and voluntary participation in the study. The statement and consent form were modified depending on the participant group: academics, students, GTAs, policymakers. These were also translated into Estonian for the participants in Tallinn University. The plan to interview academics in the University of Glasgow gained additional permissions from the heads of colleges. Apart from the College of Science and Engineering, I was allowed to contact academics directly. This has also resulted in only one participant from the disciplinary area of the Science and Engineering. Permission to contact students was gained from the Clerk of Senate. Research in Tallinn University did not require any institutional permission, but in terms of good practice, I informed the Vice-Rector for Research and gained her written support.

## ***Conclusion***

A Foucauldian understanding of reality and truth along with critical education policy orientation makes it possible to approach assessment policy and practice as being discursive, contextual and enacted differently at the individual level. The purposive



sampling allows me to draw on various documents and subjects involved in assessment and to explore the ways assessment policy and practice have been discursively constructed in the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University. Furthermore, the interviews and focus groups are seen helpful methods for gaining insight into the participants' experiences of assessment as it might be shaped by various discourses.

The involvement of various participants through interviews and focus groups has also made me carefully consider research ethics. I am conscious (and anxious) of possible consequences the participants' discourses – particularly their criticism towards their institutions - could have on their career or studies (i.e. weakening personal/collegial relations; warnings for ignoring policy or even dismissal). For the sake of protecting participants' anonymity, I tend to present minimum details about their profiles throughout the Part IV. The ways the research data from documents, interviews and focus groups is approached and analysed will be the focus of the next chapter on discourse analysis.

## Chapter 7: Analytic framework of discourse analysis

The term discourse in contemporary vocabulary stands for ‘an exchange of ideas’ (Stahl, 2004, p. 4329). In scholarly writing, however, discourse is mainly associated with the field of linguistics in which the concept refers ‘to a group of sentences, which could be a conversation, a paragraph, or a speech’, and where discourse analysis is understood as a study of relationships within and among these discursive units (Fendler, 2010, p. 35). Despite the linguistic background, discourse and discourse analysis are not only colloquial or linguistic properties, but they can be used in many other disciplines. In cultural and communication studies, for example, discourse can mean ‘a system of reasoning, an "ism", such as "the discourse of communism" or "the discourse of capitalism"' (Fendler, 2010, p. 35). This brings in a much wider and sociological meaning of discourse that applies not only to language-related fields but also to social sciences. Foucault’s theories have had a significant impact on understanding relationships between discourse and social action (Sharp and Richardson, 2001) and on the overall use of discourse analysis in social sciences and humanities (Fairclough, 1992). Thus, discourse and discourse analysis have become flexible concepts and how a researcher decides to approach them is often dependent on one’s epistemological position (Graham, 2011).

This chapter explores a Foucauldian understanding of discourse, and it creates a framework of discourse analysis. The chapter makes use of Foucault’s work and that of other influential scholars, particularly Norman Fairclough, who has developed Foucault’s ideas further in this area. The chapter starts with an overview of discourse in Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical works, and it continues with an exploration of Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis.

### ***Discourse***

Foucault’s earlier work on archaeology was focused on analysing discourse and developing a systematic understanding of its operation. In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1969, p. 131) described discourse as ‘a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation’ and are underpinned by ‘a group of conditions of

existence that can be defined'. The underpinning system of discourse includes boundaries of discourses, 'their rules of formation [and] their conditions of existence' (Foucault, 1972, p. 236). Foucault (1972) also emphasised the plurality of discourses. He stressed the importance of understanding discourses 'as discontinuous practices, which cross each other, are sometimes juxtaposed with one another, but can just as well exclude or be unaware of each other' (Foucault, 1970, p. 67). By emphasising plurality and discontinuity, 'Foucault tries to show the lack of rationality of discourses and to demonstrate their character as events rather than continuous developments' (Stahl, 2004, p. 4330). As a result of Foucault's archaeological work, most Foucauldian approaches define discourse 'as relatively rule-bound sets of statements which impose limits on what gives meaning' (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 13). These approaches focus on statements, and they aim to trace back the conditions and functions of these statements.

Furthermore, Foucault did not believe that discourses could be re-created by one person but explained discourses as 'the product of collective thoughts and actions' (Fendler, 2010, p. 36). A Foucauldian discourse as a practice is located in social areas, and it belongs to collectives rather than to individuals (Diaz-Bone *et al.*, 2008). Thus, discourse in a Foucauldian perspective is not simply a communicative exchange, dialogue or monologue (Diaz-Bone *et al.*, 2008) but a complex entity that expands to the fields of ideology, strategy, language and practice. Discourse is influenced by power relations when being reproduced and transformed in particular practices (Sharp and Richardson, 2001). As Foucault's shift to genealogy signifies 'a decentring of discourse' in which discourse becomes secondary to systems of power (Fairclough, 1992, p. 49), it appears to enhance his earlier work on systems of discourse. Foucault's archaeological and genealogical work together provide a ground for understanding discourse from both its structural and social perspectives: approaching discourse as a group of statements that functions as a social practice.

### ***Complexity of discourse***

Foucault addressed various complexities around discourses. He states that discourse belongs to 'the orders of law': the production of discourse is controlled and organised by specific procedures, barriers and limits (Foucault, 1970, p. 51). These laws 'sort and filter discourses; they make certain kinds of knowledge accessible to us and other knowledge inaccessible' (Fendler, 2010, p. 37). Therefore, discourse never consists of one statement, text, action or source, but the same discourse and a way of thinking - an episteme - appears

across a variety of texts and institutions (Hall, 2001). Furthermore, people cannot say anything they want in any circumstances (Foucault, 1970); rather, the speech and text are mostly shaped by what is acceptable to say in specific settings. Danaher, Schirato and Webb (2000, p. 31) illustrate this idea by arguing that discourses are like windows, which allow people 'to make sense of, and, "see" things'. Discourses affect how people think and see the world (Fendler, 2010), and even if subjects produce texts, they are 'operating within the limits of episteme: the regime of truth of a particular period and culture' (Hall, 2001, p. 79).

In terms of further complexities, Foucault (1970, p. 59) refers to a discipline (system of knowledge) as 'a domain of objects, a set of methods, a corpus of propositions considered to be true, a play of rules and definitions, of techniques and instruments'. The core function of a discipline is to create a truth-system that can be used by anyone, without their meaning or validity being linked to any specific inventor (Foucault, 1970). Disciplines control the production of discourse by recognising true and false propositions and pushing back all knowledge beyond its margins (Foucault, 1970). Therefore, the strongest discourses are those that have grounded themselves on 'the natural, the sincere, the scientific', which is believed to be true and reasonable (Hook, 2001, p. 524) in contemporary society.

However, discourses not only shape the ways things can be talked about, but they also have a fundamental impact on subjects themselves. For Foucault (1972, p. 232), discourse is 'a space of positions and of differentiated functioning for the subjects'. Subjects are created through discourses (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002; Hall, 2001). Foucault (1972, p. 248) admits that people have difficulties in understanding that their history, economics, social practices and language are underpinned by hidden rules, and they want to believe that they are 'able to change, if not the world, if not life, at least their "meaning" only through the freshness of a word which would come only from themselves'.

Foucault has been criticised as a structuralist who does not provide space for social agency (Fairclough, 1992). However, his later work refers to an opportunity for struggle and transformation in and through discourse (Foucault, 1970). On the one hand, these power struggles between controversial and competing discourses shape the social and physical world and shape the subjects (Sharp and Richardson, 2001). On the other hand, 'shifts in the relative influence of different discourses' can also cause structural changes in society (Sharp and Richardson, 2001, p. 196). Therefore, power struggles in discourses are

productive and can cause a change: a transformation from one rationality, from one truth-system, to another. I would therefore argue that discourse is not only systematically structured, but it shapes people and offers opportunities for resistance and change.

## ***Discourse analysis***

Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) argue that the field of discourse analysis is mainly shaped by social constructivist paradigm. From this perspective, speech is not understood as being neutral, but discourse is seen to have an active role in shaping identities and the social world (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). All discourse analysis is said to be concerned with the interplay of text, context, and the practices of talking and writing; however, they differ in the extent to which they combine text and context (Jansen, 2008). In addition to social constructivist elements, discourse analysis is often political: critical discourse analysis in particular has been established to address discourse in terms of its social and political significance, owing its prominence to one of its most influential practitioners, Norman Fairclough (Poole, 2010).

Critical discourse analysis is ‘a marriage of discourse analysis and critique’ (Wickham and Kendall, 2007, n.p.) and its main concern is related to explorations of power relations (Jansen, 2008, 108). Critical discourse analysis has been further developed by Foucauldian scholars. Foucault’s concepts of power and governmentality make it possible to ‘unmask’ power struggles, and his extended view of discourse allows researchers to go beyond speech and written documents and to explore the organisation of knowledge and worldviews (Kendall and Wickham, 2006, p. 5).

The rest of this section will explore Foucault’s and Fairclough’s perspectives on discourse analysis, and will explain how their approaches have been combined for the purposes of this study.

### ***Foucault on discourse analysis***

Foucault stressed the importance of discourse analysis. He believed that ‘discourses, in the form they can be heard or read, are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words’ (Foucault, 1969, p. 53). He argues:

...we must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognised from the outset; we must outset those forms of obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign... (Foucault, 1969, p. 24)

Questioning and examining discourses reveals the appearance of underpinning discursive rules (Foucault, 1969) and the overall constitutive and political effects of the statements (Graham, 2011). It could therefore be argued that a Foucauldian discourse analysis is concerned with statements. The statement is 'the atom of discourse', 'an ultimate, undecomposable element' that can be isolated and looked at in relation to other similar elements (Foucault, 1969, p. 90). However, the statement is not simply a sentence in its grammatical essence but a series of signs that possesses 'something else, a specific relation that concerns itself' (Foucault, 1969, p. 100). It is 'a function' rather than a linguistic unit (Foucault, 1972, cited in Graham, 2005, p. 7). Guided by Foucault, Graham (2005, p. 8) defines statement as 'an articulation that functions with constitutive effects'. As soon as a statement emerges in its materiality (i.e. text, talk), it circulates in various networks, is used, disappears, serves or resists various interests, supports or challenges struggle (Foucault, 1969).

As the statement is half-visible and half-hidden, 'it requires a certain change of viewpoint and attitude to be recognized and examined' (Foucault, 1969, p. 124). Foucault explains this methodological viewpoint as follows:

...[to] grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes... (Foucault, 1969, pp. 30-31)

A Foucauldian discourse analysis allows a shift from pure textual analysis to the analysis of practices, actions and events (Sharp and Richardson, 2001). It allows researchers to go beyond oral performances and written documents to approach knowledge and worldviews as suitable objects of investigation (Wickham and Kendall, 2007). This is closely related to a Foucauldian perspective on discourse that is approached less as language or text, but rather as an 'active occurring' that involves power and action (Hook, 2001, p. 532). Foucault not only studied discourse in its present form but followed the discourse back in its past in order to understand how power and historical components shift meanings over time (Powers, 2007). Thus, Foucauldian discourse analysts might need to trace discourses

back in their constitution in order to understand ‘how things have come to be as they are’ (Graham, 2011, p. 670).

However, Hook (2001), Graham (2005) and Diaz-Bone *et al.* (2008) argue that there is no integrated Foucauldian method of discourse analysis. There are rather ‘different strands of Foucauldian discourse research’ (Diaz-Bone *et al.*, 2008, 23). Every researcher guided by Foucault’s theories needs to find his/her own way to analyse discourse; a lack of methodological guidance from Foucault led me to explore Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis.

### ***Fairclough on discourse analysis***

Fairclough’s discourse analysis (often referred to as textually-oriented discourse analysis or critical language study) is strongly rooted in Foucault’s work. Fairclough (1992, 2001a) supports Foucault’s idea that discourse is social practice, but he provides further tools for analysis. Fairclough (1992) defines discourse as a form of social practice that constructs and constitutes social entities, relations and subjects. Thus, language and linguistic phenomena are a part of society, and social phenomena become linguistic phenomena (Fairclough, 2001a). From Fairclough’s perspective, one can never commit oneself just to the analysis of texts or text production; there is a need to analyse the complex relationships between texts, processes and social conditions in the context of immediate situational conditions and wider institutional and social structures (Fairclough, 2001a). Like Foucault, Fairclough (2001a) argues that discourse should not be seen as a passive entity but rather as influencing social structures, their continuity and social change. Fairclough’s discourse analysis emphasises the connecting of social analysis with particular instances of institutional practice by focusing on textual detail, production, distribution and interpretation of texts in wider social contexts (Fairclough, 1993).

However, the major contrast between Foucault’s and Fairclough’s approaches is that the latter is still more focused on linguistic analysis of texts (Fairclough, 1992). Furthermore, Fairclough (2003) favours the concepts of ideology and hegemony, and he draws attention to social domination. Domination for Fairclough can be seen in relation to powerful participants controlling the contributions of less powerful participants (Fairclough, 2001a). In addition to his linguistic and ideological emphasis, Fairclough (2001b) argues that discourse in national and local settings should be interpreted in the context of international processes that shape the local discourses. For example, commodification, consumerism and

marketisation should be seen as having a widespread impact on discourse by restructuring institutional orders and by ‘rewording’ students as consumers (Fairclough, 1992, p. 117). Furthermore, complex postmodern societies involve interaction ‘across different domains or fields of social life’ (i.e. economy, education) and ‘across different scales of social life’ (i.e. global, regional, national), and the orders of discourse should be seen related to these networking relationships (Fairclough, 2003, p. 30). It could be argued that Fairclough has brought into discourse analysis a neoliberal critique that sees discourses as related to societal, economic and political forces: the forces that characterise twenty first century societies and the post-Foucault world.

Fairclough has been criticised because of his theoretical position which is said to be too ideological in terms of anti-neoliberalism (Poole, 2010). Furthermore, Poole (2010) argues that Fairclough has used the work of Foucault, Bakhtin, Halliday, Gramsci, Giddens, Marx, Bourdieu, Habermas and Bernstein to develop his framework, but his framework is not coherent enough for an independent new theory. Widdowson (1996) criticises Fairclough not seeing discourse as an individual engagement of subjects with their personal impulses, fears, sensitivities and prejudices. Therefore, Fairclough’s approach has limits that should be taken into account. In this study, Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis will not be applied entirely, but his methodological tools will be combined with Foucault’s conceptual guidance in order to create a suitable analytic framework for the study (see Appendix 5)

Regarding the practicalities of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough has created a three-dimensional framework; any instance of discourse is seen as a piece of text, discursive practice and social practice (Fairclough, 1992). This framework in its modified version has informed the analytic framework in my research (see Appendix 5). The study applies Fairclough’s framework presented below but with an aim to trace the Foucauldian processes of power and subjectification. This also means that by breaking down the discourses into three categories of text, discursive practice and social practice, I was able to trace power relations evident in discourses and identify the ways they act on and are negotiated by the participants.

Firstly, textual analysis focuses on vocabulary (individual words), grammar (clauses and sentences), cohesion (links between clauses and sentences) and text structure (organisational properties of texts) (Fairclough, 1992; 2001a). Following Fairclough (1992), I looked for the use of language, such as passive language which is often seen



related to the omission of the agent. Like Fairclough (2001a), I also looked for the formality of language and metaphors, which might refer to the complexity and control aspects in the specific discourse. Fairclough (1992, p. 194) argues that metaphors construct reality in specific ways: 'they structure the way we think and the way we act, and our systems of knowledge and belief, in a pervasive and fundamental way'. Fairclough's textual focus has helped me to see that the meaning of a word is not isolated, rather words and other linguistic expressions exist in relationships that contrast and overlap and shape the meaning of words (Fairclough, 2001a).

Secondly, the interpretative analysis of discursive practice helps to reveal how a particular discourse/text is related to other discourses/texts, and how different voices might be incorporated into the specific discourse (Fairclough, 2003). Guided by Fairclough (2001a), I looked for interdiscursivity, intertextual chains and coherence of discursive practice in order to understand how the specific discourse is dependent upon other discourses (i.e. scholarly discourses, neoliberal discourses). This dimension of analysis helped to reveal possible connections among local, national and international discourses but also among various documents.

Thirdly, the analysis of discourse as a social practice is related to the question of how the specific discourse fits in the world (Fairclough, 2001a). Like Fairclough (1992), I focused on the aspects such as orders of discourse, ideological and political effects of discourse. My particular interest was targeted towards social struggles and possible power relations related to the discourses (Fairclough, 2001a). In order to explain the impacts discourse has on social life (Fairclough, 2007), discourse needs to be analysed in relation to other elements of social events, practices and structures (Fairclough, 2003). This dimension was particularly important for tracing a Foucauldian understanding of power and subjectification.

These three dimensions of critical discourse analysis overlap in practice (Fairclough, 1992). Fairclough's (1992, p. 4) discourse analysis brings together a 'social-theoretical sense of discourse' with a 'linguistically-oriented discourse analysis' and makes discourse analysis more systematic and accessible in social science research. However, Fairclough's framework has several limits. Fairclough (1992, p. 230) himself described his discourse analysis as most suitable for 'detailed analysis of a small number of discourse samples'. His approach is complex and time-consuming and thereby would not be suitable for

detailed analysis on a large scale. His first dimension of textual analysis is the most time- and resource-consuming. However, Fairclough (1992, p. 225) has also mentioned that his approach should not be regarded as ‘a blueprint’, and people should approach discourse analysis in different ways in accordance with the nature of their research and their views on discourse.

## ***Conclusion***

This study follows a Foucauldian understanding of discourse that is systematic and that operates as a social practice. Since its key interest is in the subject and subject formation, the discourse analysis in this study explores discourses with an aim to understand how assessment policy has been constructed, how it acts on academics and students and how it may be negotiated by the participants.

As Part IV will demonstrate, the discourse analysis in this study is not obsessed with linguistic details but mostly focuses on two dimensions in Fairclough’s framework: the analysis of discursive practice (the aspects of interdiscursivity) and the analysis of social practice (the aspects of power and resistance). Fairclough’s second dimension enables exploration of how different discourses are incorporated into a text, and how policy and neoliberalism influence assessment-related discourses in the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University. The third dimension will help in the analysis of the impacts of discourses on the assessment practices and the subjectivities of academics and students.

Therefore, the discourse analysis applied in this study is conceptually Foucauldian, aiming to trace the processes (i.e. power, subjectification, resistance), but using practical tools from Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis to explore and trace the discursive details reflecting these processes.

## **PART IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

## Chapter 8: Assessment policy analysis in the two universities

*Assessment is rendered much more as a technical process than intellectual process. I think there is interplay between different discourses: there are discourses of accountability assurance, discourses of scholarship and juridical discourses which all go through these regulations around assessment (Ball, 2014, [interview]).*

This research involved discourse analysis of nine assessment-related policy documents and four interviews with policymakers<sup>12</sup> who have been involved in developing some of these documents in the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University. The pseudonyms Walter, Anne and Katherine refer to policymakers in Glasgow and Tiina to one in Tallinn. The interview questions addressed the themes related to the participants' roles, assessment policy development and implementation (see Appendix 8).

The overall aim of the chapter is to trace the policy contexts shaping assessment processes: to discuss the aspects of intertextuality and interdiscursivity that characterise assessment policies in both universities and to explore the ways the policies might act on academics and students. Guided by Fairclough (2003, p. 39), the concept of intertextuality enables attention to be given to 'the relations between one text and other texts which are "external" to it'. Fairclough's (1993, p. 138) interpretation of Foucault's 'order of discourse' refers to the 'totality of discursive practices of an institution' by emphasising wider relationships between different discourses that shape the specific text(s). Foucault (1970, p. 52) approached the 'order of discourse' from an archaeological perspective in which certain 'procedures' organise the production of discourses. As this research does not aim for either an archaeological or a genealogical exploration, I have found Fairclough's (1993, 2003) concepts helpful for exploring the complexities in assessment policy and the ways it might influence academics and students.

In order to explore policy discourses in terms of power and subjectification, the chapter starts with a descriptive account of the documents analysed and the policy-making processes as these were described by the policymakers interviewed. This descriptive

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<sup>12</sup> The study includes three policymakers from the University of Glasgow and one policymaker from Tallinn University. These participants have been involved in either administrative or more academic sides of institutional policy development. In order to ensure their anonymity, the chapter will not include their profiles.

overview becomes a context for the rest of the analysis related to the aspects of intertextuality and interdiscursivity but also of discipline and governmentality as they are both evident in policy discourses. Similarly to Ball (2014, [interview]) in the opening of this chapter, the analysis presents assessment policy as an interdiscursive construct. Furthermore, it draws attention to a Foucauldian understanding of power that reflects a tendency towards minimum rather than maximum force in neoliberal settings (Foucault, 2004).

## ***An account of the policy contexts in the two universities***

The regulatory and strategic contexts shaping assessment in the University of Glasgow, and to some extent in Tallinn University, are complex and the documents exist in an intertwined relationship. In order to set the context for discourse analysis of policy documents, it is worth referring to Table 2 again (presented in Chapter 6).

**Table 2. Sample of documents**

	<b>University of Glasgow</b>	<b>Tallinn University</b>
<b>Policy and regulatory documents</b>	Code of Assessment (2013-2014) Assessment Policy (2011)	Study Regulation (2012)
<b>Guidance documents</b>	Guide to the Code of Assessment (2013-2014) Guidance on Moderation and Second Marking (2011)	Exams and Pass-Fail Tests (2012)
<b>Strategic documents</b>	Learning and Teaching Strategy 2011-2015 (2011)	Internationalisation Strategy of Tallinn University 2008-2015 Research and Development Strategy for 2012-2016
	<i>For accessing the documents see Senate Office (n.d. a) and Senate Office (n.d. b).</i>	<i>For accessing the documents see Tallinn University (n.d. d) and Tallinn University Senate (2008, 2012, 2013).</i>

As regards the regulatory context in the University of Glasgow, the *Code of Assessment* (hereafter: the *Code*) is a key document regulating student assessment in this university. It is governed by the University Court, and it is part of the wider (annually updated)

regulatory compendium the *University of Glasgow Calendar*<sup>13</sup>. The main body of the *Code* addresses themes such as: the provision of re-assessment, timing and duration of examinations, standards and penalties. The *Code* is accompanied by the *Assessment Policy* (hereafter: the *Policy*), which as a policy document explains the underlying principles in assessment and formulates specific tasks for students and academics. The *Policy*, therefore, tends to create a more nuanced context for the assessment processes in the University of Glasgow.

The *Code* is also accompanied by the *Guide to the Code of Assessment* (hereafter: the *Guide*) which provides further explanations through commentary and examples. In addition, the *Guidance to Moderation and Second Marking* (hereafter: the *Moderation*) aims to shape the regulatory context in assessment by explaining and guiding the more specific processes of moderation and second marking. However, as guidance documents, they both provide explanation and support rather than additional orders. Similarly, the wider strategic document, the *Learning and Teaching Strategy* (hereafter: the *LTS*), does not set orders but formulates broader objectives in the area of learning and teaching. The main body of the strategy includes themes that refer to the strategic objectives but also to relevant performance indicators. Overall, the policy documents in the University of Glasgow can be distinguished as those that have a regulatory purpose (the *Code*, the *Policy*) and those that have a strategic/guidance purpose (the *Guide*, the *Moderation*, the *LTS*).

In contrast, the assessment processes in Tallinn University are less regulated and shaped by policy documents. Tallinn University has the *Study Regulation* which is governed by the Senate and includes all relevant regulations that influence learning and teaching processes in the university. However, compared to the *University of Glasgow Calendar 2013-2014* which is 76 pages long, the *Study Regulation* in Tallinn University is significantly shorter (24 pages), including a 2.5 page section on assessment of learning outcomes. The main body includes a description of different study forms, and it also provides an overview of the study organisation, assessment processes, assessment of final dissertations/theses but also of monitoring students' progress and appeals process. In addition to the *Study Regulation*, there is a brief online page titled as *Examination and Pass-Fail Exams* (hereafter: the *Student Information*) introducing assessment processes to students. While the *Student Information* is based on the *Study Regulation*, the text also includes frequently

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<sup>13</sup> The *University Calendar* provides information on university fees and study organisation. The *Code of Assessment* is Chapter 16 of this compendium.

asked questions. Similarly, there are strategic documents that influence academic work processes in Tallinn University. However, as listed in Table 2, these documents are general documents that shape wider processes of internationalisation and research rather than directly influencing learning, teaching and assessment. The strategies such as *Tallinn University Internationalisation Strategy 2008-2015* (hereafter: the *Internationalisation Strategy*) and *Tallinn University Research and Development Strategy for 2012-2016* (hereafter: the *Research Strategy*) are comparable with similar documents in Glasgow. In Tallinn, however, each document tends to exist separately from others; the *Study Regulation* forms a discrete policy entity rather than being intertextually related to guidance or strategic texts.

### ***Policy development in the area of student assessment***

Interestingly, few of the policy documents explain how the specific documents came into existence. Only the *LTS* in the University of Glasgow highlights aspects of policy development by explaining that the '*particular strength of the Strategy is the extent to which it has evolved through consultation and discussion with the staff and students of the University*'.

As policy development helps us understand the complex context of assessment-related documents and the discourses they might include, this section aims to provide insight into the policy-making processes by drawing on the interviews with policymakers in the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University. Table 6 introduces key terms that the policymakers applied when describing policy-making procedures in their universities. The number in the brackets indicates how many times a specific term was used with a reference to policy development.

**Table 6. Key terms describing policy development**

<b>Katherine</b> (Glasgow)	<b>Walter</b> (Glasgow)	<b>Anne</b> (Glasgow)	<b>Tiina</b> (Tallinn)
Academic freedom (x3) Bureaucracy (x2) Clarity (x4) Consistency (x5) Democracy (x2) Fairness (x5) Quality assurance (x2)	Appropriate (x2) Clarity (x11) Consistency (x5) Effectiveness (x3) Fairness (x2) Proactive (x3) Reactive (x3) Sensibility (x3) Transparency (x3)	Consistency (x5) Fairness (x7) Harmonised (x2) Justifiable (x2) Transparency (x2)	Bureaucracy (x1) Fairness/ equality/justice (x5) Humane language (x1) Rights (x3)

As Table 6 demonstrates, all interviewees referred to fair treatment of students as a main drive in policy development. The phrases such as *‘Emm I think the regulations are underpinned by a desire to be fair to students’* (Katherine), thinking about *‘what’s fairest to students’* (Anne) and *‘to assure the equal treatment of students’* (Tiina) were common to the interviewees. Furthermore, all policymakers from Glasgow spoke about the importance of policy-making for ensuring consistency of institutional practices. The ways these two sides of the argument cause tensions will be explored in relation to accountability later in this chapter. As regards the key discursive differences outlined in Table 6, Walter emphasises the idea of *‘reactive’* and *‘proactive’* policy-making:

*Sometimes it’s, it’s reactive because questions come in and issues arise about how the Code of Assessment should operate in practice [...] but in another case it is more proactive in terms of trying to identify an issue and think, actually we need to change how this works in order to make it work more effectively.* (Walter)

He also adds that *‘at the moment it [policy-making] tends to be reactive’* (Walter). From Walter’s perspective, policy development in assessment is responsive to the issues that arise from the practice. This idea of constant change based on the emerging issues is illustrated by Walter’s example of the *Code* that has changed over the years:

*Emm and although the Code of Assessment was agreed, I don’t know 10 or more years ago now, it seems to be in a state of constant minor changes as new questions come up. So I think it’s probably fairly stable now, but it has been, it has changed quite a lot, it has developed quite a lot over, over the years since it was originally agreed.* (Walter)

Similar idea was emphasised by Anne who argues that *‘the Code of Assessment itself is about 15 pages or something, all the time we are thinking what will be different next year’*. She also explains that during a period of 10 years, the *Code* has changed, but *‘it all happened piecemeal’* (Anne). It is difficult to understand what the exact issues are that Walter and Anne are referring to in terms of needing improvement; however, this constant policy development indicates that policy has intensified.

Katherine, however, emphasised policy-making at Glasgow using the ideas of democracy and involvement:

*So we have a decision-making process of committees, student consultation and staff consultation where people can and should object where they have concerns about something as part of that process, and then in my opinion, if a policy is created*



*through a democratic process, as an employee of university I have to participate in that policy. (Katherine)*

Katherine describes policy-making in relation to a democratic university and a society: policies are proposed, they are discussed and they can also be ‘objected’ to. Policy development from Katherine’s perspective can be described as a bottom-up process in which power is shared between different parties: policymakers, academics, students etc. This participatory approach not only requires involvement in policy development but also in implementation; if academics and students have a say in the process, they also need to participate in implementing the policy. However, Katherine’s reflection on engagement contrasts with Anne’s perspective. Anne speaks about a top-down perspective to policy-making and ‘a warning’ that academics receive when regulatory changes have taken place in the university: *‘And we try and get at least a warning about imminent changes out to people, out to members of staff before they are putting their students handbooks together’*. (Academics’ perspectives on policy development will be explored in Chapters 9-10)

Assessment documents in Tallinn University do not refer to policy development. Tiina illustrates the idea of ‘reactive’ policy-making when explaining that the regulations in Tallinn University *‘receive an impulse from outside – we get a regulation from the ministry that we need to implement’*. This tends to be characteristic of the national context of higher education in Estonia which is highly controlled and monitored by the Ministry of Education and Research. The example of an ‘impulse’ that Tiina refers to is a state level regulation *Standardised marking system at the higher education level, and conditions of diploma cum laude*<sup>14</sup>. As a national regulation, it imposed outcomes-based assessment on all higher education institutions in Estonia.

Tiina states that policy-making in Tallinn University is *‘actually a long process, that does not end with the Senate giving its approval to the decision, but that's when the work en masse begins [...] we have 10,000 students, right, and 500 employees’*. She explains that any ‘impulse’ will be followed by discussion within the university in order to frame the regulations into *‘more humane language’*:

*Then we create a small working group, discuss it, try to put it into more humane language, attach procedural rules – what the student has to do, what the academic has to do, where to submit what, what has to be submitted when – then it goes on for*

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<sup>14</sup> *Standardised marking system at the higher education level, and conditions of diploma cum laude* is a national regulation developed in 2009 by the Ministry of Education and Research.

*discussion by the Heads of Studies, to the Council of the Heads of Studies; from there, to the Teaching Committee; and then either the Senate or the Vice Rector signs it – so that's the usual sequence of processes concerning studies. (Tiina)*

On the one hand, Tiina's thoughts tend to reflect an element of top-down policy-making in Tallinn University. However, this does not refer to staff and the policymakers but rather to the dynamics between the university and the ministry.

The overview of assessment-related documents and policy development makes it possible to approach assessment policy in both universities as discursive fields that include diverse regulatory, guidance and strategic documents but also complex policy-making processes that are often experienced and explained differently by various policymakers. While all interviewees acknowledge that policies need to ensure a fair treatment of students, there are crucial differences in terms of understanding policy-making as a reactive, top-down or democratic process.

### ***Tracking the crossing discourses: policy complexity and intertextuality***

This section focuses on the aspects of intertextuality: how the regulatory, guidance and strategic documents interrelate and shape the assessment policy contexts as discursive fields. As intertextuality and interdiscursivity are especially characteristic of the policy discourses in the University of Glasgow, the documents and the interviews from Glasgow receive more attention in this section. The section demonstrates that policy discourses, particularly in Glasgow, exist in complex relationships in which tensions are evident between the regulatory and guidance documents.

When tracing the ways different assessment-related documents interrelate in the University of Glasgow, the *Policy* makes the aspects of intertextuality explicit:

*In some areas of assessment practice, the principles which shape the policy are translated into regulations. These regulations are contained in the Code of Assessment which is published in the University Calendar and reproduced with explanatory notes and examples in the Guide to the Code of Assessment. (the Policy)*

These three documents – the *Code*, the *Policy* and the *Guide* - have to be read together in order to gain a complete understanding of the assessment processes in Glasgow. The

regulatory power of the *Code* is not enough for shaping practice; how to act requires explanatory notes. This guidance comes from the *Policy*, the *Guide* and also from other documents in the field. For example, the *Moderation* document justifies its aims by arguing that '*this guidance is intended to set out good practice in this [moderation] area*'. Walter also highlights that different documents overlap and: '*it's not necessarily always clear that there is such a clear dividing line between, you know, policy side of it and regulatory side of it*'. Anne explains an interrelationship between different parts of the *University Calendar*: academics often struggle to find specific rules from the 76 page compendium that has 39 chapters of study regulations. Academics struggle with '*where are the rules on something, and they are not sure whether they are in the degree regulations, generic undergraduate regulations or the Code of Assessment*' (Anne).

Assessment in the University of Glasgow is organised by a large number of documents, and it is unsurprising that academics get confused about different documents, their location and procedural requirements. Not only do they have to find the regulatory section on a specific procedure but also the guidance document that helps to explain the regulation.

Perhaps the most evident example that demonstrates how intertextuality works in policy discourses of Glasgow is related to the ways assessment purposes are addressed. For instance, the *Code* sets the overarching framework for assessment practices, but it does not explain what the purposes of assessment are. This is something that the *Guide* and the *Policy* do – they emphasise assessment functions in relation to a variety of processes such as the provision of awards, measurement of student attainment but also the support for student learning:

*Assessment is an integral part of the process by which the University makes awards to students who have completed their programmes.* (the Guide)

*Assessment should be designed with a view to student progress, both in terms of subject knowledge and in terms of skills and attributes.* (the Policy)

In contrast, policy discourses in Tallinn University demonstrate a very little evidence of intertextuality between different documents. The *Study Regulation* as the main assessment regulation states the purposes of assessment by explaining that '*the aim of assessment of learning outcomes is to support studies and to give reliable information on the merit of the completed studies*'. The only evidence of intertextuality emerges when the *Study*

*Regulation* draws on state level regulations such as the *Estonian Public Information Act*; this is mentioned when describing the processes of dissertation defence.

It could be argued that the operation of power through policy discourses of Glasgow is more complex than in Tallinn. Different policy documents in the University of Glasgow seem to exist in a collaborative relationship; however, discourses indicate that there is still a significant hierarchical difference between the documents. For example, the *Guide* highlights its secondary position in relation to the superiority of the *Code*: ‘*If in any case an explanation or illustration in this guide appears to contradict the terms of the Code itself, the Code must take precedence.*’ This differentiation between the documents is noted by Katherine and Anne:

*And is it a policy, or a recommendation, that distinction that we make [...] If it is a recommendation, I don’t have to do it, if it’s a policy, I kind of should.* (Katherine)

*I think the Assessment Policy is where we try to say what’s assessment all about, whereas the Code of Assessment is this is how you do it.* (Anne)

Anne explains that compared to some other regulations presented in the overarching *University Calendar*, the *Code* applies to all students no matter of their study year: ‘*So if we make the change to the Code of Assessment then that affects everybody in the following year*’. She also argues that the *Code* as a highly influential part of the *University Calendar* has grown and become increasingly powerful in telling staff and students ‘*what you need to know about assessment*’:

*...over the last 10 more, 10 or more years, gradually more bits have been picked up from other parts of the Calendar and dropped into the Code of Assessment, because we want them to apply to everybody. Or previously they sat in the section on their own, and we’ve been trying to get together this concept of this Code of Assessment tells you what you need to know about assessment.* (Anne)

Intertextual discourses tend not to challenge the hierarchical relationships between different documents: the assessment regulations have the key function of shaping and organising the assessment processes, and the guidance and strategic documents provide additions rather than something novel. The following sections will explore the complexity further by tracing interdiscursivity and the ways different regulatory and scholarly discourses shape the policies. The analysis will explore the operation of power and how it can act on academics and students.

## ***Exploring discourses (1): accountability***

By comparing and contrasting policy discourses in the Universities of Glasgow and Tallinn, it becomes evident that discourses of accountability shape the policies in both institutions. Accountability in Glasgow is more complex and diffuse, possibly reflecting neoliberal governance. A traditional and more meritocratic understanding of accountability operates in Tallinn. In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of accountability in assessment, the analysis includes extracts from the interviews with policymakers.

### ***Accountability for consistency, transparency and fairness***

The ways in which documents and policymakers justify the purposes of assessment regulations in terms of ‘transparency’, ‘consistency’ and ‘fairness’ provide a starting point for tracking complex aspects of accountability in both universities. For example, intertextually dependent documents, the *Guide* and the *Policy* in Glasgow, state that the *Code* is a document that is developed for ensuring consistent, transparent and fair assessment processes:

*The regulations which comprise the Code of Assessment are intended to deliver transparently fair and consistent outcomes in all student assessment.* (the Guide)

*The assessment regulations which are gathered in the Code of Assessment are principally concerned with maintaining academic standards while ensuring fairness, consistency and transparency through the process leading to the award of degrees and other qualifications.* (the Policy)

Similarly, the *Study Regulation* in Tallinn University presents its aims in relation to assurance of ‘equal treatment for all degree students and transparency of study organisation’. It appears as the documents in the two universities address accountability and fairness as existing in a causal relationship: transparent and consistent procedures will lead to fair treatment of students. It remains unclear, though, how a more philosophical idea of fairness fits with these rather practical aspects of consistency and transparency. It might be the case that clear and homogeneous procedures provide a balance against possible domination in assessment (in a Foucauldian sense). In this case, techniques of accountability could help to restrict any unjust behaviour of academics over students.

Exploring further the ways in which accountability operates in policy discourses of both universities, the importance of management authority arises. The Senate, as one of the most authoritative administrative bodies in assessment, is often explained in policy

documents as someone/something that *'approves'*, *'agrees'*, *'prescribes'*, *'decides'* and *'establishes'* (the Code, the Study Regulation). Heads of Schools in Glasgow, and Directors of the Academic Units in Tallinn, are positioned as subjects who *'approve'*, *'nominate'*, *'appoint'*, *'form'*, *'ensure'*, *'encourage'* (the Code, the Study Regulation). It is therefore characteristic to both universities to position management as having control over assessment processes.

In terms of differences, however, accountability for transparent and consistent processes in Tallinn University rests with the key governing bodies: the Senate and the academic units. In contrast, management roles in the University of Glasgow tend to be much more decentralised and divided between different governing bodies. In addition to the Senate and the Heads of Schools, there are also other administrative subjects involved in ensuring accountability of the processes and subjects at Glasgow: the Clerk of Senate, the Senate Office, the Registry, Boards of Examiners etc. On the one hand, all these bodies are responsible for accountability in the University of Glasgow, and on the other, they are also made highly accountable to each other. This kind of dual relationship in terms of power and control reflects a neoliberal mode of accountability where power is diffuse and makes everybody *'watchdogs'* of their own and others' actions (Engebretsen *et al.*, 2012, p. 414). The *Code*, for example, describes the Clerk of Senate as a person who *'consults'* and *'authorises'*, and the Board of Examiners as someone/something that *'confirms'*, *'reports'*, *'recommends'* and *'approves'*. The positions of the Senate Office and the Registry, however, are often addressed by less authoritative verbs: Senate Office *'administers'* and *'forwards'*, while the Registry *'publishes'*, *'ensures'*, *'produces'* and *'makes [things] available'*.

The policymakers from Glasgow, however, present a more nuanced and emotional perspective on management positions. In contrast with the documents that tend to ascribe disciplinary power to management positions, the policymakers describe governing bodies such as the Senate Office but also the Heads of the Schools as being rather powerless. Walter states:

*...I know at the moment the Senate office is under quite a lot of pressure because the number of staff has gone down and the amount of things they are trying to do has changed.* (Walter)

Furthermore, Katherine highlights a more abstract idea of academic freedom in universities, and the ways it limits the power of management:

*...academia is a funny place because although we have people who are the Head of School, and we have people who are the Head of College, it's rare for them to go and say to somebody, 'You do realise that you are completely ignoring university rule about whatever'. Emm so lots of things go on that maybe in another environment wouldn't because we have freedom, because we have jurisdiction to choose and to decide things. (Katherine)*

From Katherine's perspective, it is not just pressures or a complex network of governing bodies that makes management feel powerless but an overall idea of academic freedom that management cannot disregard.

Another example that demonstrates a diffuse context of accountability in the University of Glasgow is related to ascription of agency to abstract agents: university, college, school etc. The *Policy* writes about the university as having beliefs about the ways assessment should be organised, while making it unclear who exactly is addressed by this account:

*[The] university believes that assessment processes should maintain standards, provide feedback on learning, report performance against the intended learning outcomes, be regularly evaluated, demonstrate progression and develop self-regulation in learning. (the Policy)*

Similarly, the *Code* and the *Guide* ascribe agency and responsibility to academic units such as the schools and colleges that may specify requirements and give permissions:

*Schools may specify further requirements such as monitored attendance at classes and examinations. (the Code)*

*Colleges may, as a matter of policy, and if so published in course information documents, permit students two reassessment opportunities. (the Guide)*

These abstract agents are common to the policy documents of Glasgow, making it unclear who these agents are and whose feelings and rights they represent. From a neoliberal perspective, they might be referring to everybody involved in assessment, demonstrating the ways all members of the university, a college or a school are responsible for the techniques of accountability.

A similar idea of collective accountability and responsibility is emphasised by the *LTS* that speaks in terms of ‘we’ and explains the strategy as ‘*our current Learning and Teaching Strategy*’ or the set of principles as ‘*our guiding principles*’. Furthermore, phrases referring to abstract agents might demonstrate that subjects involved in assessment are also all overseen by their academic units. From this perspective, accountability in the University of Glasgow could be understood as a neoliberal technology of government that aims to manage populations, while being complex and diffuse and balancing between the techniques of domination and self-governance. This could be seen as a panoptic culture that also makes the discourses of accountability different from Tallinn University where power of the Senate and academic units is presented as a top-down disciplinary technology. If accountability is needed in Tallinn University, it is monitored and ensured by the Senate and the academic units.

### ***Discourses of accountability shaping the academic and student subjectivities***

Regarding the ways discourses of accountability position academics and students in particular, the differences between the universities continue to emerge. While the documents in Tallinn write about teachers and teaching staff to address all academics involved in assessment, the terminology in the University of Glasgow is highly formal: ‘*staff*’ (the Policy) and ‘*examiner*’ (the Code). Furthermore, academics in Glasgow tend to be further classified and grouped based to their different roles in assessment processes. The *Code* distinguishes the roles of an ‘*internal examiner*’ and ‘*external examiner*’<sup>15</sup>. The internal examiner is often described as someone who ‘*determines*’, ‘*judges*’ and ‘*assures*’ and the external examiner as a person who ‘*comments*’, ‘*certifies*’, ‘*reports*’ and ‘*adjudicates*’ (the Code). This detailed approach and division of roles tends to demonstrate once again how power in Glasgow is diffuse and divided between but also monitored by different groups involved in assessment.

Similarly to academics, students are addressed mainly as ‘*students*’ in the policy discourses of Tallinn University, though, the *Study Regulation* highlights a few differences in terms of visiting, exchange and Open Studies students. In contrast, the *Code* in Glasgow positions students as ‘*candidates*’: the word ‘student’ is applied 18 times compared to a ‘candidate’ that is used 122 times. The *Guide* changes the tone and writes about students, which also

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<sup>15</sup> All UK universities appoint external examiners to ensure the quality of the programmes. According to the HEA (2012, p. 12), ‘Generally there is an expectation that the external examiner will be an experienced academic with five or more years of experience of acting as an internal examiner, perhaps coupled with experience of being a programme leader’. There is no such a role in Estonian universities.



reflects a significant difference in formality between regulatory and guidance documents in Glasgow. By using the word ‘candidate’ at that extensive level, the *Code* tends to distance itself from students as participants in assessment and to address them as receivers of assessment. The term ‘candidate’ tends to also create an impression of a contract type relationship in which the rights and responsibilities of the university and students are formally agreed. Further aspects of client culture will be analysed in the next section.

Additional evidence of being an accountable academic or a student reflects in directive use of language such as a word ‘must’. This kind of language becomes especially evident from the documents of Tallinn University, while the policy discourses in Glasgow are more playful in balancing between commands and flexibility. However, both assessment regulations, the *Code* and the *Study Regulation* include a significant number of definitions. It looks as though definitions aim to shape academics’ understanding of assessment processes, so that there would be less variation in the ways assessment systems operate. Table 7 introduces the key definitions that both regulations include.

**Table 7. Key definitions in the *Code* and the *Study Regulation***

	<b>The Code University of Glasgow</b>	<b>The Study Regulation Tallinn University</b>
Course	✓	✓
Grade point average	✓	✓
Good cause	✓	✓
Visiting candidate/student	✓	✓
Component of assessment	✓	
Head of School	✓	
Evidence	✓	
Credit point		✓
Independent work		✓
Examination		✓
Pass/fail assessment		✓

Definitions provided in the policy documents create a discourse of accountability that tries to shape the thinking and behaviour of those who are involved in assessment, particularly those academics who are responsible for designing course programmes and assessment.

Definitions might be important for shaping academic practice as the policy discourses (especially in Glasgow) do not apply very clear directives such as ‘must’ or ‘shall’ when addressing the responsibilities of academics. Rather, ambiguity in terms of academics’ accountability is reflected in the use of words such as: ‘*should*’, ‘*normally*’, ‘*typically*’, ‘*ideally*’, ‘*most*’, ‘*it is recommended*’, ‘*as far as possible*’. By applying these words, the documents demonstrate a level of flexibility that academics have when designing and conducting assessment.

However, the ambiguity of discourses also enforces an idea of self-governance characteristic to neoliberalism. Examples below demonstrate the ways the policy discourses can be unclear, and how they might reflect aspects of responsibility and self-governance in academic work:

*Where all or part of a course’s scheme of assessment consists of an ‘end of course’ examination, that examination shall normally be held within the academic session in which the course has been taught. (the Code)*

*Ideally, those involved in the assessment should meet to arrive at a shared understanding of the criteria and how they should be applied. (the Moderation)*

It therefore looks as though none of these actions described above have to take place; these are suggestions that require professional judgement. It is thereby academics’ own responsibility to govern their practice in terms of these cases. Furthermore, these ambiguous suggestions might be related to academic freedom that perhaps does not let the regulations become utterly directive, even in the University of Glasgow where the number of regulations has grown. Instead, the policy documents create an impression of free will and ambiguity in phrasing the orders.

In contrast, directive vocabulary in terms of ‘must’ and ‘shall’ is highly evident when shaping the responsibilities of students. By applying these commands, some actions are given special importance as desired behaviours. For example, the word ‘shall’ is used in 98 instances in the *Study Regulation* in Tallinn and mostly as an order as the example below demonstrates.

*A student who has been absent for the whole examination session period for health reasons shall submit a relevant medical certificate to the study coordinator and he/she shall be given an additional opportunity and time to take an examination. (the Study Regulation)*

In some cases, the *Study Regulation* also refers to ‘*an obligation*’ when making students accountable for specific actions. For example, the *Study Regulation* states that ‘*A student has an obligation to pass exams and assessments valued at a minimum of 7 ECTS credits per semester*’. Therefore, policy discourses in Tallinn tend to demonstrate a very clear process of students’ accountability: students are responsible for certain actions which can be monitored. When tracing the use of a word ‘must’ in the University of Glasgow, it becomes evident that ‘must’ is used in 24 instances in the *Code*, while the *Guide* applies it significantly more often - 80 times. The guidance documents are more specific and certain about the instructions than regulatory texts. This again proves the importance of intertextuality in policy documents of Glasgow: in order to understand the responsibilities of different subjects, all assessment documents would have to be read together.

One of the most visible examples of how the discourses of accountability act on academics and students is related to being accountable for time. Both the *Code* and the *Study Regulation* regulate time in terms of duration of exams, submission deadlines and announcement of results. However, time is also an example that clearly demonstrates the ways documents apply the ambiguous language of domination:

*...deadlines for the submission of coursework which is to be formally assessed will be published in course documentation. (the Code)*

*...there shall be two dates given for the main examination and one additional examination time... (the Study Regulation)*

Management tends to be subjectified as overseeing and disciplining the use of time in assessment. For example, the *Study Regulation* argues that ‘*the Senate approves the academic calendar for the next academic year in April each year*’. However, as argued earlier in this chapter, in Glasgow, there is a network of bodies such as the Registry, the Senate Office that share the overarching responsibility in monitoring academics’ and students’ time:

*The Senate Office shall forward External Examiners' reports to Schools within eight weeks of receipt identifying points to which a response is required. (the Code)*

This section has demonstrated that assessment policy documents in both universities draw on discourses of accountability. However, the ways accountability operates and subjectifies academics and students in the two universities tend to differ. Policy discourses in Tallinn University reflect a more traditional and meritocratic mode of accountability that functions

through central control of the Senate and the Directors of academic units. The discourses of accountability in the University of Glasgow, however, appear to reflect the aspects of neoliberal accountability that has turned into a highly diffuse and complex technology where subjects involved in assessment are made accountable for their own actions but also those of others.

## ***Exploring discourses (2): internationalisation, excellence and client culture***

There is also evidence of other and more recent processes that shape assessment policy documents such as internationalisation, excellence and client culture. These are discourses that demonstrate a dialectical relationship between society and policy in a Faircloughian (2001b) sense. This section will present these discursive aspects in assessment policy discourses and will question how they might shape the subjectivities of academics and students. As previously, the main evidence comes from the University of Glasgow. However, the section will also analyse the ways recent strategic documents in Tallinn University address the processes characteristic to global higher education sector. In order to gain a more nuanced perspective, the section will draw again on the interviews with policymakers.

### ***Internationalisation***

While there is a separate *Internationalisation Strategy* (see Nolan, 2010) in the University of Glasgow, the ideas of internationalisation are also incorporated into most learning, teaching and assessment related documents. The *LTS* states that ‘*the University of Glasgow is a global university and, as such, internationalisation is fundamental to our core mission*’, and the *Policy* emphasises student mobility as ‘*a strategic priority*’ valued by students:

*Increasing student mobility is a strategic priority for the University in the context of a significantly increased focus on internationalisation. The benefits of spending some time studying abroad to the students themselves are clear and well accepted. (the Policy)*

Katherine also argues that there is a ‘*big big influence on international students*’ and that ‘*the staff composition has changed hugely. So we recruit many more international staff*’. However, she explains that internationalisation is not only common to the University of

Glasgow: *'I think that's a whole agenda that we are grappling with, every institution is grappling with'* (Katherine).

Internationalisation in policy discourses of Glasgow is stated as a fact and presented as part of an operating reality in this university. The process of internationalisation in Tallinn University, however, is presented as a future-looking priority, something that is strategically important for becoming a global university. The *Study Regulation* explains the organisation of *'studies abroad'*, but processes of internationalisation are mostly emphasised in wider strategies such as the *Internationalisation Strategy* and the *Research Strategy*. Internationalisation in Tallinn University is thereby enforced and assisted by more recently developed strategic documents that aim to reshape the wider academic environment and academic work. For example, the *Internationalisation Strategy* highlights that *'the university will be represented in the most important international and regional networks'*, and that it will have *'a leading role in at least one of these networks'*. Tiina states that the university has become *'flexible'* in supporting internationalisation:

*Well, university no doubt has become more flexible in that: first of all, we've made the curricula more flexible. Just in order to bring in the international context – allow the student to go away, allow to continue their studies – it's not yet quite how we'd want it to be, but let's say, we're moving in that direction.* (Tiina)

In terms of increased flexibility, the *Study Regulation* argues that it is possible to consider foreign languages as mediums of instruction when developing a course that targets international students. This example illustrates how policy discourses relate to the global higher education market.

The documents in both universities demonstrate that internationalisation has become part of the dominant strategic discourses shaping the context in which universities operate. It is not completely clear how internationalisation affects assessment and the subjects involved in assessment. However, in order to succeed in an increasingly international higher education market, universities are paying attention to institutional but also individual excellence. This might be one of the ways to understand how broader discourses such as internationalisation have started to shape the educational processes and the subjectivities of academics and students.

### *Drive for excellence*

Excellence in the policy discourses of Tallinn University is mentioned as a strategic and future-oriented priority. The *Research Strategy*, for example, prioritises the importance of an ‘*increase in the number of specialists with excellent information, IT and data analysis competencies*’. Compared to Glasgow, however, the discourses of excellence in Tallinn tend to have a minor impact on the work and lives of academics and students. The ideas of excellence might become discursively more dominant when the processes of internationalisation settle and start functioning as part of the operating reality, as is evident in the University of Glasgow.

The *LTS* in Glasgow emphasises institutional excellence by using the words like ‘*top*’, ‘*best*’ ‘*leading*’, ‘*exemplary*’ when addressing its (inter)national profile:

*We will also seek to become the top Russell Group University<sup>16</sup> for international student satisfaction as measured by the International Student Barometer. (the LTS)*

*We will maintain our position in the top quartile of the Russell Group. (the LTS)*

It could be argued that excellence in the policy discourses of Glasgow is understood as having a leading position in higher education market. Excellence therefore tends to have an economic rather than an educational meaning. It is unsurprising that the *LTS* along with the *Policy* addresses constant improvement in terms of outstanding educational practices. Words such as ‘*progress*’, ‘*enhancement*’ and ‘*innovation*’ are common to these documents. The *Policy*, for example, demonstrates how innovation in assessment design can enhance student learning experience:

*Innovation in the tools and techniques of assessment can enhance the student learning experience, open up particular areas of the curriculum, and ensure a better match with subject and discipline benchmarks. (the Policy)*

Thus, policy discourses in Glasgow tend to present innovative and outstanding practices as a way to ensure an excellent student experience and thereby perhaps also university’s market position in an increasingly international and competitive higher education context.

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<sup>16</sup> The Russell Group includes 24 UK universities ‘which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector’ (Russell Group, 2015).

Similarly to the discourses of accountability, excellence seems to operate as part of the technologies of government in Glasgow. Monitoring excellence helps to control and manage performances of the institution and its academic population. Regarding aspects of monitoring institutional excellence, the assessment policy discourses emphasise the International Student Barometer and the National Student Survey (NSS). The *LTS* sets the aims for ‘maintaining’ high student satisfaction in the University of Glasgow:

*The percentage of students expressing satisfaction of their experience of the University, as measured by those who answer ‘mostly agree’ or ‘definitely agree’ with the statement ‘overall I am satisfied with the quality of the course’ in the National Student Survey, will be maintained above 90%. (the LTS)*

Katherine, however, is sceptical about the NSS as a technology that monitors institutional success. She explains: ‘*So the NSS for me is a bit like a thermometer, it gives me what the temperature is, emm but actually the experience of talking to students is important*’ (Katherine). From her perspective, the NSS might provide a general impression of how successfully different universities and subject areas do in terms of student satisfaction, but it does not explain the reasons behind the (lack of) satisfaction.

In addition to monitoring institutional excellence, being an excellent university with excellent practices means working with certain types of subjects. Policy discourses in Glasgow tend to emphasise that not everyone is good enough for an excellent university. The *LTS* writes about ‘attracting’ ‘*the best talent*’ and ‘*talented students from under-represented groups*’, and it highlights the importance of teaching excellence of academics:

*Our students will be educated by a diverse group of teachers recognised for their teaching excellence and their abilities to facilitate effective student learning, and who engage students in innovative, relevant and challenging curricula which draw on the research activity of our staff. (the LTS)*

### ***Rewarding excellent academic and student subjects***

The personal excellence of academics and students is measured and monitored, often in terms of more traditional techniques: rewards and punishments. While the processes of rewarding and punishing are evident in the discourses of both universities, these techniques are again more complex in the University of Glasgow. For example, assessment policy documents in Glasgow define a level of minimum achievement – the so-called threshold grade – that is required for passing the course. The threshold grade defines what is acceptable for different study levels: ‘*on undergraduate programmes [it] is D, and on*

*taught masters and postgraduate certificate and diploma programmes it is C' (the Guide). Also, the Guide emphasises that 'before a student is awarded credit for a course is that he or she has completed at least 75% of the assessment for the course. In a less detailed but perhaps more direct way, the Student Information page in Tallinn University explains the penalties that students experience when failing an exam:*

*When a student fails two times to achieve a positive examination result (i.e. has received 'F' as an examination result both times), (s)he shall take the course for a second time. (the Student Information)*

By setting threshold grades and other requirements for achievement, the regulations create a disciplinary system of norms based on what the value of achievement is interpreted and punishment allocated. Failure and punishment are organised in a fairly similar way in both universities, making academics monitor and assess students' success. This tends to reflect assessment as a disciplinary technology in a Foucauldian sense that operates based on norms.

However, rewards have turned into more complex techniques, and variation in policy discourses and practices exist. Rewards in the policy documents of Tallinn University have a more traditional and meritocratic meaning. For example, the *Student Information* explains the function of the grades in the university:

*...in appointing study allowances and bursaries, during re-matriculation, in preparing a list of candidates for the available SC [state covered] student places, in admitting students to defence of a final thesis/sitting the final examination, in issuing a cum laude diploma. (the Student Information)*

Grades in Tallinn University can be interpreted as possible rewards for merit: achievement that students have earned and that can open up opportunities for bursaries and nomination of degrees. Tiina explains that grades have an emotional value in terms of recognition: *'it's an emotional aim – it's good to know that if you've made an effort, and pushed yourself, and you get this good result, then it's an acknowledgement'* (Tiina).

There are some signs of change in understanding rewards in Tallinn University. The *Research Strategy* tends to approach rewards as opportunities to monitor and shape the performance of not only students but also of academics. For example, it emphasises the development of *'the academic staff reward system'* for monitoring research excellence:



*Review of the academic staff reward system (including performance pay system) in order to be able to better take into account the employee's performance and active publishing. (the Research Strategy)*

While rewarding as a complex policy technology is just a priority area in Tallinn, it seems to be operating in the University of Glasgow. For example, the *Guide* emphasises the idea of grades and course credits as 'transferable currency':

*Course credits represent a transferable currency – this University will recognise credits gained by students in other institutions, as other institutions will recognise the value of credits awarded here – and students must accumulate course credits in order to qualify for a certificate, diploma or degree. (the Guide)*

This idea of 'a transferrable currency' ascribes economic value to credits and grades: they can be exchanged for qualifications or used as a proof of value in the institution but also in wider higher education market. Also, there are numerous rewards that honour excellent performance of academics. In addition to the Research Excellence Framework in the UK, the *LTS* emphasises that teaching excellence gets rewarded in Glasgow through Teaching Excellence Awards: '*We will ensure that exemplary performance in teaching is appropriately recognized in our promotions and recognition and reward procedures*'.

Within this highly pressurised context, where being excellent is normative, Katherine and Walter explain the emotional consequences on academic communities. Katherine argues that academic work is now highly pressurised in terms of '*research, teaching, knowledge exchange and other things*'. Walter emphasises the stress that academics experience when coping with different expectations: '*it never seems to stop now whereas before you thought once you got to summer, it will stop, now it just seems to keep all going*' (Walter). Walter also argues that academic roles have changed in the university contexts. He reflects on his experiences and argues that some aspects of academic work have been replaced with the work of part-time staff and GTAs:

*Emm and certainly you can see that across the university where there are, there are fewer [...] departments where there are fewer full-time academics, taught staff involved for example in taking tutorials in first and second year and much more of it is done by GTAs than it ever was in the past. (Walter)*

From a neoliberal perspective, it might be cost-effective to employ hourly-paid staff for work that does not require full-time academics, so that academics can focus on other - perhaps institutionally more important - parts of their work such as research (as argued in

Part II). Above all, it tends to reflect a transformed idea of higher education in which market position matters and client culture becomes dominant. These pressures and transformations are especially evident in the University of Glasgow, whereas academic work in policy discourses of Tallinn University is still mostly characterised by academic freedom.

***Client culture: increasing focus on graduate attributes***

As regards the possible discursive influence of client culture in assessment policies, the policymakers from the University of Glasgow emphasise how the student population has changed and their demands increased. Katherine, for instance, explains the changes that have taken place in student motivation to study in higher education:

*Emm maybe more students come because they need a degree as opposed to 10-15 years ago where they did it because they wanted to study, that's a perception, don't know how real it is. (Katherine)*

Furthermore, Walter explains that '*students have become emm...much more demanding in a sense*', and Anne argues that students tend to complain about their assessment loads and methods:

*...oh, we're just constantly having exams, or the assignments was too much this year, or the load is much too heavily on semester 2 of year 3, there should be more of semester 1 of year 3... (Anne)*

However, Anne clarifies that student appeals she has encountered have not been against the assessment system as such but rather related to '*normal human nature*' of not liking assessment. Tiina also emphasises pressures that students experience and demands they express. She explains that students in Tallinn University are increasingly aware of their rights:

*And if they don't like something or something seems unjust, they'll find out how it's supposed to be, and well, they know their rights increasingly well, and they know that the university procedural rules need to be fulfilled. (Tiina)*

The changes in student population seem to be characteristic to both universities; however, the idea of responding to the needs of a changing student population tends to be highly emphasised in the documents of the University of Glasgow.

Policy discourses in Glasgow emphasise the importance of developing graduate attributes and student employability. Graduate attributes create promises about employability and perhaps increase students' trust in qualifications that they often have to pay for. It might be the trust not only of fee-paying students that needs to be ensured, but also that of wider stakeholders who are interested in the value of university qualifications and graduates: the *Policy* states that '*Assessment is the property of all stakeholders in the educational process*'. Stakeholders include:

*...the state as funder of much of the process, higher education managers, consumers who as end users benefit from graduate skills, employers and validating professional agencies, all of whom have interacting interests with academics and students.* (the *Policy*)

The *Policy* also highlights the importance of '*developing graduate attributes*', and the *Code* explains how to assess professional competences by using Schedule B<sup>17</sup> (see Appendix 6). Furthermore, the *Guide* explains that '*Assessment of practical competencies is a prominent feature of some programmes (particularly Dentistry, Education, Medicine, Nursing, and Veterinary Medicine)*'. Assessment regulations in the University of Glasgow follow a competence-based model that approaches assessment as part of training and evaluation for work, so that studying in higher education receives a more practical value in terms of the increasingly competitive labour market. Furthermore, the information that Schedule A and B provide about student's performance is detailed in the University of Glasgow. The *Code* emphasises that '*[assessment] judgement shall be expressed in terms of the primary grades and secondary bands set out in Schedule A or in terms of the grades set out in Schedule B*' (see Appendix 6). By allowing differentiation of performance based on 22 point scale, students can receive detailed information about their achievement which in the longer term can provide students and also potential employers with more information about their employability.

This detailed assessment system appears to be characteristic of a neoliberal mode of government that favours panoptic relations in which students are differentiated, their self-value constantly affected and thereby self-governance enforced. In contrast, the assessment system in Tallinn University operates based on a scale from A-F that aims '*to differentiate between the levels in achievement of learning outcomes*' (see Appendix 7). This scale has

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<sup>17</sup> Schedule A and B set the grade descriptors for attainment of intended learning outcomes. While Schedule A is most commonly used in the University of Glasgow, Schedule B applies to professional and clinical courses (the *Code*).

no secondary bands: differentiation of a student's performance is less specific. Furthermore, pass/fail assessment without any differentiation between positive achievements is a possible form of assessment in Tallinn University. The *Study Regulation* provides a detailed procedure of non-differentiated assessment:

*In case of non-differentiated assessment, the acquisition of learning outcomes is compared to an established level, and if the level of learning outcomes of the student is equal or higher, then the result is assessed as sufficient with the word 'PASS', and if the level of learning outcomes of a student is lower than the level established, then the result is assessed as insufficient with the word 'FAIL'. (the Study Regulation)*

It could be argued that client culture has become dominant in the policy discourses of the University of Glasgow: the system responds to the changing profile of students and provides them with highly detailed information about their performance and graduate attributes. In contrast, the assessment approach in Tallinn University is based on a more traditional understanding of students who are rewarded and recognised for their excellent achievement but also punished if necessary. Furthermore, the section demonstrated that the neoliberal processes of internationalisation, excellence and client culture tend to be in their early stages in Tallinn University, but are operating as part of the policy reality in the University of Glasgow.

### ***Exploring discourses (3): assessment theories and pedagogies***

Discourse analysis made it also possible to detect assessment theories and pedagogies that shape the policy documents. These scholarly aspects are especially characteristic to guidance and strategic documents in the University of Glasgow. This section will explore the references to theories and pedagogies as other possible dimensions of discourses that act on academics and students. It will also analyse the ways scholarly aspects contradict, but in some cases provide support to wider discourses of (neoliberal) higher education.

#### ***Formative and summative assessment theories***

As argued earlier in this chapter, the guidance and strategic documents in the University of Glasgow are intertextually related to the *Code* when explaining and justifying assessment processes. However, these documents tend also to draw on recent scholarly work in

assessment studies in order to clarify the purposes of assessment. For example, the *Guide* distinguishes formative and summative practices:

*There are two major aspects of assessment: formative and summative. Formative assessment provides material for feedback to students and teachers, while summative assessment should result in evidence of achievement and will be used to make decisions about progress or qualification. (the Guide)*

Recent assessment studies in the UK and internationally (i.e. Boud, 2009; Boud and Falchikov, 2007; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) address the concepts of formative and summative assessment, and it is therefore unsurprising that the documents make use of this scholarly work when explaining the practice. Also, both the *Guide* and the *Policy* refer to further theories and scholars that aim to support (academics') understanding of assessment processes. For instance, the *Guide* refers to well-known assessment scholars such as Biggs (1996) and Rust (2002). Similarly, the *Policy* provides an overview of the key theoretical concepts such as 'assessment of learning', 'assessment for learning', 'assessment as learning' and 'self-assessment' that support the idea of learning-oriented assessment. While the aims of the assessment regulations are presented using regulatory concepts of consistency, transparency and fairness that refer to accountability, assessment purposes in guidance documents tend to be shaped by learning-oriented assessment theories. It seems that academics are supposed to act in response to dual forces: on the one hand, to become highly accountable and excellent academic subjects who monitor their own practices and the performances of students, and on the other hand, to act as pedagogues who facilitate student learning.

However, when trying to trace the ways academics are subjectified as pedagogues/facilitators/learning supporters in particular, the ambiguity of power tends to emerge. Pedagogical responsibilities are presented as suggestions by using passive voice and words such as 'should'. The *Policy* argues that 'assessment should be designed with a view to student progress' and that 'students should be invited to self-assess against the criteria before submitting work', making it unclear if these phrases are simply suggestions. Similarly, the *Code* emphasises the word 'should' when emphasising the aspects of students' assessment load, and the *Guide* employs the words 'may' and 'reasonable' to address assessment of disabled students:

*Consideration should also be given to the candidate's other assessment commitments to ensure that he or she is not unreasonably burdened. (the Code)*

*...tutors may also need to make reasonable adjustments to group work assessments where groups might include disabled students... (the Guide)*

It therefore appears that references to theories and pedagogies help to ground the policy documents and to make them educationally sound. However, they do not force academics to act; rather, it is left to academics to decide what to do with this reading of scholarly suggestions. Pedagogical issues seem to have a secondary importance compared to accountability. Furthermore, aspects of efficiency and accountability may hinder pedagogical practices, as becomes evident regarding assessment moderation:

*...there may be cases where the contribution of an individual assessment to the overall course grade is very small and the resource required to carry out processes of moderation and second marking would be disproportionate. (the Moderation)*

Anne explains that when providing personalised solutions to students with ‘very severe adverse circumstances’ the aspect of fair treatment of other students needs to be taken into account. This also means that any deviation from general practice is not encouraged:

*...sometimes we have people, they have very severe adverse circumstances, and maybe the member of staff says to us, ‘They have really had a hard time but the rules aren’t quite helping them enough, can you help us, can you find a way to be more generous’, and we have to say, ‘No, we can’t because although this case sounds really very hard one, and we are very sorry for the person who is going through these awful circumstances, it’s not fair on everybody else if we start being more lenient to somebody in this situation’. (Anne)*

Some policymakers emphasise the importance of formative and summative assessment practices. For example, Katherine emphasises assessment as an ‘opportunity’ that could encourage students ‘to reflect on their own achievements’. By receiving detailed and formative feedback, students are expected to act on it and improve their future performance. In this sense, formative assessment can create a culture in which students get used to governing themselves for the sake of progress.

The *Policy* in the University of Glasgow tends to enforce this culture of self-governance further by listing a number of responsibilities that students should demonstrate:

*..clarify understanding of intended learning outcomes and purposes of assessment  
..adopt good academic conduct in respect of assessment and make themselves aware of responsibilities and adhere to timelines  
..clarify understanding of criteria and use to inform learning*

- ..review and use feedback in future learning
- ..provide constructive feedback to staff on experiences (the Policy)

While the responsibilities above tend to position students as active participants in assessment who govern themselves, these tasks might also help to develop their excellent summative achievements. The importance of students' summative performances is highly emphasised by the policymakers. From their perspective, formative assessment and feedback need to lead into excellent summative outcomes which benefit the institution. For example, Katherine argues that summative assessment helps to select suitable graduates, 'ambassadors of [the] institution':

*Well, student assessment is to establish whether or not a student has actually understood what you are teaching them, had any competence in that subject, such that you would [...] graduate as an ambassador of your institution with a certificate that says, 'I am clever, I have graduated from Glasgow University'. (Katherine)*

### ***Pedagogical advancement and intended learning outcomes***

Regarding the more specific examples of pedagogical advancement in assessment, the main focus in both universities tends to be on intended learning outcomes (ILOs). The *Guide* argues that 'ILOs tell students what they are expected to learn, and all universities are now required to publish these', and the *Study Regulation* emphasises that assessment practices in this university are framed by ILOs: 'The aim of assessment of learning outcomes is to support studies and give reliable information on the merit of the completed studies'. Furthermore, the focus on ILOs in Tallinn University (2009) has been enforced by the state level regulation *Standardised marking system at the higher education level, and conditions of diploma cum laude*. Improvements towards learning-oriented assessment have taken place without reference to assessment theories: the reform of ILOs in Tallinn could be interpreted as regulatory rather than a pedagogical advancement.

It could be argued that the use of ILOs not only reflects scholarly discourses but discourses of accountability and client culture. Aspects of student employability and graduate attributes become more visible when applying and prescribing learning outcomes to curricula and assessment. In this sense, students as customers can know what they are buying and aiming to achieve with the completion of a course or a programme. Furthermore, the use of detailed ILOs makes processes of learning, teaching and assessment more easily monitored through course documentation, and academics are more clearly accountable for their work and students' achievements.

In this complex discursive context where scholarly discourses aim to support learning-oriented assessment but also to enforce excellence and client culture, the policymakers emphasise that academics tend to hold on to their own scholarly values and beliefs in assessment. New regulations intending to shape assessment practices can receive resistance from academic communities. For example, Anne argues that *'[assessment] it's a lot to do with academic judgement which is, you know, it's a holy grail in a way, and to try and regulate that is always going to be difficult job'*. Anne's reflection demonstrates a tension between assessment policies and academic practices. Katherine explains academics' resistance by arguing that *'academics typically tend to critique things'* while *'they very often point to academic freedom'* or sometimes *'they collectively get together, and say "We don't like this"'*. Similarly, Walter explains that there are occasions where academics are 'unhappy' about the policy developments that constrain their practices:

*Emm I think when people do realise that changes have happened, sometimes they are quite happy because it's it's something that they can understand, and they can see the sense of. Emm I think sometimes they are, they are outraged and are, are if not actively but at least unhappy. (Walter)*

The policymakers explain student assessment in relation to professional judgement and academic freedom. Any attempt to restrict it tends to receive unhappiness or resistance. It is therefore unsurprising that in Tallinn University, where assessment is less regulated, there are also fewer concerns expressed by the policymaker. Although, in the light of recent regulatory developments, Tiina explains that academics can be 'grumpy' and *'they try to carry on like they're used to'*. She also explains further by arguing *'So they've been given those suggestions, but yes - oftentimes academics say that for them it's superfluous bureaucracy'* (Tiina). These oppositional attitudes might occur more often as new developments emerge.

## **Conclusion**

As the chapter has demonstrated, assessment policies in the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University differ significantly: both in terms of quantity and discursive complexity. I would argue that the University of Glasgow provides an example of a neoliberal policy and practice context. The policy is complex and draws on various documents and discourses: accountability, internationalisation, excellence, client culture but also on assessment theories and pedagogies. This interdiscursivity evident in the assessment policy



of Glasgow confirms Ball's (2014, [interview]) description of assessment as a technical rather than intellectual process in neoliberal settings (presented in the opening of this chapter). Furthermore, some of these discourses reflect neoliberal processes in society and higher education, demonstrating a dialectical relationship between society and discourses and the idea of discourse being a social practice (Fairclough, 2001b). These different discourses (i.e. client culture and pedagogy) also contradict each other when shaping assessment processes and the subjectivities of academics and students, creating a strong sense of ambiguity in policy documents. This ambiguity is unsurprising as good government from a neoliberal perspective needs to manage foreseeable risks while also maintaining a level of uncertainty in order to create conditions for economic operation in a global market and to make individuals 'exercise their freedom through such notions as responsibility, duty, discipline, enterprise' (Hay and Kapitzke, 2009, p. 153). Therefore, the technologies of (self-)audit and (self-)surveillance characteristic to Glasgow University do not just demonstrate the discourses of accountability and client culture, but according to Davies and Bansel (2010, p. 9) these are technologies that aim to produce specific types of academic subjects that fit with 'the programmatic ambitions of government': responsible and accountable subjects. Policy discourses shape academics as being accountable for their actions, responsible for monitoring performances of their students but also as being facilitators in assessment. Furthermore, students are positioned as self-governing subjects who drive for excellent performance and employability.

Assessment policies are less detailed and more direct in Tallinn University, positioning academics as professionals who have rights to design their practices and make judgements about students' performances. It could be expected that this powerful positioning reflects in an interaction where academics dominate over students in assessment situations. The aspects of sovereign power and domination in academics' and students' experience will be traced in Chapters 10 and 12. Interestingly, the recent strategic documents - the *Internationalisation Strategy* and the *Research Strategy* - still demonstrate an increasing influence of neoliberalism (i.e. discourses of internationalisation and excellence) on academic work. These recent developments might predict a change in policy discourses of assessment in Tallinn University where policies become shaped by various discourses as is already evident in the University of Glasgow. This is especially as Tallinn University like the University of Glasgow operates in global higher education markets competing for students and research excellence. Boud and Molloy (2013) argue that there has been a shift towards making all required course work formally assessed in many universities

worldwide. Furthermore, Yorke (2008) argues that higher education institutions all around the world are now emphasising the development of student employability, which also means that the variety of student performances that need to be assessed has increased and assessment is not framed by clear disciplinary areas. It could therefore be expected that Tallinn University, like the University of Glasgow will be shaped by neoliberal developments. A shift towards outcomes-based assessment (initiated by the Bologna Process) has been an example of how the assessment policy in Tallinn University has been shaped by European/global policy developments. The ways in which academics and students relate to and experience these policy discourses influencing their work, studies and subjectivities in the two universities will be explored in the rest of Part IV.

## Chapter 9: Academic discourses in the University of Glasgow

*...the new norms and expectations over teaching, increased expectations over funded research, and new norms over quality publications are all increasing the stress on academics enormously, and one of the big issues in academia concerns the consequences of neoliberalism on academics' emotional lives and their senses of professional identity. What is happening is that universities are turning into highly competitive places where staff distrust other staff; where collegiality and cooperation are seen as sideshows or something. If you are doing extremely well, you might have a little bit of time to put into, but otherwise the place will not be for that. (Olssen, 2014, [interview])*

The study in the University of Glasgow included ten individual interviews and two focus groups with academic staff (see Table 8-9). These 16 participants from four structural and disciplinary areas – Social Sciences (8); Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences/MVLS (4); Arts and Humanities/A&H (3), and Science and Engineering/S&E (1) – were asked to reflect on their experiences of the changing higher education context, and of assessment policy and practice and their work (see Appendix 9). The chapter begins with an exploration of a broader macro context of higher education structures in academics' experience, and it will then move towards a more specific analysis of academic subjectivities and policy negotiation as these become evident through discourse analysis.

**Table 8. Sample of academics in the University of Glasgow (focus groups)**

Pseudonym	Academic work experience	Position	School	College
<b>Focus group 1:</b>				
Andrew	>10	University Teacher	Education	Soc Sci
Arlene	<5	University Teacher	Education	Soc Sci
<b>Focus group 2:</b>				
Peter	>5	Lecturer	Social and Political Sciences	Soc Sci
Carol	<5	Lecturer	Social and Political Sciences	Soc Sci
Martha	<5	Lecturer	Business	Soc Sci
Philip	>5	University Teacher	Medicine	MVLS

**Table 9. Sample of academics in the University of Glasgow (interviews)**

Pseudonym	Academic work experience	Position	School	Disciplinary area
Lesley	>15	Senior University Teacher	Social and Political Sciences	Soc Sci
Linda	>10	Senior Lecturer	Education	Soc Sci
David	<5	University Teacher	Education	Soc Sci
John	>15	Professor	Dental School	MVLS
Patricia	>15	University Teacher	Veterinary Medicine	MVLS
Julie	<5	University Teacher	Life Sciences	MVLS
Paul	>15	Senior Lecturer	Humanities	A&H
Angela	<10	Lecturer	Humanities	A&H
Christine	<10	Lecturer	Critical Studies	A&H
Jane	>20	Senior Lecturer	Computing Science	S&E

Before proceeding with the analysis, I would like to draw attention to the discursive context characterising the interview and focus group situations. It was common to the academics interviewed to be cautious about critiquing recent policy developments in their university. Phrases such as *‘I shouldn’t be saying that on the tape’* (Lesley), *‘we don’t need to go in core details’* (Angela), *‘I might be wrong, it’s just my opinion’* (Andrew), and *‘I don’t know who will be reading this, but you said my name will be anonymous’* (Paul) were common and demonstrated emotions and fears in academic discourses. Furthermore, some questions asked in the interview situation received initial responses that might reflect difficulties in sharing their thoughts in certain areas: *‘oh gosh, that is really difficult’* (Lesley), *‘oh dear, it’s a hard one’* (Paul). Expressions such as *‘umm’*, *‘I think’*, *‘I suppose’*, *‘I guess’*, gave a sense that academics were often unsure about their responses and that they developed their thoughts during the interviews. The dominance of these discursive elements was visually revealed by word cloud images<sup>18</sup>. There were also some clearer phrases reflecting the aspects of uncertainty in academic discourses:

*I really haven’t reflected on it much before you, I’m just thinking now on top of my head.* (Lesley)

<sup>18</sup> Word clouds were not part of discourse analysis, but they made it possible to identify words that were dominant in certain interviews/focus groups. Tool is available at: <http://www.wordle.net/>

*It's very interesting talking to you about it, actually making, sort of articulating it.*  
(Paul)

Furthermore, the interviewees from the MVLS subject area requested additional explanation during the interviews. The responses such as '*what do you mean?*' (Patricia) '*I'm not sure what you mean by the question*' (Julie), and '*I'm not quite sure what the question is that you're trying to answer*' (John) were common to this particular participant group. The participants from other disciplinary areas did not ask for such clarifications. It might be that my own discourse of assessment (i.e. the ways questions were phrased) was more common to the academics from the Social Sciences and A&H disciplines. Furthermore, these requests might once again indicate the non-reflected experiences that this research awakened.

These discursive characteristics, both in terms of emotions and uncertainties, set an overall interactive and emotional context to the interviews. This chapter recognises this significant discursive context shaping the research findings, and will return to language-related characteristics throughout the analysis. Furthermore, it is also important to note that most interviewees spoke about institutional culture and wider higher education policy constraining their work, and therefore the chapter recognises that assessment practices cannot be separated from these wider experiences of who the participants are as teachers, researchers and administrators. Therefore, the analysis tends to shift between the meanings reflecting academic experience of higher education policy and student assessment.

## ***Academic experiences of the structural context of higher education***

The academics described a macro context of higher education and academic work going through major change. The discourses used by the interviewees and presented in this section reveal some changes that the academics have experienced in relation to the commodification of higher education and managerialist practices in governing academic work.

### ***Higher education as a commodity***

When tracing the ways academics spoke about the structural context of higher education, a number of metaphoric phrases emerge. The phrases such as '*higher education is in*

*transition*' (David), *'it's lost in all sort of pressures'* (Angela), *'it's a massive export'* (Christine), *'a subject to hidden agendas'* (Andrew), *'it's part of that factory line commoditisation'* (Carol) and *'all higher education has turned into like factories'* (Philip) were evident when academics addressed their understanding of higher education as something that is going through a change. The economic metaphors involved in these phrases (i.e. factories, commoditisation and export) draw attention to economic forces that academics see as shaping higher education.

As the interviews progressed, further reflections on the link between higher education and the economy emerged and made it possible to trace the academics' concern about commodification of higher education: a process through which 'exchange' rather than 'use' value of education becomes important (Naidoo and Williams, 2015, p. 212). Linda, for example, argues *'that the market-driven bit stops some of the inspiring stuff that doesn't pay'*, and Jane describes how the business-related aspirations have become a key focus of any higher education policy development:

*I think that the majority of higher education stuff that happens is not to do with actual education of our students, so it's to do with the recruitment, it is to do with marketing, it's to do with regulations, it's to do with rules, it's to do with research, it's to do with getting money in, it's to do with everything, it's to do with building, buildings, whatever. (Jane)*

As the quotations demonstrate, Linda and Jane are concerned about market forces shaping higher education and causing a shift from educational focus to economic issues. Others argued that increasing student numbers contribute to the idea of higher education turning into a marketplace and courses into commodities. For example, Patricia and Christine draw attention to the increase of international students. While Patricia sees *'overseas students bring[ing] in maturity and certainly fresh ideas'* in its positive sense, Christine explains that internationalisation has become an economic process:

*I mean internationalisation in some ways it has always been at the sense that higher education is an international environment, but that's become more, there is more sense of this is the kind of aspiration in the way which is linked to kind of economy. (Christine)*

Furthermore, Julie argues that many (home) students choose higher education for other reasons than their educational interest which consequently has a significant impact on academic work and practices:

*I think that a lot of students end up coming to university when it's not actually something that they want to do. They just come because they don't know what else to do or where else to go or they feel it's what everyone does [...] then it changes our role, and we end up spending more time with the students who don't even want to be here... (Julie)*

It therefore appears that the academics' concerns are centred around the idea of higher education and educational processes turning into a commodity that can be easily marketed to potential students. Linda, for example, speculates that some (pedagogical) changes in teaching practices can be achieved more easily than the others depending on their impact on student recruitment:

*...if it's highly political reason why you want the change, maybe you have a brand new course that's going to be aimed for international students and you've got 300 people just really waiting to come in, and it's amazing how you can get that signed off via Vice Principal probably, you know. So I think sometimes if there is enough of a political will for whatever, the change is you pulling through sometimes it can be signed off. (Linda)*

While most participants problematise the economic influence on educational practices as evident above, John tends to see teaching practices being shaped by a shift towards professionalisation of contemporary universities. John explains his positive experience by arguing *'I think it has become much more professional. So when I first started, teaching was regarded as something that you just did'*. It could be argued that the experience of higher education and teaching practices being commoditised depends on the position from which it is approached. Some like John might perceive policy discourses of excellence, for example, having a positive impact on professionalisation of academic work rather than being an attempt to commoditise university courses.

In addition to John's view on the professionalisation of teaching practices, another more commonly shared view arose when the interviewees addressed graduate attributes. Graduate attributes were understood as necessary for supporting students who are increasingly concerned about their work prospects. This is especially as students in changing higher education contexts were often perceived as being highly pressurised and *'forced to understand themselves as customers'* (Carol) or being *'products'* who *'have to go into market and have to look for the jobs and everything'* (Philip). David states:

*It's about starting them [students] on a path of career and professional learning, it's also about trying to enthuse in them a need or an hunger, I suppose, to actually go away and then to develop their own specialisms in more detail.*

Similarly, Paul demonstrates his support for graduate attributes by mentioning the *'increase in the importance of graduate attributes across the university which I wholeheartedly agree with.'* He also provides an example of his involvement in a recent project on student portfolios in which the portfolio method is being developed to support students' employability. Similarly, Arlene refers to a presentation method that she has decided to use as a way to promote students' employability - *'standing and doing a presentation to us is part of the graduate attributes'*. It is therefore evident that graduate attributes are approached as something positive and distinctive from other reforms that reflect an economic understanding of higher education. It might be the case that academics wish to meet the needs of changing student population and to support their transition from university to an increasingly competitive labour market. Academics might have therefore internalised some parts of the policy discourses that, according to Cippitani and Gatt (2009), increasingly promote the connection between university courses and the development of an entrepreneurial mindset necessary to neoliberal society.

### ***Managerialist practices governing academic work***

Academics emphasised the more localised context of change in relation to how their work is institutionally governed. When speaking about the University of Glasgow and its profile, Linda provides an overview of its complex and pressurised context:

*In terms of Glasgow, Glasgow is a funny place I think, in terms of its own identity. I think it's kind of an ancient university, it's proud of that, and it's part of the Russell group, so it's very proud of that. But those things also bring with them pressures, to be particular things, and I sometimes worry that Glasgow is so keen on projecting a kind a particular image to those groupings, but it maybe loses what is it really want to do itself rather being pressured constantly what's going on outside, what is Glasgow inspired to be. I feel sometimes that it is very varied kind of almost of what is expected of us, rather than what Glasgow thinks it should be doing. (Linda)*

Linda's quote describes her concern about the University of Glasgow and the ways it is pressured by wider higher education developments. It is therefore unsurprising that changes in institutional management are also understood in relation to these economic pressures. For example, Angela argues that the university management is *'battered'* by various pressures: *'I just have a sense that the management is floundering around, and they have battered from outside by different pressures, and they pass those pressures downwards'* (Angela).



Aspects of managerialist changes and practices tended to become particularly visible when tracing the ways the academics spoke about managers. The university management/managers were often referred to as 'they', whereas academics themselves were seen as 'us':

*...they have actually rewritten the job description for the lecturer... (Angela)*

*...it has all got a lot more intense basically, emm everything is scrutinised much harder, so it feels like it's because they don't trust us to do the job. (Paul)*

In addition to describing management as 'they' who scrutinise and mistrust academics, the passive voice was applied when addressing managerial changes. Phrases such as '*more reflection is forced on us*' (Paul), '*different things been thrown at us*' (Paul) or '*my job has physically changed in its title, in the way it's governed and also what's expected from me*' (Lesley) were common to academic discourses. These phrases also lead to further reflection on distant and top-down decision making characteristic to their university:

*I think if there was a decision made at the top of the University hierarchy to change something, it would end up coming down to us anyway. (David)*

*Yes, we disagree and we are not listened to. The changes in regulations are imposed on us, and there is nothing we can do about it. (Paul)*

Above all, it appears that the interviewees perceive the management in the University of Glasgow as something that works in a hidden way with a top-down approach and where the agents are unknown or known as a group called 'they'.

These ambiguous discursive accounts reflect managerialism characteristic to New Public Management (NPM) explored earlier in this thesis: a management approach through which bureaucratic control mechanisms meet with business and market models of performativity (Marginson, 2013). While operating in complex ways and emphasising strategic planning, audits and quality, NPM increases institutional stress (Olssen, 2009). This experience of stress is confirmed by Jane who argues that flexibility in academic work has decreased:

*I think, well, obviously there's been a lot more university management, a lot more bureaucracy, lot more form filling, lot more quality assurance, lot more regularisation, much less flexibility from the point of view of a lecturer, much less flexibility. (Jane)*

From Jane's perspective, this shift from 'flexibility' towards 'bureaucracy' has taken place with an aim 'to make sure we're [academics] doing our job properly'. Similarly, Lesley critiques the procedures related to managerialist practices as 'rituals' by arguing: 'I attend so many meetings, and I think there are just things that are a waste of time, but we go through these rituals.' Furthermore, these experiences of managerialist top-down practices in Arlene's experience are related to the wider restructuring of the University of Glasgow in 2011. Arlene, for example, argues that restructuring the university fragmented academic work and collegial relations:

*The change from departmental to RKT [Research and Knowledge Transfer Groups], I think has actually fragmented our working, before we used to come together and there used to be far more discussion in terms of the department about approaches and how things could be done, whereas it's now so fragmented that we actually very rarely come together, and RKT groups have become more as a tool for managing our workloads, managing programmes and things like that, rather than actually looking the pedagogies behind that. (Arlene)*

This idea of fragmentation of academic work and a lack of collegial support is also confirmed by Lesley:

*I think [it is] competitive between universities, I think, between staff, between teaching and research, I think it's a place where [...] people can pursue their own careers and that doesn't necessarily go [with] the greater good of the university. (Lesley)*

These examples tend to support Olssen's (2009) argument that through fragmenting academic work and creating hierarchical and performance related structures, management has been able to move away from collegial forms of governance. Structural change can be seen as a key in developing managerialist practices that constrain academics through regularisation, competition and individuality.

## ***Academic experiences of assessment policy and practice***

While most participants perceived higher education as going through a problematic change, assessment policy and practice tended to be understood in relation to their professionalism and disciplinary background. This section will explore the ways academics experience the policy context of assessment and its influences on their practice. Furthermore, the section

will draw attention to the scholarly/discipline-related influences on academic practices, and will explore the academics' experience of their assessment interaction with students.

### ***Policy context of assessment***

In academic discourses, assessment policy and practice were often addressed in relation to the institutional context. For example, Angela argues that it is the university that '*needs*' assessment: '*the University needs to assess in order to provide a degree result at the end of the day*', and Paul draws attention to the university that '*is terribly scared by plagiarism and sees exams a sort of safe thing where plagiarism isn't possible*'. In both quotations, assessment is explained in relation to institutional needs such as providing degrees or avoiding plagiarism: the university has been ascribed the characteristics of a human agent that has '*needs*' or feelings about assessment. This ascription of agency is also characteristic to David who speaks about the university as something that can be talked to through assessment process; he explains, '*So I can tell the university how they are progressing through their studies*'. In addition to this clear involvement of the university, there is also a tendency to speak about assessment on behalf of a collective '*we*'. For example, this unclear '*we*' in Lesley's interview helps to justify the assessment policy - '*I think it's important that there is a policy, so we have got parameters, we have got guidelines*'. Jane, however, applies '*we*' to argue against the regulatory developments: '*we all have our own way of giving assignments*'. The academics tend to speak about assessment in the context of a larger institutional collective, even if it remains unclear who belongs to this greater collective. This kind of institutional dimension in academics' discourse might indicate that assessment in academics' experience is an institutional technology that is closely related to the policy context of assessment.

In terms of policy, Linda and Jane argue that assessment regulation is important for ensuring fairness:

*So I think it is important in this system we have to have that kind of set guidance that keeps us right but also protects students in terms of them feeling that they had a fair say. (Linda)*

*I think in general, most of regulations are good, in general, I think that they serve a useful purpose in terms of getting our jobs done fairly, and in terms of telling the students what is and isn't there, their rights and their role, and what responsibility they have to get things [done] on time. (Jane)*

Further justification for assessment policy emerges in relation to institutional needs for quality assurance. For example, John - who viewed most assessment policy developments as attempts to enhance quality of educational practices - argues that there is *'a very rigid approach to quality assurance in assessment in [a particular School]*, and he describes his own role and experience in developing this *'rigid approach'*.

*I was responsible for leading the whole process of quality control and quality assurance assessment, emm...which emm...really involved...emm...establishing the use of examination and assessment blueprints, establishing standard-setting, the use of psychometrics to analyse item and test performance, and emm...and really all that kind of thing. (John)*

It might be the case that the keywords evident in John's example (i.e. *'rigid'*, *'blueprints'*, *'standard-setting'*) reflect the discourses of accountability that are characteristic to assessment policy in the University of Glasgow (as analysed in Chapter 8). They may also refer to managerialist practices that aim to improve academic practices and manage academic work.

Participants' discourses indicated that they spoke rationally about assessment policy in terms of fair treatment of students but also of quality assurance. However, the overall discourse around the ways policy impacted their practice tended to be emotional, indicating difficulties and doubts. For example, when the interviewees spoke about the *Code*, they used phrases such as *'[it is] a complicated document'* (Paul) *'[it is] a crazy regulation'* (Peter), *'[it is] difficult to digest'* (Christine), and *'it is difficult to follow'* (Patricia). David states: *'And for me anyway to get my head around, and I think it's difficult as well for students to get their heads around'*. Christine shares similar thoughts: *'like any document that tries, has to speak to enormous diversity of practice in an enormous institution, it's always going to be quite difficult to digest.'* She also highlights the importance of the *Guide* that has helped her to understand the regulation:

*The fact that there is also a Guide to the Code of Assessment [laughing], I mean, I read that, I find it useful, and I'm glad that there is one, but the fact that there has to be a guide it indicates that it isn't self-explanatory, and it does need interpretation what the actual implications of that are in kind of specific circumstances. (Christine)*

These difficulties in understanding assessment policy appeared to cause negative emotions among academics. The interviewees expressed how they are *'frightened'* of not getting assessment *'right'* (Lesley, Jane) or how *'there is always a terrible feeling that things*

*might have been updated*’ in the assessment regulation without noticing it (Christine). Paul emphasises ‘disempowerment’: *‘So I think we feel quite disempowered at the sort of regulatory side of things’*.

All the participants, apart from John, tend to experience institutional assessment policy as difficult and constraining their academic work and practices. Linda and Angela call these constraints ‘scrutiny’ and an ‘extraordinary administrative process’:

*...every course in this institution has to go through scrutiny, so every course that is designed or new has to be scrutinised and approved, and every course that we have in the book if you want to make major changes to it, they have to be re-scrutinised and that feels that it kind of completely slows the system down, as it can sometimes take 18 months. You could have somebody who is really, really excited about changing something, and they think, ‘Well, that’s going to take ages to change in the scrutiny, so I just carry on as I have always done’*. (Linda)

*...the energy behind, ‘Well, let’s try something interesting and different’, it’s really easy to douse that with the cold reality of the extraordinary administrative process that it takes to officially change your assessment practices*. (Angela)

A more specific example of scrutiny is provided by Carol who highlights difficulties academics face when trying to change assessment practices through the Programme Information Process (PIP)<sup>19</sup>:

*If I want to change, I want to change some aspects of my course, I can do that relatively easy, but if I want to change assessment, not only I have got to go through PIP and kind of, all of that scrutiny which I think is really bizarre because I just made it up on a train and now it is with me all my life. And I’m like, ‘Why is it that I am suddenly tied to something that I literally made up?’*. (Carol)

Consequently, some academics perceive assessment as something complex and mysterious: ‘a lottery’ (Lesley), ‘jumping through hoops’ (Lesley, David), ‘a big magic box’ (David), ‘a fixed rubric’ (Angela), ‘a necessary evil’ (Andrew), ‘a sort of gate keeping process’ (Andrew) but also something that is ‘dusty and inappropriate’ (Martha). These phrases reflect the academics’ experience of assessment policy and scrutiny that makes them both constrained but also puzzled about the regulation when practising assessment.

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<sup>19</sup> PIP is a web system used in the University of Glasgow. It allows academics to propose new and changed courses/course programmes and to receive an institutional approval to these changes.

### *Scholarly positions in assessment*

It might be the case that this negative experience of assessment policy is caused by the academics' rather contradictory scholarly understandings of assessment. The discourse analysis indicated a difference in the ways academics from various disciplines reason about assessment but also a strong belief about different disciplinary areas having different assessment cultures. For example, the participants from the Social Sciences tended to emphasise the importance of facilitating student learning through assessment. Lesley argues that she tries *'to create a...a...more collaborative assessment, so that students are not so frightened of it'*, and Arlene speaks about her belief in *'supporting students'*: *'we're also trying to get the students to send us a draft before they submit and things like that as well.'* David emphasises the importance of benchmarking student learning and teaching, and Linda describes a learning-oriented *'ethos'* that underpins assessment in her department:

*...assessment for me is all about, it's all about benchmarking the student learning, it's all about benchmarking my teaching as well. Because assessment shouldn't just be tied to learning of the student, but it also has to be linked into my teaching. (David)*

*...there is definitely an ethos in here that when we are marking, we are marking to try to encourage people and to try to help people to actually learn through the process. (Linda)*

Interviewees from Social Sciences shared similar understandings of assessment that emphasise supporting and encouraging students and their learning, rarely mentioning grades or degree systems. This might have been a coincidence, but it might also demonstrate their disciplinary culture. David in particular, argues that in the School of Education, there is a *'philosophy'* that emphasises pedagogical practices of assessment: *'most of us in here do have a teaching background. So we have that philosophy in-built, if you like'*.

When tracing the ways the academics from the Arts and Humanities/A&H reason about assessment, the importance of facilitating student learning tends to be emphasised, but there is also significant focus on grades and degrees. Christine emphasises a dual purpose of assessment: on the one hand, *'giving the students a mark...emm...that they then add up together their final degree'* and on the other, *'feed-forwarding'* their progress. Paul also explains assessment being a dual process:

*...so there are two parts of it. One of it is you're having to come to judgement, you're evaluating how good the work is because you need to come up with a number, because that's how they get their degree. Emm but then the...the interesting part of it is of course the feedback. To some extent it is summative and formative assessment. (Paul)*

The interviewees from the A&H disciplines have a more pragmatic way of reasoning and explaining assessment, especially in relation to grades and degree systems. However, Jane (the only participant from the College of Science and Engineering) shared her thoughts about fairness in assessment that can be accomplished by giving students *'enough of a variety of assessment methods, such that that mark is fair'*. She speaks about her role as an assessor by arguing:

*I have a responsibility to give a mark that represents to students two things: their performance, well three things I suppose, the kind of natural competence, their performance and also the effort that they have put in. (Jane)*

Jane's reference to 'natural competence' raises a question about her thoughts on students' different intellectual capacities that assessment might have to differentiate.

However, the biggest differences arise from the discourses of academics from the Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences/MVLS. The interviewees from the MVLS described assessment as *'a stimulus for learning'* (Patricia) and *'a measure'* of something (Julie):

*I honestly think assessment is a stimulus for learning. I wish it weren't, but I think it is a necessary, it is not an evil, I don't mean that at all, but it is necessary, otherwise students won't push themselves to learn. (Patricia)*

*I think we need it because I think we need to have a measure how our students are doing, we need to have the measure that they know stuff before they leave the university. (Julie)*

The quotations above reflect an understanding of students as someone who do not want to learn but need to be forced to learn. Such deficit model of students appears to be related to behaviourist understandings of learning and teaching. Philip, for example, explains that assessment in his work is very much based on technology, which reduces his involvement in assessment: *'I don't have to mark, just a computer'*. Thus, the 'measurement' of right and wrong answers can be possible in that disciplinary area. Furthermore, John argues that the MVLS courses differ by their *'major summative function and that's particularly important in professional courses.'* John also argues that assessment in these professional

courses needs to be carefully organised and ‘monitored’: *‘So within any given assessment, we know precisely which outcomes [are] being assessed, and we monitor that to ensure that we are sampling across the curriculum appropriately’.*

However, the idea of disciplinary difference that most research participants demonstrated might also contribute to their overall experience of isolation in assessment practices. Lesley argues, *‘I’ve got very limited knowledge of what other parts of the university do’.* Similarly, Julie states *‘emm I mean I’m not aware of what’s going on in other disciplines because I don’t teach on those’.* Angela also adds that *‘there is no regular institutionalised means by which we would have any clue what other people do other than informal conversations’*, but she also draws attention to the annual and university-wide Learning and Teaching Conference, a possible opportunity for the exchange of practices, being not the most efficient use of academics’ time:

*I suppose the only other place you might understand what the people do is the Learning and Teaching Conference which I have attended once and I have an interest in learning and teaching, but I don’t, I don’t, I haven’t considered that as a good use of my time as a way of finding out about what happens at the university.*  
(Angela)

Even if the sample size in this research does not make any conclusions about disciplinary influence possible, the discourses indicate that the world of regulations in the University of Glasgow can challenge the world of disciplines and departmental cultures. While the regulatory context of assessment appears to promote standardised practices across the colleges, disciplines still favour their own ways of reasoning and practising assessment.

### ***Assessment relations: interaction between assessors and assessed***

As the policy context and the scholarly/disciplinary positions tend to contradict at the practice level of academic work, these contradictory experiences might also influence the ways in which academics and students interact. On the one hand, some academics emphasise that they want to *‘practise what [they] preach’* (David), *‘to walk the walk as well as talking the talk’* (David), and to see *‘students blossom’* (Carol); all reflect scholarly positions related to facilitating student learning. On the other hand, there are occasions where the regulations are seen constraining these attempts. For example, Martha explains how she feels like *‘a translator’* between the institutional regulations and students:



*I think I feel like that because I've been a student not so long ago, and I feel quite well connected to students, and I really feel that I am myself a translator between those two worlds. (Martha)*

Similarly, Paul questions if the increasing focus on regulations makes academics constrained in assessment practices but also constraining students and their creativity:

*...encouraging our students to go for it, to take up the challenge, to be a bit risky, and to try and put together really new dramatic arguments, something really creative and original or are we encouraging them to play safe, don't go out on a limb just be a bit careful, don't do anything too original, don't try and get an A, it's the message there. And I wonder if we are actually telling them to do that. Because all of the criteria, careful referencing, it's all very pedestrian sometimes... (Paul)*

The further dimension shaping the academic-student interaction might go back to wider structural changes in higher education and the student population as mentioned earlier in this chapter. So it might not only be tensions between the regulations and scholarly cultures that academics face, but also changing student expectations, especially as students in today's universities need to balance between their work and studies: '*they are working at the same time as studying*' (Paul), '*all my students work, every single one of our students work*' (Arlene). Arlene also argues that non-traditional students who have jobs and family commitments struggle to meet assessment deadlines:

*I think another thing is one of the difficulties with our students is that they are working full-time, because a majority of them have family commitments whether it's young children, whether it's elderly parents or whatever, plus they are studying. And that can actually impact their engagement with assessment, trying to meet deadlines and things like that. (Arlene)*

Furthermore, the academics interviewed describe contemporary students as instrumental and demanding in their studies, while being more aware of the assessment process and their rights in assessment. The aspects of increased awareness are described by Patricia:

*The students easily say compared to 10-20 years ago are much more aware of the assessment process, how it works. Emm and are free to talk about it, you know, we have focus groups, meetings with them every term to discuss it. So completely different from when I was a student, we weren't involved in it, we didn't understand the process, we just did what we were told. (Patricia)*

In terms of expectations and demands, however, Paul argues that '*students are perhaps expecting more, they're expecting more, more detailed, more specific feedback*', and Jane

states that *'there [are] demands from students for emm regular, defined, very concrete tuition'*.

This understanding of student demands might reflect a client culture in academia and students as consumers who have pragmatic attitudes towards tuition and who feel entitled to feedback. Therefore, students tend to see innovative assessment as *'radical'* (Lesley). Lesley's argument is based on her experience with a final year student who reacted against her innovative assessment methods by saying *'I just want something safe, because it's her final year, she wants to know exactly what she is going to get her head around'*. Similar concern is shared by Julie who argues that students are increasingly demanding:

*I think too many students think that it's their right to be at university, it's their right to be taught, it's their right to get lecture notes on Moodle, it's their right to whatever, and none of it's their right, it is a privilege to be in the university, it is a privilege to be, get education at this level, that so many other countries, other people don't have that privilege, and I think students sometimes forget that.* (Julie)

Furthermore, Jane argues that *'we have lost a lot of flexibility on both sides: both in terms of the dealings with students and the dealings with the university'*. Her understanding of assessment might be shaped by the policy context but also by the change in student population and attitudes.

This highly complex experience of regulations, disciplines and student expectations shapes the way academics interact with their students. Some academics may hold on to authority and disciplinary power in a Foucauldian sense where students are put *'under the thumb'* of an academic (Foucault, 1984a, p. 299). For example, David speaks about his interaction with first year students, and he refers to his professional expertise and experience as something that can create a sense of authority:

*[They] come to university, and they show me something, and I'll say, 'Right, that's a grade B', and they will say, 'Why is it a grade B?', and I'll say, 'Because I consider it to be grade B, I know how a grade B looks like'.* (David)

David's quotation above contradicts his previously presented understanding of assessment as a way of supporting student learning and to *'practise what [you] preach'*. Even if he describes assessment as a learning-oriented process, he still perceives himself as the arbiter of the grade. Further examples of authority in academic-student relationships are brought forward by Lesley and Jane:

*I made it clear to them that I would actually have the final word which kind of takes away from the idea of being democratic, but they seem to be Okay with that I think. (Lesley)*

*I would put up on Moodle, even if I don't discuss this in class, I would put up on Moodle the bar, the frequency histogram for the marks. So that gives them additional feedback, the way they stand in the class. (Jane)*

Both examples position students as being subordinate in assessment relations. While Lesley speaks about the direct authority of an assessor in determining the grades, Jane draws attention to the instruments that can be used to create rank orders of students. Therefore, even if students are perceived being more confident about their rights in assessment (see Franz, 1998; Naidoo, 2005; Svensson and Wood, 2007), the ways academics demonstrate their authority and domination over students tend to still (perhaps intentionally) constrain students.

Linda argues that student assessment includes a risk of mistreating disciplinary power:

*So assessment is a powerful tool in terms of learning, but it's a powerful way of which we demonstrate our power over students. I think and I am not always convinced that's used as well as it could be or that power couldn't be broken down and changed in some way. (Linda)*

From Linda's perspective, '*a lot of assessment should be negotiable*'; however, she also highlights that this negotiability of assessment '*has massive implications of power*, confirming Taras's (2008) argument that assessment is commonly understood as the domain of the teacher. It might be the case that assessment is a main area in higher education where a Foucauldian understanding of sovereign and disciplinary power remains evident. Foucault (1975, p. 186) argued that assessment enables teachers to 'transform [their] pupils into a whole field of knowledge' – to objectify students and to increase their docility. It might be the form of control that academics still have over changing student population. As further evidence of power relations, academics describe students as being '*a bit perhaps wary of stepping out of the boundaries*' (Lesley), '*worried*' (Paul) and not being '*that confident about precisely what we are expecting from them*' (Paul). Carol also states that '*the assessment just freaks them out*'. So it seems that academics' authority and domination in assessment also position students accordingly. The counter-perspective in terms of the ways students experience assessment and their relationship with academics will be explored in Chapter 12.

As the discourses have indicated, academics from the University of Glasgow experience assessment policy and practice existing in a complex and rather contradictory relationship. On the one hand, they perceive assessment policy being part of the managerialist practices that constrain their work and educational processes such as assessment, and on the other hand, they still often rely on their scholarly/disciplinary understandings of assessment in their practice contexts. In addition, they also view changing student expectations (demands as the participants call it) contributing to this complex experience. It is therefore unsurprising that the academics still fall back on their authority and disciplinary power to operate in this complex context of assessment.

### ***Academic understanding of themselves in the (assessment) policy contexts***

Assessment policy and practice contexts tend to shape the academics' understanding of themselves. As the analysis below will demonstrate, academics appear to feel highly pressurised and concerned about their work and educational practices. This section will start with an exploration of discourses that reflect how academics perceive themselves in higher education and assessment policy contexts, and it will then trace the ways academics negotiate and respond to the policy.

#### ***Pressurised academic subjectivity***

Despite the policy constraints highlighted earlier in this chapter, some academics still explain assessment as a relatively free and flexible process in their work. For example, David compares his current role as an assessor with his previous experiences in a school context, and he argues, *'I actually feel I have quite a lot of flexibility'*, but he also immediately adds that *'I don't know whether that's because I've come from a school where the assessment is less flexible because of SQA arrangement, the national qualifications'*. So his experience of flexibility tends to be relative to his past experiences of being an assessor at school. Peter views his work as a lecturer in the University of Glasgow being less constrained and commoditised than the work of his friends/colleagues in English universities. This also means that he compares his understanding of flexibility with that of others:

*I talk to a lot of my friends who are in English universities, particularly English universities which are sort of almost in precarious positions, University of Surrey,*

*Sussex where the subjects aren't entirely established there, and I feel it's much more pressure for these types of things like, all their courses have to have clear employability outcomes, all the, you know, everything they do is linked to, they have to have placements, they have to go and help students to find placements. It's much stronger, it's much more. Their day to day lives, when I talk to them, it seems much more commoditised. (Peter)*

So it might be the case that an 'illusion of individual autonomy' (Davies, 2005, 10) that is contextual characterises some academics' experiences of higher education policy contexts.

More often, however, the discourse analysis revealed the pressures related to being an academic in the University of Glasgow: 'pressure on time' (Angela), 'extreme pressure on front' (Angela), and 'pressure on people to give less feedback' (Linda). Some pressures were described as being expected in relation to career development and therefore accepted amongst the participants. Linda states, 'I have been promoted, so of course I have more pressure higher level probably than I had when I first arrived'. John, a professor with management duties, does not refer to pressures, but he describes the changes that have taken place during his career:

*Well, it has changed over the years quite a lot, and that I have gradually become...emm...more orientated towards leadership and management roles, and I think that's just something that happens as you become more senior. (John)*

Both Linda and John explain their experience of change in connection with higher responsibility and career development. It could be also argued that John perceives an involvement in management being a part of a common career path in academia, characterising anyone who progresses.

However, most pressures emphasised by the interviewees tended to have roots in recent policy developments. This became especially evident when tracing the ways academics spoke about a conflicting relationship between research and teaching. The academics emphasised their concerns about teaching in the University of Glasgow as affected by neoliberal techniques such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF). This is especially visible in Angela's interview when she speaks about the REF by arguing that 'much more emphasis [is] put on research outputs and the quality of research output which is fine but that then puts pressure on time that people can commit to teaching'. The

university teachers<sup>20</sup> are even more critical in their reflections. Lesley, for example, shares her concerns about devaluing university teaching. She states, *'I am a university teacher'*, but immediately adds, *'I have been up to quite recently the only university teacher in this particular department'*. Patricia, however, speaks about the tension between research and teaching positions, and argues how promotion for teaching staff is more difficult in Glasgow:

*I think my coping strategy has changed from trying to publish in teaching as to go back and do research, and I do mean medical research and hopefully getting publications that way because otherwise I'll never get promotion. It is just a fact of life. (Patricia)*

Both Lesley and Patricia view this distinction between university teachers and lecturers as a structural problem caused by a lack of institutional support to university teachers and their career development.

However, some participants explain that lecturers are highly pressurised, as it is not only research that matters but also teaching excellence and administrative duties. Angela, for example, describes the *'extraordinary pressure'* in a lecturer's work:

*So I think staff are increasingly feeling under quite extraordinary pressure to both be as amazing as a researcher and within that I should mention the new impact agenda, so we just don't produce the research, we now have to think much more about disseminating it. And on top of that now it's about teaching excellence. So yes, extreme pressure on front, let's put it like that way. (Angela)*

Paul also draws attention to the increasing administrative duties. On the one hand, he argues that teaching is *'tremendous for job satisfaction'*, but on the other, he adds that *'increasing amounts of admin work'* compete with his opportunities to deal with individual students and teaching. Paul says, *'we have to do a million other things at the same time which makes it even more difficult to keep track of one particular job'*. Interestingly, Christine emphasises that not only teaching but also research duties can be under threat because of the lack of research funding in disciplinary area of Arts and Humanities. She argues, *'I love teaching, but it wouldn't be the job I would have gone into it if I wouldn't be able to do also research'*. Christine is concerned about the lack of research opportunities:

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<sup>20</sup> Compared to lecturers who carry out both teaching and research in the UK universities, university teachers are academics who have been contracted to do mostly teaching.

*...it's a real sense the way the whole higher education landscape might be kind of dramatically changing such that yes, there is barely any research in Arts and Humanities; we are really just doing teaching. (Christine)*

Clearly linked to the changing nature of academic work pressures related to time and workload receive significant attention in academic discourses of the University of Glasgow. Time is often problematised in relation to efficiency that policy discourses promote. Julie and Martha, for instance, argue that workload issues prevent academics developing their assessment practices:

*I think that a lot of the courses the assessment we use may not be the most innovative or exciting or whatever, but I think it comes down to the amount of time that the staff have in order to develop more innovative, exciting assessment and test whether it's actually assessing what we want it to assess. (Julie)*

*It's nowhere as creative as I would like it to be. Every so often I try to innovate a little bit, just as long as ten minutes of thinking allows me to innovate, and I would maybe base that essay starting from a real case or I will give them a choice of two or three assessments. (Martha)*

Many others confirm this view. Patricia argues, 'So yeah there're problems of making the assessment as formative as it could be, and it's workload pressures that keep us from doing that'. John also explains how workload issues constrain academics, and this is especially in feedback part of assessment:

*...I would like us to do better in some areas in particular, in particular, I would like us to do better around feedback, but there are huge challenges there, in particular, you know, the workload that is implicit, providing high-quality individual feedback to all students is actually just not possible for most assessments. (John)*

It could be that pressures academics experience in their work - coping with various roles and workload issues - affect their practices. These pressures hold back pedagogical development of assessment. However, Linda also emphasises that it might not be only pedagogical advancements that will be affected but also academic integrity in dealing with such issues as plagiarism:

*I feel there is a lot of pressure on people to give less feedback, and there is a lot of pressure to pass people rather than fail them because, you know, that it is going to be more work. I think there is a lot of pressure - I haven't felt it this much on this job as on my previous job - but a lot of pressure to deal lightly with plagiarism when it comes up because that can be such a huge amount of work dealing with a plagiarism case. (Linda)*

### ***Tracing the forms of policy negotiation and resistance***

When tracing the ways the academics cope with their experiences of being pressurised and constrained academic subjects, the phrases such as '*we have to start a revolution*' (Martha) and '*I'm trying to think about what gets me frustrated with the system*' (Patricia) were often common, and they demonstrated academics' oppositional attitude against constraining policy developments. The practical strategies, however, tended to be much more covert. For example, in terms of visible collegial support, only Linda mentioned the importance of support she receives from her team:

*If I didn't have that really supportive team, I'd probably be looking for another job. So I think that's important bit, that's part of what keeps you in the institution is the people you work with closely.* (Linda)

The lack of reference to collegial support in other interviews might be related to managerialist practices and a culture of performativity that was explored earlier in this chapter. Lesley argues that '*everybody works away in their own wee pockets*', or Paul who explains metaphorically that academics feel '*divorced from people making these regulations*'. A feeling of isolation from both collegial but also management networks might hinder the forms of collegial response to (neoliberal) policy developments, and it causes a situation in which individual forms of negotiation and response are the only option. Some academics, for example, have tried to distance themselves from the regulatory context of assessment. Julie speaks about her role as a university teacher not requiring being '*worried*' about regulations:

*Well, I am not an Assessment Officer, so I actually don't need to worry too much about the regulations because there is an Assessment Officer for each of the courses I am involved in. Emm and they basically guide me in what I'm able to do and what I'm not able to do. Emm so I wouldn't say that I have a huge of understanding of all of the regulations, but then my job I don't think requires me to have that understanding at the moment.* (Julie)

It might be the case that distancing oneself from regulations is already a form of oppositional response to policy development.

In terms of more specific individual approaches to coping with pressures, however, Linda argues that she takes '*the regulations with a pinch of salt*' and goes further by explaining '*I think I sometimes try to advise staff to think about writing assessment in such a way in*



*those documents that there is a relative amount of flexibility in them*'. She also gives a vivid example of manoeuvring within regulatory context of assessment:

*So for example, a member of staff recently came to me to ask about an exam, whether it could be an open book exam rather than a closed exam. And I said, 'Go back to your documents what did you write in there', and she said, 'It's great, I just wrote exam'. So I said, 'You don't need to go back to 18 months worth scrutiny if you want to make it open book. There is nothing that says that you can't do that, as long as your students know and as long as you give them plenty of notice'. (Linda)*

Linda's example illustrates how flexibility and freedom can be gained by knowing the regulations and being ready to manoeuvre within the regulations and managerialist practices. Similar meanings are also brought forward by others. Angela argues, *'I have always gone with just flexing the rules as far as possible before I hit the point when I actually have to do paperwork'*. Paul uses the words *'semi-ignore'* and *'semi-tweak'* to speak about regulations. He also explains that flexibility depends on the ways academics read regulations:

*...there certainly is flexibility which is really important. How much I suppose it depends...emm it depends whether they notice or not, it depends precisely how you read the regulations or how aware you are of the regulations. (Paul)*

Similarly, Andrew argues that there appears to be *'flexibility built in'* the regulations. From his perspective, the language used in the regulations makes it possible to have some flexibility at the practice level:

*...one thing about the regulations that they are not set up as astonishing as you think they are. I think the language often is chosen very carefully that actually it's almost like there is some flexibility built in, I mean even things like the regulations state that you have to have assignments returned to the students within three weeks, but it does say 'normally', and therefore, as long as you give students a notification, you can be flexible within that as well. (Andrew)*

In addition to a form of covert resistance taking place within the policy ambiguity, Christine and Paul emphasise the status-related advantages that some academics have when coping with pressures. For example, Christine speaks about freedom that a convenor can have compared to the members of a teaching team, and Paul provides an example from his own experience of being a course convenor:

*I think that the conveners have a certain amount of flexibility, so again what kind of assessment they set, but again all the teaching team would do that in the same way. (Christine)*

*So I do have the flexibility to throw all that out of the window and think what I really want to achieve with the assessment, and let's go back to the basics. (Paul)*

It therefore appears that forms of policy negotiation and resistance in academic work depend on individual actions such as a readiness to manoeuvre within regulations but also to use one's academic position to shape practices. Thus, the overall perceived freedom and an opportunity to manoeuvre within the regulations and managerialist practices is not something that exists independently but is related to opportunities that arise with different academic positions and with willingness to 'ignore' and 'tweak' (Paul) the regulations.

## **Conclusion**

The academic discourses explored and analysed in this chapter reflect an experience of a neoliberal mode of government that operates based on an economic interest and competition (Foucault, 2004) and that affects 'academics' emotional lives and their senses of professional identity' as vividly explained by Olssen (2014, [interview]) at the beginning of this chapter. The academics interviewed perceive marketisation and commodification of higher education as shaping the operation of the university, their academic work and educational practices. For some, this is a negative change - 'dark times' as metaphorically explained by Tamboukou (2012, p. 849) – making the university operate as a 'factory' (Carol, Philip) shaped by various economic forces. Furthermore - and in line with Clegg and Smith (2010) - the academics perceive educational processes such as teaching, learning and assessment being increasingly regulated via set institutional regulations and managerialist practices. Academics therefore feel managed (Fanghanel, 2012), monitored and assessed rather than trusted in their work (Barnett, 2008).

Most academics perceive the assessment policy in the University of Glasgow as part of managerialist practices that constrain their work and their scholarly/disciplinary understanding of assessment. Furthermore, this conflict between the policy and scholarly/disciplinary practices tends to refer to academics' experience of policy discourses as a threat rather than something that has already been internalised and enforced by academics themselves (an exception was John's interview). This oppositional attitude

towards policy might also be reflected in a direct assessment relationship with students where academics tend to hold on their traditional authority and domination. It might be the case that academics struggle to cope with both policy and changing student population, and they try to control the situation by constraining students: making them ‘describable and analysable objects’ who would behave as required (Foucault, 1975, p. 190). This assumption, however, would require further research.

While the academics tend to be highly certain about the constraints acting on their work, they struggle to point to any particular agents responsible for these constraints. The only reference is made to management as an ambiguous ‘they’ or to highly demanding students who make their academic life more difficult. It might also demonstrate a Foucauldian understanding of power that is highly diffuse in neoliberal settings: ‘at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous’ as Foucault and Deleuze (1977b, p. 213) explained the operation of power. Therefore, also this so called ‘enemy’ acting on academics remains unclear.

Even if the neoliberal (assessment) policy developments remain ambiguous, they still act on academic subjectivities: ‘in their minds and in their being’ academics are not completely free, but institutional developments increasingly ‘filter’ their experiences (Barnett, 2008, p. 15). The academics’ positive attitude towards graduate attributes might be one example of how institutional discourses start affecting academics’ perceptions and beliefs. So even if this research does not support the understanding of academics being ‘rational, autonomous, entrepreneurial’ subjects in a neoliberal sense (Bansel, 2011, p. 551), it still demonstrates that neoliberal policy developments with their constraints and mistrust act on academics by creating academics who are increasingly pressurised, fearful and stressed. This experience of pressures, fears and stress could be contextualised in what Ball (2000, p. 6) calls a replacement of ‘authentic social relations’ with individualism and performativity. ‘Universities are turning into highly competitive places where staff distrust other staff; where collegiality and cooperation are seen as sideshows or something’ as explained by Olssen (2014, [interview]).

It could therefore be argued that neoliberal policy developments in the University of Glasgow have not (yet) created academic ‘homo economicus’ (Hamann, 2009 p. 37) in a Foucauldian sense, but they have produced an academic subject who is unhappy and pressurised. While being concerned, the academics interviewed still emphasise that there

are ‘pockets of freedom’ (Peters and Olssen, 2005, p. 47) in neoliberal academia. These forms of resistance are rather individual and hidden actions, depending on academics’ readiness to manoeuvre within the policy context and to exploit one’s academic status for the sake of some flexibility. These are not the technologies of the self in a Foucauldian sense where truth-telling and risks are the core centre (Foucault, 2010), but they demonstrate how resistance can take place in multiple forms as Muckelbauer (2000) interpreted a Foucauldian resistance. Furthermore, these multiple responses might also demonstrate that the complex process of constituting subjects has always some space for resistance (Grant, 1997).

## Chapter 10: Academic discourses in Tallinn University

The study carried out in Tallinn University involved 10 academics from various disciplinary areas: Social Sciences (4), Arts and Humanities (3), Health and Life Sciences (2), and Science and Engineering (1) (see Table 10). The interview questions addressed the participants' experiences of higher education context, their academic work and assessment policies and practices (see Appendix 9). Academics were also encouraged to reflect on possible changes in these areas.

**Table 10. Sample of academics in Tallinn University**

Pseudonym	Gender	Academic work experience (years)	Position	Institute	Disciplinary Area
Mart	M	>35	Professor	<i>Combined between institutes</i>	Soc Sci
Kersti	F	>15	Lecturer	Educational Sciences	Soc Sci
Liina	F	<10	Lecturer	Educational Sciences	Soc Sci
Karina	F	<10	Lecturer	International and Social Studies	Soc Sci
Madis	M	>15	Lecturer	Humanities	A&H
Eerika	F	>10	Lecturer	Estonian Language and Culture	A&H
Merje	F	<5	Lecturer	Fine Arts	A&H
Maarika	F	>40	Associate Professor	Health Sciences and Sports	Health & Life Sci
Terje	F	>10	Professor	Mathematics and Natural Sciences	Health & Life Sci
Harri	M	>35	Professor	Informatics	S&E

The academics interviewed from Tallinn University, like their colleagues from the University of Glasgow, experienced some interview questions being 'difficult'. Responses such as *'well, I find it difficult to talk about'* (Liina), *'it's hard to answer this question'* (Maarika), *'oh, that's difficult'* (Terje) were common, and they might have indicated some non-reflected aspects in academic work. Also, a dominant use of a word *'maybe'* was recognisable via the phrases such as *'I don't know, I maybe think - actually, actually like'* (Eerika) and *'maybe it's that influence'* (Kersti). While *'maybe'* and *'difficult'* provide

some insight into academics' uncertainties during the interviews, there were also some clearer phrases reflecting participants' experience of the interview questions:

*Again, this is a very pluralistic issue for me... (Liina)*

*Three words - it's quite complicated at first... (Merje)*

*But I don't know really [...] how to say... (Kersti)*

*So what should I say...what word should it be? (Maarika)*

These phrases demonstrate that the interviewees reflected on their past experiences, and they constructed their understanding of certain processes (particularly related to higher education and assessment policy) during the interviews. This might be also a reason why, in some cases, the participants summarised their reflections by saying *'I'm starting to think that more things have changed for an academic after all'* (Kersti) or *'I think I just created the meaning of assessment for myself, I think'* (Eerika).

While acknowledging this complex discursive context of the interviews, this chapter starts with an exploration of academics' experiences of higher education and institutional contexts, and it will then move towards the academic understanding of assessment policy and practice and their own subject positions in these contexts.

## ***Academic experiences of higher education and institutional contexts***

This section focuses on the higher education context as described by the academics interviewed. The section starts with a particular focus on tensions between recent (neoliberal) policy developments and historic context of higher education in Estonia. Furthermore, the section explores the ways the participants explain the institutional profile of Tallinn University.

### ***Changing higher education context in Estonia***

The academics interviewed from Tallinn University described higher education in Estonia, using words such as a *'constant change'* (Mart), *'internationalisation'* (Liina) *'changing'*, *'measurable'* and *'factory'* (Eerika) but also something that is still *'rose-coloured'*, *'sterile'*

and 'idealistic' (Madis). Madis explains the aspects of sterility by describing university as 'a safe bubble' and 'a freshly cleaned hotel room' that does not have connection with outside world or societal change and equality:

*...it's like a freshly cleaned hotel room - that's constantly cleaned - like you leave for a while, and an invisible chambermaid has come and tidied up. And it's always comfortable there - fresh, conditioned air, fresh toothpaste and soap and what you have - yet next door, people might live in bamboo huts. (Madis)*

Similarly, Liina criticises higher education as 'an ivory tower' that 'fail[s] to keep pace with what happens outside'. So there appears to exist a tension in academic discourses between the experiences of change - perhaps even a negative change in terms of higher education becoming 'measurable' and 'factory' as Eerika described it above - and higher education operating in isolation and based on traditions. When tracing this tension further, aspects of internationalisation and expansion of higher education emerge. Internationalisation and an increase in student numbers appear to be recent changes in Tallinn University, contrasted with the historic context of higher education in Estonia.

In terms of internationalisation, the policy influences of the European Union (especially the Bologna Process) were often highlighted. Karina argues that 'the EU-level documents [are] setting the targets', and Maarika sees 'the whole quality assurance process, the whole accreditation process' being based on 'the Bologna thing'. Similarly, Mart argues that various European influences are constantly shaping the 'game' in higher education in Estonia: 'In a word, the game itself here in higher education [...] comes a European programme, something has to change, so, constant change'. Karina and Madis, however, express their concern about the impact internationalisation has on Estonian language as a language of science:

*Another sad thing is that it's encouraged or thought, that the most valuable science done in Estonia is published in English or in another foreign language. That way, the local science - science in Estonian - is given a low blow. [...] this kind of science is on the path to extinction. (Madis)*

*Certainly internationalisation is important - but whether or not we have to do it, we can't forget keeping a high-level of our own language, development of terminology. (Karina)*

In addition to the concerns about national language, Harri explains that some higher education policy developments and (international) funding opportunities favour certain

universities in Estonia and thereby promote *'cartel politics'* in higher education. Harri refers to the University of Tartu, the oldest and largest university in Estonia, by critiquing that *'the University of Tartu started defining itself as the national university'*, and therefore *'the interests of the University of Tartu serve the interests of Estonia'*. From his point of view, this puts other Estonian universities, including Tallinn University, into an unfair position in defining themselves and competing for funding. This is especially as research in Estonian universities is strongly dependent on foreign (particularly EU) funding; in recent years, 13-17 per cent of all research and development funding has been foreign (Jaakson and Reino, 2013).

The academics interviewed perceive internationalisation in relation to European policy developments that (negatively) affect the national higher education context in Estonia. Unlike the academics from Glasgow, the participants in Tallinn do not perceive international students being at the centre of internationalisation – working with international students might not be an experienced reality yet. Rather, internationalisation appears to be experienced as a development that mostly affects policy and research aspects of the university.

Changes in student population are still emphasised by the academics. However, these are explained in relation to the increased number of home students. For example, the phrases such as *'the university has blown up to massive proportions'* (Kersti), *'mass education and the expansion of education, it's lasted for a while now'* (Karina), *'the number of people we teach has grown significantly'* (Mart), and *'everybody's attending university - as if it's normal, like the natural continuation'* (Merje) were part of commonly shared discourses in Tallinn University. These experiences of *'mass education'* (Karina) could be expected, as according to Tõnisson (2011, cited in Unt *et al.*, 2013, p. 371), the number of students studying in higher education in Estonia has almost tripled over the last decade. The interviewees emphasise diversity of student population by the phrases such as *'we get more adult learners now'* (Karina) and *'when we started a high school graduate was the most common student, it's not like this now'* (Kersti).

As regards the more specific changes in student profiles, the interviewees emphasise utilitarian attitude of students: *'nowadays they're more, how to say, utilitarian - more oriented towards benefit or result'* (Madis). Harri also critiques that many secondary school graduates go to universities abroad and therefore local universities *'get fewer top*



*achievers*', which means that students '*are that much dumber*', expecting academics to act as '*high school teachers*'. However, from a more positive perspective, Merje refers to higher education funding reform<sup>21</sup> in 2012 that abolished student fees and aimed to make university education more accessible. Merje argues that higher education is '*currently within the Estonian context for completely free; it's, go, study, develop, as good conditions as possible have been created for you*'. So from Merje's perspective, the idea of widening participation does not reflect in decreased intellectual capacity of students as argued by Harri above, but rather something worth celebrating. This opinion, however, tends to be minor, and most participants as evident above tend to be concerned about the impacts that both internationalisation and the expansion of higher education have on universities in Estonia.

### ***Historic context of higher education in Estonia***

Recent changes in academic experience were compared and contrasted with the historic context of higher education in Estonia. For example, Maarika reflects on her past experiences as '*better times*' that allowed her to have more interaction with students: '*there was so much more oral work that you spent twice the time interacting with the students*'. Harri also explains how the Soviet context of higher education and academic work – up to re-independence in 1991 - differed from the present situation:

*Oh, the late '70s were Russian times - everything was 100% dictated from above. It was that the oral work load was much higher for students than it is nowadays, and the proportion of independent work respectively lower. (Harri)*

However, as a younger academic, Liina refers to the Soviet past as something rather negative that disturbs the necessary reforms taking place in higher education. This might also reflect a generational difference in understanding higher education changes. Liina explains how there is a group of academics who do not want to go along with the changes - these are the academics who argue that '*it's all fine on the paper!*', '*It has always been done this way*', Liina also adds that '*it's a Soviet remnant - if the five-year-plan paperwork was fine, all was well, and the actual reality was secondary*'. Furthermore, her oppositional attitude against '*Soviet remnants*' and generational differences tend to be reflected in an example below:

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<sup>21</sup> Funding reform made higher education free of charge from 2012/2013 academic year and to those who are studying full-time and at the courses taught in the Estonian language.

*I admire the older-generation academics who have managed to keep up absolutely wonderfully and think in the exact same rhythm as we do. Not that I can say that there're many of them. (Liina)*

This reference to present and past settings might confirm that policy developments related to internationalisation and expansion of higher education have not been entirely accepted by the academics, or at least by the academics with longer work experience.

This comparison with the past tends to confirm Fairclough's (2001b) viewpoint that any new discourse (i.e. the discourses of internationalisation) can meet resistance in institutions which result them being partly, if at all, enacted or inculcated by people. Furthermore, this tension might reflect a generational difference in academia described by El-Khawas (2008) who argued that newer academics can differ from their long-serving colleagues in their teaching skills, knowledge base but also in their expectations for their career. Archer (2008, p. 387) argues that younger academics are located 'at the nexus of competing discourses' around the issues of what it means to be an academic: this means that they need to constantly negotiate not only their attempts at 'becoming' but the risks of 'unbecoming' academics. It could therefore be expected that younger academics go along with higher education policy developments more easily than their more experienced colleagues, as their career is highly dependent on their success in present academic environment.

### ***Portraying Tallinn University***

It is unsurprising that in this complex higher education context where past and present meet, the academics interviewed are uncertain about the image of Tallinn University. Phrases such as '*We were trying here to find the niche of this particular university*' (Terje) and wanting to '*differ*' from the '*big rival – University of Tartu*' (Merje) might illustrate this uncertainty. Furthermore, these uncertainties might be caused by the fact that Tallinn University was established relatively recently, in 2005. The university has grown since, and it has been recently joined by the University Nord and Tallinn Pedagogical College, along with the foundation of new colleges and institutes. In this sense, Tallinn University could be described as being in a process of 'becoming'.

However, when attempting to capture an experience of Tallinn University as it is expressed by the academics interviewed, the meanings related to physical environment and positive atmosphere arise. For example, Merje describes that '*the campus buildings are finished, and there's a fresh and new environment*'. The interviewees also emphasise the importance

of increasing support services. For instance, Madis argues that in terms of support services *'the institution has changed a lot to the better'*; however, he still critiques that *'giving exams to people with special needs has been very badly organised, indeed, not to say unorganised altogether'*. Regarding further developments in support services, Terje argues that she is *'grateful to the Primus training'<sup>22</sup>*, that has focused on improvement of teaching practices in higher education:

*I've participated in them actively within the last years, and I've received new tips and more self-confidence, and found that this thing can be taught not just in the form of lectures like I was taught at university, but there are other methods, and I've been trying to incorporate these into my courses. (Terje)*

A positive atmosphere tended to be expressed by phrases that describe Tallinn University as *'an exciting place'* (Merje), and *'a nest where, say, in the sense of thinking and work, a relatively free, free bunch of people has come together'* (Mart). Furthermore, Karina argues that Tallinn University seems to be *'more relaxed than many others'*; she continues by explaining *'if you go, for instance, to the Tallinn University of Technology, then the crowd you see there looks a bit different'*.

However, Karina also notes that because of its *'slightly more relaxed atmosphere'* Tallinn University might be *'taken a bit less seriously'* than other Estonian universities. In terms of student rights, however, Harri argues that *'students' liberties are certainly higher'* in this university. He provides an example of *'curricular freedom'* that students have in Tallinn University:

*I've been assessing curricula a lot in different countries, different institutions of higher education. I'll be honest, I haven't seen a similar level of freedom anywhere - so curricular freedom. (Harri)*

This positive atmosphere tends to also reflect in interaction between academics and students in Tallinn University. For example, Terje explains that in Tallinn University, *'the attitude between students and academics is more liberal, it's - I think more friendly, and at the same time, constructively progressive'*. Harri describes this friendliness as being *'flat'* interaction that does not apply a clear *'hierarchy'* in terms of *'student [being] somewhere*

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<sup>22</sup> Primus programme (2008-2015) is funded by the European Social Fund, and it focuses on developing teaching competences in higher education along with other higher education development actions such as strategic management, recognition of prior learning etc (Primus, n.d.).

at the bottom'. He also provides a more specific example from his experience with foreign colleagues who found this 'flat' interaction unusual but soon started liking it:

*...we have two foreign members of staff here who were elected for five years, and I sensed how it was unaccustomed for them, this flat structure. In the life of the institute, in the seminar, each doctoral candidate can argue with the professor, no question - everybody's equal. Now they've grown accustomed to it, and I think they really like it. (Harri)*

Furthermore, Terje argues that not only is interaction between students and academics positive in Tallinn University but so is the way academics interact and collaborate with each other across the institution:

*...we have here people from different fields, different departments, and while at other major universities the walls separate everyone, then here you can find people in every department that you can talk to, freely, about all subjects of the wide world. (Terje)*

It could be argued that academic experiences of higher education and their university are complex, drawing on recent policy developments (i.e. internationalisation and expansion of higher education) and traditions. The discourses demonstrate that the academic understanding of higher education is in a process of change. This is particularly evident among the less experienced academics who tend not to have a strong sense of (emotional) attachment to the historic past of higher education in Estonia.

## ***Academic experiences of assessment policy and practice***

This section will focus on academic experiences of assessment policy and practice. By exploring academic discourses, the section will analyse the ways assessment policy is experienced by the participants and how it might relate to complex higher education context analysed earlier in this chapter. The section will also draw attention to the participants' scholarly understanding of assessment and their interaction with students in assessment situations.

### ***Grade descriptors***

The academics interviewed in Tallinn University emphasised their experiences of practical matters in assessment policy such as grade descriptors (see Appendix 7). The grade A, in

particular, was often referred being problematic. For example, Madis argues that *'If a "5" means "excellent" and "4" means "very good", then many will want to stop at "very good", that "excellent" is something, something mystical'* (Madis). Karina also explains that different academics have different views on *'excellent'* performance:

*The other grades are perhaps clearer, but 'excellent' – whether it's something extraordinary or just a work well done. Whether we expect something higher or just norms achieved. So whether you need to overachieve to be graded as an 'excellent' or not – different academics have very different views on it.* (Karina)

While differentiation of top grades tend to be difficult for academics, it is unsurprising that some perceive non-differentiated (pass/fail) assessment being *'the easiest'* (Karina) or *'more natural'* (Merje) form of practice in Tallinn University:

*For an academic, pass-fail assessment is definitely the easiest, because marking is clearly subjective, and it's hard to work on the grades.* (Karina)

*...the non-differentiated assessment is a far more natural, like, means of, whether passing or failing the student, but not slapping artificial labels on it.* (Merje)

It could be argued that non-differentiated assessment helps academics avoid grade descriptors - *'artificial labels'* as Merje argued above. Liina, however, shares her more critical opinion of non-differentiated assessment approach. From her perspective, pass/fail assessment can negatively affect student attitudes towards learning and assessment:

*It was quite difficult for me at first when I first started teaching subjects with pass/fail examination – I had to make the students understand that a pass/fail exam wasn't as easy as just sitting through the course and getting credit for your mere existence.* (Liina)

The quotes above demonstrate that academics' experience of grade descriptors not only reflects the difficulty of descriptors, but raises further and more complex issues related to subjectivity and student commitment in assessment. These aspects will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

### ***Outcomes-based assessment reform***

In addition to practical issues with grade descriptors in assessment policy, the academics interviewed reflected on their recent experience of outcomes-based assessment policy development. Compared to *'flat'* (Harri) structures in Tallinn University highlighted earlier, this reform was experienced as a top-down development. For example, the phrases such as

*'outcomes-based criteria were being hammered out'* (Maarika), *'outcomes-based assessment system happened'* (Liina), and *'I just started doing as I was asked'* (Merje) reflected the experience of top-down approach. Some argue that the outcomes-based assessment policy development was *'pointless'* (Terje) and that *'it seemed to cause dissatisfaction among academics'* (Karina). Terje, for instance, criticises the process of developing marking criteria as part of the policy:

*I know that there was, hang on, what was it – marking – teaching competence, some kind of, development of marking criteria – oh, that felt such a pointless activity to me.* (Terje)

Some others (a minority in this study) explain the policy in relation to a positive shift towards greater objectivity in assessment. For example, Eerika explains how she likes that assessment cannot be *'subjective or personal'* and that she has *'to be able to rationalise it to the other party, like a contract'*. Similarly, Maarika and Karina explain how outcomes-based reform with its detailed marking criteria has improved objectivity and clarity in assessment:

*On the one hand, it may be tedious to write out the marks in such a detail; on the other hand, it's good after all to try to bring some kind of objectivity into the system.* (Karina)

*Now that we have outcomes-based assessment, in that sense, the assessment system has certainly become more objective and more precise. Maybe – I wouldn't really say more objective but rather clearer for the student...because if all necessary learning outcomes and their assessment possibilities have been brought out in the study programme, it makes assessment clearer for the student.* (Maarika)

Interestingly, there were also some who appeared to be unaware of the outcomes-based assessment policy. For instance, Madis refers to the outcomes-based reform – *'a booklet'* he has received, but he also explains that he has not seen anybody following it in practice. Similarly, Mart argues – *'I've heard the words, but I don't really know what they mean by it'*. Mart also explains how he knows *'nothing'* about any other assessment regulation in Tallinn University.

*Yes, we've received – I think I have the...not even a leaflet, rather a booklet – in a drawer somewhere, and I've read it, but I've never really seen it in action, so I can't really comment on it.* (Madis)

*But let's say, in terms of assessment, I haven't really exerted myself too much over any documents, looking at whether I'm assessing correctly or not – I, based on gut sense or something, think it should be done this way. (Mart)*

This idea of being unaware of assessment policy (except the grade descriptors) appeared to be common to the academics interviewed in Tallinn University. It might be also related to relatively little regulation of assessment in Tallinn University as it became evident through policy analysis in Chapter 8.

However, this distance from the institutional policy tends to cause diverse (and localised) assessment policy and practice across the institution. Merje, for example, emphasises that assessment in her department is a '*relatively free*' activity, while Madis describes assessment being the '*strictest*' in his department:

*In our department, it's relatively free – the Head of Department has said that it has to be as clear as possible, and that it shouldn't be changed within one course period. (Merje)*

*I've had – don't know whether the luck or misfortune – to be in undergraduate/Master's dissertations assessment boards of other departments in Tallinn University, and I have to say the marking system in [my department] is one of the strictest that I know of or that I've witnessed. Very, very, very different assessment exists, and different attitudes exist. (Madis)*

In addition to departmental differences, also unwritten rules have been emphasised by the academics interviewed. For example, Madis argues: '*there's no written rule that a PhD thesis has to be in English, but there's a hidden rule, a hidden requirement – that it should be in English, for example.*' He continues with his reflection by saying that '*if you go and ask about it straight out if there are any hidden requirements – "No, no, we don't have any" – but there are, really*'. These complexities between (localised) policy, unwritten rules and practice might refer to a possible conflict between the worlds of policy and practice in Tallinn University. Phrases such as '*So the curriculum-based learning outcomes are one thing and what's in the course paper is something else*' (Liina) and '*If you ask how many have read the Study Regulation, I think not too many*' (Mart) seem to illustrate this separation. This means that policy is often described as existing separately, while actual practices are depending on the individual and departmental decisions made '*based on gut sense*' as Mart explains it. At the more abstract level, Mart also highlights the remoteness of '*the world of red tape*' in Tallinn University or even more broadly in Estonia:

*But it seems to me that at least in this university and maybe the general practice in Estonia, that the world of red tape and of documentation is a separate world, and it's shown to the accrediting staff – but we have the real life here, it follows its own logic. Sure the two occasionally meet, but let's say perhaps not too often. (Mart)*

### ***Scholarly positions in assessment***

While there is a sense of confrontation against assessment policy amongst the interviewees, academics' scholarly positions in assessment tended to be much more certain. There was some evidence of disciplinary differences in approaching and practising assessment. For example, Karina explains how she distinguishes '*science-like subjects and artistic ones, "softer" and "harder" subjects*' and how this also makes assessment practices different across the institution. When speaking about the uniqueness of disciplinary areas, Terje raises an issue of scientific approach in Health and Life Sciences, and Harri explains his rather unique way of giving feedback to students in disciplinary area of Science and Engineering:

*This is a scientific approach, right: specific methodology, described, analysed, numbers, digits that should be comparable and reproducible by somebody else - such a very scientific approach that we have to those things... (Terje)*

*I note down a '+' if entirely true, '-' if entirely false, and '+/-' if mostly correct with small issues, and '-/+' if mostly wrong with some kernel of truth [...] and the size of the '+/-' shows just how large the proportion of correct stuff was. (Harri)*

Furthermore, Harri argues that he does not know how assessment practices might look across Tallinn University, as from his point of view, there is not '*really any comparison between institutes on the topic*'. Similarly, Kersti argues that there is very little '*cooperation between academics*' in the matter of assessment and that this affects '*the internal assessment culture and teaching culture in general*'. Similar experiences of (isolated) disciplinary cultures were also evident in the interviews conducted in the University of Glasgow.

However, unlike the participants from Glasgow, the academics interviewed in Tallinn tended to have relatively similar scholarly understandings of assessment. Most academics interviewed drew on the ideas of supporting student learning through assessment. Assessment was therefore often explained as a way '*to support student development*' (Eerika), an '*ultimate and maybe the best, most efficient lesson*' (Liina), and '*very effective instrument of teaching*' (Liina). In addition, the phrases such as '*students should learn something from it*' (Harri), '*it's not just the grades that are important*' (Karina), '*in*



*assessment, there's a lot of feedback function'* (Kersti) were also evident. It therefore looks as the participants drew on the scholarly discourses of learning-oriented assessment that emphasise the importance of feedback and learning through assessment (Knight, 2006; Torrance, 2012).

As regards other and perhaps competing meanings in academics' scholarly positions, ideas related to disciplining students emerge. Despite speaking about assessment as a way to support learning, the interviewees also explain assessment as *'a power instrument'* (Eerika), *'discipline'* (Mart), *'a contract'* (Karina), which is accompanied by *'pains'* (Liina). Maarika argues that assessment *'first of all, it's the discipline...students, all people are, we all are – lazy, dumb, and messy – we all are that by nature.'* From Mart's perspective, this idea of people being *'lazy, stupid and helpless'* makes assessment as a form of discipline (in a Foucauldian sense) necessary:

*And as most people are lazy, stupid and helpless, and so are organisations, it's needed, but in a longer perspective, or in an ideal world, all the external assessment could change into such internal self-assessment. And that could be perhaps, yes, in a hundred years' time – perhaps it would be, could be like that. (Mart)*

Furthermore, meanings related to institutional aims of assessment such as ensuring educational quality were common. Maarika, for example, explains quality assurance via assessment by arguing that she *'can't allow it to happen that a person without certain competences completes this course'*. Similar thoughts are shared by Kersti, who justifies the importance of assessment in building trust between universities, employers and society:

*As we work in the formal education sector, it's after all that we've been set the duty of ensuring a certain quality. That the grade, or the preliminary exam result, or the undergraduate or Master's diploma shows that the employer or the society or the education system can trust us, that we've issued this... (Kersti)*

In terms of further institutional functions, professors such as Mart and Harri explain that assessment needs to select students for higher levels of university education:

*...if one does accumulate those better grades, perhaps s/he is a slightly smarter person and should be directed into the Master's studies or pushed on to doctoral studies. (Mart)*

*As everything is competition-based, then resources won't be divided equally between people, and criteria will need to be found for selecting people for positions, or give them resources, then, I think assessment is one way. (Harri)*

This selective function of assessment could reflect a Foucauldian understanding of assessment as ‘a normalising gaze’ that makes students visible and helps to differentiate them for rewards and punishments (Foucault, 1975).

As the discourses indicated, academics interviewed in Tallinn University appeared to understand assessment in relation to both educational and institutional purposes. However, they also demonstrated their critique of assessment as an institutional technology. This element of critique makes their discourses different from the discourses explored in Glasgow. For example, some participants questioned the overall value of assessment in higher education and in society more broadly. Madis argues that *‘the grade means nothing in real life’*; Terje states, *‘Well, to be honest, I have to admit that I don't like assessment at all’*, and Karina argues that *‘hopefully, it's not just the grades that count and there's something else, meanings as well’*. As a further example, Mart emphasises that grades do not reflect the value of a person:

*On the one hand, it's certainly necessary and reasonable, but you have to stay rational about it. If you insist that your whole life is the number you received at assessment, then something is wrong. (Mart)*

It could therefore be argued that the academics interviewed in Tallinn University reason about various assessment purposes, and they have a broad and often critical understanding of assessment. Assessment policy, however, appears to be secondary in academic experience compared to their scholarly positions, departmental culture and reasoning.

### ***Assessment relationship between an assessor and assessed***

When tracing the ways the academics from Tallinn University describe their assessment relationship with students, academic reasoning tends to narrow, and the dominant meanings reflect an academic-centred interaction with students. Maarika, for instance, argues that assessment is her *‘business’*, and Liina explains that teaching and learning processes can be *‘cool’* as long as she has control over assessment:

*...when I see the learning outcomes, it's my business to find a way to set a grade to those learning outcomes. (Maarika)*

*...even after we've established a good contact, and always I say that ‘We may have a good time and the lectures might be cool but bear in mind that joking ends where exams begin, and that's where you have to show what you've learned through all of this’. (Liina)*

On similar lines, Eerika argues that she has decided not to give students an opportunity to retake their assessments - *'I've decided, on general principle, no joke, I give them a mark and it stays, there's no way to rewrite'*. It therefore looks as assessment relationship between an assessor and assessed is something different from general *'flat'* (Harri) interaction characteristic of Tallinn University. Interestingly, these quotes above tend also to contrast with academic understandings of assessment as a way of supporting student learning: assessors clearly discipline students and their behaviours (Foucault, 1975). Furthermore, some of these decisions, such as Eerika's on exam retakes, are not in accordance with assessment policy in Tallinn University. The *Study Regulation* requires academics to set three submission/exam dates for each summative assessment. It might demonstrate once again academics' lack of awareness of or confrontation towards policy context of assessment in Tallinn University.

This freedom of practice and top-down power dynamics were explained as *'normal'*, but the academics still tended to be concerned about student experiences in assessment. Students were addressed by phrases such as *'it doesn't seem pleasant for them after all'* (Kersti), *'students tend to study what's graded'* (Liina), and *'the course programme has no meaning at all for a student'* (Kersti). Further concerns emerged in relation to changing student expectations but also capacities in assessment. For example, Karina emphasises that *'there's another category of students - the really result-oriented ones - maybe want to graduate cum laude etc'*, and Madis argues that *'So now students are less interested in the content and more interested in passing the course'*. Furthermore, Karina and Madis draw attention to diverse student achievement. Karina argues that this diversity in achievement *'makes assessment difficult'*, and Madis adds that he misses *'those truly dedicated students'*:

*We were talking about assessment, but another thing that makes assessment difficult is the diversity of students. We have top students coming in, they get the highest possible marks - then along with them there will be others entering who barely passed the threshold. They are very different groups altogether. (Karina)*

*I miss those truly dedicated students, with whom it was clear that they're not just good for an undergraduate degree, but also for a Master's and perhaps potentially even for a PhD degree, whether in the field of [specific] studies or something else. People studying out of pure interest still exist - but they're few and far between. (Madis)*

In addition, Merje explains that students in today's universities are '*tired for different reasons*' (Merje) and therefore less engaged with assessment. Similarly, Kersti speaks about student exhaustion by reflecting on the '*unexpected feedback*' she received from her students. This feedback might also reflect the institutional problem in assessment in Tallinn University that does not take into account students' workload or the distribution of assessments:

*I got this unexpected feedback from a student that all academics give large, substantial assessment tasks during the same period. They said their eyes no longer shine because the joy of studying is gone; one said, 'I'm absolutely senseless, I'm already afraid that it's the start of something bad - I don't feel joy anymore, I don't feel anything - completely emotionless'. (Kersti)*

Kersti's example above tends to demonstrate how assessment can clearly affect students and their wellbeing.

These attempts to understand pressures experienced by students were characteristic to the discourses in Tallinn. However, there were also some who had a more radical view towards student expectations in assessment. Maarika, for instance, explains that students '*try to explain to us that we demand far too much of them within the capacity of those credit points*'. From a more practical perspective, Eerika reflects on her experience of peer-assessment that stopped her '*being good*':

*I gave the students too much responsibility, and they could give each other feedback and grade each other and themselves, and the grade I gave them weighed for one third of the final mark [...] The group members didn't dare - they gave themselves the maximum grade, and the group members didn't dare to give below that - and my '4' was no longer enough to sway the final mark. Right. And I think this was a, a real, failure - that must have been the moment I stopped being 'good'. What's the use - the use of trying to glorify the situation in the world, when everybody can just wheedle themselves high marks. (Eerika)*

Eerika's quote demonstrates how peer-assessment as a student-centred form of assessment reduces academics' sovereign power in assessment. However, from her point of view, students tend to violate this power for their own advantage. Harri also explains that students have too much freedom compared to '*the old times*' and that this has disturbed the '*order*' in the courses:

*And of course all order is gone. I mean that now within the framework of all this freedom the student doesn't need to even do their exams, then they can try even several times, still fail, take the course again next year etc. – so there was no such thing in the old times - if you didn't cut it, you were kicked out and that was it. (Harri)*

On the one hand, the academics view their control and domination as constraining and tiring students; on the other hand, they also perceive student expectation and also profiles changing and threatening traditional 'order' (Harri), perhaps a disciplinary relationship between an assessor and assessed in a Foucauldian sense. This traditional disciplinary assessment relationship in Tallinn University might be grounded in academics' distance from assessment policy: academics might see themselves entitled to practise assessment as they wish. However, academic domination appears to contradict with the participants' broad understanding of assessment. The ways academics position themselves within these complex contexts will be explored further in the next section.

## ***Academic understanding of themselves in assessment policy context***

As the previous two sections have highlighted, there seems to exist a mismatch between policy and practice in Tallinn University. This section will explore the aspects of academic freedom further, and it will draw attention to the ways academics experience themselves in higher education and assessment policy context. The section starts by analysing the aspects of freedom and enjoyment in academic work, and it will then move towards concerns, pressures and forms of resistance as these become also evident through discourse analysis.

### ***Sense of freedom, enjoyment and concern in academic work***

The interviewees in Tallinn explain their academic practices as relatively free and autonomous: *'I feel a lot of liberty'* (Liina), *'I feel I can choose my options pretty freely'* (Merje), *'we can always make suggestions and change it'* (Kersti). These discursive accounts illustrate the distinction between the *'world of red tape'* (Mart) and academic practice. Kersti also draws attention to the idea of trust in academic work by arguing *'I feel – think that the university trusts the academics'*. Furthermore, words like 'anyone', 'nobody', 'no one' as well as the generalisations such as 'all people' and 'most people' were often applied to emphasise academic ownership over practices:

*...no one has really ever interfered and said there's a discord or I should do something differently. (Liina)*

*...nobody has said there's anything wrong... (Terje)*

*Goodness – I can say I haven't noticed anyone limiting mine yet, I can tell I've completely free hands in this matter... (Maarika)*

The academics from Tallinn University appear to have a clear sense of freedom in their work and practices. In this context of freedom, the participants express their enjoyment and satisfaction with their work, particularly in terms of teaching duties. For example, Eerika explains how she *'gains pleasure'* from seeing her students analysing (certain) texts or how she experiences *'joy'* when they are able to apply (specific) analysis. Liina also explains her enjoyment of teaching work by arguing *'I'm certainly a teacher by soul, and I actually really enjoy the contact with students and teaching'*.

Similarly, Karina expresses her emotional attachment to her work by saying *'I really enjoy working as an academic'*; she emphasises positive *'returns'* teaching provides:

*[Teaching] gives a lot in the way of a different kind of returns - you can share the experiences of your scientific work with students, you'll receive feedback, you'll be able to develop both. (Karina)*

These aspects of enjoyment make discourses in Tallinn University different from that of the University of Glasgow. Furthermore, there appears to exist a sense of pride amongst the academics interviewed in Tallinn. Kersti argues that academics in Estonia are *'dedicated, relevant, caring - they want to contribute to their fields'*. In similar lines, Madis argues that his *'ideal academic is Indiana Jones'* who is an adventurous archaeologist but also a hero.

In contrast with enjoyable teaching duties, academic freedom in assessment tended to make academics concerned and less happy. Harri uses the word *'sin'* when referring to academic freedom in assessment, and Madis argues that *'the lecturers have too much freedom'* that consequently promotes subjectivity in assessment:

*Well, the academics - I have to admit the sin that they've quite a lot of freedom here - here the institute doesn't additionally regulate them. (Harri)*

*I know academics exist who keep an eye on their students' grades, and if they notice that somebody has received good or bad marks earlier, then the future assessment is*

*based more on that than their real work. It's very difficult to change your image for one or another academic. (Madis)*

The academic freedom that creates a sense of enjoyment and pride can turn into a negative experience in assessment contexts: it can cause unfairness and ‘face-based assessment’ as argued by Madis. From Madis’s perspective, assessment includes an element of subjectivity - ‘we’re all people, and to some extent we assess the person as well, not just their paper’. He argues that ‘if you match the grade and the face, I think there could be a face-based assessment’. In similar lines, Terje speaks about her fears by saying ‘I’m afraid of being very subjective, that if a person is more likeable to me, I’ll look then how...’. She continues by saying that she can be ‘pretty easily influenced’: ‘I’m not, such a cold, concrete - a very strict academic’ (Terje). Objectivity in assessment is related to being a ‘cold’ and ‘concrete’ academic in her experience.

Eerika speaks about ‘positive discrimination’ when she describes her experience of assessing the work of Russian-speaking students and taking into account their Estonian as a foreign language skills. From a more abstract level, Kersti explains how she has not wanted to become an assessor for years as she has been afraid of ‘screwing’ someone over:

*I haven't wanted to take the role of an assessor for years. The semester has always been fun-fun, and then once the time to assess came around, there was a lot of doubts and hesitation, that you wouldn't screw anyone over, lots of questions came up – ugh, wasn't pleasant at all. (Kersti)*

In order to gain a better understanding of subjectivity and ‘face-based assessment’ (Madis) that cause concerns amongst academics in Tallinn University, student experiences will be explored in Chapter 12.

### ***Pressures in academic work***

Further pressures in academic work in Tallinn University emerge in relation to more recent higher education developments highlighted in the first section of this chapter. For example, academics with 35 or more years of work experience explain that ‘multitasking’ (Terje) and increasing workload is something they now face in their work. Regarding the more specific examples of pressures, Terje and Mart argue:

*...it's that, one piece here and another there, and in the evening do research, and, yes, and then supervising, as well, yes, of course, supervising too. (Terje)*

*Well, work is made up of several pieces: pure teaching, right, then periodical research, right – project-based, so you have a project and you complete it, right.* (Mart)

Furthermore, these academics with significant work experience also explain how an understanding of academics has changed. Terje emphasises that in the past *‘such grand old men came from afar, a professor came, and then the respect’*. Similarly, Harri describes how during the Soviet time *‘a professor came, taught his two classes, and was free of teaching’*, while academics (particularly professors) in contemporary universities are being pressured by increasing teaching and administrative duties:

*...academics are massively overburdened, which then means that science is held back, development is held back. So the life of academics is clearly harder nowadays than it was during the Russian time - if I think back to it now.* (Harri)

These examples above confirm once again the generational differences in Tallinn University, and the ways in which work experience can influence an understanding of academic work.

The key pressures amongst all academics interviewed in Tallinn University (as in Glasgow) seemed to be related to their research and teaching roles. However, this tension in Tallinn refers to the academics’ ambition to be good at both teaching and research in their work. For example, Madis argues that from his point of view, *‘it’s wonderful that there are people who do research or teach, but joining the two seems to me to be a difficult issue’*. Similarly, Kersti highlights the tensions between research and teaching. On the one hand, she explains how lecturers *‘don’t have the obligation to procure projects, that’s a duty of the professorship’*, but she also adds how expectations for income generation are often unclear and create tensions in terms of what is expected from the lecturer:

*I sense a lot of pressure, because of funding schemes and everything are very – well, like some decisions are made somewhere, and funding issues create tension.* (Kersti)

In addition, Kersti speaks how good teaching practices are not recognised in some departments. She brings an example from her own experience in developing team-based teaching, and she explains that teaching in pairs was recognised as a half workload, making it less beneficial for academics to work together for the sake of pedagogical practices:



*...and I value a lot the fact that we increasingly use teaching in pairs. It's our own initiative, no one has imposed the double burden on us - we do it voluntarily, in a positive sense, we do it in pairs, but we have half workload each then. (Kersti)*

The tension between research and teaching in Tallinn University is not to do with institutional undervaluing of teaching roles (as was evident in Glasgow), but is caused by workload and time-related concerns.

Furthermore, the academics interviewed expressed their concerns about increasing workload and giving up one's free time for work-related duties by phrases such as '*the workload is insane*' (Harri), and '*a constant lack of time*' (Liina). Merje explains that it is difficult to measure academic workload: '*they list it for a number of hours and assume it's going to be enough to do it all, but in reality, it's expected that the work gets done*'. Professors such as Harri also argue that '*extra-university activities, those take massively time*' and from his point of view '*no one will manage with eight hours per day*'. Some interviewees also addressed their own strategies for coping with increasing workload. Liina, an academic with management duties, says that she keeps repeating to herself '*that it's temporary*'.

*I keep repeating to myself the mantra that it's temporary - that at some point this administrative work will have got into line in a way that leaves me more time for actual work; and I've had to forget free time altogether since [promotion]. (Liina)*

Liina's reflection above demonstrates once again how administrative duties are not perceived as being '*actual work*' but rather something that competes with traditional academic roles of teaching and research.

Similarly, Harri's personal strategy includes giving up one's free time – '*And well, I do my work as an academic to meet all the norms, maybe even a bit more, but it's again, weekends and evenings suffer - but it's not just me.*' Eerika, however, seems to be grateful for students being late with their coursework that makes it possible to extend the return deadlines:

*It's actually massive - I've got, I need to correct 60 analyses - I'm at the 24th - it's been almost two weeks - fortunately not everybody submitted on time. (Eerika)*

In terms of further pressures in academic work, the participants emphasised recent policy changes in higher education that affect their work. For example, Eerika emphasises the pressures she experiences in terms of *'producing graduates'*:

*I need to produce fourteen graduates every year. It's not within my power [...] [it's] ticking in the back of my head how many graduates we have and how to get more.* (Eerika)

Furthermore, Liina shares her concern about possible financial pressures that might start affecting assessment and make academics pass students more easily. From her perspective, management can start saying to academics: *'hey, you're too strict, you expect too much, our budget suffers because too few students graduate'*. However, compared to the academics' reference to practical issues such as workload that makes teaching difficult, the pressures related to wider (neoliberal) higher education policy remained secondary in current academic discourses.

### ***Tracing the forms of resistance***

While these academics perceive themselves as autonomous subjects who enjoy their work, they still experience increasing pressures in the university. When tracing the ways the academics cope with their concerns and pressures, the aspects of active response and negotiation emerge. Forms of resistance are discursively more visible in Tallinn University than they were in the University of Glasgow. For example, the meanings related to ignoring and avoiding policy developments and regulations became evident through phrases such as *'we do everything just like we always have, but we leave the impression that we follow some rules'* (Madis), *'Well, I think the first possibility is not to read them at all'* (Mart), and *'I set them aside, and wait that maybe they'll pass, so I won't have to do them'* (Terje). Furthermore, Terje explains that she has learnt not *'to stick [her] neck out and adopt all the reforms in a hurry'*:

*Well, I expect that it will pass. Just – [laughs] ignore it quietly for a bit, and not go along with the reforms and all those things straight away, see what happens. And I say, some of these things that have started off with great excitement have died out quietly on their own. It's this experience I've accumulated over years, that there's no need to stick your neck out and adopt all the reforms in a hurry, if you feel that it's for you - well, something against your principles, that, I've learned that, yes.* (Terje)

In more practical terms, there are also some who modify their practices to cope with the workload pressures. For example, Mart explains how 10 years ago he had about 100

undergraduate papers to assess, and how the numbers have now increased to 300. In order to cope with this increase, he applies multiple choice tests as a new form of assessment:

*I have about 300 students and certainly I can't and don't want to assess them and don't think it's reasonable to make a question of each one. I make Moodle-based exams, about 50 questions, multiple-choice, they are given a deadline, fill it in, and I receive the results as they come. (Mart)*

Mart's response to increasing workload seems to be proactive: instead of spending his free time on marking, he has decided to change his practice. While this change might help Mart to cope with his workload, it tends not to benefit assessment as a pedagogical process.

In addition to ignoring policies or tweaking practices (both of which were also common to Glasgow), the academic discourses in Tallinn University reflected aspects of overt resistance: '*speaking up*' (Mart) '*fighting for*' and '*arguing against*' (Maarika). For example, Maarika speaks about her department and argues that they have '*fought for*' more oral work in their courses than it was allowed by the regulation:

*But that's what we've fought for ourselves after all. That in practical subjects we do more oral work and less individual work. In that sense, we can – definitely we can. If it's obvious something won't do, then we can – we can help along, and argue against, if something is really undoable – all the fields are so different that everything can't always be done the same way. (Maarika)*

Mart encourages academics to '*speak up*' when they do not agree with policy developments: '*if there's a clear, say, mess-up, or anything, then you need to speak up, say that it's wrong, it's pointless*'. He also argues that some academics in Tallinn University, '*angry little men*' as he calls them, do speak up. Furthermore he explains that '*speaking up*' can lead into a change in policies:

*We have some – say, the internal list of the university – every now and then some angry little man comes, saying that what you're doing here is rubbish, and then somebody else speaks up. (Mart)*

*If a certain number of academics speak up clearly, saying it's rubbish – well, I – the management are responsible people, they'll have a look at what's off. (Mart)*

Interestingly, Mart's reflection above suggests that he sees management being '*responsible*' and approachable, but he himself tends to identify with management in Tallinn University. He seems to struggle between speaking in terms of 'I' and 'they'.

In contrast to the dominant discourses of overt resistance, Eerika spoke about neoliberalisation of higher education as the interview progressed, and she argued that she does not feel like resisting any more: *'I'm not even fighting. I'm going along with the flow'*. Similarly, Merje argues that quite often *'debating'* that *'there's some kind of new horror dreamt up'* does not help:

*Well you can debate, or, in a way, bring it up in the department meeting that you don't like it, but then they'll come back to Earth, that if you don't like it, it's your problem. (Merje)*

Another controversy in the dominant discourses of resistance emerged in relation to the interviewees who remained oppositional towards any form of resistance; these were often academics with management duties. Harri, for example, does not agree with *'speaking up'* and resisting policies; he argues – *'if the university regulations require something, they need to be followed'*. Interestingly, Liina explains that it is not about *'the lack of willingness – or that they [academics] don't want to – but rather the lack of information, there has not been enough explanations'*. So there are academics who do not support resistance in academia and would rather see academics obeying regulations. These, however, tend to be minor voices in this study, and they mostly belong to the academics who are involved in developing (some) regulations themselves.

## **Conclusion**

As the discourses have demonstrated, the academics interviewed in Tallinn University perceive their work and possibly also their academic subjectivities in a contrasting way. They draw on traditions, their scholarly understandings and academic freedom but also on their more recent experiences of higher education policy changes and pressures. These various experiences often demonstrate a tension between policy and practice in academic experience in Tallinn that might reflect a discursive operation of different *'forms of rationality'* (Foucault, 1980b, p. 230) and a transformation from a more liberal understanding of higher education towards a neoliberal reorganisation of the university. Academic discourses at Tallinn do not demonstrate the operation of neoliberal modes of government as was evident in the University of Glasgow. However, they still draw attention to the changing higher education context in Estonia. This study might have captured academic experiences of a very *'fresh'* change that the participants are in the process of understanding. It could therefore be expected that various and contradictory

discursive meanings (i.e. internationalisation, assessment theories, academic freedom, traditions) are incorporated into their discourses.

The academics interviewed perceive themselves as autonomous subjects who can design their practices as they wish. There seems to be a sense of pride and enjoyment in this experience of academic freedom, illustrating Lewis's (2008, p. 59) description of a traditional academia as 'a privileged space within which to work and from within which to speak'. However, this sense of freedom tends to make academics concerned when it comes to assessment or recent higher education changes. The academics interviewed are aware of their powerful position over students and risks of '*face-based assessment*' (Madis) that is subjective and that renders students subject to 'the arbitrary and unnecessary authority of a teacher' (Foucault, 1984a, p. 299). So this sense of freedom to dominate can also cause stress among academics, make them concerned academic subjects, indicating a Foucauldian understanding of a 'judge of normality' who requires a moral justification for one's domination (Foucault, 1984b, p. 402). However, as the understanding of higher education and academic work tends to be shaped by recent policy developments and changing student population, it might also shake up academics' understanding of themselves and the (moral) value of their work.

These experiences of change in higher education, particularly related to increase in student numbers and European policy influences, are confirmed by recent scholarly work carried out in Estonia. In terms of student numbers, for example, Tõnisson (2011, cited in Unt *et al.*, 2013, p. 371) argues that while in early 1990s the number of students studying in higher education institutions was about 25 000, it increased to 70 000 by 2010/11. Therefore, a sense of academic freedom could be seen affected by changing student population and their different needs and expectations. This all tends to be experienced and perceived as challenging to traditional understanding of assessment as an autonomous and teacher-controlled activity in Tallinn University. Academics seemed to be concerned that the changing population of students might become 'dangerous' to traditional power relations - '*order*' as Harri explained it. In terms of further concerns, academics in Tallinn University, as in many other universities, are concerned about their increasing workloads. It has become difficult to establish boundaries between academic work and academics' 'wider lifeworld' (Guzman-Valenzuela and Barnett, 2013, p. 1122). Furthermore, academics tend to apply various strategies to 'outsmart' time (Gonzales, Martinez and Ordu, 2013, p. 1105) which vary from modifying assessment practices as Mart explained it

to convincing oneself that it is temporary as evident in Liina's example. Overall, it could be argued that the academics interviewed experience higher education developments as a way to 'destroy traditions' (Jaakson and Reino, 2013, p. 225) in universities and academic work.

Furthermore, this study confirms Cribb and Gewirtz's (2013, p. 348) argument that while academics cannot 'disentangle' themselves from the institutional context of their work (policy developments), they can struggle against it. The struggles tended to be highly visible among the academics interviewed in Tallinn. While resistance in the University of Glasgow often included '*semi-tweaking*' and '*semi-ignoring*' policies (Paul), the academics from Tallinn University used statements such as '*fighting for*', '*arguing against*' (Maarika), '*speaking up*' (Mart) and practices that involve setting the regulations aside and keeping the actual academic work separate from the '*world of red tape*' (Mart). These rather overt forms of resistance confirm how power relations and resistance exist in dual relationship just as Manuel and Llamas (2006, p. 680) argue that 'there are no power relations without resistance'. Based on the analysis presented in this chapter, it could be also argued that there is no resistance without power relations. Academics' significant focus on resistance tends to demonstrate that there is something to resist in the changing higher education system: perhaps academics do not want to lose their sense of academic freedom. It might be often unclear what exactly academics in Tallinn University oppose, but their examples of resistance are still highly vocal and overt.

## Chapter 11: GTA discourses in the University of Glasgow

This research involved nine Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) from the University of Glasgow. All are doctoral students (except Rebecca) who are involved in teaching and assessment at undergraduate levels; in some cases they also teach and assess at postgraduate study level. The University of Glasgow has a description of the GTA role on its website:

Some departments offer Graduate Teaching Assistantships to postgraduate research students, which involve conducting tutorials and undertaking other teaching-related duties for first and second-year undergraduate students. Many students find that being a Graduate Teaching Assistant is an excellent way of gaining valuable work experience, as well as a means of supplementing their income. (University of Glasgow, n.d. c)

While this description includes ambiguous phrases such as '*some departments*' or '*other teaching-related duties*', it still attempts to formalise and acknowledge GTA work in this university. There is no formalised role of a GTA in Tallinn University.

This research also acknowledges that GTA work, roles and pay are diverse across higher education institutions in the UK, possibly also within the university. Else (2014) notes in the *Times Higher Education* that pay for GTAs across the country varies from less than £10 per hour at some universities to more than £40 an hour at others. In addition, Riddell (2014) problematises increasing expectations placed on GTAs compared to their relatively low payment:

No longer just expected to run seminars, GTAs now also lecture and design exam and essay questions, and they are often the first point of pastoral care for their students. This often means that the majority of an undergraduate's taught experience will come from someone on an hourly contract, whose yearly pay will equal less than a single month's worth of housing and utility bills. (Riddell, 2014)

My own experiences as a GTA in the School of Education, at the University of Glasgow confirm the tensions characterising and shaping GTA work. I am familiar with the insecurities GTAs face in terms of acting as hourly paid teaching staff with often very high workload and low pay rate. Like many others I have experienced pressures that occur when teaching a high number of students and trying to maintain a formative and student-centred

approach to teaching and assessment. I would therefore argue that my decision to include GTAs in this PhD research was personal, and aimed at exploring the GTAs' experiences of assessment and higher education and making their voices heard. In order to balance my own subjective experiences of GTA work, I carried out two focus groups with nine GTAs from various disciplines and study years in the University of Glasgow (see Table 11).

**Table 11. GTA focus groups**

Pseudonym	School	Disciplinary area
<i><b>Focus group 1</b></i>		
Jonathan	Medicine	MVLS
Jennifer	Psychology	S&E
Maria	Education	Soc Sci
Allison	Modern Languages and Cultures	Arts
Daniel	Critical Studies	Arts
<i><b>Focus group 2</b></i>		
Amy	Critical Studies	Arts
Rebecca	Psychology	S&E
Eric	Education	Soc Sci
Sarah	Education	Soc Sci

The focus group questions addressed the following thematic areas: profile of the University of Glasgow, assessment policies and practices in the university, and the GTA role and relations with academics and students (see Appendix 10). In order to facilitate the participants' reflection, they were often asked to use post it notes and to come up with keywords/metaphors when addressing the profile of the University of Glasgow or the assessment purposes. Further reflection and discussion were based on these activities.

This chapter will trace the ways the participants see assessment operating in the institutional context but also in the relationship of assessors and assessed, and the ways power moves and balances between freedom and domination. The chapter starts by discussing their perceptions of the institutional context for teaching and assessment in the University of Glasgow. The chapter will then continue with an exploration of how the GTAs experience the assessment processes. Finally, it will analyse the ways the GTAs experience their subjectivity as mediators and pastoral care providers.



## ***GTA experiences of the institutional context***

In discussing their understandings of the university context, the GTA discourses were ambiguous in terms of using passive voice and also ascription of agency to non-human agents. However, the way of expressing their experiences and perceptions tended to be highly emotional and accompanied by sustained critique of recent higher education developments, particularly of internationalisation, excellence, client culture and employability, that the GTAs see having an impact on academic work, study processes and subjects.

In order to set the context for the analysis, I would like to present a quote from Allison who provides her portrayal of the University of Glasgow:

*It's a big and growing University, so we have more and more students each year. It's really old, and it cares very much about its reputation. It's becoming business-like, so you hear both as students and staff, you hear more and more about what departments or what courses are financially lucrative and what not, and you hear about the cuts and all that. And it's run by economists as well. Emm it's pushing a number of new initiatives, so the library is very concerned about mobile technology. Internationalisation is a big word, fostering new relationships with Singapore and China, for example. Emm it has got too many students and too few staff, and staff is overworked and underpaid. There is very little administrative support due to financial problems which students and staff both feel. Emm on the other hand, it has got amazing resources, so I think it stands out among other universities for its resources, and I'm thinking about things like well-equipped library, special collections and also Learning and Teaching Centre and Student Learning Service which provide amazing student support. In that sense, I think it's very easy to be a student here, and it's hard to be a student here for other reasons. (Allison)*

Allison's narrative emphasises various but crucial keywords that she perceives characterising the University of Glasgow: 'growing', 'old', 'reputation', 'business-like', 'financial problems', 'new initiatives', 'internationalisation', and 'amazing resources'. Other GTAs apply similar terms when speaking about the institution. Words such as 'huge' (Rebecca), 'old' (Amy), 'traditional' (Sarah, Eric), 'multicultural' (Sarah), 'research intensive' (Jennifer), and 'international' (Maria, Jonathan) were common throughout the focus groups, and they set the discursive context but also a critical tone for the discussion.

Their description of the University of Glasgow tends to be common to Russell Group universities in the UK, particularly the ancient universities that often have medieval origins

but are now developing a modern profile focused on excellence, internationalisation and innovation:

Russell Group universities provide an outstanding student experience for both undergraduates and postgraduates. Their combination of teaching and research excellence creates an ideal learning environment which attracts the most outstanding students from the UK and across the world. (Russell Group, 2014, p. 11)

### ***The university as internationalised***

As regards specific examples of internationalisation in the University of Glasgow, Maria argues that *'the School of Education [is] being very internationalised'*. However, it remains unclear who is the agent that she sees *'internationalising'* the School. Similarly, Jonathan reflects on the profile of the School of Medicine and argues that if *'it's undergrad, you get a lot of home and EU students, once you reach postgraduate then it's becoming very international'*. Both GTAs speak about internationalisation by applying ambiguous language. Maria and Jonathan seem to be taking care with word choice, so that they do not appear critical of any particular ethnic group. It appears to be a reason why they prefer to use phrases such as *'a particular region'* or a *'certain region'* when discussing the international profile of the University of Glasgow:

*Like on the course we are GTAs, we've got I'd say 90% or even more from a particular region...* (Maria)

*...we only have 5 out of 30 are EU or UK, and the rest of them are all coming from a very certain region...* (Jonathan)

Maria and Jonathan both explain internationalisation in line with financial aspirations. Maria explains, *'I think in a couple of years ago there were staff issues being cut down, and I think maybe this is one way to see if they can raise funds'*, and Jonathan argues, *'So I think there is clear point of we don't have much funding, they are willing to pay, being...having international front looks good'*. So from their perspective there seems to be a causal relationship between financial constraints and the participation in an international higher education market. Furthermore, Jonathan's quote above tends to create an oppositional relationship between the university and international students who are positioned as *'they'* who have money that *'we'* need. It might be the case that when Jonathan speaks about internationalisation and international students, he positions himself as part of the university (*'we'*) rather than seeing himself as an international PhD student. Although, his dual identity emerges when he emphasises the financial aspects of his own

doctoral studies, and how the university ('they') does not fund his PhD: *'they don't fund my PhD directly, but since I'm not paying for consumables, someone has to'*.

Some GTAs also perceive internationalisation creating difficulties, especially in terms of a changing student population. Rebecca, for example, argues that *'students are meant to meet certain level of English requirements to be able to get entry'*, but from her perspective, the university has become flexible with language requirements. She explains the aspects of flexibility in relation to the situation in which *'[the] university [is] now going more out to commercial gain'* when trying to increase the number of fee-paying students. This also means that the university has an increasing number of students who *'are never going to get to the really high grades because [they] just don't have that ability to have English to high enough standards yet'* (Rebecca). Rebecca's reflection highlights the ways internationalisation might affect educational processes of teaching and assessment by increasing a number of students whose language skills do not meet the assessment expectations. Sarah also describes issues she has experienced when assessing the work of international students with limited English skills:

*I think the English language thing is a big difficulty if the student is writing an essay in English but they have very limited English, that is very difficult as a GTA to know how to mark them.* (Sarah)

Interestingly, Sarah's discursive account in terms of *'mark[ing] them'* reflects a possible idea of grading students rather than their work or performance. This raises an issue of objectivity in assessment in which not only students' performance but also their background, language skills and other factors become part of the assessment process.

### ***Excellence and client culture***

In addition to the processes of internationalisation that are clearly evident in the GTA discourses, the participants spoke about the National Student Survey (NSS) as an indicator for institutional excellence. Jonathan argues that *'there is a focus on teaching in terms of trying to keep the students satisfied, so they will give you good rankings'*. Eric also emphasises excellent student satisfaction - NSS results - with the assessment processes in his subject area in the University of Glasgow: *'So also we've got really high NSS scores compared to any other history department in the country'*. This focus on the NSS might be shaped by the wider policy discourses in the UK that explain student satisfaction in connection with the institutional excellence and high ratings in the university league tables.

As argued in Chapter 8, the *Learning and Teaching Strategy* in Glasgow emphasises the importance of student satisfaction with teaching and assessment processes in order to ensure the excellent profile of the University of Glasgow.

As part of the overall context of excellence, Jonathan argues that universities are '*afraid of the students*' as clients who can affect their excellent ratings. It could be argued that institutional excellence for GTAs is clearly related to more complex developments in higher education such as a shift towards client culture. From Jonathan's point of view, the changing relationship between the university and its students can affect educational processes such as assessment:

*I think that this payment, you know, client service is something that I find very frustrating especially in unis, and I'm not only talking about Glasgow Uni, who are trying to improve the rankings because you will end up being afraid of the students saying something bad about the uni, even if the student saying it just because they weren't doing the work they were supposed to do... (Jonathan)*

Jonathan continues with his reflection by explaining that in the University of Glasgow, he has seen '*people not failing just because the department might look bad or someone has been told you cannot fail that amount of students which I find ridiculous*'. Furthermore, Rebecca argues that this type of client culture is accepted and perhaps even favoured by students. She argues that the attitudes such as '*I am paying 14 grand a year to be here, you know, I deserve whatever*' (Rebecca) are common. This is also supported by Sarah, who explains that she feels that '*some students are just paying for their grade*' and that '*we [the university] are probably less harsh with the marking of students who are paying*'.

Amy and Allison also share their concerns about the ways client culture and '*commercial drive*' as Amy phrases it, might start shaping the operation of the university, the educational processes and the relationship with students:

*...and I would worry that if we get too much into that, you know, particularly where university is going now, where it's more kind of you know, well, it is more commercial drive, let's be honest, it is. You know, the students are clients, they are paying a lot of money, they want as much feedback as they possibly can, and there would be that temptation to say, 'Oh right, OK so you know, you weren't happy about B, want an A, OK just take it and shut up'. (Amy)*

*So I have had to deal with students who were quite...pushy and insisted that I give them an higher mark, and I think that's, that's a very dangerous precedent cause that*

*suggests that all we need to do is to come and complain about their mark, and they might be able to get something better. (Allison)*

The quotes above demonstrate the ways the GTAs position students as being ‘*clients [...] paying a lot of money*’ (Amy) but also ‘*pushy*’ and ‘*entitled*’ to good grades and feedback (Allison). This idea of entitlement is something that the GTAs problematise in a higher education context that is dependent on student funding and ratings. The GTAs perceive the relationship between the university and the students changing from an educational interaction towards more commercial relations, operating based on the idea of consumer transaction.

From the perspective of academics, however, Maria explains that there are increasing pressures and expectations to teaching and assessment. She emphasises the ways academics might not be ‘*physically, psychologically*’ prepared to teach the international student population:

*...it’s a real issue and it’s also coming out at the School of Education that maybe management wants things to be done in a certain way and the staff is not in the same page in the same way of thinking, and so all these students are brought on them, and they are not prepared physically, psychologically, and you got to sort of adjust the way you teach, the way you approach things... (Maria)*

Maria’s reflection includes an element of ambiguity in which an unclear agent ‘*management*’ is causing pressures and tensions in academic work.

While being critical about the ways various discourses and processes shape the University of Glasgow, students and academics, the GTAs emphasise the importance of assessment standards applied to all students. They see standards as a way to protect the educational processes and their traditional purposes:

*...the standard has to be the same no matter if you are paying five times or one time or zero. (Jonathan)*

*...I think that’s something [that] should be made very clear to GTAs that the money doesn’t equal grades, the money equals us doing as good job as we can for them. (Eric)*

*...you chose to come here and pay that money, just cause you are paying doesn’t mean that you are going to be treated in any different from the people who aren’t paying. (Rebecca)*

### ***Economic approach to higher education***

As argued earlier in this thesis, no participant group in this research was asked to reflect on neoliberalisation of higher education but on higher education/university as they perceive and experience it in the present day. The GTAs' very vivid experiences of internationalisation and customerisation were therefore unexpected, as well as their understanding of the University of Glasgow as becoming a highly pressurised learning, teaching and work environment. It could be argued that the GTA discourses show uncertainty about the causes of structural change, but they are passionate in terms of protecting liberal higher education against overt economic aspirations. The GTAs emphasise their overall concern with the ways in which the understanding of the nature of higher education and the place of students and academics in the university has been changing in Glasgow.

The GTAs argue that an economic approach to education with the main focus on student employability and graduate attributes has become prevalent in this university. Sarah mentioned the idea of students approaching their education as '*a stepping stone to something else*', and Amy argued that fee-paying undergraduate students might be aiming for the '*taught Master's*'.

A more specific area of pressures in the GTAs' experience relates to discourses of student employability and graduate attributes that shape the educational processes but perhaps also the wider purposes of higher education. Daniel explains:

*I think it is a big problem in the Arts subjects at the moment particularly because the subjects don't have wide economic application really. They are very important for other reasons, but when they get forced to justify themselves in terms of transferable skills and things like that, which inevitably finds its way into assessment, I think we are damaging quite a wide reaching way that I find quite stressing as someone who cares quite deeply about these disciplines I suppose. (Daniel)*

Similarly, Rebecca argues that discourses of graduate attributes are transforming some courses in the School of Psychology and states, '*I think the university has kind of shot itself on the foot with new graduate attributes*' (Rebecca). Rebecca does not explain her argument further, except that she perceives graduate attributes as being '*dictated*' by professional bodies. This statement might reflect the issue that in some subject areas academics need to shape their courses in line with the needs of accrediting bodies:

*'[students] need to be able to accredited by the Psychological Society, so they dictate a little bit down on us what kind of assessments we should be giving students'.*

However, some other GTAs from Medicine and Psychology see benefits in the increased emphasis on student employability in higher education. Jonathan (Medicine) argues that *'professional bodies are very important when you need someone to say are you good enough for the job'*. Similarly, Jennifer (Psychology) argues that *'universities have an important role to differentiate students for employers when they leave university'*. Jonathan's and Jennifer's perspectives on student employability may reflect the ways in which current pressures on higher education in terms of employability influence understanding of educational processes such as assessment.

Despite some positive impacts graduate attributes might have on student employability, the overall idea of economic approach to higher education tends to be problematised by all GTAs interviewed. Daniel, for example, highlights the notion of neoliberalism and refers to a *'neoliberal education establishment'* that currently characterises UK universities and the society more broadly:

*There is something about the neoliberal education establishment in neoliberal society in general if we can speak of such a thing that poses away from what we are talking about in terms of the subject for its own sake and the importance of the learning.* (Daniel)

Daniel continues with his reflection by posing a question *'isn't that part of seeing education as not as something that one submits to but that becomes something else when one pays for?'* This question raises the issue of changing educational purposes, an issue other GTAs discussed. Furthermore, from Sarah's perspective, the instrumental focus prevalent in universities causes a situation in which higher education *'it turns into kind of factory line'*. It therefore appears that the GTAs are concerned about the pragmatic focus among the students and institutions (possibly caused by internationalisation and client culture) that hinders the traditional value of higher education as a place for learning and knowledge creation. On similar lines, Rebecca states that there is now a 'moral issue' that academics experience: *'So how much [it is] about financial gain and how much it's actually about making sure that you have, you are supporting your students'* (Rebecca). This illustrates how educational processes in higher education are related to morality at the individual and practice level: it is left up to academics to find opportunities for *'supporting'*

students in the structural context where institutional financial gain in terms of having fee-paying students is more valued than pedagogical processes.

As the GTA discourses indicate, the students have power and demands in higher education: they have power over academics, educational processes but also over the university and its reputation through the student surveys and fee-paying relations. This also means that while in a Foucauldian sense we are all subjectified, we can sometimes have power. Whether or not this is positive power depends on individual perspectives of the situation. The GTAs, for example, perceive student power being rather destructive for the traditional understanding of the university and academic work. Thus, the GTA discourses indicate that the work and subjectivity of academics become increasingly pressurised, particularly with respect to assessment practices and the assessment system in a neoliberal higher education context.

### ***GTA experiences of assessment policy, practice and the role of the GTA as assessor***

The GTAs acknowledged their insufficient knowledge of the assessment policy context in the University of Glasgow. Phrases such as *'I don't think I know anything in detail to be honest'* (Jonathan), *'pretty much nothing'* (Amy) and *'not very much'* (Sarah) were common to the two focus groups. Their views on assessment are therefore shaped by what they characterise as lack of awareness of the assessment policies that increasingly aim to standardise assessment in the University of Glasgow. However, their discussion revealed substantial amounts of tacit knowledge about assessment.

#### ***Schedule A***

The one aspect of assessment policy that the GTAs were familiar with was Schedule A (see Appendix 6). Also, discursive complexity arose when the participants spoke about Schedule A, particularly in terms of the grade descriptors. The language used to describe their interaction with the assessment schedule was emotive – in particular to the confusion about the 22 point scale and differentiation of grades based on secondary bands: *'extremely confusing'* (Maria), *'difficult'* (Jennifer), *'uncomfortable'* (Jennifer), *'odd'*, (Jennifer), *'they can be a pain'* (Allison), and *'I'm not a big fan of the grading system'* (Jonathan). Maria explains:



*...it can be confusing sometimes, especially when it comes to an A, different levels of A, different levels of B. Sometimes I don't see the sense in that, I think it should just be if it's an A grade, these are the things you're looking for or if it's a B grade [...] it doesn't need to be 22 levels, it can be less. (Maria)*

On similar lines, Jonathan reflects on his past experiences of being a student and a marker, and he argues that he finds it difficult to differentiate borderline grades while he feels 'comfortable' with B2 as 'a true B, solid B':

*...when I was a student, [I] never understood what really, what is the real difference between B3 and B2. B3 and B1 I can say okay, for me being a B3 means I'm just not a C kind of a thing and being a B1 is like ah just a bit more to get and A. I always felt comfortable with midgrade, B2 for me even as an assessor is true B, solid B, you are there. (Jonathan)*

Furthermore, the GTAs emphasise their concern about an A grade that has five secondary bands compared to three levels of differentiation of other grades. The participants question the necessity for such a detailed differentiation of excellent performance by speculating with phrases such as 'you have more chances to get A [laughing]' (Jonathan), and 'I think that just discourages people from giving people an A1 and A2, cause they just start from A3, A4 and A5 [laughing]' (Jennifer). Allison and Jonathan also explain their experiences of 'being told' that top A grades refer to a work quality that is unachievable for students.

*I don't think it's official thing, but you hear that sometimes, you know, I was told to think of A1 in terms of something that is publishable and then you know, work my grading from that. (Allison)*

*...everyone has told me how to mark, that if I see A1 or A2, you're dead. A2 is the paper I would write, A1 is the paper that I would say, 'Oh, I would love to write that way'. (Jonathan)*

It is unclear from the discourse who is telling the GTAs to approach A1 and A2 grades as something unachievable. This ambiguous idea of 'being told' might reflect hidden rules and academics' tacit knowledge that make assessment practices differ from the regulatory prescriptions. Allison continues:

*If we think about it, that's ridiculous why do we have marks that nobody can achieve? It's pointless because we are not measuring students against something that they might be in 30 years time, that's pointless at this stage. Why don't we just have the marks that we actually give out... (Allison)*

Allison's quotation demonstrates her strong sense of unhappiness with an A grade; she perceives the current system being '*ridiculous*' and '*pointless*'. Furthermore, her reflection tends to indicate her feeling of not being able to influence the assessment process in terms of creating a fairer and perhaps more sensible assessment system. The GTAs tend '*[to be] told*' (Allison, Jonathan) rather than engaged in the discussion.

### ***Assessment practices***

The participants spoke about their perceptions of inconsistency in assessment practice. Sarah argues that assessment in the University of Glasgow is '*varied*': '*everyone has different ideas how they want to mark things, and it varies a lot within subjects as well*'. Eric explains that there are '*subject-based national and international standards and grading benchmarks*'. However, he also emphasises that '*they don't seem to be producing consistency*'.

While the examples above problematise inconsistency as leading to bias in assessment, there are also some GTAs who emphasise inconsistency as a rather positive aspect that is underpinned by an idea of professionalism and allows academics as subject experts to design the best practices for their courses and students. Jennifer argues that '*I think it's quite hard to have a standardised way of assessing; I think if you did that, you would limit students' creativity*'. Similarly, Amy explains that '*one size*' might not '*fit*' all disciplines:

*I would be a bit vary about consistency [...] I would be worried that one size doesn't fit all, and actually sometimes departments being idiosyncratic about their assessment is not such a bad thing. (Amy)*

Allison also questions the aspect of consistency and argues that diversity is fine as long as there is '*a general understanding among teaching staff on what an A means and what B means and what exactly they are looking for*'. However, she emphasises that she '*didn't find [it] in [her] own teaching experience*', making it unclear if she would actually prefer to have a more standardised approach to assessment in the University of Glasgow.

From a pedagogical perspective, however, the GTAs explained assessment as a learning-oriented process. In terms of language, the two focus groups included expressions such as '*feed-forward*' (Jennifer), '*feedback*' (Sarah, Jonathan), '*continuous assessment*'

(Jonathan), *'formative assessment'* (Maria), *'improvement'* (Jonathan), *'reflective'* (Eric) and *'supportive'* (Amy) along with other similar phrases that clearly reflect the discourses of learning-oriented assessment. These expressions were incorporated into various discursive accounts that explain the purposes of assessment as these are understood by the GTAs. For example, Jennifer argues that *'There is no point of having a thing in assessment that doesn't allow them to feed-forward into the next assessment'*, and Rebecca explains that *'I think from the student perspective, the assessment needs to seem like it's actually taking them somewhere'*.

The participants' discourses above provide an insight into a complex subjectivity of the GTAs. On the one hand, the GTAs tend to be unaware of the policy context regulating assessment; on the other hand, they demonstrate their pedagogical confidence and learning-oriented understanding of assessment. It is unclear how the GTAs have developed their knowledge of processes such as formative assessment and feedback, particularly as they tend to be critical about the institutional training available to GTAs as it becomes evident later in this chapter. It might be the case that this pedagogical understanding of assessment is rooted in their experience as students, independent work or interactions with academics. It could therefore be argued that discourses shaping GTAs as teaching subjects are complex and related to scholarly rather than regulatory forces. The further aspects of GTA work and subjectivity will be explored below.

### ***Perceptions of the GTA work***

As regards the ways the GTAs further position themselves as teaching subjects in the university context, the participants explain:

*...I think very much we as PhD students, you are expected to be a GTA. (Amy)*

*...if you are in Master's, you are not expected to, but in your PhD in your first and second year of PhD, you are expected to be a GTA. (Eric)*

Furthermore, Eric argues that *'if you are not [a GTA], you have done something weird'*. In addition to these expectations, the GTAs position themselves as *'relative experts'* (Eric), *'not qualified enough'* (Amy) or having *'not enough distance from students'* (Amy) when speaking about their more specific teaching and assessment duties. Eric explains that *'we have to realise even if you are on the third year of your PhD as a GTA, you are not a qualified subject expert yet'*. More specifically, the GTAs explain their roles and expertise as being *'a step, at best two steps ahead of the students'* (Amy). These discursive accounts reflect that it is not only pedagogical confidence and clear understanding of learning-

oriented assessment that characterises GTAs as teaching subjects but there are also challenges and a less secure teaching identity that to which they relate. The following quotations demonstrate the ways in which the GTAs understand themselves as relative experts in their interaction with students:

*You kind of get the reading that the students would have to do and then just read it the night before and trying to do a little bit of extra reading on internet and come up with questions and kind of. Yeah, this was really hard and really scary as well.* (Sarah)

*I was teaching this stuff, I was doing the seminars based solely on me doing the same reading at the same time that the students were.* (Eric)

*...I don't feel qualified enough to, you know, think to myself, 'Oh well, I know exactly what I am talking about, I have the confidence to be, you know, creative with assessment', you know.* (Amy)

This perception of themselves as subjects with a low expertise seems to help the GTAs to justify the importance of academics as professionals. The idea of professionalism appears to make assessment as an institutional technology trustworthy but also pedagogically sound in a context where the influence of regulations is perceived to be modest as argued earlier in this chapter. Furthermore, the GTA discourses tend to emphasise professionalism as something that supports the work and roles of the GTAs as '*relative experts*' (Eric). In a Foucauldian sense, however, academic professionalism, especially in terms of status and tacit knowledge as it is highlighted by the GTAs, might reflect authority and disciplinary power that make academics dominate over teaching and assessment processes, GTAs and students. This domination, however, does not have a negative connotation in the participants' experience; rather, it is academic expertise that leads academics to have power over others. Lecturers and university teachers have a duty to use their power wisely: to support and develop GTAs but also to make assessment trustworthy in the university. In this respect, the positioning of the GTA becomes shaped by the institutional context, by academics, as well as the ways in which individual GTAs interpret and enact that role.

The participants argue that both students and GTAs need to conform to academic authority. For example, Jennifer argues that academics provide '*a sort of strategic view*' in assessment but also that '*you [the GTAs] have to just trust professional judgement call of whoever is in charge*'. On similar lines, Eric explains the importance of '*subject experts*' who set the standards and make assessment trustworthy for students:

*...there needs to be standard set by the subject experts that you [the GTAs] conform to. And it's, it's for the students, I mean they, they, they should be able to rely on that level of expertise because there are real and definable qualities of higher levels of expertise that are what they are depending on and what they are expecting to be getting. (Eric)*

Above all, the GTAs explain the necessity of academic authority in relation to students. Amy argues: *'I think students have to know that ultimately assessment comes [from] higher above'*. Furthermore, Rebecca shares her experience of assessing postgraduate students' work while being a Master's student herself. She explains that this was a secret between her and the academic who explained that *'students wouldn't be happy if you were doing this'*. It could be argued that if regulations do not create consistency in assessment, it needs to be academic authority that ensures it, at least from the perspective of the GTAs interviewed.

In addition to status, the GTAs emphasise the importance of professional experience that contributes to academic authority and provides academics with tacit knowledge: a form of knowledge that is not accessible to GTAs but can be gained through professional experience. Jennifer and Maria explain how GTAs' expertise and confidence in assessment grows over the years:

*...because what you were last year is not what you're going to be in the next 2-3 years and you know, with time you are going to learn about this invisible assessment criteria and you're gonna be able to say, 'No, don't use that'... (Maria)*

*I don't think you can teach someone how to mark, I think all you can do is to support, and they learn how to do it... (Jennifer)*

Furthermore, Jennifer explains that she has *'probably marked 200 papers by now'* and even as a GTA her confidence has grown during her work experience: *'I'm quite confident now, I can grade it just by looking at it, but I think at the start I felt very uncomfortable with this all idea of grading other people's work'*. This sense of tacit knowledge that grows and becomes accessible through experience was emphasised by several other participants. For example, Allison shares her experience in assessment where she felt that academics were assessing based on *'self-criteria that's invisible'* and inaccessible to new GTAs:

*So my sense was that almost that there was other self-criteria that's invisible, that the markers go by, and as a new GTA you would have no way of accessing it, it just comes with practice, and I don't know if that's a necessary evil or it's something that we should improve about the practice of marking. (Allison)*

Sarah and Eric emphasise their experiences of being told to ‘bump’ their grades up, which might be related to emerging client culture analysed in the previous section; however, it might also refer to tacit knowledge to which GTAs do not yet have access, and therefore their grades might differ from the ones given by the academics:

*...we had like a bunch of marking to do, we maybe did 5 each and then came together to see where our grades were and me and one other girl had marked them all like Cs or Ds because they were awful and they were meant to be Master’s level. Emm and then we were told to bump them up to As and Bs. (Sarah)*  
*I actually, I had an E1 that I gave somebody, no it was E3, and I got told to bump it up to a C3. (Eric)*

It is therefore unsurprising that the participants’ discourse highlights doubt and fears. The following phrases characterise the discourses of the GTAs in terms of being worried, scared and afraid of ‘doing it [assessment] wrong’:

*Even if I do end up getting the same points with someone else, I always feel that yeah, I’m doing it wrong... (Jonathan)*

*I do worry sometimes whether, you know, how well I am marking if I’m marking as other people would mark... (Daniel)*

*...even if a lecturer or, you know, higher up, is also doing the marking then that kind of scares me, I think, ‘Oh no, what if I mark too high or I mark too low’ (Sarah)*

Interestingly, it also appears that the GTAs cope with their fears and insecurity in a complex way. On the one hand, the GTAs seem to like their dependence on academics. For example, Eric critiques the idea of ‘freedom’ and ‘flexibility’ in GTA’s practice: ‘*I don’t think GTAs should have much if any freedom or flexibility with it.*’ On the other hand, they try to ascribe some authority to themselves when interacting with students. It might be illusionary authority in their experience, but they see it operating in a power relationship between a GTA and students. Amy explains the authority she has experienced in her work with students:

*...yeah, I have taught where I feel if I am literally a step, a best two steps ahead of the students...emm for some of the stuff. Emm but it’s amazing how you have been in a position of authority to them makes it seem like you know exactly what you are talking about. It totally works in your favour. (Amy)*

The ways the participants explain the power relations between the academics, GTAs and students demonstrate a Foucauldian idea of power that is not a singular entity owned and

practised by a group of people such as academics. Rather, it is diffuse, and it operates in multiple ways. For example, the GTAs position themselves as being both accountable to and dominated by academics but at the same time also gaining support from this control and having some power over students. Furthermore, while the students were described being highly powerful in the context of emerging client culture as analysed in previous section, they tend to be perceived disciplined and significantly less powerful in terms of assessment processes.

### ***Perception of students***

As regards the more specific examples of student positioning in assessment, the GTAs speak about students in terms of their experiences of fairness and fears. The discursive phrases such as *'I think they think it's unfair'* (Jennifer), *'I think they will always think it's unfair'* (Jonathan) and *'they don't understand what the grades are for at university level'* (Allison) were common. Furthermore, Sarah argues that *'students are terrified of assessment. Emm and the whole thing panics, the all idea of assessment panics them'*. In the same lines, Allison argues that students are *'anxious'* about their grades, and Rebecca argues that this makes students avoid certain *'harsh markers'*:

*I think students are very, very anxious about their marks, and they are not just used to the idea of not doing well, of not getting good marks because they come out of school and they got straight As in school... (Allison)*

*I know in Psychology, emm students avoid answering certain lecturers' questions because they think those lecturers are harsh markers. (Rebecca)*

This idea of *'harsh markers'* in Rebecca's quote might reflect once again the GTA experiences of inconsistency but also of academic authority in assessment. Furthermore, Sarah and Jennifer emphasise that students not only demand for higher grades, as it was analysed earlier, they are often demanding for feedback that directly affects the GTA work. For example, Sarah emphasises the idea of *'spoon-feeding'* by arguing that *'the undergraduate courses I think yeah, they always want more feedback. And it's almost like they have to be spoon-fed throughout the process'*. Jennifer, however, highlights the effect of *'snowball'* that *'huge amounts of feedback'* can cause:

*Like if you give them really, really good feedback, then the next essay they do, they want more feedback than they got the first time, and you set up this snowball almost, that you just cannot keep up. (Jennifer)*

Jennifer also raises a paradox in which students demand for feedback but often do not collect the feedback that academics have written for them:

*So academic staff spends huge amounts of time writing feedback and then maybe half the students don't even bother picking it up. So I think that shows what students think of feedback [laughing]. They moan when they don't get enough but then when they have the opportunity to collect their feedback, they just don't bother. (Jennifer)*

An example that might explain the reasons for not collecting the feedback is provided by Rebecca, who argues that Psychology students are often 'disappointed' with the format of feedback, so-called 'ticky boxes':

*But most of the time it's ticky boxes which students obviously don't like, you know, it doesn't give them any kind of individual kind of specific things to them, and I think like the feedback that they get, they are always really disappointed with it. (Rebecca)*

Difficulties that the GTAs need to cope with also result from assessing students who they recognise from their writing style. For example, Allison explains that 'you know your students, you know [laughing]', and Jonathan illustrates that 'I know out 30 students like that's him' and 'even if you mix them up like, I can put the pages together'. In similar lines, Daniel argues that what he has 'found most difficult is marking students who [he] know[s] are clever, and then also seeing people who are perhaps less gifted'. Another issue relates to rewarding student effort. As recognising and rewarding effort tends to be part of support that the GTAs want to provide, they also struggle to assess assignments that do not demonstrate high effort or engagement:

*...in the sense that you might look at the guidance and say okay, that ticks the boxes but then you see it, that's clearly something that you haven't put effort in. (Jonathan)*

*You make me work this hard when you put no effort into this. There were times, when I read something and I just thought, this really like, what are you doing... (Rebecca)*

The GTAs wish to support their students throughout their learning and study process, but as they know their students very well, the difficulties in terms of being fair and unbiased emerge. It might also make the authority that GTAs ascribe to themselves questionable, as not only a lack of professional experience and educational distance but also a lack inter-relational distance causes stress and discomfort in GTAs' experience. As these are the difficulties that GTAs experience in their micro contexts – in their relationship with students - they also need to cope with these difficulties on their own and often without the



help from academics. Jonathan explains, '*I find it very hard to be truly objective about it*', and Allison argues:

*I need to remember that I will see the students again; I will see them in the class, I bump into them in the street, and I need to be able to look the student in the eye [laughing].*

This section has demonstrated the GTAs' understanding of assessment in which the regulations have a secondary importance compared to the authority of academics. It might be the case that the way the GTAs want to depend on academics but also to ascribe some authority to themselves, helps them to prepare for their own future roles as academics with status and professional experience: they are internalising tacit knowledge. This idea of acquiring tacit knowledge might reflect the reproductive but also protective nature of higher education, academia and assessors' work. It requires time and effort to become part of the academic community. Furthermore, within this context where authority is a key organising principle in assessment, also the idea of disciplinary power emerges. The GTAs describe themselves as being accountable to and controlled by academics, while students tend to be positioned as dominated by both academics and the GTAs. It is therefore unsurprising that students in assessment context are perceived as being fearful and concerned about their grades and feedback.

### ***The wider positioning: GTAs as pressurised mediators and pastoral care providers***

As previous sections demonstrated, the participants perceive themselves as subjects who are expected to become GTAs but who need and want to conform to academic authority in their work. When tracing the ways the GTAs experience and explain their subject positions further, the ideas related to mediation and pastoral care emerge. This section will demonstrate how these positions cause tensions and stress among the participants. Furthermore, the section will emphasise that GTAs feel that current institutional support is not sufficient for supporting them in their work.

#### ***GTAs as mediators and pastoral care providers***

The aspects of mediation emerge when tracing the ways the GTAs see themselves being positioned within a neoliberal higher education context. For example, while the GTA

discourses position students as powerful clients and academics as pressurised subjects, they tend to explain how the GTAs need to operate between the staff and students in order to balance the pressures that academics increasingly experience. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the GTAs perceive their position as being underpinned by an idea of '*offloading*': an opportunity to balance the workload of pressurised academic staff. For example, Sarah argues that '*I think in Education, people want to offload their marking because they don't have any time*', and Rebecca explains that '*when I got given the Master's stuff to mark, this was purely the case of offloading*'. Amy confirms the idea of offloading by saying '*yeah, that's the kind of attitude in English language*', and she also explains the ways it operates in her department:

*Emm so we are kind of over the way in English language, language where if you fit, you know, you get sucked in, 'Oh yes, such and such knows that, yeah, shuffle the teaching to them'. (Amy)*

This idea of offloading that is not controlled by the GTAs as such, however, shapes the ways the GTAs perceive and position themselves in academia. Rebecca, for instance, explains that she is '*doing teaching and other bits and pieces that nobody else wants to do*'. She continues:

*...GTAs [are] acting a little bit like peacekeepers and a little bit like a machine factory, just to get everybody through. So especially with the labs, so I taught the same lab 21 times over three-week period, and it was a little bit like a factory turning out the same thing over and over and over again to students. (Rebecca)*

Rebecca tends to perceive herself as a GTA in terms of mediation and offloading. The idea of '*a machine factory*' might refer to her experiences of how GTAs take care of increasing teaching loads in the university and make sure that they get all students '*through*'. So she appears to see herself filling a gap that makes the overall system and programme work. Interestingly, she also refers to '*peacekeeping*' which might refer to tensions in academia and/between student communities that need to be dealt with and mediated. So even if Rebecca speaks about doing '*bits and pieces that nobody else wants to do*', she still perceives herself being proactive and needed in the university setting.

The GTAs also stress their role as one of being supportive towards students. In terms of the support that the participants perceive themselves as providing, they emphasise the aspects of mediation further. For example, some GTAs emphasise the importance of mediation between academic staff and students in order to facilitate students and their learning but

perhaps again to protect academics from their further pressures. Amy, for example, argues that she is *‘a bit of a mediator between the lecturer and students sometimes in English language’*, and Rebecca responds that *‘I like that bit of being a mediator between like the students and the staff, cause I feel I fall into that quite a lot’*. This idea of mediation might refer to advice and guidance that GTAs provide to students but perhaps also to negotiation of academic authority.

An example of mediating disciplinary power is provided by Rebecca, who explains that the first and second year undergraduate Psychology students experience lecturers being *‘very far away’*, while their main support comes from the GTAs. Furthermore, Rebecca describes the GTAs in her department as *‘the face of Psychology’* or *‘the frontline defence’*:

*...one of the things they [academics] tell us when we become GTAs is because we have a completely different lab space for first and second years, completely sort of detached from the Psychology department, they would say, ‘Oh, you are the face of Psychology for two years because you are the people that the students are actually going to talk to, they are not going to the member of staff, they are going to come to talk to you’. So you are a little bit of a mediator, you kind of feel like you have to know who students should talk to, who is the best kind of members of staff to talk to for each problem and kind of mediate stuff [...] you are kind of like the frontline defence sort of. (Rebecca)*

This idea of being a *‘frontline defence’* tends to have a dual meaning. On the one hand, it might reflect the aspects of looking after and supporting students, and on the other, it might also involve an idea of protecting academics who GTAs perceive being increasingly pressurised, as it was analysed earlier. It could be argued that mediation in GTA’s work is a highly complex process. As GTAs are most often doctoral students, their dual identity in terms of being a student and staff appears to facilitate and encourage their subject positions as mediators.

The participants also highlight the importance of the pastoral care that GTAs provide to students. This tends to be a more emotional form of support, and it takes place in a more direct relationship between GTAs and their students. For example, Allison emphasises pastoral care by arguing *‘I find interesting about this role of GTA or a marker in general, is this pastoral care aspect that is always there’*. She also vividly explains that she cannot *‘machine stamp’* essays, but she needs to make her feedback *‘encouraging and constructive’*. Similar examples of pastoral care are provided by Sarah and Maria who explain their experiences of supporting students, *‘nurturing’* as Maria argues:

*...you're nurturing, you're looking at these people who are still in the learning process, and you're saying, 'I'm here to work with you, I'm here to help you, so let's look at this, so let's see how you can improve'... (Maria)*

*...I was just teaching on the [specific course], I felt like I had kind of to set them up for their essay and tell them what would be expected, and then kind of set them up for the ones who wouldn't do well, tell them why, if they didn't do well, this is why you weren't doing well. I had a huge amount of responsibility, and they were kind of relying on me, and I would tell them information how they could improve. (Sarah)*

Sometimes, support, however, has to be offered in response to sensitive issues. Rebecca explains that where students have mental health problems, this can have '*front line effects, so there are occasional things when, you know, we have had instances when students have been abusive to GTAs*'. She also provides an example of sensitive matters that the students share with GTAs:

*But I had a student to come and like, you know, 'My essay is due in late cause I had an abortion'. I'm like, this is not information that I want to have or I feel capable of handling. I was just like, 'Ok, well, the way I take your essay is still exactly the same, you need to go and speak to somebody else'. (Rebecca)*

### ***Institutional support and GTA training***

This idea of emotional support on sensitive matters seems to make GTAs express their experience of stress and frustration in their work. Furthermore, the participants argue that they do not receive enough support for coping with the tensions that intense and direct contact with students causes. While the University of Glasgow website highlights the statutory nature of the GTA training, the participants' experiences of this training tend to differ. The website highlights:

All new GTAs (Graduate Teaching Assistants, Tutors and Laboratory Demonstrators) are required to undergo training to aid them in their teaching duties. The Learning and Teaching Centre is responsible for half of this training with the GTA's own school being responsible for the other half (University of Glasgow, n.d. c).

Amy, however, describes the statutory GTA training in the University of Glasgow as '*pretty much a tick in the box exercises*' and '*it just wasn't great*'. Furthermore, Rebecca argues that the statutory training is not compulsory for the GTAs in the School of Psychology:

*...in Psychology, we don't go to the university-led GTA trainings. I know that there is GTA training course, but we don't get sent to it, emm which seems quite strange, but*

*the Psychology department thinks that actually what the university teaches on GTA training isn't what the GTA is in the Psychology department. (Rebecca)*

Also, Sarah explains that nobody has checked her attendance at the training by arguing '*I haven't been in GTA training, and I have taught every year of my PhD*'. Furthermore, the GTAs argue that in terms of pastoral care, they do not receive any support. Amy shares her view by arguing '*yeah, I think that pastoral role, care thing is something that you don't get taught as a GTA, you don't get enough*', and Rebecca explains how the pastoral care issues are like '*a ticking time bomb*' in her department: '*And students have, you know, blown up at GTAs, emm so I think like, this is one of the things, you know, we don't really get any training in and is kind of like a ticking time bomb*'. It seems that a key concern that the GTAs have in relation to their work and roles is related to coping with mediation and pastoral care provision. It might be because the ideas of mediation and pastoral care tend to define the GTA subjectivity in their own experiences.

Furthermore, because the participants find the institutional support insufficient, they emphasise how they rely on their doctoral supervisors when needing advice and support as GTAs. Jennifer and Daniel provide their examples:

*...well, I actually, a bit, oh that's a bit, I'm a bit, I was a bit uncomfortable with that, how far do you extend an extension and I have sorted, I went to ask someone, I went to ask my own supervisor... (Jennifer)*

*...yeah, I just, you know, someone who started doing GTA, this is something I ran into, and I was being far too lenient on this student, and I was talking to my supervisor about it, I feel really bad because I was feeling really, really I don't want to be responsible for this guy... (Daniel)*

However, the quotes above raise a question if this kind of support should be provided by a doctoral supervisor or perhaps by an institutional support mechanism. This is especially as the GTAs tend to be concerned about the institutional inconsistency of GTA roles and expectations. The phrases referring to inconsistency were dominant throughout the two focus groups: '*what is expected of GTAs to be doing is inconsistent*' (Eric) and '*I think our role as GTAs across the university is very inconsistent*' (Amy) along with other similar statements. This demonstrates once again the tensions that shape GTA work in the university but perhaps also nationally, as recent media discussions have indicated (see Else, 2014; Riddell, 2014).

## ***Conclusion***

As the chapter has demonstrated, the GTA discourses are complex, reflecting a Foucauldian idea of power which is diffuse while moving and transforming within structural contexts. In terms of institutional and higher education contexts, the GTAs problematise neoliberalisation of higher education and describe the University of Glasgow as being highly focused on internationalisation, excellence, client culture and employability. From a Foucauldian perspective, these processes act in various ways and on various subjects: students, academics and GTAs. While, the GTAs interviewed are unsure about the forces responsible for neoliberalisation – demonstrating the idea of diffuse power – they also see neoliberal discourses positioning GTAs as mediators between increasingly demanding students and pressurised academics. This tends to confirm the tensions highlighted in wider scholarly work which emphasise that the GTA role in the UK is highly shaped by the structural changes in higher education.

Park argues in his work (Park, 2004; Park, 2002; Park and Ramos, 2002) that the main driver for the increasing number of GTAs in the UK universities is related to the institutional challenges such as rising student numbers, resource constraints and pressures on academic staff and their research duties. Similar thoughts are shared by Chadha (2013) and Muzaka (2009) who emphasise that GTAs along with other part-time staff help to deal with these institutional challenges by filling a teaching gap. This means that from an institutional perspective ‘GTAs perform a much-needed and valued function as substitute teachers’ (Chadha, 2013, p. 206). However, some of this scholarly work could be also critiqued as it tends to apply exploitative discourse in terms of addressing GTAs as someone that can be ‘used’. For example, the phrases such as ‘the main driver for increasing use of GTAs’ (Park 2002, p. 50) and ‘the way in which departments use GTAs’ (Park and Ramos, 2002, p. 52) make it look as GTAs are in the universities to be used rather than to act or practice any form of techniques of the self in a Foucauldian sense. It is therefore unsurprising that the GTAs in this research project tended to be highly critical about the neoliberalisation of higher education as it shapes and constitutes their work but also their subjectivity, making them feel and act as mediators.

Assessment from the GTAs’ perspective tends to be an educational process that can support student learning; however, their discourses also indicate how assessment includes disciplinary power in which ‘one person tries to control the conduct of the other’ (Foucault,

1984a, p. 292). The GTAs tend to reflect aspects of professionalism by drawing on the 'authority of a teacher' (Foucault, 1984a, p. 299). While Foucault (1975, 1984a) sees this kind of assessment relations as being oppressive, the GTAs interviewed perceive it as a way to ensure trustworthy assessment processes and to support the GTAs as early career teachers/assessors. This also means that the GTAs might favour and perhaps enforce the idea of academic authority that oversees and controls assessment which also makes them position themselves as being dominated by academics. It might be the case that assessment as a technology itself is something that makes the GTAs feel less confident and less authoritative as their own identity of being a student emerges: a student who has been assessed throughout his/her educational experiences. It might also be related to tacit knowledge that the GTAs see as being crucial in assessment but (yet) inaccessible to GTAs. This might make academics even more authoritative in the GTAs' experience.

Furthermore, the ways the GTAs speak about learning and acquiring tacit knowledge might reflect the way academic communities protect but also reproduce their expertise-related authority. By learning this tacit knowledge, the perception of confidence and status increases. This could be seen to reflect a Foucauldian idea of power-knowledge dimensions in which 'power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge' (Foucault, 1975, p. 27). So there seems to be a tension in the GTAs' experience: on the one hand, the GTAs act against the neoliberalisation of higher education and protect the liberal idea of education by mediating and providing pastoral care; on the other hand, the GTAs still favour and enforce the idea of academics' disciplinary power over the students and the GTAs. While favouring disciplinary power in assessment, the GTAs emphasise the importance of the pastoral care they provide to students in relation to educational processes such as assessment. Their subject positions tend to be relative depending on the structural contexts and demonstrating the idea of diffuse power in which power is not a singular entity but rather operates differently through various technologies and structural contexts.

Similarly to many authors (Park, 2002; Muzaka, 2009), the discourses have demonstrated the ambiguity of the GTA role: they are 'neither fish nor fowl' as Park (2002, p. 59) metaphorically argued. As the GTAs balance their roles of being students and employees, teachers and researches, tensions also emerge associated with such roles (Muzaka, 2009). This is seen especially in terms of assessment which is fundamentally shaped by power relations as argued earlier in this thesis. It is therefore unsurprising that the GTAs perceive

themselves as being subjectified as mediators and pastoral care providers who act within the meeting points of both institutional and assessment pressures: mediating the teaching load of academics but also balancing domination evident in assessment.



## Chapter 12: Student discourses in the two universities

*Students in neoliberal universities get sucked into the rampant individualism and competition, at the same time as they understand the competition is not about gaining understanding or the capacity to think but to produce pre-envisaged products through which they will gain certification. Although, student cheating has always been rampant, there is no longer any ethics that could inform a desire not to cheat. What passes as 'ethics' in universities is not ethics but risk-management. (Davies, 2014, [e-mail])*

This study involved four focus groups with students from the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University, including 15 students. The chapter aims to explore the student discourses and to analyse the ways the participants perceive the structural contexts of higher education, assessment policy and practice in their universities but also themselves within these complex power relations. In order to set the context for the analysis, an overview of the participants is provided below. For recruitment processes undertaken please see Chapter 6.

The sample in Tallinn University includes four undergraduate (UG) and six postgraduate (PG) students from various disciplinary areas (see Table 12).

**Table 12. Student focus groups in Tallinn University**

Pseudonym	Study year	Programme	Disciplinary area
<b><i>Focus group 1</i></b>			
Kristiina	PG 1	Slavic Languages and Cultures	A&H
Kerli	PG 2	Environmental Management	Health & Life Sci
Liisa	PG 2	Geo-ecology	Health & Life Sci
Marili	UG 1	Pre-school Education	Soc Sci
Markus	UG 2	Biology	Health & Life Sci
Merle	UG 3	Adult Education	Soc Sci
Karl	UG 3	Information Technology	S&E
<b><i>Focus group 2</i></b>			
Annika	PG 1	Educational Sciences	Soc Sci
Greta	PG 1	Adult Education	Soc Sci
Karoliine	PG 1	Arts and Crafts Teaching	Soc Sci

The sample in the University of Glasgow is smaller, and it includes five students (see Table 13).

**Table 13. Student focus groups in the University of Glasgow**

Pseudonym	Study year	Programme	Disciplinary area
<i><b>Focus group 1</b></i>			
Rachel	UG 2	Immunology	MVLS
Sophie	UG 2	Physiology	MVLS
Callum	UG 3	Geography	S&E
<i><b>Focus group 2</b></i>			
Chloe	PG, completed in 2014	PG Diploma in Education	Soc Sci
Tracy	PG, completed in 2014	PG Diploma in Education	Soc Sci

Despite the difficulties with student recruitment in Glasgow (as analysed in Chapter 6), focus groups with students in the two universities addressed the same thematic areas: profile of their university, assessment methods and involvement in assessment, assessor's role and relations with academics and students (see Appendix 11). Possible limitations caused by sample sizes in the two universities will be emphasised throughout the chapter.

In order to present and analyse the key findings, the chapter starts by tracing the ways students in both universities speak about structural contexts of higher education: their universities and the purposes of higher education in particular. It then continues with an exploration of the ways students relate to assessment processes and assessors. Finally, the chapter analyses how students perceive and position themselves in these structural and assessment contexts.

### ***Student experiences of institutional and higher education contexts***

When tracing the ways students speak about their universities, a number of different discursive concepts emerged (see Table 14).

**Table 14. Perception of the university in student discourses**

The University of Glasgow	Tallinn University
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ International/multicultural (Chloe, Rachel)</li> <li>▪ Old/ancient (Chloe, Callum)</li> <li>▪ Prestigious (Tracy, Chloe)</li> <li>▪ Privileged/elite (Tracy, Chloe)</li> <li>▪ Chaotic (Chloe)</li> <li>▪ Challenging (Tracy)</li> <li>▪ Clever (Sophie)</li> <li>▪ Diverse (Sophie)</li> <li>▪ Excellence (Callum)</li> <li>▪ Friendly (Sophie)</li> <li>▪ Good reputation (Tracy)</li> <li>▪ Good research (Sophie)</li> <li>▪ Green (Chloe)</li> <li>▪ Hard to get into some courses (Tracy)</li> <li>▪ Nice buildings (Rachel)</li> <li>▪ Resourceful (Rachel)</li> <li>▪ West End (Tracy)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creative (Greta, Karoliine)</li> <li>▪ Innovative (Merle, Karoliine)</li> <li>▪ Theoretical (Markus, Kerli)</li> <li>▪ Trust (Liisa, Kerli)</li> <li>▪ City centre (Annika)</li> <li>▪ Diverse optional courses (Kerli)</li> <li>▪ Freedom (Liisa)</li> <li>▪ International (Karoliine)</li> <li>▪ Modernity (Merle)</li> <li>▪ Motivating atmosphere (Karl)</li> <li>▪ Old and new (Annika)</li> <li>▪ Student-friendliness (Liisa)</li> <li>▪ Uneven (Merle)</li> </ul>

Most of these concepts emphasise positive terms relating to the universities. For example, the references to excellence and resources in the University of Glasgow appear to reflect the profile of the University of Glasgow as a Russell Group university. These concepts were expanded in the focus groups: phrases such as *‘I put excellence, top 50 in the world, cause it was a main driver for me to come to’* (Callum) or *‘Emm I had also had elite that is quite a kind of emm thoughts around Glasgow being you know above Strathclyde’* (Tracy) illustrate the importance of status in the student discourses of Glasgow. Naidoo and Williams (2015) and Pritchard (2005) argue that various league tables and rank orders are increasingly used by students when making educational decisions. It is therefore unsurprising that student discourses highlight the importance of university rankings.

In contrast, none of the Tallinn students emphasised status-related characteristics. Their focus tends to be on a positive learning environment that reflects *‘creativity’* (Greta, Karoliine), *‘innovation’* (Merle, Karoliine) and *‘trust’* (Liisa, Kerli). It might be that student discourses in Tallinn are shaped by the wider institutional policy discourses that they have come across: discourses that position Tallinn University as an ‘innovative and academically enriching university’ but also ‘the most student-friendly university in Estonia’:

By pursuing your studies at Tallinn University you will have the opportunity of becoming part of a contemporary and dynamic university that has a reputation of being the most student-friendly university in Estonia (Tallinn University, n.d. c).

The quotes from Karl and Liisa, for example, confirm (or perhaps repeat) the (marketing) discourses of Tallinn University that emphasise the university's supportive and friendly atmosphere:

*...I should say about the university that it has a very motivating atmosphere, a helpful one, that even if you approach an academic with a personal problem, that's external to the university, they help a lot. (Karl)*

*...already at the undergraduate level – we got the institute door cards, could go to the labs whenever we wanted – it's the student-friendliness, freedom, things like this – elsewhere you're not trusted. (Liisa)*

When tracing the ways students explain their understanding of wider higher education purposes, the student discourses in the two universities become much more similar. Students from both universities emphasise the functional aims of university education in terms of approaching education as being necessary for developing one's work-related skills. Chloe, for example, explains her concerns about how higher education has become more 'functional':

*I think the idea of university when it started it was only for the elite and then it was just for you to keep progressing your own knowledge whatever you interested in. Now it's more functional, and I think it has sort of lost a bit of what it was aiming for which is just to develop you as an individual and instead of now just benchmarks that you have to go and pass by, by a certain time. (Chloe)*

Other participants from both Glasgow and Tallinn did not question their pragmatic and functional approaches to higher education. Callum explained the importance of increasing employability through educational choices and reflected on his personal experience of changing his major: '*not lots of people get jobs in Politics degrees, so I decided for Geography [laughing]*'. Similarly, Tracy explained that her first degree in Sociology, '*a Mickey Mouse degree*' as she now calls it, did not help her with finding a relevant job:

*...when I went to university the first time, if you had a degree, you were guaranteed a job, you were guaranteed to start with 15 grand or above a year. It's absolute rubbish, I couldn't get a job in my field at all, you know, I ended up working in a supermarket and then trying to find out what I was going to do next. It wasn't till I moved to Glasgow where there was more choice, and I was kind of left on my own to find out about things, that I went into a classroom assistant... (Tracy)*

The discourse used by the students indicates how students reason and evaluate their educational choices based on pragmatic purposes such as work-related prospects. Furthermore, these examples above illustrate Peters and Olssen's (2005) argument that students in neoliberal societies have become increasingly reluctant to choose programmes for which jobs are difficult to obtain.

The students in Tallinn University tend to be less personal in their examples, but they still problematise the aspects of employability. For example, Kerli emphasised that a university education should develop '*logical thinking*' rather than '*pointless factual knowledge*', demonstrating a utilitarian approach to learning. She also argues that as university education does not often provide '*work-oriented*' experience, it makes some students in Estonia '*choose professional higher education*':

*And actually, in a way, it's a problem – occasionally for this reason people choose professional higher education, because it's more practical, more work-oriented. It's, in general, an issue with the university as an institution – it gives knowledge rather than work skills for future life. (Kerli)*

Students in Tallinn expect practical knowledge and experiences from higher education, and they see a lack of it as being '*an issue*' (Kerli). This tends to demonstrate an increasing tension between academic knowledge and practice in which academic knowledge is given secondary importance compared to any form of practice that could increase graduate competitiveness. Markus argues that excellent academic knowledge and good grades do not provide any advantage at the labour market:

*Well, at today's labour market, if there's two people running for the same position, one has work experience, and the other one has a 'cum laude', then the one with the experience gets it. Yes, no one will care why you got that B or... (Markus)*

However, some students in Tallinn University, mostly from more practical degree programmes such as Information Technology, Language Studies and Adult Education, see their courses as providing work-related experience. The phrases such as '*I'd say that practice for us comes along with the theory because we're doing software development*' (Karl), '*my field is languages, and it's connected to work practice*' (Kristiina) and '*on my subject the practical side is very strong*' (Merle) reflect a certainty that is characteristic of the discursive accounts of some participants.

In relation to this significant focus on employability and work-related skills in student discourses in both universities, several students shared concerns about societal pressures that make students go to universities. Tracy from the University of Glasgow explains how her educational decisions have been shaped by societal expectations:

*I probably would have gone to college and done interior design and gone through that avenue and done more skills and craft-based things I would have enjoyed. Whereas you know the expectation of going to university and the pressure, although, it obviously has helped me to get into a profession I really enjoy now, it wouldn't have been the path I chose if I had more options. (Tracy)*

The rest of the students tended to speak about these expectations and pressures as something distant from their own experiences. Marili from Tallinn University explains that students' study motivation might be shaped by parental expectations: *'maybe many youth come forced by their parents or just to study something'* (Marili). Also, Kerli explains that *'many go to university to get the degree'*. However, she also emphasises that *'many don't – I know from my own field that most people don't care about their grades'* which creates a more balanced view. However, the students still tend to see higher education turning into an expected educational pathway that helps them survive in a competitive labour market – while college education is increasingly devalued.

Svensson and Wood (2007) argue that in the current service-based economy, individual job prospects are highly dependent on degrees. The student discourses above indicate that the participants value practice and employability, but the discourses also raise a question about student subjectivity in higher education: do students act as rational subjects shaped by self-interest in a Foucauldian sense? The participants tend to have economic interest in education, and they also seem to be interested in becoming employable individuals. It could be argued that the students interviewed demonstrate a form of self-governance that makes them active subjects in planning their educational choices and future career. However, this activeness appears to be a survival strategy in a highly competitive labour market rather than students' accepted understanding of themselves as (young) adults and customers. The ways in which their activeness might reflect in assessment processes will be explored in the next sections.

## ***Student experiences of assessment policy and practice***

When tracing the ways the students in the University of Glasgow speak about their experiences of assessment, phrases such as *'we are pushed to essays'* (Chloe), *'the essays we have done are based on the standard kind of marking grid'* (Tracy) or *'it's all multiple choice'* (Rachel) were common. These phrases demonstrate the participants' rather negative experiences of limited assessment methods used in their courses: essays mostly in Social Sciences and multiple choice tests in Medical Sciences:

*...there is only one way they assess you in university, everybody class for essays, honestly they say like oh the coursework, it's about, I don't know let's say 20 and then assessed things like 10 percent but always, always it's 60 percent or above like yeah minimum 50 percent is the essay anyway. (Chloe)*

*...the fact that it's all multiple choice does make you feel that you have to do, it makes you feel that you could just guess quite a lot rather than actually think a lot about it. (Rachel)*

Tracy would like to see *'more formative methods of assessment, more formative like we are doing at schools'*. It might be the case that Chloe and Tracy who both study on the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme are able to compare and evaluate their experiences of assessment based on their pedagogical understandings that have evolved during their studies and school placements. This might make them also more critical about assessment methods than that are the other participants from Glasgow.

However, even if the PGDE students speak in terms of formative assessment methods, they along with other research participants still demonstrate very little reasoning about the wider purposes of assessment. Assessment is simply approached as a process for *'testing'* (Tracy) and *'checking'* (Chloe): *'I've put testing'* (Tracy), *'just testing, just to check how smart you are'* (Chloe), and *'so you know how well you are doing'* (Rachel). It could be argued that the participants from Glasgow are concerned about assessment instruments – the ways assessment is practised – but understanding about wider assessment context remains rather absent in their discourses.

In contrast, the students from Tallinn University describe their experiences of much more diverse assessment practices; their understanding of assessment purposes appears to be broader and more explicitly shared. Most participants from Tallinn emphasise how they are

used to being assessed by a variety of methods (i.e. open book exams, group work, presentations and self-assessment):

*In many courses, you can use all your materials, Google, everything, but it's that you're assessed according to how you can implement this learned and found knowledge. (Karl)*

*...using not just the exam grade but also teamwork: a lot of group work, presentations, and then we get a summative grade... (Marili)*

*...in the final year, there's a lot of situations where we set our own assessment criteria. (Merle)*

However, Annika still emphasises that single exam-based assessments can be dominant in some courses in Tallinn University such as the teacher training programme that she studies on. Her example might reflect once again the ‘uneven’ (Merle) nature of this university in which departments/programmes differ in their approaches to practice, as it was highlighted in the previous section.

*There may be a few rare courses where the end result comes as a result of continuous assessment – but as a rule, I think 90% of courses for sure are assessed based on a single exam at the very end. (Annika)*

Furthermore - and again in contrast with the students interviewed in Glasgow - the participants from Tallinn explain assessment in relation to a wide range of functions. Keywords such as ‘grants’ and ‘bursaries’ (Liisa, Annika, Karoliine), ‘feedback’ (Marili, Karoliine), ‘filter’ (Annika, Liisa), ‘quality assurance’ (Merle), ‘rewards’ (Annika) and ‘comparison’ (Greta) provide some insight into how the students justify the need for assessment. As these discursive concepts demonstrate, assessments tend to be seen in relation to pragmatic purposes such as assuring educational quality and comparison but also selecting students for bursaries and other types of rewards. The following phrases illustrate the ways the students from Tallinn perceive assessment in relation to selection processes:

*I find it's creating comparison within university, between universities, within Estonia and abroad etc, so that ultimately we'd be able to, based on a standard, a yardstick, to analyse you and me. (Greta)*

*Not everybody can be allowed to graduate... (Liisa)*



*...purely financial reasons, giving the grants and bursaries – who gets the funding, who doesn't, who graduates with a distinction, who doesn't – they need to be filtered.*  
(Annika)

Annika's metaphoric idea of 'filtering' via assessment is also emphasised by Liisa who argues that in her academic unit, *'there are some general courses that are meant to just filter the first year undergraduates*. Assessment is understood as a process that enables the selection of the best candidates from the overall student population to reward them, either with financial benefits or academic progress. Karoliine also highlights the link between assessment and *'financial issue[s]'*:

*There was the financial issue what I sensed, to receive the student bursary. I worked for that – my group was strong and there was a fight, I wanted it, even though the amount was what it was – but it's gone now, and I feel when looking at some course mates who have also continued with the Master's degree, that a few may have let go a bit.* (Karoliine)

This idea of competition and 'fights' that assessment causes might contribute to the students' overall experience of developing oneself as a competitive subject. Competition in terms of resources and rewards is noted by Manuel and Llmas (2006) who argue that student relationships tend to be highly competitive and rival in contemporary universities. Scholarships, for example, can shape student behaviour and their desires to get rewarded (Grant, 1997).

However, there are also some students in Tallinn University who view assessment in relation to educational processes of learning and teaching, and who thereby critique the selective functions of assessment. For example, Marili emphasises that assessment can be feedback to students: *'Feedback to us, isn't it?'*, and Karoliine emphasises that assessment makes it possible *'to get feedback about your actions, and it influences your further development'*. Furthermore, Marili critiques the overall role of grades as a key motivating force in universities, and she argues that assessment should be about *'chasing the knowledge not the grades'*. Similarly, Markus explains that he would like to see not grades but interest or future ambitions motivating students:

*I also think that, we have the ingrained habit that the grade motivates us, from the secondary school – that it's what you put your effort towards. We could have a system, rather, where something else motivates: that the course is so interesting, or you have a purpose – that if you gain this knowledge, it'll help you in the future.*  
(Markus)

As the discourses demonstrate, the students from the two universities address assessment differently. The students in the University of Glasgow tend to be highly focused on their (negative) experiences of particular assessment instruments such as essays or tests, but they rarely question or reason about wider assessment policy or value context. This means that the question ‘why is assessment needed?’ gets ignored in their discourses. On the other hand, the students from Tallinn appear to have a much wider experience of various practices, and they also reason about the purposes of assessment and the policy discourse shaping assessment purposes. This means that their focus is not on their personal concerns as such but rather on the operation of assessment technology in the university. Jakob’s quote above, for example, could be interpreted as a critique of the system that makes students chase the grades – ‘*ingrained habit*’ as he calls it. This is a cultural context – a dominant rationality in a Foucauldian sense. However, it would be also important to note that the sample in Tallinn University was significantly larger than that in the University of Glasgow, and this might have also affected the focus group discussions and the findings of this research.

#### ***Assessment relationship: interaction between the assessed and assessors***

There is also a significant difference in the ways the students from the two universities relate to academics as assessors. For example, while the participants from Glasgow spoke about assessment as a relatively standardised process, it is also unsurprising that they describe academics as assessors being strict with certain standards and rules. Callum, for instance, emphasises academic strictness in his courses, and he argues that ‘*with Geography they are kind of like, they are really harsh I must admit*’. As a further example, he describes academics’ focus on details such as punctuation marks: ‘*First year, I thought I was dropping Geography because if you missed a full stop or a comma, you would get criticised for it*’. Similarly, Sophie explains how academics in her disciplinary area are being strict with word limits which appear as they are ‘*set in stone*’. Furthermore, when Sophie speaks about her exams, she emphasises that computerised multiple choice tests create a very distant relationship with academics, ‘*nobody is involved*’ in assessment, as she explains it:

*...the general feeling I get with the Sciences is nobody is involved, it’s all kind of computerised and external like, nobody really knows what’s happening because you get the Moodle tests and then, we’ve got, we’ve class tests and stuff and most of them are computer marked and yeah, I don’t think anybody is actually that involved [laughing]. (Sophie)*

Interestingly, Sophie's experience of multiple choice tests in Medicine provides a counter perspective to Philip's reflection presented earlier in this thesis. Philip, a university teacher from the MVLS explained his role in assessment by arguing '*I don't have to mark, just a computer*'. It appears that computerised assessment is experienced as being highly impersonal and distant by both, the assessor and the assessed.

The students interviewed in Glasgow describe academics as strict and standard-based in their practice: academics draw on the standards and control the assessment processes. However, the student perception of academics and the ways power operates is complicated when tracing the ways the participants speak about the marking teams that are increasingly common in the University of Glasgow, as well as in many other UK universities that face increasing student numbers. For example, Tracy emphasises the importance of marking criteria in academic work, but also argues that subject specialism can '*intervene*' and make various assessors in a team to look for different things. She provides an example from her PGDE course:

*And obviously they are all marking with the same criteria but then specialism kind of intervenes as well. For example, people who are marked by language tutors tended to get marked down for grammar and things like that and structure, emm whereas I think people who are marked by maybe Maths specialists or other things, are maybe more kind of focused on the content. (Tracy)*

Similarly, Callum shares his concern about the expertise of different tutors in a Geography course, and he explains how this might affect the assessment results:

*...well, what I have found, especially in the Geography department, was we would hand in essays that not necessarily the tutor would know that much about. I always considered, you know, because we always handed in our essay in one tutorial, usually our tutors were always Human Geographers, and I always considered what if you had done a Physical Geography essay, how much would that tutor actually know about the topic you are discussing. (Callum)*

In addition to the subject specialism, the students see some academics (seminar tutors in particular) being more approachable than the others within the same team. For example, Tracy describes how tutors' different approachability can affect students' progress and assessment results:

*...we found it at our seminars that our tutors were very approachable and gave up as much time as we wanted via email and in person, but some people's tutors were*

*either unapproachable or they could not get a hold of them or get replied or feedback, and that obviously affected a lot of people's progress. (Tracy)*

These discursive accounts above reflect the participants' complex experiences of assessors who operate as part of marking teams and who - despite the standards and rules - can still differ in their practices. It could be expected that these perceptions/experiences of bias challenge students' understanding of assessment as a strict and standardised process.

However, the students from Glasgow tend to explain how these diverse marking teams mediate their biases by becoming protective against student queries. Chloe explains:

*...I don't know if this is right or not to say but obviously teachers as well might want to...keep things like...they don't want to say anything wrong about other, like a colleague [...] as a student you get the feeling like that it's you against them in a way, you are not going to win because they are going to be altogether. I'm not saying that's the way it happened here but that's the feeling that maybe some students might feel. (Chloe)*

Julia's quote reflects her understanding of how marking teams ensure their control over students through their collegiality. It could be argued that despite the students' understanding of assessment as a highly standardised and regulated process, they still see a subjective element in assessment that according to Julia gets mediated through academics' protectiveness against student queries. Furthermore, Julia's quote might also demonstrate the ways students feel uncomfortable to criticise academic practices, and when they do express their critique, they apply uncertain phrases such as '*I don't know if this is right or wrong*' or '*I'm not saying that's the way it happened here*', as these were evident in the example above.

While assessment responsibilities in the University of Glasgow are often divided amongst a team of academics, associate tutors and GTAs, assessment in Tallinn University is mostly practised by a single academic. This structural difference along with student experiences of various assessment practices tends to contribute to the ways the students perceive academics as assessors in Tallinn. Markus, for example, argues that '*there's no specific framework based on what students are assessed*' and that assessment is '*very relative*' in terms of individual academics and their preferences. This diversity of practice depending on individual academics is also emphasised by Kerli and Marili who explain how some academics have adopted their own policies for organising assessment and exam retakes:

*Some academics, at least in Natural Sciences, set the best paper as the maximum or 100% and then deduct from that. (Kerli)*

*We also have assessment criteria, and if, say, the academic feels, when we sit an assessment and many fail, and if the academic feels that they did not explain well enough what they expected of the student, they'll give them another chance... (Marili)*

The students describe academics in Tallinn University in a particular way: academics have high levels of autonomy to design assessment processes, and they have control over assessment conditions in terms of standards and exam retakes. From this perspective, academics do not just act based on institutional policy and collegiality (as it is common to Glasgow), but they set their own personal standards and policies. For example, Liisa explains the role of academics by saying ‘*Maybe a role with lots of responsibility*’, and Greta argues that academics need to ‘*have their finger on the pulse*’ in terms of guiding students through ‘*the right pathway*’. While it remains unclear what Greta means by ‘*the right pathway*’ and whether she refers to rightness of knowledge, skills, opinion, educational choices, her discourse demonstrates the importance of disciplinary power in a relationship of an academic and a student.

The students in Tallinn University position academics as being powerful in terms of designing and controlling assessment processes, and this relationship raises significant questions about academic biases and subjective judgements. The discursive phrases such as ‘*Yes, there's subjectivity in assessment*’ (Karl), ‘*Clearly most academics don't manage to avoid marking by the face*’ (Kerli), and ‘*Sure, there are academics – like we heard – who don't mark very well*’ (Marili) were discursively common to Tallinn University. These phrases create a certain understanding of academics who differ in their practices and who might favour certain students over the others. Kerli provides an example of tensions between objectivity and subjectivity in assessor’s work in Tallinn University, and she argues that even in Natural Sciences subjectivity ‘*creeps in*’:

*...I wrote down, sometimes objective, sometimes subjective. Clearly most academics don't manage to avoid marking by the face – well, yes, even in Natural Sciences, even though in Natural Sciences it's often possible to mark very objectively, because Natural Sciences include Maths, Chemistry, Physics, data processing, which often could be assessed very objectively because you can tell whether the answer is right or wrong. Another thing is how this answer was reached – that is also important, and oftentimes that's where subjectivity creeps in. (Kerli)*

In addition to the dimension of subjectivity versus objectivity, Markus explains that there are two types of academics in Tallinn University: those who read student work and use ‘a certain point system’ and those who do not read the assignments and mark randomly:

*Well, I assume that many academics mark pretty well. They read, certainly, all the works – for one thing, the questions have been written in a way that they are clearly understood, and that they can assess different students based on a certain point system...then also I know where people don't read the works and give marks at random. It's something we realised when we compared our returned works – where there was no logical explanation as to why one failed; another received an ‘A’ etc. (Markus)*

Furthermore, when the students explain how academics in Tallinn University mark randomly and favour certain students in assessment, they use strong words/phrases such as ‘knowing according to the face’ (Liisa), ‘forgiving’ (Liisa) and ‘face-based assessment’ (Kerli). These phrases refer to the assessment system in Tallinn University that does not rely on anonymity: academics know the authors of the assessed works. For example, Liisa explains that ‘they already know according to the face, you're good, you're less so’. Kerli argues that academics develop their opinion of students prior to assessment, during their various encounters with students, and this increases their subjective bias in assessment:

*And that's where the face-based assessment can come in – that if you're thought of well, if you're above the average and have been noticed through the years, your grades are better, and if you have been slacking and haven't done well enough, then also later you get assessed worse in relatively subjective situations. (Kerli)*

Liisa brings a more specific example from her own disciplinary area: ‘say, Sciences, there are few students, then more is expected of certain students, but more is also forgiven to them – whether it should be let happen?’. She uses a word ‘forgive’ in her quotation–forgiving a poor performance - to refer to a process in which academics in Tallinn not only grade students’ work, but also allow themselves to become biased in assessment because of teacher-student interaction in classroom settings. However, none of the students interviewed in Tallinn University interpret the aspects of academic bias and subjectivity as causing unfairness. Rather, the students take academic bias for granted and perceive it as part of ‘normal’ academic work. It might be the case that student perception of academics as being at the centre of assessment policy and practice reduces their doubts about fairness: they might be used to these dominant practices. However, it might be also the case that they see academic bias as something that enables to reward students who do well and to perhaps punish those who have been ‘slacking’ (Kerli). This attitude was common to the

sample in Tallinn University. However, the research participants were suggested by the heads of studies and so might be students who are thought well of their academics and who have mostly experienced the rewarding side of academic bias. This overall domination of academics in Tallinn University tends to still reflect a disciplinary relationship in assessment in a Foucauldian sense in which academics not only assess student performance but their overall behaviour and being in the university (a student's *'face'*). Assessment might operate as a panoptic system in which assessment processes make it possible to monitor, measure and compare the individual students but also wider student populations (Foucault, 1975). Assessment as a normalising technology might therefore not only enforce students to perform better but also to behave in certain ways. The ways students perceive themselves in these complex structural and assessment contexts – described by standardisation and collegiality in Glasgow and subjectivity in Tallinn - will be analysed in the next section.

## ***Student understanding of themselves in assessment processes***

The students in the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University have relatively similar understanding of higher education in relation to one's employability; however, their experiences of assessment processes and academics as assessors differ significantly in the two universities. The characteristics and attributes that the students ascribe to education and assessment processes tend to shape their understanding of themselves as learners.

### ***Proactive student subjectivity in Tallinn University***

Greta describes herself as *'a standard learner'* who likes the teacher-centred approach to assessment:

*I'm kind of a standard learner – I like it when somebody talks, and I listen and later, in the context of assessment, I would feedback what I received. (Greta)*

It therefore appears that Greta accepts the domination of academics and positions herself accordingly in this disciplinary relationship. Similar positioning is described by Annika who argues that academics *'ask, I answer, points are given. I think there's nothing complicated there'*. However, it might be important to note that both Greta and Annika are mature students whose perception of *'a good student'* might be affected by their former

experiences of perhaps more traditional pedagogical practices. More commonly, the participants from Tallinn University described themselves as being proactive in manoeuvring within assessment (power) relations and trying to create a good impression of themselves that would also affect academics' assessment decisions. For example, Markus argues that *'only after the first assignment you'll know what kind of academic you're dealing with, how you should do your work for them'*, and Liisa emphasises that *'as I've been studying here for five years, I know practically all academics pretty well, and they know what to expect of whom'*. This idea of *'knowing'* academics and doing *'work for them'* helps students to shape their behaviour in order to increase their chances for success in their studies and beyond. This also reflects how students are having their behaviour shaped by the system in which assessment is highly controlled by academics without any form of student anonymity. It could be even argued that students are conditioned to be proactive and to try and become academics' favourites.

Furthermore, the ways the students in Tallinn interact with and give feedback to academics on their practices tend to demonstrate their proactiveness. Markus and Greta share their positive experiences in terms of being able to influence academic practices. Markus' example focuses on providing feedback on exam questions, while Greta speaks about her involvement in developing marking criteria:

*...and it did seem to me that they had improved their questions, they have started communicating with people and changing their assessment system and their expectations. (Markus)*

*Well, for example with [academic's name], I was re-doing her marking criteria...[laughing]. It wasn't even initiated by me, it was a dialogue – I pointed out what I wasn't happy with, she agreed...it's really, I understand the academic very well – that the world of assessment in the context of outcomes-based assessment feels like a confusing mess for the academic. They didn't even realise that one day the outcomes criteria were introduced, and two years later...I try to support rather than attack. (Greta)*

Interestingly, Greta's reflection above emphasises how she has tried *'to support rather than attack'* academics which might reflect a certain way of interacting with academics: *'a dialogue'* that does not threaten the authority of academics. Students with a more confrontational approach might not be that successful in influencing academic practices, just as Marili argues: *'Oftentimes it's that the academics expect our feedback, but when we give it, they're upset that we give such feedback'*. Interestingly, Liisa expresses her



negative opinion of students who try to affect academic practices through unjustified feedback and complaints:

*And the feedback, if you have, say, 90% of relatively dull, say, beasts, give very negative feedback as the academic may be too strict for their liking, demand too much work, and then there's the 10%, then the, say, whining majority may not be entirely adequate. So whom to listen to – whether those who work or those who always whine anyway? (Liisa)*

Anna's reference to 'dull beasts' tends to reflect her own unstated perception of herself as being a more able learner who works hard and does not complain about it. She therefore creates a clear distinction between herself and some 'less able' students. Some discourses indicate a tendency to protect the way the assessment system operates in Tallinn University and to enforce this division between students who are well thought of and assessed highly by academics and the others who perhaps struggle to conform and create a positive impression of themselves. It could be that students are competing for a place in each academic's favour, just as they are competing for their scholarships and future work in wider higher education and labour market contexts.

### ***Constrained and fearful student subjectivity in the University of Glasgow***

Compared to the students in Tallinn University who position themselves as being proactive and relatively pleased with the ways assessment system operates in this university, student discourses in Glasgow reflect a more emotional and constrained positioning of the students. The phrases below provide some insight into negative emotions such as 'panic' (Chloe, Callum), 'fear' (Chloe), 'freak-out' (Sophie), 'stress' (Rachel) and 'nightmare' (Callum) that characterise the student descriptions of themselves in assessment processes and that also provide an initial impression of students as someone fearful and constrained in the University of Glasgow:

*...I freak out when it's like 'Oh, just discuss'... (Sophie)*

*I just put stressful because I get very stressed... (Rachel)*

*It was, yeah, it was no clear guidelines for a couple of the essays we had to write and that made things a lot difficult, people panicked quite a lot. (Chloe)*

*I have been asked to do a Moodle examination [...] that was a nightmare because I was literally right or wrong, and that's when you get panic because I can't talk myself around this because I have got to click one of these buttons... (Callum)*

Also, some students share their highly emotional experiences of coping with low grades by phrases such as *'I just cry'* (Rachel), *'yeah, I just have a little break down'* (Sophie) or hoping for *'better luck next time'* (Sophie). Similarly, Rachel explains her fears to ask about her low grades: *'often I think well, the work probably isn't that good like if I argued about it, they would probably just give me a very detailed answer, make me feel terrible'*.

Tracy reflects on these aspects of stress and negative emotions that assessment causes among students, and she argues that these negative feelings are caused by standardised and fixed assessment practices that constrain students and thereby do not allow students to *'play out [their] strengths'*.

*I think everybody, assessment puts stress on everybody and because you don't get to choose the way you are assessed, to sort of play out your strengths, then yeah, it would definitely affect the way you are feeling about [it].* (Tracy)

Grades appear to operate as a currency that define personal worth and the worth of others (Becker, Geer and Hughes, 1968). Chloe provides an example from her own experience: *'my only concern was maybe coming back to do my Master's and [if] I have enough to come back and do my Master's'*. It is therefore unsurprising that the students interviewed in the University of Glasgow tend to be concerned about performing in a 'right' way in their study processes:

*I have now learned to think that for every hundred words in an essay if I'm not quoting somebody or mentioned somebody, I've got something wrong here.* (Callum)

*I was reading my friend's essay, she was in Archaeology, she was talking about buildings, she had put her opinion in it, she had so many 'I-s', and I was like what is this...it's not correct.* (Rachel)

The students in Glasgow position themselves as being highly cautious but also strategic in their study processes, especially in terms of referencing, note taking, and expressing one's opinion along with other similar examples. Also, as soon as their understanding of the 'right' way of doing things gets threatened by new methods or ambiguous instructions, they become fearful and unsure. For example, Rachel argues: *'So it's kind of how much do you need to know, you are not really sure sometimes'*. Similarly, Tracy and Chloe reflect on their experiences of assessment having 'grey areas' and causing doubts:

*...it wasn't actually stated that how academic your essay was supposed to be when you are reporting on your own findings, so that was quite this kind of grey area in assessment that make[s] it harder for you to kind of jump through the hoops. (Tracy)*

*I think people started doubting. I doubt myself at some point as well because it sounds like did I misunderstood what I like, I just don't know if I'm doing it right and like am I right person for this programme, if they made a mistake when they let me in. (Chloe)*

Interestingly, Chloe's doubts also reflect her much wider and very personal fears in terms of being 'a right person' for the specific degree programme. Her example indicates the importance assessment results have for students in the University of Glasgow and how assessment can assure their sense of institutional belonging.

There is a significant difference between the student positioning in Tallinn University and in the University of Glasgow. In the student discourses in Tallinn, assessment tends not to control student learning or affect their wellbeing. Kerli, for instance, argues that 'to go after a cum laude or something no matter what – it's mostly meaningless because it gives you no advantage whatsoever'. In contrast, assessment processes in Glasgow have a significant impact on students' study processes and their understanding of themselves. For example, Tracy describes herself as 'not particularly proficient in writing essays' and states, 'you maybe don't do that well in academic tests like myself'. Similarly, Sophie positions herself this way: 'I don't have any opinions. I have been trained not to have opinions'. In terms of further constraints, Tracy and Callum explain how they have changed their majors based on the ways assessment operates in different courses:

*...I actually was majoring in Law and I swapped for majoring in Sociology, so you can swop around the credits which was quite a lot to do with assessment actually, because it was after I had essays, I decided that assessment in Sociology is better for me because [...] I excelled at presentations and lacked ability in essays. (Tracy)*

*Politics always tends to have an essay equivalent to 30% of the mark, 10% goes to tutorial participation, and then the reminder goes to your overall exam, whereas Geography was so different, you know, it would be split down to very small fractions [...] say, well, if I do good at this, this and this, and not so well in this, I could still come for a good grade. So that's what I liked about Geography, and that's why I went on. (Callum)*

The quotes above demonstrate how the students in the University of Glasgow tend to experience assessment as a panoptic gaze that monitors their performance but also directs their educational choices. This sense of fear also makes them more defeatists, and their

discourse indicates vulnerability in assessment: they start removing themselves towards 'easier' options (i.e. degree programmes, courses, essay topics). The students in Tallinn University, however, demonstrate their proactiveness in assessment: they 'game play' in their interaction with academics in order to receive better assessment results.

## **Conclusion**

As the discourse analysis has demonstrated, the students interviewed in the two universities perceive assessment processes, academics as assessors but also themselves as learners in different ways. While the experience of academic-centred assessment processes as well as of disciplinary power are common to students from both universities, the students in Tallinn University recognise their opportunities for manoeuvring within these power relations. Students tend to make use of the ways assessment – so called '*face-based assessment*' system (Kerli) – operates in this university. They perceive academics being at the centre of assessment policy and practice, and therefore also they count for their personal relations with academics in order to promote their educational progress and success. This also demonstrates a Foucauldian idea of power that is not owned by a single person but rather exists in various 'networks of social' (Foucault, 1983a, p. 372). Academics as assessors could therefore be seen as both powerful and powerless in their relations with students. This opportunity for manoeuvring tends to make the students interviewed appear more confident and proactive learners compared to their counterparts in the University of Glasgow. Furthermore, students from Tallinn are not only manoeuvring based on their self-interest as it would be common to a neoliberal student subjectivity (Naidoo and Williams, 2015), but they also critique and reason about wider assessment context and purposes. For most students in Tallinn, assessment is still an educational process related to learning and teaching and not 'a commodity' that neoliberal education policies might want to promote (Thornton, 2013, p. 131).

In contrast, the students interviewed in the University of Glasgow perceive academics as assessors operating based on the framework of strict standards and protective marking teams. From their perspective, it would be very difficult to act against these standards and/or academics' collegiality, even if they recognise academic bias and subjectivity in assessment processes or results. This might also confirm Manuel and Llamas' (2006) argument that student resistance tends to be restricted to the context of interaction between

students and academics. If this interaction is standardised and protected as in the example of Glasgow, it might also prevent student agency. Furthermore, this experience of standardisation and collegial defence appears to make students constrained, fearful and strategic in their learning – they try to conform to a system and to get used to the ways assessment is practised in certain courses. It therefore looks as highly regulated and standardised assessment system such as the one in the University of Glasgow creates a stronger sense of discipline and sovereignty in a Foucauldian perspective than perhaps this under-regulated and *'face-based'* (Kerli) assessment system in Tallinn University.

Discourse analysis revealed very little if any evidence of neoliberal influence on student experiences of assessment. Some neoliberal influence could have been expected, as there were signs of neoliberal discourses shaping students' understanding of higher education in terms of economic interest and employability prospects. The students interviewed do exercise educational choices in the higher education market as Franz (1998) described it, and they could be seen being interested in university education for promoting their competitiveness at the labour market (Canaan and Shumar, 2008). However, these processes characteristic to client culture tended not to emerge in relation to assessment. This means that 'student voice' that is now central to education policy (Bragg, 2007, p. 343) appeared to be something weak and hidden when the students addressed their experiences and understanding of assessment processes. I would therefore suggest that 'rampant individualism and competition' emphasised by Davies (2014, [e-mail]) at the opening of this chapter characterise the students interviewed in their educational choices and relationships with the university (particularly in the University of Glasgow). However, I would still argue that these (neoliberal) processes have not caused unethical behaviour among the students interviewed. The participants from the two universities positioned themselves as ethical and astute subjects who are concerned about how assessment operates in their universities and worried about their future employability rather than acting based on economic self-interest in a neoliberal sense.

This analysis would let me to suggest that students in assessment contexts cannot be seen being 'homo economicus' in a Foucauldian sense, acting as 'a free and autonomous "atom" of self-interest' (Hamann, 2009, p. 37). They are rather dominated by academics as assessors, and they are left to find their own ways to cope with it: the students in Tallinn University tend to be focused on creating good impressions of themselves, and the students in the University of Glasgow try to manage their fears by becoming strategic learners.

## PART V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

*To some extent I feel a bit like a white elephant in the institution these days defending perhaps an antiquated view of education. It is a challenge defending that view of education seeing how that particular view can still be defended in the current context. The first thing to do is to acknowledge that regarding assessment the importance of the accountability and transparency, standardisation of norms and standards and methods, is in many ways a good thing, then we can say what are the criticisms or the negatives associated with this. (Olssen, 2014, [interview])*

## Chapter 13: Discussion and conclusions

Similarly to Olssen's (2014, [interview]) reflection on the front page of Part V, my thesis tends to read as a 'defence' of liberal idea of higher education. Part IV drew attention to pressures and concerns that academics and students increasingly experience in the two European universities, and as a researcher I felt responsible for making these voices heard. However, I would like to note that the study did not aim to sound nostalgic. Universities have never been ideal places in terms of either social equality or student assessment; the assessor's domination over the assessed is still evident in higher education. This study does not suggest that the universities should return to their past; rather, they should be cautious of their past and their present in order to become better places for work and study. By 'better' I mean collegial and education-oriented institutions as characteristic to the liberal university (see Barnett 1990, 2005; Giroux 2009) but also more socially equal places for study and work. The latter, however, requires a shift from a historically dominated elitist understanding of higher education towards a more open university.

The final chapter of this thesis aims to discuss and summarise the key findings in terms of the research questions and their broader theoretical significance. In some cases, discussion also draws on expert conversations carried out with Prof Stephen Ball and Prof Mark Olssen. Discussion will take place in three interrelated stages:

1. Summarising the key findings in terms of the research questions
2. Theorising the key findings
3. Concluding thoughts: opportunities for further research

### ***Summarising the key findings in terms of the research questions***

This research explored three assessment policy and practice related questions: (1) *How are the assessment policy discourses constructed in the two universities?* (2) *How do the assessment policies act on academics and students in the two universities?* (3) *How do academics and students negotiate and respond to the assessment policies in the two universities?* The section below will revisit these questions.

### ***How are the assessment policy discourses constructed in the two universities?***

This research demonstrates that institutional assessment policies are differently constructed and operate in various ways. Assessment policy in the University of Glasgow is intertextual and interdiscursive. The policy context draws on five intertextually related documents in which the guidance documents are more explicit in setting orders than the key assessment regulation – *the Code of Assessment*. The high number of assessment-related documents shape assessment as a standardised institutional technology that is seen by policymakers, but also by most academics interviewed, as necessary for ensuring fairness and institutional consistency of assessment practices. However, discourse analysis also demonstrated that the assessment policy in Glasgow is highly complex and diffuse: it draws on various neoliberal discourses (i.e. accountability, internationalisation, excellence, client culture), various agents (i.e. the Senate, the Registry, external examiners) and involves ambiguous use of language (i.e. passive voice, non-human agents). The aspects of standardisation (being regulated, monitored) but also diffuseness (regulating oneself) in both policy and participants' discourses indicate that assessment operates as part of a neoliberal governmentality that helps to manage the academic and student populations in the institution; it makes academics and students accountable to various subjects but also encourages them to monitor their own and others' behaviour.

In contrast, assessment in Tallinn University is less regulated; the policy consists of one direct document that is constructed as a discrete policy entity. Also, assessment policy development could be understood as a centralised process shaped by governmental impulses. Thus, the (lack of) policy in Tallinn creates student assessment as an academic-centred process in which only the very few practical matters (i.e. time, grade descriptors) require centralised control. As assessment (policy) operates as a localised and individual process designed by academics, it also includes high risks of turning into a disciplinary technology that relies on academics' control and domination over the process and the assessed. However, there is still evidence of some recent (neoliberal) policy developments in assessment, particularly related to outcomes-based assessment initiated by the European Union and ministerial reforms.

The findings demonstrate that the assessment policies in the two universities are shaped by wider institutional rationality and policy discourses. This also means that regularisation and diffuseness of assessment policy in the University of Glasgow is most likely an outcome of neoliberalisation of higher education. It might be that the assessment policy in



Tallinn will be reformed as time passes and neoliberalism as an institutional rationality becomes more evident. Recent strategies on internationalisation and research demonstrate an involvement of neoliberal discourses of internationalisation, excellence and client culture in wider institutional policies in Tallinn University.

***How do the assessment policies act on academics and students in the two universities?***

The policy analysis demonstrated that the assessment policy in the University of Glasgow positions academics as being accountable to others: the Head of School, the Registry, the Senate etc. The policy also makes academics monitor their own practice and student performance via such things as deadlines, form filling, reporting and rewards/punishments. It is therefore unsurprising that the academics perceive the assessment policy operating as part of managerial practices where a strong sense of scrutiny, pressures and constraints is common. The (lack of) assessment policy in Tallinn University, however, indicates trust in academics as professionals. This sense of academic freedom – freedom of practice but also freedom to ignore policy – is confirmed by the academics interviewed. Despite the differences in the two universities, discourse analysis did not indicate that the academics in either university act as neoliberal subjects, ‘homo economicus’ in a Foucauldian sense (Hamann, 2009, p. 37). Rather, academics in the University of Glasgow try to understand the assessment policy and to cope with increasing regularisation of assessment, and the academics in Tallinn University act based on their traditional understanding of academic freedom and authority.

In terms of students, the assessment policy in the University of Glasgow positions students as ‘candidates’ who drive for excellent performance and employability. The students themselves feel constrained and fearful as assessment practices in their experience are highly standardised and distant. Interestingly, the GTAs interviewed perceive themselves as mediators between pressurised academics and fearful students; also, they speak of their ‘relative’ expertise (Eric) that makes it possible to distance themselves from the actual policy. The policy in Tallinn University, however, tends to have an informative function for students. The students describe themselves as proactive and confident: they manoeuvre in a system where assessment relies on academics rather than regulations. Even if the policies in the two universities relate to students differently, both student groups still explain themselves in terms of their self-interest and a desire to become employable subjects. This rather rational understanding of oneself (evolution of neoliberal subjectivity),

however, appears to be related to wider neoliberal developments in higher education and in society more broadly rather than to the assessment policy or practice.

I would argue that the assessment (both policy and practice) in the University of Glasgow shapes the subjectivities of academics and students. There is a strong sense of procedural domination and self-governance that demonstrates an operation of neoliberal governmentality: being a constrained, pressurised and fearful subject who monitors one's own behaviour. The academics and students in Tallinn University experience the assessment policy as something irrelevant to their practice; however, assessment as a disciplinary technology still acts on their subjectivities. This is particularly as the student experience of domination in assessment in Tallinn is related to the assessor's power over assessed as Foucault (1975) would describe it. These differences in subject formation will be discussed later in this chapter.

### ***How do academics and students negotiate and respond to assessment policies in the two universities?***

The assessment policy negotiation in the two universities takes place at an individual level and in various forms. The policy diffuseness in the University of Glasgow makes it difficult to ascribe agency to any one person or group as the originator of the policy – therefore, it is difficult to know who to resist for the policy. Academics speak about 'they', 'management' or 'university' as the main scrutiniser in assessment and in academic work more broadly. Also, these academics feel isolated from their collegial networks, and they tweak and semi-ignore the policy to cope with perceived constraints. In order to manoeuvre within the (diffuse) policy context, academics require excellent knowledge of the policy. In Tallinn University where policy is less ambiguous, also resistance against any unwanted policy development takes place in more overt forms: 'fighting for', 'arguing against' and 'speaking up' but also ignoring developments such as the outcomes-based assessment reform. These different ways of negotiating and responding to the assessment policy in the two universities demonstrate a Foucauldian understanding of the subject that can differ in various contexts and that can be shaped by policy discourses while having some agency over his/her own subjectivity. It might not be a very evident resistance in Glasgow, but the academics interviewed still demonstrate their ways of creating (or protecting) themselves as assessors by tweaking and flexing the rules. Even if academic discourses from Tallinn University were more certain about their opportunities for

resistance, it remains unclear what the academics resist, as the policy in their experience tends not to be constraining.

Resistance to neoliberalisation of university policy and practice in the GTAs' and the students' experience was less evident; they might be unaware of policies to express their resistance against policy development. However, like the academics, the students in Glasgow struggle to identify the cause of the pressure they feel: they speak about employability pressures, standards and academic protectiveness. Their response to these pressures results in their becoming strategic learners. The students in Tallinn University, however, take advantage of the academic-centred assessment system and invest in their relations with academics to increase their wellbeing and success in the university. It could therefore be argued that the students in the two universities operate within the institutional assessment system set by the policy and/or academics. Thus, resistance can take multiple forms in academic and student experiences. However, academic and student resistance in this study appeared to be an action against experienced pressures (i.e. policy developments, assessment methods) rather than the techniques of the self in terms of one's work on the soul and becoming an ethical subject as Foucault (1982a) described it.

Guided by Foucauldian theorisation, this research has demonstrated assessment-related complexity in relation to three key aspects: discursive construction of assessment policy, subjectification of academics and students, and resistance. Thus, this research contributes to the understanding of assessment as an institutional technology that involves power and that shapes behaviour and subjectivities of both academics and students. More specifically, the research findings demonstrate that assessment policy and practice are fundamentally linked to the dominant institutional rationality such as neoliberalism. The study indicates that in a highly neoliberalised university setting such as the University of Glasgow assessment can become a neoliberal technology of government that not only disciplines academics and students but also makes them self-governing and less resistant to policy. This also means that neoliberalisation of higher education and assessment policy transforms power in assessment: academics become less in charge of their work and practices and students perhaps less engaged with assessment. However, the study still argues that some forms of (covert) resistance remain and the subjectivities of academics and students have not become utterly passive. The further theoretical significance of this doctoral research will be highlighted in the next section.

## ***Theorising the key findings***

This section focuses on five dimensions that draw from the research questions revisited above and enable further theorisation of the key findings:

- Dimension 1: Higher education as a site of neoliberal change
- Dimension 2: Power in assessment: aspects of discipline and neoliberal governmentality
- Dimension 3: Pressurised academic and student subjectivities
- Dimension 4: Constrained vs. autonomous academic and student subjectivities
- Dimension 5: Policy and practice negotiation: overt vs. covert forms of resistance

### ***Dimension 1: Higher education as a site of neoliberal change***

All participant groups (academics, students, GTAs) in the two universities expressed their sense of neoliberal change and a shift from the liberal university and its interest in knowledge, learning and democracy as many scholars (i.e Barnett, 1990, 2005; Giroux, 2009; Moss, 2012; Naidoo, 2008) have explained it, towards a more neoliberal institution. Similarly to Barnett (2011), the participants perceived their universities being focused on raising market value rather than improving educational processes. Particular examples were related to internationalisation and the increase in student numbers. However, the research findings also demonstrate that the scope of neoliberalisation differs in the two institutions.

Neoliberalism as a mode of government (Foucault, 2004) tends to be part of an operating reality in policy context and the participants' experience in the University of Glasgow. The academics interviewed emphasised their experience of performativity and '*scrutiny*' (Linda, Carol) in academic work that someone - 'they' - is responsible for and that demonstrates New Public Management dominant in many UK and international universities. The GTAs problematised an increasing number of international students that constrain academic practices but also create a need for hourly paid staff such as GTAs. The students, however, emphasised their sense of standardisation of educational practices and importance of graduate attributes. These personal experiences of higher education demonstrate that neoliberalism is not just a recent policy discourse in Glasgow; rather, it is part of government that transforms policies, educational processes and academic and student experiences in this university.

The neoliberalisation of Tallinn University, however, appears to be going through its first stage. Neoliberalism is more related to recent strategies on internationalisation and research, and is less visible in practice. For example, the academics interviewed spoke about European policy initiatives and the expansion of higher education in Estonia as the main form of change. The key force promoting neoliberalisation of higher education in Tallinn University and more broadly in Estonia comes from the EU. However, the process is taking place at its own pace, and it might currently be in its earliest stage, illustrating Foucault's (2000b, p. 12) argument that the transformation of discursive practice is related to 'a whole, often quite complex set of modifications' that might take place within the discourse but also more broadly in terms of changing political institutions and social relations. The latter might be particularly relevant to Tallinn University where the wider policy discourses (strategies), and in some sense also practices (outcomes-based assessment), are changing faster than the discourses shared by academics and students.

Furthermore, this difference in the scope of change demonstrates that no university exists independently from prevailing societal rationality (i.e. neoliberalism). Rather, a neoliberal societal rationality shaped by 'economical, social and technical processes' (Foucault, 1988, p. 416) is embodied in higher education institutions and their policies. This means that the current changes taking place in local and global higher education could be seen as direct results of policies shaped by neoliberal thinking (Radice, 2013).

This research also highlighted how different participant groups can have different understandings of higher education and societal change. Contemporary students are affected by societal and political expectations that promote self-interest and employability and have little experience of a liberal university or one that that does not prioritise graduate attributes. The students' pragmatic expectations of higher education revealed in this study confirm recent scholarly work in this area (i.e. Naidoo, 2005; Peters and Olssen, 2005; Svensson and Wood, 2007). Furthermore, the findings align with Olssen's vivid reflection on how student expectations have changed from democratic involvement in university life to more career-oriented aspirations:

*To some extent, higher education used to be seen as a liberal education prior to your decision what you are going to do in life; it was a good time to learn how to live; it was a good time to participate in democracy or at least practise democracy. It was a good time to read widely, and it was prior to career involvement and engagement. However, if you are spending 9000 pounds per year for your studies, you do not want to waste your money. It is probably a 'false paradise' and obviously based*

*upon imperfect information, but students think it is true when they are making their [educational] choices. (Olssen, 2014, [interview])*

The students' careful educational choices and pragmatic attitudes provide evidence of their self-government (Peters, 2005) and evolvment of neoliberal subjectivity. However, the findings also demonstrate that the changed student expectations should not be seen as purely negative; rather, students' careful educational choices help them to prepare for future and to cope with assessment-related stress. This research did not reveal any unethical behaviour in terms of fraud or plagiarism in assessment or university that could be related to students' pragmatic aspirations.

***Dimension 2: Power in assessment: aspects of discipline and neoliberal governmentality***

This research suggests that disciplinary and sovereign forms of power are highly common to assessment policy and practice in both universities. Domination in its sovereign sense - between an assessor and assessed - is more characteristic of Tallinn University. The main evidence of domination in Tallinn arises from the assessment practices in which the academics perceived themselves being in charge and acting based on their academic freedom. This sense of domination tends to rely on a lack of regulations that would oversee academic practices. The students shared a similar experience: they perceived academics being at the centre of their rather subjective 'face-based assessment' practices (Kerli, Liisa). The metaphoric expression - 'face-based assessment' - could reflect a bodily element in assessment technology: if a student looks appealing, behaves well, creates a good impression of oneself, s/he might receive a better grade. Foucault (1975, p. 25) argued that body is involved in a political field: 'power relations have an immediate hold upon it, they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs'. It is therefore unsurprising that the students work on their 'body' (the impression they create of themselves) in order to cope with 'face-based assessment'.

Academic and student discourses in the University of Glasgow indicated a sense of procedural rather than interpersonal domination of assessment. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the complexity around the experience of being disciplined in a neoliberal setting such as the University of Glasgow, confirming Ball's argument that coercive forms of power can operate together with more diffuse neoliberal governmentality:

*Alongside with the intensification of governmentality, there is also intensification of disciplinary forms of power, and you could also perhaps make an argument that*

*intensification of sovereign forms of power that [...] is now hand in by all sorts of juridical constraints.* (Ball, 2014, [interview])

Academics and students from Glasgow highlighted how assessment is standardised and institutionally controlled, making academics conform to form-filling and monitoring their practices and students highly strategic in their learning and wider educational choices. Furthermore, the academics perceived structural changes (i.e. changing student population) constraining their practice and changing traditional assessment interaction between an assessor and assessed. So there is a sense of being dominated in academics' experience. It also appears that in order to cope with this experience, the academics tend to hold on their authority and control in their assessment relations with students. It might be that by 'correcting' (Foucault, 2000c, p. 52) contemporary students, the academics believe they can save the liberal understanding of academic work and the university.

The GTAs confirm the importance of domination in assessment; however, they never use the word 'domination' or 'discipline' but for the GTAs, academic control over students is positioned as professionalism. Similarly, the students shared their experience of discipline in assessment; however, they are not sure whether their experience is caused by strict assessment policy, individual academics or academics' protective collegiality. I would therefore argue that an experience of discipline in neoliberal universities such as the University of Glasgow is highly complex: academics and students tend to be unable to locate the centre of this disciplinary power. They might have become part of its operation by governing and disciplining themselves. It tends to confirm Foucault's argument that 'discipline is a political anatomy of detail' (Foucault, 1975, p. 139). It is a type of power that comprises 'a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets' (Foucault, 1975, p. 215).

Furthermore, discourses from the participants in Glasgow indicate the ways in which discipline in its new and more diffused forms becomes part of neoliberal governmentality. In neoliberal governmentality, 'government and mentality [that of neoliberalism] swirl around and define one another' (Fendler, 2010, p. 49). Foucault (1978, p. 202) argued that a key problematic of government are the questions 'how to be ruled, how strictly, by whom, to what end, by what methods'. Assessment policy (as in Glasgow) addresses these questions with detailed but often discursively diffuse regulations that make various subjects accountable to each other. This also indicates that assessment policy for academics in particular operates as any other institutional policy that tries to manage them

(Fanghanel, 2012). As argued earlier, academics are highly regulated and controlled through technologies that assign and measure workload (hours allocated to teaching, research and administration) (Davies and Bansel, 2005), and assessment policy only adds to this experience. 'We are incited, hailed, to recognise ourselves' in terms of government, as Ball (2015a, p. 3) explains the experience of neoliberal technologies of government.

I would therefore argue that assessment as a neoliberal technology fulfils much broader purposes than organising education or academic-student interaction. Unlike a disciplinary understanding of assessment as the domain of the teacher (characteristic to Tallinn), assessment as a neoliberal technology creates a sense of uncertain and impersonal domination. However, I would argue that this transformed experience of being disciplined can be even more constraining than that of assessment as a traditional disciplinary technology.

### ***Dimension 3: Pressurised academic and student subjectivities***

Power relations shaping assessment but also academic and student subjectivities are complex, and they are often related to (a combination of) discipline and neoliberal governmentality as discussed above. This also means that subjectivity needs to be seen as 'the point of contact between self and power' (Ball, 2015a, p. 3). Despite the complexity of power acting on subjects, the participants' discourses did not support the clear emergence of an economic neoliberal subjectivity ('homo economicus') in assessment: subjects who would be 'driven, competitive and capable risk-taker(s)' (Patsarika, 2014, p. 528). There might have been a sense of neoliberal self-interest amongst the students in terms of their rational educational choices. Students see their 'survival' as their personal responsibility, something that, according to Davies (2005, p. 9), is highly characteristic to neoliberalism. In terms of assessment, however, I would argue that assessment in the two universities is above all experienced in relation to discipline that makes academics and students feel pressurised rather than self-interested subjects.

This sense of being pressurised subjects tends to confirm the participants' experience of disciplinary power that operates in assessment and in academia more broadly, that acts on the subjectivity of academics and student and materialises in a variety of forms:

- having very little time for assessment (academics: Glasgow, Tallinn)
- being concerned about university/assessment policy developments (academics: Glasgow, Tallinn)



- being concerned about the value of teaching (academics, GTAs: Glasgow)
- being concerned about work prospects (students: Glasgow, Tallinn)
- being fearful about assessment (students: Glasgow)
- being concerned about academics' and students' wellbeing in assessment (GTAs: Glasgow)

The findings from the two universities indicate that an experience of being a pressurised subject is not necessarily related to neoliberal reforms but to academic work and university studies that are demanding. However, the scope of pressures and the ways academics and students respond to these tend to be more context-specific and related to neoliberalism.

#### ***Dimension 4: Constrained vs. autonomous academic and student subjectivities***

Even if the feeling of being a pressurised academic, GTA or a student was relatively similar amongst the participants in the two universities (despite the different stages of neoliberalisation), there are crucial differences in the ways the participants understand and respond to these pressures highlighted above. The research findings suggest that the academics, GTAs and students interviewed in the University of Glasgow perceive themselves as constrained by these pressures in their practice. The idea of being highly constrained but also constraining students in assessment situations aligns with a Foucauldian understanding of the subject as a form that can differ in various situations (Foucault, 1984a, p. 290). The academics interviewed could therefore be seen being both 'powerless' and 'powerful' depending on the context and interaction they engage with. While students from Glasgow feel highly constrained by and fearful of standardised academic practices and academic authority, they are not only concerned about their limited actions (strategic learning and educational choices) but also about much deeper ontological questions such as '*Am I right person for this programme?*' (Chloe). This strong sense of constraint among all participant groups in Glasgow tends to demonstrate once again how neoliberal governmentality transforms power relations in higher education and makes subjects govern themselves:

*Governmentality as a set of power relations is ubiquitous in higher education: we are insightful constantly to be responsible, to manage ourselves, to take the role of enterprising ourselves etc. (Ball, 2014, [interview])*

Furthermore, these complex experiences of power in neoliberal universities demonstrate that 'governmentality is not solely the "point of application" of power, but also its vehicle' (Ball, 2015a, p. 3). It is a neoliberal process rather than an outcome.

However, the discourses indicate some evidence of activeness amongst the participants in the two universities. Academics from Glasgow demonstrate clear meaning-making processes and a will to understand the (assessment) policy developments that they might not like. They tend to be actively engaged in trying to identify their opportunities for practising assessment as an educational process guided by their discipline-related understandings. This activeness combined with significant autonomy was particularly evident in the less neoliberalised and regulated settings of Tallinn University. Academics as well as students see themselves being proactive in assessment, and they are aware of their opportunities for shaping the practices. These elements of both constraint and activeness align with Foucault's (1982a) later work in which subjects cannot be seen only as passive outcomes of power relations but who can act and negotiate their experience of themselves to some extent. The policy and practice negotiation, however, takes place in various forms depending on the institutional contexts as becomes evident below.

#### ***Dimension 5: Policy and practice negotiation: overt vs. covert forms of resistance***

The research findings did not reveal any clear evidence of *parrhesia* – the risky and challenging technique of truth-telling (Foucault, 1983b) - amongst the participants in the two universities. It might be that single interviews/focus groups with participants were not enough for exploring complex and highly personal techniques of the self such as *parrhesia*. This is especially as the 'self' that requires work is not about the body in terms of clothing, tools or possessions (lack of time as the academics emphasised), but is about the soul (Foucault, 1982a). Foucault (1983b) also argued that the exploration of the techniques of the self is difficult, as these techniques can be often invisible or they are linked to the techniques for the direction of others (i.e. teaching).

This study revealed various other ways policy and practice are negotiated in the two universities: so-called 'pockets of freedom' (Peters and Olssen, 2005, p. 47) that help academics and students to cope with assessment-related pressures (and constraints). These forms of resistance tend to be the participants' responses to the neoliberal discourses - the truths that are told about us, as Ball (2015a) explains the ways individuals can engage with truth and critique. Furthermore, the findings confirm a Foucauldian understanding of

power that exist in a dual relationship with resistance (Foucault, 1984c): some form of resistance is always there, even if the subjects feel being highly pressurised and constrained as evident in Glasgow.

This research argues that assessment policy negotiation is highly individual process, and the aspects of resistance vary among the two universities and the research participants. The academics in the University of Glasgow demonstrated less evidence of resistance and only of covert forms such as manoeuvring within the set policy context. The study confirms Davies and Bansel's (2010) argument that neoliberal audit technologies might make individuals less engaged in individual or collective critique. Similarly, the students interviewed demonstrated very little overt resistance, and their responses reflected in adaptation strategies such as becoming strategic in learning and educational choices. It could therefore be argued that assessment policy and practice negotiation in Glasgow takes place in rather covert forms that are difficult to identify and trace. Furthermore, as a result of this study I believe that there are more of these covert forms of policy negotiation that future research might reveal.

In contrast, resistance tends to take place in much more overt forms in Tallinn University. It was common to the academics interviewed to admit that they do not know or follow regulations, and that they 'speak up', 'argue against' and 'fight' when necessary. Similarly, the students interviewed were proactive in terms of creating good impression of themselves and investing in their relations with academics. However, I would not describe these practices being the techniques of the self either. Neither the academics nor the students interviewed in Tallinn saw themselves as being constrained (yet), they considered themselves being pressurised but still autonomous subjects who do not need to work on themselves (Foucault, 1982a).

Foucault (1982b, p. 331) argued that there can be three broad types of struggles amongst the subjects: against the forms of domination (i.e. ethnic, social, religious); against (work-related) exploitation; or against subjectification and the forms of subjectivity. Based on the findings, I would argue that the forms of resistance revealed in this study demonstrated mostly a response to (neoliberal) reforms that reshape the work/study conditions of academics and students. There might be also an element of resistance against subjectification and changing understanding of academic subjectivity in Glasgow,

particularly as according to Ball, traditional struggles and neoliberal struggles over subjectivity can often overlap:

*So I think there isn't an absolute binary between traditional collective struggles and neoliberal struggles over subjectivity. I think they overlap to a great extent [...]. In a traditional sense (although it has changed a little bit), the politics is to do with things like pay and conditions of work; whereas as for struggles over subjectivity, the key issues are about recognition and reflexivity. But they come together around some vague middle grounds to do with wellbeing and sense of worth and those sorts of issues in some ways. (Ball, 2014, [interview])*

The findings indicate that resistance in academics' (possibly also in students') experience is highly complex, contextual and individual, including not only overt but covert practices that help academics and students to respond to the changing structural contexts and their experiences of themselves within these contexts.

### ***Concluding thoughts: opportunities for further research***

This study captured a moment in history of the two European universities in relation to neoliberalism and assessment policy and practice. The study has raised several issues related to neoliberalisation of academic practices, and the subjectivity of academics and students. Like Davies (2005), I would argue that neoliberalism risks turning people (academics and students) into something they do not want to be. The study also confirmed that student assessment that is more often conceptualised in its pedagogical sense (i.e. learning-oriented assessment) can operate as a disciplinary technology, more recently also as a neoliberal technology of government that creates constrained but self-governing academic and student subjectivities. I would therefore argue that assessment is currently a potentially dangerous technology in which disciplinary power through both domination and governmental facets (procedural domination) includes risks to pedagogical processes of teaching and learning. I would contend that these risks have been underestimated in recent assessment studies.

However, as Foucault argued: 'If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do' (Foucault, 1983b, p. 256). I would therefore make following suggestions for further scholarly discussion in this area:

- The study carried out in Tallinn University offers an excellent potential for further research in next 5-10 years. Future studies would enable us to trace the processes of neoliberalisation and to explore to what extent neoliberal reforms evolve in Tallinn University, and how academic and student experience of autonomy changes. It would be particularly important to trace the possible regularisation of assessment in Tallinn University and the ways it might start shaping the interaction of the assessor and the assessed.
- The findings suggest that single interviews/focus groups might not be a suitable method to capture the academic or student experience of the techniques of the self. Deeper exploration in this area might require continuous research that develops trust between the researcher and the participant(s) and/or methods that initiate reflection at deeper level (i.e. ‘self-writing’ through reflective diaries).
- The study suggested that academic resistance can take place in various covert and overt forms. Further research on individual policy negotiation could help to understand the importance of covert resistance in neoliberal academia.
- The study did not reveal any major disciplinary differences in understanding and following assessment policy. Further research could help to reveal if neoliberal developments in assessment are more easily accepted and enacted by some disciplines/departments than others.
- As this study focused on assessment policy and practice in its current moment of history, the further genealogical studies of assessment policy and practice would help to create a better historic understanding of assessment.
- Finally, this study recognised that assessment processes in neoliberalised universities relate to wider technologies of government. The study therefore suggests that further research on quality assurance, accountability and performance management techniques (e.g. Research Excellence Framework, National Student Survey, Teaching Excellence Awards) would greatly benefit our critical understanding of the ways in which discipline and governmentality operate in contemporary university settings.

Undertaking further research would enable new research in areas of assessment and educational policy to be opened up and encourage the strengthening of an understanding of assessment as not only a pedagogical process but also as an institutional technology that shapes practices and subjectivities of academics and students. This is particularly important in neoliberal times when educational policies and practices are increasingly shaped by economic discourses rather than educational values.

## Appendix 1: Key characteristics of higher education contexts in the UK/Scotland and Estonia

	<b>UNITED KINGDOM</b>	<b>SCOTLAND</b>	<b>ESTONIA</b>
<b>Population</b>	~64.1 million	~ 5.2 million (~593 000 people in Glasgow)	~ 1.3 million (~425 000 people in Tallinn)
<b>HE institutions</b>	160 universities and HE institutions	19 universities and HE institutions	25 universities and HE institutions
<b>Student numbers in 2013/2014</b>	2,299,355 UG 1 759 915 PG 539 440	279,495 UG 225 385 PG 53 890	59,998 UG 40 539 PG 15 728 Integrated UG and PG 3731
<b>HE funding</b>	Tuition fees are mostly applied	First degree students from Scotland or the EU are entitled to have their tuition fees paid by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS).	Since 2012/2013, HE is free of charge in Estonia for students studying full-time and on programmes in Estonian language.
<b>References</b>	See British Council (n.d.), Estonia.eu (2010), HESA (n.d.), Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (n.d.), Office for National Statistics (n.d.), Scotland.org (n.d.), SFC (2015), Universities Scotland (n.d.)		

## Appendix 2: Key organisations shaping higher education policy context in the UK

Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/>

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/>

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/>

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) <https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/>

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/>

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) <https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/>

Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/>

Medical Research Council (MRC) <http://www.mrc.ac.uk/>

Million+ <http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/>

National Centre for Universities and Businesses (NCUB) <http://www.ncub.co.uk/>

Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/>

Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) <http://www.stfc.ac.uk/>

Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/>

Universities Scotland <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/>

Universities UK <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/>

Universities Wales <http://www.uniswales.ac.uk/>



## Appendix 3: An example of a plain language statement



<b>PHD PROJECT</b>	<b>STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT</b>
<b>RESEARCHER</b>	Rille Raaper, PhD student, School of Education, University of Glasgow <a href="mailto:r.raaper.1@research.gla.ac.uk">r.raaper.1@research.gla.ac.uk</a>
<b>SUPERVISORS</b>	Dr. Fiona Patrick, School of Education, University of Glasgow <a href="mailto:Fiona.Patrick@glasgow.ac.uk">Fiona.Patrick@glasgow.ac.uk</a>  Dr. Margaret McCulloch, School of Education, University of Glasgow <a href="mailto:Margaret.McCulloch@glasgow.ac.uk">Margaret.McCulloch@glasgow.ac.uk</a>
<b>PURPOSE OF THE STUDY</b>	<p>You are being invited to take part in a research study. Please take time to read the following information. Please contact us if you have any questions or you would like to have more information.</p> <p>This research will help to understand student assessment in the context of current higher education (HE) changes. The study will analyse HE and assessment policies, strategies and regulations in the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University, and it will bring in the perspectives of academics and students in relation to student assessment.</p> <p>Participation in this research will give you an opportunity to reflect on your experience of HE and student assessment and to share your opinion regarding the current developments in student assessment.</p>
<b>Why were you chosen?</b>	The study aims to interview academics from a variety of disciplines with different working experience and teaching positions. You have been chosen based on these criteria.
<b>What would be expected of you?</b>	If you decide to take part in this research you would be taking part of face to face interview. The interview will be semi-structured, and you would have a chance to add any other relevant themes. The interview will be audio-recorded, and it will last approximately 1 hour, depending on your availability. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	All information, which is collected about you during the interview, will be kept confidential. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym and any information about you will have your name and contact details removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.
<b>Research results</b>	The results will be published in my doctoral thesis, academic publications and conference presentations. The final results will be available in 2015 and a copy of final manuscript will be provided to all

participants if requested. The data will be kept until December 2015.

*The research project has been funded by ESRC DTC 3+ Scholarship. The project has been reviewed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.*

*If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research, please contact Dr. Valentina Bold, College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, [Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk)*

## Appendix 4: An example of a consent form



### Consent Form

**Title of PhD Project:** Student Assessment in Higher Education (Cross-Cultural Study of the University of Glasgow and Tallinn University)

**Name of Researcher:** Rille Raaper, School of Education, University of Glasgow

**E-mail address:** [r.raaper.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:r.raaper.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I confirm that the interview will be audio-taped and the copies of transcripts can be returned for verification.
4. I understand that all information which is collected about me during the interview will be kept strictly confidential. My name will be replaced by a pseudonym and any information about me will have my name and contact details removed so that I cannot be recognised from it.
5. I agree / do not agree (underline as applicable) to take part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

## Appendix 5: Analytic framework of discourse analysis

Analytic framework is guided by Foucault's (1969, 1970, 1972) and Fairclough's (1992, 2001a, 2003) approaches.

<b>1. TEXT ANALYSIS</b>  <i>Description of text</i>	1.1. Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Are there markedly formal/informal words?</li> <li>– Are there words that are ideologically contested?</li> <li>– What metaphors are used?</li> </ul>
	1.2. Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Is agency clear/unclear (the use of I/you/we)?</li> <li>– Are sentences active/passive?</li> <li>– What sort of modalities are most frequent (declarative/questions/imperative)?</li> </ul>
	1.3. Textual structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What larger-scale structures does the text have?</li> <li>– What interactional conventions are used? (Are one participant controlling the turns over others)</li> </ul>
<b>2. DISCURSIVE PRACTICE</b>  <i>Interpretation of the relationship between text, context and other discourses</i>	2.1. Situational context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What's going on (topic, purpose of the discourse)?</li> <li>– Who's involved? Which subject positions are set up?</li> <li>– In what relations? What relationships of power, social distance are enacted in the situation?</li> </ul>
	2.2. Text production and consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Is the text produced/consumed individually or collectively?</li> <li>– What kind of audience the text producer anticipates?</li> <li>– Might it receive resistant readings?</li> </ul>
	2.3. Intertextual context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What discourse types drawn upon?</li> <li>– What other texts it involves?</li> </ul>
<b>3. SOCIAL PRACTICE</b>  <i>Explanation of the relationship between discourse and social context</i>	3.1. Social determinants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What power relations at situational, institutional and societal levels shape this discourse?</li> <li>– What might be the ideological characteristics?</li> </ul>
	3.2. Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What are key statements that arise in these conditions?</li> <li>– What are the functions of the statements?</li> </ul>
	3.2. Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How does discourse stand in relation to the structures and relations (is it conventional and normative, creative and innovative, oriented to</li> </ul>

		<p>restructuring, oppositional)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Does it contribute to sustaining existing power relations, or transforming them?</li> <li>– What might be the effects on systems of knowledge and belief?</li> <li>– What might be the effects on social relations?</li> <li>– What might be the effects on subjectivity?</li> </ul>
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# Appendix 6: Schedule A and B in the University of Glasgow

The Schedule A and B presented below are part of the *Code of Assessment*.

**SCHEDULE A**

All Courses				Primary verbal descriptors for attainment of Intended Learning Outcomes	Honours Class	BDS, BVMS, MBChB
Primary Grade	Gloss	Secondary Band*	Grade Point			
A	Excellent	A1 A2 A3 A4 A5	22 21 20 19 18	Exemplary range and depth of attainment of intended learning outcomes, secured by discriminating command of a comprehensive range of relevant materials and analyses, and by deployment of considered judgement relating to key issues, concepts and procedures	First	Honours
B	Very Good	B1 B2 B3	17 16 15	Conclusive attainment of virtually all intended learning outcomes, clearly grounded on a close familiarity with a wide range of supporting evidence, constructively utilised to reveal appreciable depth of understanding	Upper Second	Commendation
C	Good	C1 C2 C3	14 13 12	Clear attainment of most of the intended learning outcomes, some more securely grasped than others, resting on a circumscribed range of evidence and displaying a variable depth of understanding	Lower Second	Pass
D	Satisfactory†	D1 D2 D3	11 10 9	Acceptable attainment of intended learning outcomes, displaying a qualified familiarity with a minimally sufficient range of relevant materials, and a grasp of the analytical issues and concepts which is generally reasonable, albeit insecure	Third	
E	Weak	E1 E2 E3	8 7 6	Attainment deficient in respect of specific intended learning outcomes, with mixed evidence as to the depth of knowledge and weak deployment of arguments or deficient manipulations	Fail	Fail
F	Poor	F1 F2 F3	5 4 3	Attainment of intended learning outcomes appreciably deficient in critical respects, lacking secure basis in relevant factual and analytical dimensions		
G	Very Poor	G1 G2	2 1	Attainment of intended learning outcomes markedly deficient in respect of nearly all intended learning outcomes, with irrelevant use of materials and incomplete and flawed explanation		
H			0	No convincing evidence of attainment of intended learning outcomes, such treatment of the subject as is in evidence being directionless and fragmentary		
CR	CREDIT REFUSED	Failure to comply, in the absence of good cause, with the published requirements of the course or programme; and/or a serious breach of regulations				

\* The Secondary Band indicates the degree to which the work possesses the quality of the corresponding descriptor.

† This gloss is used because it is the lowest grade normally associated with the attainment of an undergraduate award. Postgraduate students should be aware, however, that an average of at least grade C in taught courses is required for progress to the dissertation at Masters level, and students should consult the appropriate degree regulations and course handbooks for the grade they may require to progress to specific awards.

**SCHEDULE B**

All Courses		Primary verbal descriptors for attainment of Intended Learning Outcomes relating to professional or clinical skills	Honours Class	BDS, BVMS, MBChB
Primary Grade	Aggregation Scores			
A	5	Exemplary and polished demonstration of the required skill(s), displaying underpinning knowledge, sound judgement and appropriate professional values, as evidenced by focussed sensitivity to the context, the needs of any subject, and the wider implications of the candidate's actions	First	Honours
B	4	Efficient and confident demonstration of the required skill(s), displaying underpinning knowledge, sound judgement and appropriate professional values, as evidenced by an evident appreciation of the possible implications of the candidate's actions, demonstrating initiative and flexibility of approach	Upper Second	Commendation
C	3	Clear demonstration of attainment of the required skill(s), displaying underpinning knowledge, good judgement and appropriate professional values, as evidenced by familiarity with how to proceed in a range of contexts	Lower Second	Pass
D	2	Adequate independent performance of required skill, displaying underpinning knowledge, adequate judgement and appropriate professional values, suitable to routine contexts	Third	
E	1	Presently inadequate independent performance of the required skill. Knowledge, judgement and professional values are at least sufficient to indicate an awareness of personal limitations	Fail	Fail
F	0	Not presently capable of independent performance of the required skill, lacking self-awareness of limitations, and prone to errors of judgement and faulty practice		
CR	CREDIT REFUSED	Failure to comply, in the absence of good cause, with the published requirements of the course or programme; and/or a serious breach of regulations		

## Appendix 7: Grade descriptors in Tallinn University

The grade descriptors presented below are part of the *Study Regulation*.

**A (excellent)** – an outstanding and excellent level of achievement of learning outcomes characterised by free and creative use of knowledge and skills beyond a very good level.

**B (very good)** – a very good level of achievement of learning outcomes characterised by purposeful and creative use of knowledge and skills. Un-substantive and non-conceptual errors may occur with regard to specific and detailed knowledge and skills.

**C (good)** – a good level of achievement of learning outcomes characterised by purposeful use of knowledge and skills. Uncertainty and inaccuracies may occur with regard to specific and detailed knowledge and skills.

**D (satisfactory)** – a sufficient level of achievement of learning outcomes characterised by the use of knowledge and skills in typical situations. Deficiencies and uncertainties may occur with regard to non-standard situations.

**E (poor)** – a minimally acceptable level of achievement of learning outcomes characterised by limited use of knowledge and skills in typical situations. Significant deficiencies and uncertainty may occur with regard to non-standard situations.

**F (fail)** – the level of knowledge and skills acquired by a student remain below the required minimum 'F' is a negative outcome and the examination/test etc shall be retaken.

# **Appendix 8: Interview questions for policymakers**

## **Introduction**

1. How long have you worked in this university, in this particular role?
2. How would you describe your role?
3. How would you describe HE changes that have taken place during your work experience?

## **Assessment policy/regulations**

4. How would you describe the process of policy-making in the field of assessment in the university?
5. How would you explain the aims of assessment regulations in the university?
6. What do you think are the main functions of student assessment in the university?
7. Based on your experience, do you think assessment and its functions have changed in the university over time?

## **Policy negotiation and resistance**

8. How do you think academics in this university respond to developments which they do not agree with?
9. How do you think students experience assessment in this university?
10. How do students respond to assessment developments in this university?



## **Appendix 9: Interview/focus group questions for academics**

### **Introduction, academic work**

1. How long have you worked in HE, in this university?
2. How would you describe HE changes that have taken place during your work experience? (*only interviews*)
3. How has your own academic job changed? (*only interviews*)
4. Do you feel comfortable with these changes? How do you cope with the level of discomfort? (*only interviews*)

### **Assessment policy and practice**

5. How would you describe your role as an assessor?
6. How much training have you got in assessment? (*only focus groups*)
7. What is your opinion about the assessment regulations in your university?
8. What kind of functions do you see student assessment fulfilling? What do you see being the most important ones in your university/school at the moment?
9. How do staff know what students think about assessment?
10. How do your students react to assessment changes?

### **Policy negotiation, resistance**

11. How much flexibility do you have in conducting assessment?
12. Have you ever encountered any issues/challenges regarding assessment in your university? Can you give me an example?
13. What can academics do if they do not agree with the assessment regulations, changes?

### **Conclusion**

14. If you could use only 3 words to describe HE at this moment of time, what would these words be?

# Appendix 10: Focus group questions for GTAs

## Introduction:

1. Could you please introduce yourself: name, college, department and the year of your PhD studies?
2. How would you describe the University of Glasgow?
3. What one word would you choose to describe student assessment? Or can you come up with an appropriate metaphor?

## Main discussion:

4. How would you describe your role as an assessor?
5. What kind of functions do you see assessment fulfilling? What do you think are the most important ones?
6. What do you know about assessment regulations in your university? What is your opinion regarding these?
7. How much freedom do you think you have when practising assessment?
8. How do you think your students experience assessment?

## Conclusion

9. Is there anything you would like to add in relation to your experience of assessment?

# **Appendix 11: Focus group questions for students**

## **Introduction**

1. How would you describe your university? Please write down any keywords that help you to describe it.
2. What is the first word/ metaphor that relates to you with student assessment?

## **Main discussion: assessment, assessor, resistance**

3. Why does the university need assessment?
4. Do you think that assessment has changed any way during your experience as a student?
5. How would you describe a teacher's role as an assessor?
6. Does assessment influence your learning in anyway? Can you bring an example?
7. Do you always agree with the assessment result? What do you do if you disagree with your result?
8. How much involvement do you think you have in assessment decisions?

## **Conclusion**

9. Is there anything you would like to add in relation to your experience of assessment?

# **Appendix 12: Conversations with academic experts**

## **Theme 1: The concept of neoliberalism in HE**

1. How would you explain the concept of neoliberalism?
2. How do you think academics/students are influenced by neoliberal changes?
3. To what extent do you think there is scope for academics/students to resist neoliberal aspects of study and work?

## **Theme 2: Power**

4. How do you see power being practised in the HE context that you work in?
5. In what ways does power work on individuals and groups in HE?
6. As neoliberal governmentality makes people often feel that they are autonomous and self-directed, it seems to include hidden control mechanisms. What are your thoughts on this?

## **Theme 3: Assessment and issues of discipline and governmentality**

7. My study is specifically analysing assessment policy and practice in universities, so I'm interested in your thoughts about why universities need student assessment practices?
8. How might contemporary assessment policies and practices position academics and students?
9. Based on your experience, do you think that assessment has changed in purpose or function during the era of neoliberal influence?

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