The Characteristics, Roles and Selection of Vice-Chancellors

Summary Report

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A NOTE ABOUT THIS REPORT

This summary report presents the findings and conclusions from the research project, and includes summaries of the literature review and analyses of quantitative data. A full report is also available which includes, as appendices, the complete literature review, a full report on the quantitative data analysis and other related documents. The full report is available from the Leadership Foundation website on http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/publications/research.html. Further details about the project can be found on http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/research/projects/4breakwellbath.html.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives and Methods
The objectives of the study were to:

• Analyse the changing patterns in those characteristics of vice-chancellors (VCs) which are a matter of public record (i.e. largely socio-demographic data) and create an interactive electronic database to summarise these key data for VCs in post between 1997 and 2006.
• Provide a more detailed examination of the characteristics (competencies, career structures & trajectories, training for management, and so on) and roles of VCs by interviewing a sample of serving VCs.
• Examine changes over time in the required and desired characteristics of VCs – as reflected in job specifications and advertisements.
• Explore the methods used to recruit VCs.

A literature review proved the available empirical data on the characteristics of VCs to be very limited, with the exception of one UK, one Australian, and one US study.

In order to examine the characteristics, roles and selection of VCs, three complementary methods of data collection were used. The first entailed collecting archival data, available in the public domain, on the personal characteristics of VCs. These data were amenable to quantitative analyses. The second method involved interviewing both VCs (N=13) and representatives of the executive search agencies (ESAs) (N=9) that are, or would like to be, active in the recruitment of VCs. These data were subjected to systematic qualitative analysis.

The third method focussed upon the content analysis of the job descriptions and person specifications provided in the further particulars for 32 VC posts advertised during the period of the study.

Characteristics, Competences and Roles of VCs
The quantitative analysis of the archival data on the socio-demographic characteristics of VCs in post 1997-2006 showed that virtually all VCs appointed since 1997 are white. Most are either married or living with a partner. The average age of current VCs was 57.76 years; 20% of serving VCs were aged 61 or older. For most, their prior career is in academia. The majority of VCs appointed since 1997 had been formerly Assistant, Deputy or Pro- VCs or former VCs; this was particularly evident in post-92s. Few had professional management qualifications and there was very little evidence of non-academic experience outside higher education, particularly in post-92s. Experience of Oxford or Cambridge at either undergraduate or postgraduate level is a marker for VCs. A continued intra-sub-sector recruitment strata is evident – VCs are recruited from pre-92s to pre-92s and from post-92s to post-92s. Most VCs are male. However, there was an increase after 1997 in the appointment of women. Women were appointed to 6% of VC posts 1991-96 compared to 15% thereafter. Since 1997, the highest numbers of VCs, including all of the 17 female VCs in the sample, came from social science backgrounds. The mean age of appointment since 1997 was 54 years, with no significant difference between pre- and post-92s.

VCs’ Perceptions of Characteristics, Competences and Roles
The current study showed that the competences VCs say are required can be categorised into four main areas: academic-related, business-related, management-related and personal. Academic-related characteristics: the emphasis is on academic credibility, required to achieve influence and to understand how a university works. Business-related characteristics: with increasing emphasis placed on universities for ‘brand purification’, together with the numbers and complexities of funding streams which VCs have to deal with, being ‘financially aware’ was deemed essential. Managerial/Leadership characteristics: VCs needed to play a very ‘visible’, ‘transparent’ and ‘ambassadorial’ role, securing the ‘university profile’, not only nationally and internationally, but also locally. It was felt that the increased use of senior management teams (SMT) allowed VCs to ‘step back from the house-keeping’. The VC’s purpose is then to make sure that all team members
understand their roles and feel sufficiently ‘empowered’ to deliver. Establishing the right membership and structure of the SMT was seen to be a vital step in creating the VC’s platform for directing the institution. Being able to work with and through the committee culture was described as an important competence. The need for flexibility and speed of decision-making in the modern university climate was seen as antithetical to the committee culture but it was acknowledged that persuading the academic community of the need to change was often best done through using the committee processes. The most important committee skills were those required to work with the Senate (or Academic Board) and the Governing Body (or Council). Looking at the governance structure from the point of view of the characteristics and competences required of the VC, the most important issue seems to revolve around being able to establish and maintain clearly defined boundaries around the responsibility and role of the VC and those of the members of the governing body. The relationship between the Chair of the governing body and the VC was seen “as absolutely critical”.

Personal characteristics: they were cautious about generalising about the personal characteristics needed to be a successful VC but they did identify some commonalities: being self-confident, acting with confidence and, in turn, instilling confidence in others; being ‘thick-skinned’; being ‘outgoing’ and ‘gregarious’; being able to ‘enthuse’ about their institution; being a ‘good communicator in whatever style you feel comfortable with’; having considerable intellectual stamina; being able to keep an increasingly wide range of activities on the go simultaneously; and, having ‘sheer physical stamina’. Flexibility was also seen as vital and having the capacity to be a “visionary leader” was noted by all. Internal vs External Roles: VCs described a duality of focus - ‘internal leadership and senior management role’ and an ‘external promotional, presentational and ambassadorial role’ of the VC. Traditions and customs associated with the role were seen to push the incumbent towards not operational isolation but a form of psychological isolation, required if the authority of the role is to be maintained. Leadership Styles: Asked about their leadership styles, the VCs tended to deny they had any one style but rather shifted between them. Managing Change: being able to manage change is one of the key competences desired in VCs by governing bodies. VCs interviewed were asked about their approach to creating change. Interestingly, a strong theme emerging was the importance of avoiding change for change’s sake. However, changing the senior management team was seen as a lever for bringing about significant behavioural change across the institution. No one underestimated how difficult it is to bring about change in a university but having control of the purse-strings was deemed vital.

ESAs and Job and Person Specifications for VCs
The 32 sets of further particulars we collected were analysed under six main themes. We found:

In the Job Specification: Main Responsibilities and duties fell into three main categories:

- Internal Management – primarily promoting new, and maintain ongoing, relationships across all areas of the university.
- External Leadership - a key theme here was for VCs to be both ambassadorial and responsive. Specific duties described within this category included: ‘providing leadership and strategic direction to the university’; ‘maintaining close links with government and government agencies, employers and regional community’; and leading ‘the consolidation of existing partnerships and, more importantly, the creation of new ones’.
- Business-related (including fundraising and commercial activity) plus Academic-related (being responsible for promoting excellence in research and teaching).

In the Person Specification:

- Personal characteristics required included energy and enthusiasm, the ability to inspire and motivate others, persuasive communication skills, and great interpersonal skills.
- Academic-related characteristics focussed on academic credibility and understanding of the issues facing higher education.
- Business-related characteristics interestingly did not extend to requiring candidates to have any specific professional qualifications in management.
- Managerial/Leadership characteristics required commonly called for an ‘open, consultative and inclusive’ style. In particular: ‘authoritative but consultative’; ‘empowering’; ‘open, consensual and collegiate’; ‘open and un-bureaucratic’; and ‘collegial, consensual and inclusive’. There was also some emphasis on requiring a manager/leader that is a ‘good’ and ‘skilful’ team-builder.
This numerical analysis tends to oversimplify the message that is actually carried by the package of information generated about these posts. The person and job specification is invariably embedded in a document that describes the university. The overall effect is to contextualise the bald statement of the characteristics and competences required of candidates. Also, further particulars are unlikely to state explicitly things which are supposed to be common knowledge. The simple content analysis of the further particulars for these posts also fails to take into account the role that the ESA plays in many cases in interpreting them for potential applicants.

Perspective of ESAs: The higher education sector was described as being different from others - but it was felt that the same basic criteria for leaders apply to all types organisation. ESAs described how they only focussed on candidates from old Commonwealth and US universities when searching for British VCs because of the ‘greater levels of compatibility’ with British higher education. Whilst having international experience was generally seen as being ‘an advantage’; greater emphasis was placed on having experience ‘external to the academic world’. The ideal candidate for VC was described as being someone with both academic and commercial experience. The ‘power’ of academics in the selection process was claimed to be a deterrent to making appointments from outside higher education. Personality-focussed characteristics sought included ‘natural leadership’ – ‘gravitas’, ‘forceful personality’ or ‘confidence’. Statements about needing to be ‘a good ambassador, proficient in networking and fundraising’, ‘a good communicator’ were made. In orientation, candidates for VC needed to be ‘amazingly political, capable of horizon scanning and several steps ahead of competitors when looking at markets’.

The Selection of VCs
Our literature search showed there to be very little published empirical evidence on how VCs are sought and selected. This study examines the search and selection procedures that were used to appoint VCs in service 1997-2006 through reference to data from the semi-structured interviews with our sample of representatives of ESAs and VCs, plus our content analysis of the job and person specifications for 32 vice-chancellorships advertised during September 2004 to February 2007 inclusive.

Who Chooses the VC? Typically, the university’s own governing body, on which there is no national government representation though there may be local government representation, ultimately appoints the VC. But the administration of the processes of search and selection were normally delegated to a smaller committee (the search committee) often brought together solely for the purpose of recruiting the VC and comprised of a majority of lay members from the governing body. The membership structures of these committees vary considerably across universities. Typically the committee will be responsible for choosing whether to use an ESA and, if one is used, which one. The use of ESAs is now common.

ESAs: a small number of ESAs dominate the market in search for VCs. The nature of the relationship between the ESA and the search committee varies very significantly across universities. There was general consensus among the ESAs that these search committees do not know how to use ESAs to their best advantage. ESAs highlighted the different facets of the role they perform in the search process:

- providing selection panels with ‘a menu from which they can choose, rather than imposing a choice upon them’
- giving the university advice
- pointing out skills, not background, required of the post holder
- helping them define and clarify the role of a VC.

Most ESAs perceived their roles as being ‘facilitators’ and ‘informers, as opposed to directly making the final appointment decision’.

Methods of Search Used by ESAs: The first stage of any search for most ESAs was described as the ‘establishing a profile’. The next stage, the outcome of the briefing and data collection, is the production of an information pack. The role of this pack was to ‘sell’ and to give the process ‘transparency’. Then their task is to determine where the job would be advertised and how the advert would be drafted. The job advert may actually say very little about the role itself, its main purpose being to attract those people who are ‘interested’ and ‘excited’ by this ‘sort of challenge’. The third task for the ESA is to make informal contact with all those potential candidates that might be serious contenders for the job but who would not wish to be seen to respond to an advert or may not even be actively looking to find another job. Explaining the attractions of the job and inviting the potential candidates to consider themselves for it is one of the main elements in this stage of the search process. The next stage usually comprises formal interviews by the ESA with those...
who have been long-listed. The long list will usually have been chosen following a presentation of all actual and potential candidates to the search committee by the ESA. The aim of this particular approach to a long list interview is to provide a: ‘short list of candidates … who would all be able to do the job, would all be able to bring something to it’, giving the selection panel ‘a choice on the day’. Short listing by the search committee is not infrequently followed by a further briefing of the candidates by the ESA. The structure of the final interview varied. A comparison of what ESAs with great experience of searching for VCs and those who had little or no experience said about methods of search indicated that there are minimal differences in those used.

**Perspectives of VCs on the Selection Process:** All of those VCs interviewed had been invited to apply for the post they occupied. As one said: ‘people no longer expect to apply for a VC’s post’. They felt universities are amateurish in their approach to appointing VCs. Some felt ESAs were too ill-informed to do the job required. Methods of search for VCs were seen as too restrictive by some. Universities were seen to need to do more to pro-actively manage the succession.

**Conclusions**

There have been no radical changes in the socio-demographic characteristics of VCs in the last decade – though there are now more women VCs.

In seeking VCs, universities are looking for very similar characteristics and competences to those sought in leaders in other spheres – with the all important exception that a VC must have academic credibility.

This means that VCs are expected to combine academic credibility with all the other competences expected of the leaders of any large commercial businesses that have political significance. There is no evidence that the desired profile has been changing over the last decade.

Finding people who have the desired profile – and who would wish to become a VC - is not simple. It requires great professionalism in search and selection. ESAs can offer this but universities are not currently using them optimally and there is undoubtedly scope for improving the understanding that both lay members of governing bodies and HR professional within universities have of the executive search process.
1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Context
In October 1963, the Robbins Report recorded a total of 31 UK universities'. By 1997, the Dearing Report recorded the existence of 115 and by the end of 2006, we identified a total of 140. This expansion of the sector has been coterminous with significant changes in the demands placed on universities. There has been a growing emphasis upon widening participation in higher education, on the necessity for universities to act as engines of economic development for their communities and the nation through innovation and knowledge transfer, and on the requirement that they achieve greater financial self-sufficiency. It is not unreasonable to hypothesise that these fundamental changes in demands, therefore, would result in them requiring different types of leadership. In the UK university, the VC is the head of the institution and, as such, ultimately responsible for academic standards, for establishing and executing strategy, and for financial probity and robustness. It would seem likely that the transformations in the higher education system that have occurred since the Dearing Report in 1997 might have precipitated a change in the sort of people who are being chosen to lead universities and the methods used for their recruitment.

In parallel with the expansion of universities, and changes in their function and priorities, the formal role of the university VC has evolved too. Moving on from ‘substitute’ to the Chancellor pre-1945, to the ‘institution builders’ and managers of complexity post-Robbins in 1963, by 1985 and the publication of the Jarratt Report on university efficiency, the roles of the governing body in the university sector were strengthened to “ensure better management, particularly strategic management, more responsiveness to commercial interests, [and] more entrepreneurial attitudes”4. The implication according to Smith, Bargh, Bocock & Scott5, was that VCs should be in control, with their authority “rooted in managerial competence rather than collegial charisma”6. In fact, Bargh, Bocock, Scott & Smith7 examined the changing patterns in the characteristics of heads of institutions.

Hypothesising that a ‘shift to the style of CE’8 (Chief Executive) would have taken place, in particular, they compared the demographic characteristics and career preparation of VCs appointed over four decades from 1960–1996 (N=341). Despite finding that managerial and political pressures on VCs had increased, together with the expectations of the institutional leadership they provide, they found substantial evidence of significant continuities; VCs were ‘much the same people they have always been, namely academics who have predominantly enjoyed an academic career prior to appointment to their present post’. In the majority of cases, VCs appointed from 1991-1996 were white men in their early fifties (average 52 years; range 38-65 years), with those leading pre-92s appointed at slightly older ages than those in post-92s (average age = 53 versus 50 years respectively). Attendance at either Oxford or Cambridge, particularly in pre-92s, remained significant, with a background in science the dominant area of expertise. The question addressed in the current study is whether there have been significant changes since 1997.

1.2 Aims of the Study
The objectives of the study reported here were to:

- Analyse the changing patterns in those characteristics of VCs which are a matter of public record (i.e. largely socio-demographic data) and create an interactive electronic database to summarise these key data for VCs in post between 1997 and 2006.
- Provide a more detailed examination of the characteristics (competencies, career structures and trajectories, training for management, and so on) and roles of VCs by interviewing a sample of serving VCs.
- Examine changes over time in the required and desired characteristics of VCs – as reflected in job specifications and advertisements.
- Explore the changes in methods of recruitment of VCs (particularly examining the current role of executive search agencies and the manner of the decision-making concerning the appointment within university governing bodies), taking into account the guidance which has emerged (e.g. UUK, SCOP, CUC, ECU, UCEA, 2004).

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2 The British university system has been classified in a number of different ways, depending on institutional histories, main functions and nationalities. Drennan & Beck, (2001); Scott (1995); Tight (1996). For the purpose of this study, UK universities have been classified according to three age groups based upon when they received independent university status or, for the colleges of the Universities of London and Wales, the dates they were formed:
- Pre-92s (N=74): comprising the twelfth and thirteenth century establishments of Oxford and Cambridge; the fifteenth and sixteenth century Scottish universities; the ‘ancient’ early nineteenth century establishments of the Universities of London and Durham; the ‘civics’ in the major English cities, and the ‘redbricks’ in other English cities established in the early part of the twentieth century; and 1960’s ‘technological’ universities, new campus universities and the Open University.
- Post-92s (N=48): comprising the former colleges and polytechnics established as universities by the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992;
3 Jarratt, A. (1985)
5 Smith, D. et al. (1999)
6 Smith, D. et al. (1999) p34
7 Bargh, C. et al. (2000)
8 Jarratt, A. (1985) p26
9 Bargh, C. et al. (2000) p154
Full details of the research proposal for this study are presented in Appendix I.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Characteristics and Recruitment

As a precursor to empirical data collection, a systematic review of the literature published after January 1999 and before February 2006 on either the characteristics or recruitment of VCs was conducted\textsuperscript{10}. Further details of the literature review methodology can be found in the full report\textsuperscript{11} from this study. Essentially, compared to other more narrative and journalistic reviews, the benefit of using a systematic approach is that it is ‘replicable, scientific and transparent’\textsuperscript{12}. It uses a pre-planned and documented protocol to identify and select publications for review. This means that users of the review know its provenance and can evaluate it\textsuperscript{13}. Seven bibliographic databases were searched (ABI/Inform, BREI, AUEI, ERIC, PsychINFO, IBSS, and SSCI) covering the major sources in management, education, psychology and social sciences. References in papers identified by this method were then examined to determine whether they offered further valuable information. In addition, a general search of the worldwide web for data on VC’s characteristics or methods of recruitment was conducted using Google. Where possible, authors of studies identified by the search were contacted for details of any unpublished or working papers. This process yielded 29 articles satisfying the search criteria and only 16 of these had original empirical data. The methodologies and findings of the most relevant empirical and review studies can be found in the full report from this research\textsuperscript{14}. These include 10 studies carried out in the UK, 4 in Australia and 4 in the US. Four review articles are included, so are one unpublished paper and two unpublished postgraduate dissertations.

The search proved that there have been few empirical studies of UK VCs since the landmark research of Bargh \textit{et al} in the year 2000\textsuperscript{15}. There are empirical data available on the characteristics and selection of Australian VCs\textsuperscript{16} but it is based on either small samples or represents an ancillary concern embedded in studies focussed on other issues. In addition, the data collected by O’Meara and Petzall covered a similar time period to that of Bargh \textit{et al} and neither can reflect the impact of changes in higher education over the last decade. Most of what is known about the characteristics and roles of 21st Century university leaders has been based upon the investigation of American University Presidents (AUPs)\textsuperscript{17}. While the key conclusions from the Australian and American studies are considered below, it is important to remember that there are significant differences between the higher education systems in the UK, US and Australia. There are major differences in governance arrangements. For instance, in the largest Australian universities the Council (i.e. the supreme governing body) is chaired by the Chancellor and a large number of its members will be nominated by the Minister of State for Education, further the VC does not chair Senate (i.e. the prime academic authority). Other differences revolve around funding mechanisms. Clearly, the most pronounced difference between the US and UK systems in this respect is the existence in the former of many privately-funded institutions. It is not the purpose of this report to catalogue the vast array of differences between these three higher education systems, suffice it to say that there are important differences that are likely to affect the role of VCs and the characteristics they may be required to possess in order to do their jobs and this means that direct comparisons between studies of VCs in the three systems must be treated cautiously\textsuperscript{18}. The implications of comparisons between the characteristics, roles and selection of UK VCs and the heads of institution in other countries (for instance, in Europe or Asia), where the political position of universities and their cultural traditions are very different, would be even more open to debate.

Interestingly, possibly as a consequence of limitations on availability or access, most of the previous research concerning the characteristics of VCs has been limited to socio-demographic data available in the public domain. As a result, most of the previous analyses have included little direct insight into the way VCs personally understand their role or the characteristics it demands. The prime exception to this comes from the ACE (2007) study of AUPs which included a self-report survey of AUPs.

The literature search also revealed a dearth of material on the way VCs are recruited. Only one study focussed specifically on the selection of VCs (the O’Meara and Petzall study in Australia). Indeed, like Magnusson & Boggs\textsuperscript{19}, we found little empirical data on the factors that influence the selection of

\textsuperscript{10}The initial review has been updated to encompass relevant publications from February 2006 to August 2007 prior to the production of this report.
\textsuperscript{11}Appendix III and IV of the full report – available at http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/publications/research.html
\textsuperscript{12}Tranfield,D. \textit{et al.} (2002)
\textsuperscript{13}Evans, D. (2001)
\textsuperscript{14}Table 2 in Appendix IV of the full report – this can be found at http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/publications/research.html
\textsuperscript{15}Bargh, C. \textit{et al} (2000)
\textsuperscript{16}e.g. O’Meara, B. (2002); O’Meara, B. & Petzall, S. (2001), (2003), (2005), and (2007)
\textsuperscript{17}American Council on Education (2007)
\textsuperscript{18}Rosenzweig, R.M. (1998)
Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in other sectors either. Further, there is also only limited evidence available reporting how the job adverts for VCs make reference to the CEO and more entrepreneurial and managerial roles\textsuperscript{20}. According to Becker\textsuperscript{21}, if universities are to behave more like commercial businesses (and it is assumed that they must, given the new demands placed upon them regarding accountability and funding), then their management must be more similar to that of the private sector. This suggests that it is possible that recruitment methods will be changing in order to attract a broader and different pool of candidates. Of course, understanding the impact of the search and selection mechanisms used is extremely important since they determine not only who is included but also who is excluded\textsuperscript{22} and can be the basis of undesired or unanticipated consequences.

While the literature search did not yield many studies that offered new data on the characteristics, roles and selection of VCs, it is possible to discern certain patterns that emerge. Like Bargh et al\textsuperscript{23}, O’Meara\textsuperscript{24} found Australian VCs were, predominantly, male career academics, appointed in their mid-fifties, who had enjoyed a successful career in higher education prior to incumbency. Most Australian VCs had also been formerly a Deputy or Pro VC. Most VCs had attended either Sydney or Melbourne universities. Indeed, O’Meara found that only the ‘great eight’ Australian universities felt they could ‘afford’ to choose a VC from other and younger smaller ones. The ‘gumtree’ and younger universities saw the reputation of older universities as a ‘bankable commodity’ and sought to appoint VCs from them. The pattern in the UK is similar with post-92s feeling they can benefit by appointing candidates from pre-92s\textsuperscript{25}.

Whilst an arts or science background remained the norm, O’Meara found VCs starting to be recruited from educational or business backgrounds. Sloper\textsuperscript{26} suggested this may reflect a response to perceived changes in the nature of the VCs role. However, this has not been empirically proven. In fact, Soh\textsuperscript{27} found an over-representation of VCs in Australia from the natural and physical sciences and, most notably, from the pure sciences compared to social sciences. She reports science was thought to be ‘of benefit to academic administration through its focus on solutions and answers, teaching and investigative skills, gathering data, analysing it, coming to conclusions and the associated implications, as well as the ability to manage complex concepts’\textsuperscript{28}. Soh also found an under-representation of VCs coming from backgrounds in management and commerce.

It might be assumed that the increased emphasis upon business management in the role of VCs would be reflected in a tendency to recruit those with previous experience of larger scale organisational management outside of higher education, but Bargh et al\textsuperscript{29} found no evidence to support this. Almost one third of UK VCs in the 1990s had no history of previous employment in any other public- or private-sectors. If experience in a civil service post and non-executive directorships in enterprises established by universities is included, two thirds had some non-university employment but rarely with senior executive roles. Interestingly, those leading post-92 universities were twice as likely to have had non-academic experience as their counterparts in pre-92s. In fact, Dolton and Ma\textsuperscript{30} found that, while there had only been a few appointments of VCs with no work experience in the education sector, these appointments had been to post-92s. Clearly, the prior career of VCs still seemed dominated by employment within the higher education sector and few had professional or formal managerial qualifications.

Bargh et al. attributed this recruitment pattern, particularly in pre-92s, to the commonly held view that universities have to be run by academics. In fact, Goodall\textsuperscript{31} found the top research universities in the world systematically appoint top researchers as their VCs. She reports how research universities look for candidates who fit their institutional missions, with being a successful, high profile research academic thought to ‘enhance the appeal of an institution’ for attracting others.

Goodall suggests that two components are involved when leading a research university: managerial experience and inherent knowledge of the core business. In a leading researcher, managerial experience tends to be taken for granted, with most who go on to run major research universities having gained experience in managerial positions on their career path to the top (e.g., a research centre director, as Head of Department or pro-vice-chancellor (PVC)). The inherent knowledge of the core business comes from having been a significant contributor to that business typically for 30 years prior to becoming a VC.
These two components identified by Goodall could be likened to the ‘personal versus positional qualities’ identified by Yelder and Codling. In their investigation of management and leadership in a UK university, they found that, whereas academic leadership is collegiate and vested in the person, managerial leadership is corporate and vested in the position. They claim that the most fundamental principle in leadership is that academic and managerial leadership have separate roles, but that both are valued equally. They found the older, more traditional universities tend to promote elements of academic leadership at the expense of management, whereas the newer universities tend to emphasise the latter.

Most VCs, having followed a ‘traditional’ academic career pathway to the top, may have little external managerial experience, reflected either by professional qualifications or paid employment outside the sector, but as former Heads of Department and/or Deputy/Pro VCs, they have significant, more context-specific, managerial experience internal to academe. Johnson reports current VCs espousing the benefits of learning as ‘manager-academics’ through engagement in practice and through social interaction that is context-specific. It should be noted that rising through the ranks of middle management to attain their top level positions is common in other public- and private-sector ranks of middle management to attain their top level positions is common in other public- and private-sector CEOs. Regarding the internalised VC recruitment strategy of the higher education sector to be atypical or ineffective may be inappropriate.

During the period studied by Bargh et al., career trajectory prior to appointment did not seem to be changing radically but length of time in post was changing. Acknowledging that their figures may have been misleading because they included data from VCs still serving, they found that compared to an average 11-16 years pre-1960, by the 1990’s the average period in office for VCs was less than five years. They found no difference in this shrinkage of the lengths of time in post between pre- and post-92s. Interestingly, Marx reported an average of 4.05 years for public- and private-sector CEOs in the FTSE 100, which was a decrease from the average of 5.6 years identified in 1996. O’Meara and O’Meara and Petzall examining similar time periods also reported Australian VCs serving for shorter periods, on average five years. They also found them being appointed at younger ages (most appointed in their early fifties), and with an increase in the numbers of females and appointments of candidates from non-academic backgrounds starting to be made.

A review of the literature on executive leadership suggests that the frequency of CEO turnover depends on the goals of their organisation; in relation to performance, longer tenures are recommended for organisations which do not require change. Thus, any variation in the term served by VCs may be a reflection of the changing demands placed on universities. For instance, VCs may have been appointed for shorter periods when the role of universities was more turbulent.

Change within commercial organisations has also been addressed in relation to appointing internal versus external successors. Internal succession, or ‘relay CEO successions’ represents a ‘maintenance strategy’ and is recommended when a company is performing at or above stakeholder expectations and does not require change. By appointing an internal successor, the organisational ‘turbulence’ often associated with leadership change is potentially reduced. Moreover, the ‘heir apparent’ may have some on-the-job training through having access to the CEO before assuming the position. On the other hand, selection committees for firms performing at below standard may desire to stimulate change by appointing an external successor. With most VCs having been either former VCs or deputies prior to appointment, they may be regarded as ‘heirs apparent’. Yet, while promotion within the sector is the norm, it is rare for VCs to be promoted from within their own university. In following this strategy, universities may be getting the advantages of continuity and knowledge of the business and culture within the disadvantages of losing the change-potential of the newcomer.

Despite the similarities in demographic characteristics of UK and Australian VCs, a more recent large scale study commissioned by the American Council on Education, exploring the changes in roles of American university presidents (AUPs) since 1986, shows some different patterns. They found that the average mean age of AUPs in 1986 was 52.3 years and was 59.9 years in 2006, with an increase from 14% to 49% of AUPs aged 61 years or older. Unfortunately, the study did not collect data on age of appointment as an AUP. However, AUPs were found to be holding their jobs for longer than any other time during the past 20 years, the average time in office having increased from 6.3 years in 1986, to 8.5 years in 2006.

36 O’Meara, B. (2002)
42 ACE (2007)
The question of whether the VCs or AUPs are serving for longer or shorter terms is difficult to answer. Whilst there have been reports that ‘the terms of office for VCs are getting shorter (typically five-year renewable terms)’, a problem with reporting years in office is that there are several statistical artefacts that may affect the interpretation of results. At any point when data are collected, the length of service of those VCs in post can be calculated. However, the researcher cannot know how many more years they will serve (some may serve many more; others may resign or retire rather quickly). Average lengths of service of current VCs are thus misleading if interpreted as indicators of trends over time (unless one assumes that the cohorts considered at each time point were identical in other respects – e.g. age of initial appointment – and such an assumption cannot be supported). It might be argued that this problem can be overcome by making the calculation of average length of service only on the basis of those who have completed their period as a VC. The problem then revolves around establishing genuine comparability for the time periods over which trends are to be examined. Possibly the most effective way to explore the issue is to take only those VCs who have left their appointment and map length of service against date of appointment, taking into account their age upon appointment (since assumed retirement age is 65 at least in the UK, the older they are on appointment, inevitably the shorter their period in post). When this sort of mapping is done, it might be hypothesised that the most marked feature will be the individual differences in period of service rather than a simple trend to shorter tenure. We return to address this question in our own data analysis.

The ACE study showed that the percentage of female AUPs had more than doubled. In 1986, 9.5% were women compared to 23% in 2006. However, the rate of growth in numbers had slowed in recent years. There was also evidence to show that women AUPs were less likely to have left their appointment and map length of service against date of appointment, taking into account their age upon appointment (since assumed retirement age is 65 at least in the UK, the older they are on appointment, inevitably the shorter their period in post). When this sort of mapping is done, it might be hypothesised that the most marked feature will be the individual differences in period of service rather than a simple trend to shorter tenure. We return to address this question in our own data analysis.

The ACE study, in addition to examining the demographics of AUPs explored their perceptions of their roles. They were most like to cite fundraising as their primary use of time (38%), followed by budget/financial management (35%), community relations (21%) and strategic planning (21%). ‘All aspects’ of fundraising (91%), closely followed by budget/finance (88%), was described as the activity attended to the most. Fundraising was described as the activity for which AUPs felt most unprepared. It was also described as the single greatest challenge. Yet it was also amongst the activities that most AUPs enjoyed - exceeded only by community relations.

Many AUPs perceived their roles as university leaders as having much in common with a CEO in the private sector. They described their roles as acting as the ‘vision’ keeper for the campus, requiring strong commitment and high energy, needing to focus on teamwork or facilitating the work of others, and playing an important part in public discourse. They felt that traditional academic posts may not have provided the best preparation for the role and suggested preparation needed to be more systematic, with mentoring incorporated.

The relationship between an AUP and the governing body was deemed essential to success and, sometimes, also as a barrier to accomplishment. With the life of an AUP described as being ‘one of solitude’, governing bodies needed to be ‘supportive and helpful’, both in the AUP’s personal and professional life. Several AUPs also described how boards ‘needed to be better educated about their roles and the difference between education institutions and business, or some of the professions’.

1.3.2 Leadership Styles

While not core to the literature review, we considered material that examined leadership styles, particularly in education contexts. This material may offer some basis for interpreting what VCs in our study describe as the competences and roles required of contemporary university leaders.

While a full account of this particular research is beyond the scope of this review, it should be noted that pre-1945 leadership research was primarily concerned with identifying traits, behaviours and personality patterns that differentiated leaders from non-leaders. These ‘trait’ theories are based on the assumption that leaders possess certain personal qualities (e.g., extrovert vs. introvert, feeling vs. intuitive, charismatic, creative, visionary), that make them fundamentally different from the rest of the population and particularly suited to running major organisations.
However, one major criticism of the trait models was that they failed to acknowledge the relevance of situational factors\(^{47}\) and, as a result, the contingency theories\(^{48}\) were developed. According to these, leadership cannot be fully explained by personality or behavioural models; the leadership qualities required of a good leader need to be adapted to suit different companies, teams and situations. For example, Fiedler’s contingency model\(^{49}\) attributes group performance to a combination of leadership style (i.e., task- or relationship-motivated) and situational favourableness. In particular: the degree to which the leader is accepted and supported by his/her group members; the extent to which the task is structured and defined; and the ability of the leader to control the group through reward and punishment. Multidimensional models of leadership have also been produced and utilised in educational settings to convey the complexity of leading such organisations. For example, Quinn’s\(^{50}\) model conveys a picture of modern leaders having to play a number of sometimes complementary and, apparently, competing roles. In short, therefore, perhaps the most important lesson learned during the past 60 or so years is that leadership is an ongoing, highly complex interaction between an individual and the social and task environment, requiring a leader who can adapt to this accordingly\(^{51}\). Similarly, Dulewicz & Higgs\(^{52}\) claimed that leaders could not be categorised in terms of simplistic patterns of behaviour that might be labelled habitual “styles”. Rather they suggest that leadership behaviours should be viewed as ranged on a continuum, individuals shift position on the continuum according to circumstances.

Nevertheless, there is a tendency among researchers to revert to attempts to juxtapose contrasting “leadership styles” (e.g. the democratic vs the authoritarian; the task-oriented vs the interpersonal-oriented; and so on) and then to classify individuals in terms of these. In the literature on leadership in higher education, the so-called transformation/transactional/laissez-faire model\(^{53}\) seems the most popular classification system now. Transformational leadership\(^{54}\) has been identified as the most appropriate for generating change\(^{55}\), with the ‘highest transformers’ associated with the greatest successes, both in the UK and US\(^{56}\). Much of the literature on transformational leadership implies that leaders require emotional intelligence\(^{57}\) and whilst not yet reported for the higher education sector, more recent evidence suggests that understanding the emotions of ‘others’ (more often viewed as a ‘female’ trait) in the workplace is fast becoming significant for leaders, particularly if the leader wants to maintain motivation and increase productivity\(^{58}\). According to the emotional intelligence (EI) model, a leader has four fundamental capabilities: self-awareness (personal competence); self-management (personal competence); social awareness (social competence); and relationship management (social competence). There are also two competing models of EI: one which is cognitive based, the other which is based on traits\(^{59}\). A main criticism of the model, however, is that an operational definition of EI is still required.

The translation of emotional intelligence into effective leadership may not be as simple as one might expect. For instance, in his study investigating relationships amongst managerial style, organisational climate and several measures of college-student performance in a sample of 92 British further education college principals, Sala\(^{60}\) found that the more authoritative and the more coaching styles were associated with higher performance and, in particular, with higher rates of student retention. A more authoritative style was also associated with higher support for students and better college management ratings. These findings were consistent with views of US researchers who have argued that ‘effective academic leadership must rely less on popularity and appeasement and more on “strong, confident, risk taking presidents who can capitalise on opportunities and solve problems”\(^{61}\). They also support the idea that presidents should use the authoritative and coaching styles more characteristic of business leaders, rather than affiliative, democratic and pacesetting managerial styles\(^{62}\).

Interestingly, a relationship between leadership style and length of tenure has been reported\(^{63}\): the longer the tenure the less adaptive the leadership style. Sala’s study in UK further education\(^{64}\) also found a relationship between

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47 Sadler, P. (1997)
49 Fiedler, F.E. (1997)
50 Quinn, R.E. (1984)
51 Fiedler, F.E. (1997)
54 Transformational Leadership: Idealized attributes and behaviours - inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration. Transactional Leadership: Contingent Reward; Management-by-Exception (Active)
55 Pounder, J.S. (2001)
60 Sala, F. (2003)
64 Sala, F. (2003)
leadership style and age, with older leaders perceived as showing fewer positive leadership styles compared to younger ones. Nevertheless, older leaders tended to be more successful than younger ones in terms of college management, student support and classroom ratings. The most effective further education leaders were also those who set long-term vision and direction for their institutions.

There has been particular attention given to putative gender differences in leadership style in higher education. Whilst criticised for being research on men by men\(^65\), the ‘traditional’ stereotype of a successful leader is still saturated with archetypically masculine characteristics. For example, according to the ‘femininity/competency’ bind\(^66\), ‘feminine’ behaviour is associated with incompetence, and ‘masculine’ behaviour with competence. Also, while masculinity is associated with task-orientated leadership, femininity is associated with relationship-orientated leadership\(^67\). Yet relationship-orientated leadership, according to Regine and Lewin\(^68\), is vital for business success in complex working environments.

In educational management settings, Hall\(^69\) in the UK and Hope-Arlene\(^70\) in Canada argued that female school principals are more likely to employ ‘power through’ and ‘power within’ approaches to leadership, compared to the ‘power over’ approach associated with the masculine image of power. Coleman’s\(^71\) survey of all-female head teachers in England and Wales indicated a preference for a collaborative, people-oriented style of leadership. Coleman also noted that her results are consistent with other studies of female teachers and principals carried out in USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. An earlier study of UK heads suggested subtle differences in leadership style that were more collaborative and men simply delegatory\(^72\). Growe and Montgomery\(^73\) described how ‘women leaders possess an inclusive style that is to improve the institutions. Some even consider that the educational system continues to be structured as a traditional home: men manage the schools and women nurture the learners’\(^74\).

There are, however, some studies in educational settings which have identified little or no gender differences in leadership\(^75\). Indeed, in her more recent study examining the leadership styles used in a higher education institution which had recently undergone change, Young\(^76\) identified a combination of transformational and transactional leadership behaviours in all senior managers, male and female - over time, transformational attitudes were superseded by transactional styles.

Young found that, in higher education, female managers identified more with male gender paradigms than men, seeing themselves as being more disciplined, evaluative, formal, normative and objective. In contrast, men appeared to identify with more female gender paradigms and female-type leadership. This may be explained by the fact that women managers are more ‘driven’ to succeed, have to work harder to gain promotion, and/or overcome socialisation and gender stereotyping\(^77\).

Given that a female leadership style as an alternative to the ‘traditional’ style has been suggested\(^78\), sometimes female leaders have been said to adopt male styles of leadership only because they are the ‘norm’ in their workplaces. Indeed, in a male-dominated working environment in Australia, Gardiner and Tigge mann\(^79\) found that, whilst male and female leaders did not differ on interpersonal orientation, women felt more pressure than men and reported higher levels of mental ill-health if they used an ‘interpersonally-orientated’ female leadership style. In contrast, men reported lower levels of mental ill-health. Feeling isolated in a male-dominated environment can have a detrimental effect on women’s mental health, lead to increased visibility and consequent attraction of a disproportionate share of attention.

The structuralist theory of leadership behaviour postulates that men and women behave differently in the workplace due to organisational influences. That is, gender differences in leadership occur because the sexes are treated differently in terms of job status, duties, tenure and promotion opportunities. Whilst it has been shown that men and women in other public and private sectors have a similar chance of being successful once considered for promotion to Chair, men tend to be ‘fast-tracked’ through the system and ‘being considered’ is a ‘given’ for a larger proportion of men\(^80\). Our review of the literature suggested a disproportionate

\(^66\) Jamieson, K.R. (1999)
\(^69\) Hall, V. (1996, 1997)
\(^70\) Hope-Arlene, F. (1999)
\(^71\) Coleman, M. (2002); Evetts, J. (1994); Thompson, M.D. (2000)
\(^72\) Coleman, M. (2002); Evetts, J. (1994); Thompson, M.D. (2000)
\(^73\) Growing, R. and Montgomery, P. (2001)
\(^74\) Whiting, R.S. & Lane, K. (1996)
\(^75\) Coleman, M. (2002); Evetts, J. (1994); Thompson, M.D. (2000)
\(^76\) Young, P. (2004)
\(^77\) e.g., Deem, R. et al (2000); Stain, F. (2000)
\(^78\) Trinidad, C. & Normore, A.H. (2005)
number of successful female CEOs in the other public- and private-sectors\textsuperscript{81}. In higher education, Deem\textsuperscript{82} suggested that, as it can take longer for women to reach positions in executive senior management compared to men (particularly in pre-1992 universities), they less frequently have the time available to them to proceed further to, say, VC level.

According to Pounder and Coleman\textsuperscript{83}, modern leaders need to be ‘androgyrous’, able to combine the best of both male and female traits, particularly as modern organisations have multi-gender, multi-national and multi-social environments. This has also been recommended in educational settings\textsuperscript{84}.

\textsuperscript{81} Marx, E. (2003)
\textsuperscript{82} Deem, R. (2001, 2004)
\textsuperscript{83} Pounder, J.S. and Coleman, M.
2. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

In order to examine the characteristics, roles and selection of VCs, we decided to use three complementary methods of data collection. The first entailed collecting archival data, available in the public domain, on the personal characteristics of VCs. These data were amenable to quantitative analyses. The second method involved interviewing both VCs and representatives of the executive search agencies that are active in the recruitment of VCs. These data were subjected to systematic qualitative analysis. The third method focussed upon the content analysis of the job descriptions and person specifications provided in the further particulars for VC posts advertised during the period of the study. The details of the methods used and respondents involved are given below.

2.1 Quantitative Analysis of Characteristics of VCs

The data collected comprised information recorded in Who's Who, supplemented from other sources (e.g. THES, university websites, the Universities UK website and the Internet), about VCs in post during the period 1997 to 2006 inclusive. Given the public sources of the data, it is not surprising that the information largely concerned socio-demographic characteristics rather than details of personality or other types of characteristics.

Based upon previous research, the following main research hypotheses were tested:

- VCs will be appointed at a younger average age than 52 years, with those leading pre-92s appointed at slightly older ages than those in post-92s
- The career preparation for VCs will be predominantly employment in the higher education sector
- VCs will be predominantly appointed from those with a science background
- VCs appointed to post-92s will be more likely to have non-academic experience compared to those appointed to pre-92s
- There will be evidence of a preference for appointing VCs to pre-92s from previous posts in pre-92s, and to post-92s from post-92s

The dataset used in the analysis comprised 255 records of biographical data, including details for 140 current and 115 former VCs in service during 1997-2006 inclusive. The set contained 45 main fields of information, each providing key descriptors of the profiles of VCs, categorised into five key themes:

- **Demographic details** (e.g., age, gender, marital status and age appointed)
- **Career preparation** (e.g., university education, career paths, source of qualifications and area of expertise)
- **Information about the institution** (e.g., classification of appointing university as pre-92, post-92 or post-2003)
- **Whether the university had declared itself to be research intensive or not** (this includes members of the Russell Group and the 94 Group)
- **Service information** (e.g., period in current position, or – for those not still in post by 2007 - completed service)

To enable comparisons in the data to be made, where appropriate we tried to ensure compatibility between our categories of analysis and those used by previous researchers. Full details of the actual field names used in the database, together with a description/definition of the contents are in Appendix II. The database is lodged with the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. The dataset was also rendered amenable to analysis using SPSS for the statistical tests reported later.

Figure 1 (overleaf) shows the majority of VCs in post 1997-2006 (including those appointed to post-2003s) had been appointed between 1997 and 2006 (N=121), 13 were appointed during 1991-1996 and there were outliers appointed in 1988 (N=2) and 1989 (N=1);. The appointment dates for three in post at 2007 and two former VCs were unavailable from the public sources.
2.2 Interviews with VCs

Breakwell had, as part of an earlier study conducted in 2003-04, asked 12 serving (or recently retired) VCs to comment on their role, the core competencies required and the organisation of their senior management team; with a particular emphasis upon what they regarded to be the changes which are occurring and the major levers they use to achieve organisational change. There were a series of reasons why strong conclusions could not be drawn from this initial study. The sample was small and it was not representative but totally opportunistic. The exchanges with the VCs in this initial work were informal, often conversations rather than systematic question and answer sessions. Consequently, not all informants were asked the same questions in the same sequence. Notes were made of their comments either \textit{in situ} or immediately after the exchange but the sessions were not tape recorded. The study can however be regarded as pilot work for the current research. It would be inappropriate to amalgamate the informant pools from the two studies given the lack of commonality in data collection. Nevertheless, material from the earlier study can be sensibly used to support or elaborate findings from the current study. Where this is done later in this report, a rigorous distinction will be made between findings from the earlier study and findings from the current study.

In the current study, 13 additional VCs were interviewed. The informants were chosen in order to ensure some heterogeneity (in length of service, type of institution, former career). Table 1 opposite presents some basic demographic information about the informants. No VC invited to participate in the research refused to do so.

The profile of respondents was not very different from the overall profile of UK VCs during 1997-2006. It could be argued that there should have been more women or more from post-92 universities included in the informant group. However, it should be noted that with such a small sample it would be inappropriate to analyse for differences in responses as a result of demographic characteristics. Instead, informant selection was targeted at achieving diversity and then the analysis is targeted at identifying any commonalities of perspective, while acknowledging where commonality is absent.

All informants were assured that their anonymity would be maintained. All interviews, except one, were conducted by the principal investigator who is also a current VC. While using a fellow-incumbent VC as interviewer is open to criticism, our rationale for adopting this approach was two-fold:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{PERIOD_OF_VC APPOINTMENTS.png}
\caption{PERIOD OF VC APPOINTMENTS}
\end{figure}
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERIES

- It facilitated access to the informant pool and improved participation compliance
- As participants could assume a level of common knowledge in the interviewer, they would be more willing to provide more detail to enable a more in depth analysis to be carried out

All interviews followed the skeleton question protocol given in Appendix III but issues raised by the informant were pursued if necessary. All interviews were tape recorded and were transcribed for analysis. The interviews addressed the following key themes:
- Career prior to becoming a VC
- Core competencies and personal characteristics perceived to be required of VCs
- Perceptions of their role – inside and external to the university
- Comparison of the VC role with that of CEOs in other public- and/or private-sector organisations

### Table 1: Demographics of the 13 Current VCs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender:</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Background:</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Humanities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age appointed to first or current VC appointment 87:</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40-49 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 years</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Mean age of appointment:                           | 52.6488 years |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction of move to current appointment: 88</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From pre-92 to pre-92</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From pre-92 to post-92</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From post-92 to post-92</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Other UK public sector to pre-92</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Service:</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 10 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period appointed:</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-2000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-2000 (including 2000)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of university appointed to:</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1992</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-1992</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

87 Including two VCs who had been VCs previously.
88 Excluding missing data.
• Structure of and relationship with their governing body
• Perceptions of methods used in recruitment of VCs – including personal experiences of executive search agencies
• Career trajectory anticipated after their current post

Some questions were also asked about the structure of and their perception of changes which are occurring in the sector and the major levers VCs use to achieve organisational change. However, since other Leadership Foundation for Higher Education research projects (including Kennie and Woodfield; Smith et al.; Whitchurch; Gosling et al.; Llewelyn; and Bryman) were concurrently examining these areas, we did not focus on these issues in this study.

All interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word format and analysed with the assistance of the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo7. Once imported into NVivo7, each word document was then auto-coded according to the key themes of interest, and manually coded for content. The analyses were conducted independently by both researchers and inter-rater reliability established.

2.3 Interviews with Executive Search Agents

Breakwell had found that most UK VC appointments employ executive search agencies (ESAs) – sometimes known as “head hunters”. Examination of the job advertisements for VC posts indicated that there were a small number of ESAs focussing upon this market. In order to understand their role in the process of VC recruitment, senior representatives from each of the most frequently used ESAs were interviewed. In addition, a small number of representatives from ESAs who are notable in conducting searches for CEOs in other sectors were interviewed. The object in including these ESAs who do not specialise in VC appointments was to understand more about the way the search profession works in general and whether there is anything peculiar about the way it works for universities.

In total, representatives from 9 ESAs were interviewed. Four of these ESAs dominate the market for UK VC search. The others had considerable experience of making appointments at either ‘other’ senior levels within the higher education sector (e.g. appointment of Deans, Deputy/Pro-VCs), and at CEO level in other public- and private-sectors. Table 2 (below) summarises some general information about the ESAs interviewed.

The ESAs interviewed comprised a mixture of old and new, large and small, and UK-only versus international companies. It was notable that interviewees in all cases had a broad range of experiences across the public- and private-sectors. As one ESA specialising in higher education said, having staff at all levels in an organisation and from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences allowed them to ‘work across a very wide range of disciplines and subject areas, inside and outside academia’. Moreover, having some consultants who have held non-executive posts in the private, public and charitable sectors, was seen to give ESAs an ‘in-depth understanding’ of different sectors and the policy developments within them.

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ESAs</th>
<th>AGENCIES EXPERIENCED IN VC SELECTION N=4</th>
<th>AGENCIES WITH EXPERIENCE IN ‘OTHER’ AREAS N=5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximate years established</td>
<td>4 - 50 years</td>
<td>15 - 100 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of no of employees</td>
<td>15 - 1300</td>
<td>20 - 9,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where based</td>
<td>UK only and international</td>
<td>UK, Ireland and international</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of annual turnovers</td>
<td>£1.2M to £30M</td>
<td>£2.5M - £30M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General background of employees</td>
<td>Educated, at least, first degree level,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with broad experience in a variety of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fields, including senior management, in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>public and private and not-for-profit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sectors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years experience of interviewees</td>
<td>4 - 10 years</td>
<td>1 - 10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While ESAs were assured of confidentiality, they recognised that maintaining anonymity for the four that are most active in VC recruitment would be impossible. Of course, particular comments will not be attributed to specific ESAs but it is inevitable that part of the body of findings will clearly emanate from these four ESAs. All ESAs interviewed should have an opportunity to see this report before its publication, and have agreed that it is an accurate reflection of their comments and they have no objection to it going into the public domain.

The semi-structured interviews with ESAs were based on the question protocol presented in Appendix III. Each interview covered:

- The size, structure and nature of the business of the firm
- The role of ESAs in searches in relation to the client (i.e. in relation to the appointment of VCs, the university) and the candidates
- The methodology of searches – identifying what is wanted and identifying where it can be found
- The characteristics usually seen to be necessary in VCs (or other types of CEO)

Five ESA interviews were conducted by one researcher, the rest by the other. All were face-to-face, except one (which had to be done over the telephone). All except two were tape recorded. In those that were not taped, complete notes were taken in situ.

All records of the interviews were transcribed and analysed with the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo7, and content analysed. Both researchers coded the transcripts and reasonable inter-rater reliabilities were achieved.

2.4 Content Analysis of VC Job and Person Specifications

Twenty-three UK VC posts were advertised during the period of this study (October 2005 to February 2007). Nine others had been advertised during September 2004 – September 2005. Further particulars for each of these 32 posts were acquired. Typically, these included both a description of the key elements of the job and identified what characteristics were sought in the person to be appointed. All job and person specifications were transcribed and subjected to content analysis using NVivo7.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the type of university and the ESA involved in these 32 posts. ESAs were used in 30 out of the 32 appointments. Four key ESAs were working with universities to appoint VCs during our study identified. They were: Heidrich & Struggles International; Odgers, Ray and Berndston; The Perrett Laver Partnership; and Saxton Bamphylde Hever. Fourteen of the 30 searches involving ESAs were done by the Perrett Laver Partnership, and this company accounted for 61% of all searches for VCs in the post-92 sector during the period. In the pre-92s, 36% were conducted by Saxton Bamphylde Hever.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of appointing university:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-92 Russell</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-92, excluding Russell</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-92, excluding post-2003</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-2003</td>
<td>4</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If research led or not:</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research led</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-research led</td>
<td>25</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source acting for appointment:</th>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>University (in-house)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidrich &amp; Struggles International</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odgers, Ray and Berndston</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Perrett Laver Partnership</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saxton Bamphylde Hever</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomson Partners</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of advertisement:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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</table>
3. FINDINGS

This study used a variety of methods to collect data relevant to its central questions concerning the characteristics, roles and selection of UK VCs. The approach to reporting the findings will be to integrate data collected by different methods in order to construct answers to these questions. The first section deals with characteristics, competences and roles of VCs based on the quantitative analysis of archival data, what VCs themselves say, what ESAs say they look for and what the person specification in job further particulars call for. Section two uses the qualitative analyses of the two sets of interviews and of the job details to explore the selection of VCs.

3.1 Characteristics, Competences and Roles of VCs

We start with a summary of the quantitative analysis of the archival data on the socio-demographic characteristics of VCs in post 1997-2006. These data do not offer any understanding of the roles that VCs play. A more comprehensive description of the data is provided in the full report (see also, Breakwell and Tytherleigh, in press)90. To highlight changes that have taken place, the data are summarised here in terms of similarities and differences to data collected on VC characteristics in former years.

3.1.1 Similarities

Ethnicity, Domestic Status and Age: Virtually all VCs appointed since 1997 are white. Most are either married or living with a partner (78%; 15% data missing) and have children (69%; 9% data missing). The average age of current VCs in our sample (N=122) was 57.76 years; ages ranged from 45-69 years, with both the youngest and oldest VCs being men. At the time of our study, 20% of serving VCs were aged 61 or older, this compares with 49% of AUPs (ACE, 2007).

Academia and Oxbridge: For most, the prior career is in academia, with all but two VCs appointed since 1997 having post-graduate qualifications. Most hold a professorship (82%). The majority of VCs appointed since 1997 had been formerly Assistant, Deputy or Pro-VCs (45%) or former VCs (23%); this was particularly evident in post-92s. This includes six pre-92 VCs who were former VCs of overseas universities. As of 2006, we found no VCs of post-92s appointed from overseas. We found few had professional management qualifications and there was very little evidence of non-academic experience outside of higher education. This was particularly noticeable in post-92s, where 94% were appointed from within the higher education sector, compared to 80% in pre-92s. However, all VCs of post-2003s were appointed from within the sector. Experience of Oxford or Cambridge (Oxbridge) at either undergraduate or postgraduate level is a marker for VCs: 23% were Oxbridge undergraduates and 28% had been postgraduates. VCs of pre-92s were also more than twice as likely to have had experience of Oxbridge.

Intra-sub-sector Recruitment: The direction of moves from former to current universities (excluding those automatically appointed VC as principals of former polytechnics when their institutions were translated into universities), pre-1997 and post-1996 is shown in Table 4 (below). Evidence for a continued intra-sub-sector recruitment strata still remains (Giddens, 1974) – VCs are recruited from pre-92s to pre-92s and from post-92s to post-92s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORMER AND CURRENT INSTITUTION TYPE</th>
<th>FORMER UNIVERSITY-TYPE</th>
<th>CURRENT UNIVERSITY-TYPE</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VC appointments made up to and including 1996 (N=72)</td>
<td>Pre-92</td>
<td>Pre-92</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-92</td>
<td>Post-92</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-92</td>
<td>Pre-92</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-92</td>
<td>Post-92</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC appointments made from 1997-2006 (N=97)</td>
<td>Pre-92</td>
<td>Pre-92</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-92</td>
<td>Post-92</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-92</td>
<td>Post-92</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-92</td>
<td>Pre-92</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1.2 Differences

**Gender:** Most VCs are male (85%). However, compared to Bargh et al’s findings, and also to our data for VCs appointed from 1991-1996, there was an increase post-92s in the appointment of women. Women were appointed to 6% of VC posts 1991-96 compared to 15% thereafter. Most notably, since 1997, relatively more women were appointed to pre-compared to post-92s. Women now lead three research-intensive universities. The mean age of appointment was older for women than men (54.71 compared to 53.77 years). Women VCs were less likely to be on public record as in long term relationships or to have children than their male counterparts. 96% of men compared to 68% of women report that they are either married and/or living with a partner, and 81% of men compared to 50% of women report having children.

**Discipline:** In contrast to earlier studies, we did not find that the majority of VCs appointed since 1997 came from science backgrounds. Rather, the highest numbers of VCs (39%), including all of the 17 female VCs in the sample, came from social science backgrounds. Figure 2 (above) shows the breakdown of academic backgrounds by university type for VCs (irrespective of gender) appointed since 1997.

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**Age of appointment**: Bargh et al (2000) reported different mean ages of appointment for VCs at pre-92 (53 years) and post-92 (50 years) institutions. We found the mean age of appointment since 1997 was 54 years, with no significant difference between pre- and post-92s ($F(1,123)=0.449$; NS). Combining our data with that of Bargh et al, Figure 3 profiles the mean ages of appointment by decade since 1960 broken down by institution type. There is some evidence of a trend in post-92s to appoint at older ages from the 1970s.

**Length of Service**: Whether VCs are serving for shorter lengths of time is an interesting issue. In the literature review, the problems with interpreting data on the question were outlined. While the statistical artefacts discussed earlier make it impossible to draw robust conclusions, Table 5 shows a trend of decreasing years served over the three time periods. Indeed, our analysis of service years for VCs appointed from 1991-1996 only (including data for former and current VCs still serving) shows an average of 8.46 years. With Bargh et al.\(^92\) having reported an average period in office of less than five years for this time period, we assume that our results reflect how their earlier study had captured VCs early in their tenure who subsequently stayed in post. Our own data for current VCs, however, remains subject to the same problem of interpretation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period Appointed</th>
<th>COMPLETED SERVICE YEARS FOR FORMER VCS ONLY</th>
<th>YEARS IN POST AS AT 2006 FOR CURRENT VCS ONLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1991</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-1996</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-2006</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^92\) Bargh, C. et al. (2000)
To further explore whether the decreasing trend in service years may be explained by age at appointment, a Pearson’s correlation, partialling out the effects of age appointed, was carried out. A significant negative relationship between the year of appointment and years of service remained ($r = -0.880; N=106, p<0.0001, r^2 = 0.77$, representing a large effect), which suggests that the decreasing trend in years service is not explained by the age at which appointment was made.

3.1.3 VCs’ Perceptions of Characteristics, Competences and Roles

The archival data provide information on a relatively narrow range of characteristics associated with VCs. It does not deal with the role of VCs. Breakwell\textsuperscript{93} reported what the 12 VCs in her initial study had suggested were the competencies and characteristics that they believed VCs need to possess. While describing the competences required of VCs, informants were clearly also identifying parts of the roles played by VCs – the roles determine the competences required. Having emphasised the limitations of her sample structure and the data collected, Breakwell identified themes in what they said:

**Vision:** Setting and maintaining a “vision” for their institution, persuading others to support it and bring it about, these are prime imperatives in the role of VCs. Knowing that this was true and believing it to be the key to success, was common across VCs (though the terminology that they used differed). Translating this into a set of competences or characteristics that might be needed was not so simple. However, respondents were clear that the manner of building the vision (not just the substantive content of the vision) was context-specific. The skill lies in understanding the context in which you are working and moving towards your goals within the contexts that it creates. Building a vision is one thing, negotiating the environmental constraints so that it is possible to pursue it is quite another. Both activities are required. This is tied to a subsidiary characteristic they acknowledge is required in a VC: since circumstances change quickly, the VC must be flexible, adaptable, and the vision, in its entirety, cannot be a fixed thing.

**Operational management:** Bargh et al\textsuperscript{94} said “VCs define their roles as predominantly strategic while spending most of their time on routine management”. This tension was still prevalent. The VCs consulted were not at all removed from the operational management of their institutions. Yet they were also pivotal to external relations and strategy creation. In the main, they did not subscribe (at least in their own action) to the distinction between chief executive and chief operating officer that is so common now in commercial contexts. Where the distinction was in the process of being created, it had largely been imposed through the action of the Chair of the governing body. Relinquishing day-to-day operational control seems quite difficult for most of the VCs consulted. Of course, sampling bias may mean this conclusion is not generalisable.

**Governors:** Most VCs consulted commented that a vital component of their role was to relate effectively with the lay governors of their institution. The relationship with the Chair of the governing body was very important. Managing that relationship properly was fundamentally important to the efficient functioning of the institution. Very experienced VCs talked of having established a partnership with their Chair.

**Fundraising:** There was a recurrent theme across the exchanges that fundraising was a new and important component of the VC’s role. Willingness to devote time to the process was seen to be essential. There was also a suggestion that fundraising was something of a black art, not routinised within UK institutions, and that the process of “major gift” negotiation, involving “the ask”, was quite difficult for VCs. It was noted that the push to have the VC more involved in fundraising is associated with a push to shift the role to one that focuses more upon external relations and less on operational management. Interestingly, the Council for Industry and Higher Education\textsuperscript{95} has claimed that many universities in the UK are appointing “Deputy Vice-Chancellors who perform the academic and administrative role, leaving the VC freer to take on fundraising”. At least three of the VCs consulted were explicitly questioning how far should a VC now be an operational manager.

**Power:** Knowing who has the power to give you what you want or to make what you want ultimately available is another competence VCs need. This applies inside and outside of the institution.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility:** This was discussed in many ways but the common factor was the belief that the community of senior academics must trust a VC - if the VC is to be successful. To do this the VC must speak the language of the senior academics and gain their support. Some respondents talked of credibility rather than trust. Some

\textsuperscript{93} Breakwell, G.M. (2004)
\textsuperscript{94} Bargh, C. et al (2000)
\textsuperscript{95} CIHE (2004)
talked about consistency and certainty in decision-making. Yet all were, in reality, concerned with assuring that the academic community had confidence in the VC. However, every VC consulted had a different recipe for gaining confidence. The role of effective communication was highlighted. Most commented that achieving good communication structures in an organisation as diverse as a university was – while of paramount importance – virtually impossible.

While Breakwell’s earlier study offers some insights into the way VCs understand their role and the core competences and characteristics it requires, the current study provides a much more systematic database and analysis. Breakwell and Tytherleigh\(^\text{96}\) reported the core competencies that the 13 VCs in this study perceived were necessary, together with the relationship between competencies needed and role requirements. A full analysis of the interviews, including material on characteristics, competences and roles is available in the full report\(^\text{97}\). This provides substantial quotations from the interviews. However, a selective summary of that material is presented here, emphasising the recurrent themes that emerge from the interviews.

**Key Characteristics, Competencies and Roles:** The most frequently reported characteristics and competences in relation to roles are shown in Figure 4. The scale represents the number of informants mentioning each characteristic. These 15 have been categorised into four main areas: academic-related, business-related, management-related and personal.

**Academic-related characteristics:** The emphasis on academic credibility remains, with most VCs subscribing to the view that universities need to be led by academics, with academic credibility providing the ‘respect’ and ‘influence’ that a VC requires. As one VC said: without academic credibility it is ‘extremely difficult’ to be successful, and there are ‘plenty of examples that prove that if you haven’t got it then you can’t do it’. This was seen to be because ‘universities are full of very clever and creative people who .. don’t have to be led by their vice-chancellor because of who they are’.

It was described how the primary way VCs can ‘exercise leadership is by persuasion’ and a necessary condition for doing this was ‘by being a person that other people respect’. A VC without academic credibility was a ‘big risk’ because it is ‘academic influence’ that counts. Moreover, whilst several definitions of ‘academic credibility’ were used (ranging from having been a very successful researcher oneself to someone with only experience of post-doctoral work in universities), it was also stated that academic credibility ‘is difficult to explain’ and something you have to ‘understand’.

\(^97\) Appendix X of the full report – available at http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/publications/research.html
The skills acquired through academic experience were considered absolutely essential to understanding how a university works. With the environment in which a VC works very much 'grounded in critical analysis', VCs were seen to need to be 'questioning' and analytical. They need to be 'very sharp in dissecting somebody else's' work, amongst other things, as a way of getting 'improved performance'. Having 'hands-on knowledge' of what is happening within the university and being able to, at least 'understand the language and to make judgements' about whoever comes through the door and know something about 'what the knock on consequences might be' was also deemed essential. Indeed, when it comes to other portfolios and complexities of funding streams which VCs have to deal with, being 'financially aware' was deemed essential. A VC didn't need to be a 'financial expert'; indeed, it was described how there are some 'very very successful non-numerate VCs' who rely on a 'very good Finance Director' being around. However, VCs have to have 'sufficient intelligence' to be able to ask questions of their Director of Finance 'to be able to put him or her on the spot'. Without having 'a handle on the finance', VCs were 'lost… immediately in trouble'. A VC who gets him/herself into 'unsignalled, unannounced financial difficulties immediately loses a degree of credibility - both with the governing body and with the institution'.

**Business-related characteristics:** Notwithstanding the emphasis placed on academic credibility, it was also recognised that more recent changes within the higher education sector require universities to behave in a more business-like manner; despite working in an environment which was described as much 'messier' than other public- and private-sectors. So the role of VC was now felt to be more aligned to that of a corporate CEO. In particular, with increasing emphasis placed on universities for 'brand purification', together with the numbers and complexities of funding streams which VCs have to deal with, being 'financially aware' was deemed essential. A VC didn’t need to be a 'financial expert'; indeed, it was described how there are some 'very very successful non-numerate VCs' who rely on a 'very good Finance Director' being around. However, VCs have to have 'sufficient intelligence' to be able to ask questions of their Director of Finance 'to be able to put him or her on the spot'. Without having 'a handle on the finance', VCs were 'lost… immediately in trouble'. A VC who gets him/herself into 'unsignalled, unannounced financial difficulties immediately loses a degree of credibility - both with the governing body and with the institution'.

With universities becoming 'more and more sophisticated in what they have to do and how they have to do it', the decrease in funds from government sources had created a 'whole question of leadership in a kind of world of multiple funders, in a world where the future is a bit more make or break than it used to be' and where new VCs thinking of embarking on the role 'need to become prepared for that and have an opportunity to stand back and think about it a bit more than they have done in the past'. It was described how the 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks' attitude often held by older VCs needed to be removed, updated and regularly assessed, making it a 'lot tougher on [new] VCs'.

Finding 'individuals who have got both academic credibility and business acumen, but don't actually sit at either end of the spectrum', however, was recognised to be not an easy task. Indeed, one VC described this as a 'current issue' that a lot of ESAs are 'having trouble with'. It was also described by ESAs as being something which universities have too high an expectation of finding and can result in universities looking for one of at the expense of the other.

As universities have started to engage in a broader range of subsidiary business activities (including running research and science parks as landlords; licensing intellectual property and creating spin out companies; and, operating venture capital funds), the need for the VC to be able to manage the experts that the institution employs in these areas has emerged. The VC was not thought by the interviewees to need to be an expert in these areas but a broad understanding of them was thought necessary.

**Managerial/Leadership characteristics:** In terms of the management/leadership split, one VC described the role as being 20% management, 80% leadership, and with a 'very important distinction between the two'. Leading their universities outside the HE sector, VCs needed to play a very 'visible', 'transparent' and 'ambassadorial' role, securing the 'university profile', not only nationally and internationally, but also locally within 'its local environment'. Related to this, VCs needed to be prepared to 'put themselves on a platform' within their institutions 'and give an account to anyone who wants to turn up'. They also had to be prepared to take 'whatever comes'. Indeed, this change in accountability of VCs was described as operating closer to the 'business model - the 'VC as CEO' is now 'not constrained in the same way by Government structures as they were in the past, and should be able, although not always true, be able to work with a smaller Council to deal with the other major policy or issues'.

Compared to approximately 15 years earlier, when it was described that many VCs saw their role as being very much more managerial and with staff expecting a 'lot of hands-on management', whilst managing academics was still considered to be 'one of the fundamental parts of the (VCs) job, particularly in research-strong institutions', it was felt that VCs now needed to be 'out of the place more than in the
place. Spending time outside the institution (described as about 33% excluding evenings, by one, and 40% by another) was described as ‘institutionally beneficial’. It was also felt, however, that institutions don’t always get that and that the VC has to explain within the institution why ‘the division of [their] time is appropriate’.

The increased use of senior management teams (SMTs) allowed VCs to ‘step back from the house-keeping’ and to make sure that the house-keeping structures in place are ‘actually the ones that deliver what [the university] needs’. It was emphasised how a VC needs to have ‘confidence’ in his/her team. The VC’s purpose is then to make sure that all team members understand their roles and feel sufficiently ‘empowered’ to deliver. The most frequently reported characteristic was the need for VCs to be ‘empowering’, particularly when making change: ‘it is very rare that I would actually say that I, the VC, did that’. It is much more likely that, well, ‘we’ve done this’. ‘We achieve things through other people… essentially to work with the team’. Empowering by delegation, and by giving ‘praise’ and ‘encouragement’ was described. Indeed, one VC described ‘watching it work as a team (is)... like flying’. An effective delegator, however, needs to be very clear about his/her expectations: people need to understand what is ‘expected of them’ and what represents ‘good’ and ‘less good’ performance. One VC spoke most eloquently about the role of the VC being that of the conductor in a great orchestra – seeing the work in its entirety and pulling in each instrument to contribute its part at exactly the right time and in the right way. The conductor does not need to be able to play each instrument but needs to know what each can do and how it should be used to produce the whole effect.

The size and structure of SMTs reported varied. Most teams had a core of at least 6-7 members, including the VC, and comprised three deputies/PVCs, a Director of Finance and a Registrar/Secretary/Clerk to the Governing Body. The frequency of meetings between the VC and the SMT also varied, with one VC describing how this was influenced by the degree of confidence he had in his team. The majority of interviewees described one of the important jobs for a new VC as to change the membership and structure of the SMT. Establishing the form for the team and choosing its personalities was seen to be a vital step in creating the VC’s platform for directing the institution. Not all moved immediately to change the SMT but many did.

It was suggested that one of the key differences between managing a university and running a business is the number of committees. Compared to other types of businesses, ‘even very large businesses’, universities are managed through large numbers of committees. Being able to work with and through the committee culture was described as an important competence. Being a good chairperson of committees was considered a significant advantage. However, virtually all the interviewees were frustrated with the amount of committee-work they were required to do. Several were in the process of reducing the number of committees in their university management structures. The need for flexibility and speed of decision-making in the modern university climate was seen as antithetical to the committee culture. Yet, it was acknowledged that persuading the academic community of the need to change was often best done through using the committee processes. Several supported the idea that the committee process would often produce better solutions to problems than those proposed initially by senior management. Their analyses of the role of the committee processes suggest that these VCs saw the committees as the ground where executive authority and collegiality worked through their compromises.

Of course, there are many types of committee in universities. The VCs were acutely aware that they need the skills to work with committees of all types but the most important were the Senate (or Academic Board) and the Governing Body (or Council). Even in a small group of VCs, it turned out that there was considerable variation in the sizes of their governing bodies (ranging from 15 to 34 members). VCs did not agree about the optimum size, though all were aware of the recommendations that had recently come from the Lambert Review. The mixture of lay and non-lay members differed. The way committees subordinate to the governing body were structured also differed widely. Frequency of meetings of the governing body also varied.

Fortunately, the purpose of this report is not to analyse the workings of the governance structure of universities since the variety does pose problems. Looking at the governance structure from the point of view of the characteristics and competences required of the VC, the most important issue seems to revolve around being able to establish and maintain clearly defined boundaries around the responsibility and role of the VC and those of the members of the governing body. Most of the interviewees spoke of the parallel between the executive and non-executive member functions in a commercial company’s board. Some had found that some of their governing body members, on occasion, failed to adhere to the distinction. This highlighted
for them that one role of the VC was to ensure that governing body members were fully informed about university strategy and the context in which it operated in order that they could effectively comment on performance and contribute to setting future direction. The other aspect of this process was ensuring that governing body members did not ‘stray into attempts at operational management’. One VC described wanting Council members ‘who actually want to contribute something’ and ‘have a range of skills’ that they know how to use them; it was stated how universities are not very good at using the skills that their governing bodies have. Another described how he needed to be able to respect and relate with the members of his governing body ‘on a personal level, not just on a professional level’.

Overall, the selection of members for the governing body was ‘really, really important’, where the ‘chemistry’ had to be right. Particularly since, as one VC said, ‘the governance model isn’t always clear in many universities’. He felt that some top representatives act a bit like stakeholders, where the model is ‘a bit of a kind of Local Authority Governance model’. Others, he claimed, use a ‘Performance Management model, where the role of the governing body is ‘limited to developing and monitoring a set of [performance] indicators for the institution’.

While the size of the sample of VCs in this study would preclude suggestions about the differences between pre- and post-92 universities in the perceived role of their governing bodies, it would be inappropriate not to mention that the history of the role of the governing bodies in the two sets of institutions is very different.

The relationship between the Chair of the governing body and the VC was seen ‘as absolutely critical’. Understanding each others roles was also considered ‘absolutely essential’ and ‘muddling (them) doesn’t help’. One VC said: ‘In a very early discussion I said “look, I’m the Chief Executive, you’re the Chairman”; we understand our roles’. Another described how, if he could avoid it, he would never work with a Chair who had been a CEO, particularly a ‘major CEO’ who ‘can’t keep his hands out of it’.

Another said:

‘you want somebody who knows that he is not a CEO, .. the relationship with this person which is actually two-fold. One, I want him to agree with the direction we are moving in and to want to talk to me and give feedback to me about whether this is moving in the right direction. I want him, at a private personal level, to be putting me under a bit of pressure to show him what is happening. Secondly, I want that, at a personal level, to be a relationship in which I can turn to him when I have got difficult decisions to make either for (a) advice; I want somebody who I deeply respect and for him to give me advice in an area where there is hardly anybody else I can talk to about it. But […] he will support me when there are difficult things to be done and the Chairman can often, actually, appear as the front for the VC. To be able to say “I am sorry, I could never get that through Council” to people who, you know… even if I didn’t think it was right, Council would force me to do it’.

The capacity to work well with the Chair of the governing body is an essential competence for a VC. Since Chairs may change during the tenure of a VC, this is not just a matter of achieving a ‘match’ with a single incumbent – serial marriages are often required.

VCs differed in how they built what most saw as a partnership. One met with his Chair once a fortnight and for a couple of hours; this VC described his governing body as providing a ‘useful touch stone’, using them ‘as a sounding board acting as a check on judgment’. Another VC reported meeting with his Chair once a month and for an hour and a half. He described his agenda as being ‘just to put him in the big picture of some of the big things that are going on. And also to tell him about some of the tricky things that are going on which, maybe, aren’t very big but could become noisy and, therefore, he should know about … and in that context I want to seek his advice’. Others, working with busy Chairs, kept in touch outside of the normal meeting cycle through email and phone calls whenever issues emerged.

**Personal characteristics:** Interviewees were cautious about generalising about the personal characteristics needed to be a successful VC. They indicated that they recognised the vast array of differences between current incumbents. One said: ‘You can look round and see people – there are plenty in my area – who are seen to be extremely effective as VCs, and they seem to have completely different characteristics and skill sets’. Yet, they did identify some commonalities.

Being self-confident, acting with confidence and, in turn, instilling confidence in others were the most frequently mentioned personal characteristics. One said: ‘You obviously need to be able to ride over incredibly difficult situations that
some of us sometimes have to face, and be able to sustain a degree of self-confidence through it. Not an unrealistic degree... that absolutely has to be balanced by an ability to say 'this is an awful mess' or 'we have got this wrong' or, if necessary, 'I can't cope and I am going to have to find somebody to help me cope with it'. You really need to be able to... Actually, that is part of self-confidence isn't it? It is characteristic of a truly self-confident person... that you don't have to feel that you have got to be able to cope with everything and do everything right. So I think you have to have that. And the resilience that, I guess, goes alongside that: Further, several alluded to the fact that 'a successful VC also couldn't afford to be a worrier'; a VC who was 'would be dead quite quickly'.

By never being able to please everybody all of the time, on occasions VCs needed to be 'thick-skinned' and, at times, not always very 'nice'; 'And that is the traditional CE role. You have got to be able to say No, you have got to be firm, you have got to make decisions at times with imperfect information and be firm about it. So you can move on.' As ambassador for their institution, they also needed to be 'outgoing' and 'gregarious', with being able to 'enthusiastic' about their institution 'absolutely essential'. The significance of good interpersonal skills was emphasised in one way or another by all the interviewees.

Having said this, the same VC did acknowledge that, whilst it would be quite difficult [to be a VC] if you were a shy person who felt uncomfortable in company, successful VCs 'who were much more quiet' had been observed. As such, he felt that whilst having to like people was important, being a 'good communicator in whatever style you feel comfortable with', was what mattered most.

Whilst stated explicitly by only one VC, the need to have considerable intellectual stamina underlay several of the comments made. One said: 'you have to have enormous intellectual stamina, as well as physical stamina because, I don't know about you, but I work awfully long days. I work every day of the week and I know that many people do. And it is not work in the sense of dragging myself around the world, it is also dragging my mind around an infinite array of different problems that can expand from... you know... what are we going to do with the £20M investment in a new academic building to why is it that the post isn't being delivered'. Another commented: 'The 'fast moving situations' of today's universities also required a leader 'capable of dealing with, not just complexity, but things which shift from one thing to another very quickly'. Another said: 'a very very important one is, not only an ability to, but a comfortableness with keeping an awful lot of things going at the same time. If you are the sort of person that starts a task, and that has a beginning, a middle and an end, and feels very uncomfortable about having to drop it halfway through and do something else, then this is not the job for you. It would just drive you crazy. So it is what I would call the ability to keep spinning plates going. It is an ability, in any one day, to do an enormous diversity of things for half an hour each, and there is this dashing around, spinning a plate here, spinning a plate there, and this is often working with colleagues to do this, working through colleagues, but actually to keep a huge range, an increasingly wide range of activities on the go simultaneously, is also really important'.

Having 'sheer physical stamina' was also emphasised by another VC, who described the role as 'a very stamina-sapping job', not 'a job for an elderly retired sort of civil servant like the VCs used to be in the fifties'. Another said: 'resilience... (is important)... because I think if you don't have it you just get knocked around too much'.

Flexibility was also seen as vital: 'you have got to be very flexible because the skill set that the institution might have, with good reason, sought when the VC was appointed, might not be quite the skill set which is required three or four years downstream because the institution has shifted, or just because the external circumstances have shifted. So you have got to hire somebody who has a range of resources and, I think, over his or her career has demonstrated a capacity to adapt and to develop'.

Having the capacity to be a 'visionary leader' was noted by all. The nuances around what this entailed differed between interviewees. One talked about being 'a big picture person'. Another explained the complexities of timescale when thinking about vision: 'I think you have got to be able to navigate the, sort of, extraordinary binary in universities, between the challenges of the moment of which most universities are always acute, but recognising that most of the important decisions that you take, apart from the firefighting ones, will either have their impact late in your vice-chancellorship, or their impacts on your successor, or your successor's successor. And I think that is a real challenge and particularly now because of some of the sort of rhetoric we use around university management in terms of brand,
positioning, mission and so forth, if one is not careful the expectation develops that, somehow, you can turn these things round over a 6, 12 or 18 month period. And if it is anything that, as it were, goes to the heart of the university, then almost certainly those timescales are not realistic. So I think, as it were, dealing with the day to day, on the one hand, whilst with your senior team, your Governing Body, the wider institution, keeping what you might broadly call the corporate planning process focussed on the right time horizon is, I think, a real challenge.

Internal vs External Roles: Several VCs described an ‘internal leadership and senior management role’ versus an ‘external promotional, presentational and ambassadorial role’ of the VC. This internal role required a VC able to ‘identify and focus on the priorities to take the university forward’ in a strategic way. In contrast, the external role required a VC good at ‘promoting and communicating the vision for the university to an increasingly large and complex, and often mutually disagreeing, set of stakeholders’. Again, this latter role was ‘very visible’ and had to be ‘transparent’.

A significant and emergent theme throughout the interviews, described explicitly by three different VCs, was the cyclical pattern of the VC’s role. One described it as being ‘a five year cycle’, where a VC: ‘… starts off by coming in, looking at the internal organisation. You have got 2 or 3 big problems internally, and you tend towards being a bit inward for a period of time whilst sorting those issues out. But, I think, after that period of time you, then, have got things running and you have got confidence and you are happy how the place is organised and happy how it is running… 16-18 months gives you just enough time to sort out the internal things so that it runs how you want it, and then I think you start poaching more outside’. A second VC described the ‘enormous rush of adrenaline’ which all new VCs should feel at the start of their vice-chancellorship. This lasts about 6-9 months; any longer is ‘not good for the institution, it is not good for your health’. He also described how VCs who don’t experience this rush ‘shouldn’t, probably, be in it [the job]’. According to a third VC, the first ‘phase’ of the job is devoted to ‘restructuring and making your mark’. He described this period as being very ‘hands-on’, where ‘you have to be there all the time’. However, ‘once you’ve got your team in place’ and you can ‘walk away’, ‘essentially, the day job [can] become very boring’.

The life-cycle model suggests that VCs may need different competences in different stages of their incumbency. The idea that the individual grows into the role as the role itself changes is not uncommon. The implications for individuals that take on more than one vice-chancellorship could be interesting. For instance, the life-cycle might be condensed. This would have implications for the institutions they lead second time around. Two of the interviewees had been VC twice. There was evidence in their comments that they were able more readily to complete the “internal reorganisation” phase in their second institution.

Comparison of the role of the VC with CEOs in other sectors: Seven of the interviewees had experience as CEOs (or the equivalent) of other public or private sector organisations. While there were obvious similarities to other organisational contexts, across all interviewees, the consensus was that universities were “enormously” different. One former CEO of another public-sector organisation described how leading universities was much ‘messier’ partly because you never know your income accurately. Compared to other sectors, some VCs felt that university leaders were more answerable and the decision-making processes much slower. However, there were others who felt that VCs still had more power and were much better able to get things done. One VC, appointed from a large-scale public-sector organisation, described how the biggest difference between leading a university compared to leading in other public sectors as having to be ‘much more operational’ and ‘much more hands on’. He also described how you couldn’t simply ‘assume’ that things were done by asking in universities and that as the leader, you had to be ‘much more involved in the detail’. Moreover, compared to leaders of other sectors, VCs were described as having to be ‘strangely more visible’ and more formal in their role: ‘There was a requirement to be visible, to be the [VC], as it were, and that came as a bit of a shock to me because, although I was quite senior in my previous job, it was all very informal and, you know, it was all kind of team work and first names, and no one standing on ceremony in order to get the job done. But here I found there was a kind of, a great sense of tradition around these jobs which surprised me a little bit’.

This point also emphasises the ‘lonely’ aspect to the role of VC. The traditions and customs associated with the role push the incumbent towards isolation. This does not entail operational isolation (since even the minutiae of the university life traffics across the VCs desk). It is a form of psychological isolation required if the authority of the role is to be maintained.
Leadership Styles: Asked about their leadership styles, the VCs tended to deny they had any one style. Several talked about how their style was tailored to the task and those who had to be led. “It is horses for courses. It is a matching process”. Several talked about how their leadership style had changed during their career, especially after becoming a VC or a CEO in another organisation earlier. One said: ‘I remember one of the first testing… I was relatively early in my career and I came out, then, as high-supportive, low-directive… In some ways I wasn’t surprised about that. You know, I only had those couple of terms as a HOD, after then I led a pretty good research group. And if you want to lead a successful research group, you are high-supportive, low-directive - almost by definition. … And I suspect a lot of academics’ first experience of management and leadership is in research and they discover that high-supportive, low-directive is very effective. And I took that style into being a Deputy VC and, after a year or so, people would say to me in the Administrative functions, ‘look, you are great in giving us feedback, you are really encouraging and we like that, but we would just like it if you would tell us what the bloody hell we are supposed to’. And I realised that there are groups of people who really appreciate a high directive as well. So, I hope … I try to sustain a high supportive because it’s me, that’s the way I am; it is something I can do. But, I try to bury the amount of directive according to who I am dealing with. I try not, for example, to tell my Deans how to run their faculties because I think, you know, the Dean of the Business School ought to know better how to run a business school than I do. But, when it comes to staffing the more support functions, I learned that it is really helpful to them if you say I want this’. Being clear, direct and overtly leading were seen to be advantages: ‘The other thing which if you ask me, and you could ask me the question, about my leadership style, is that I think it is very much upfront. That’s, again, the way I am. If there is something to be done, I guess I like to be in the front line of doing it and leading it, if that makes sense’. More claimed to be outcomes-oriented and process-oriented but all were evidently sensitive to the need to get where they wanted to go efficiently but also with the minimum undesirable collateral effects.

Managing Change: Being able to manage change is one of the key competences desired in VCs by governing bodies. VCs interviewed were asked about their approach to creating change. Interestingly, a strong theme emerging from a number of VCs was the importance of avoiding change for change’s sake: ‘changing things is always the most exciting bit of it and I think that, actually, there is an enormous danger in that and I guess, I think, that the most mature style of leadership is somebody who can really work out when something needs changing and when it doesn’t. And resist the temptation to play around with the train set when you don’t have to’. Someone said: ‘it is not about leaving the successful things alone and changing the unsuccessful things. It is about deciding that there are certain things that, for the moment, you need to keep stable or going as they are because you might want to really move in three years time. Or recognising that you can change too many things all at once, sometimes’.

Managing change was often seen in terms of changing the constitution or membership of the management team. Changing the SMT was seen as a lever for bringing about significant behavioural change across the institution. By changing the portfolios of PVCs or reallocating administrative tasks across the team, new perspectives could be introduced and new strategies supported. One commented: ‘if you haven’t had a major set of structural changes, it doesn’t half do a bit of good, occasionally, to have one. If things are the same for too long, people get very comfortable. So occasionally, but not too frequently, that is crucial. I mean, as a bit of a knee jerk towards a new vice-chancellor, we are going to have a structural change. I think it is much more difficult, it might even be better, to actually launch a structural change when you have been in a place for three years, or thereabouts. That certainly shakes people up much more, but it actually makes human relationships a bit more complicated. So I think structural change is an
important lever’. Capitalising on the desire to be successful in comparison to competitors was also used as a lever of change: “you are able to say to your colleagues - look, we are sliding behind in this particular aspect of what we do and it is because our policies are not right, or we are not delivering in some way, we need to change and do it better”. So you are evidencing the need for change by comparison with others.

No one underestimated how difficult it is to bring about change in a university but having control of the purse-strings was important. One said: “I think you have got to at a certain level command the confidence of the institution to be able to do it because some of the levers which we can talk about in a moment are not sufficient in themselves. And, you know these are institutions which have been around for a long time, they are big, they are complex, so there are 101 ways in which you can put spanners into the works, that’s if people want to frustrate change. So I think confidence is important. And confidence arises from the clarity of the analysis that we bring and that you share. And also a sense, in the institution, that you understand it. I mean that is to say you understand it technically, but also you understand it in terms of the kind of institution it is and the kind of institution it might become. And given that most VCs come from outside of the institution, I think quite quickly establishing a kind of quality of affinity with the institution is important. The way in which you say ‘we’ and mean we is important. And I think that is a pre-requisite for other kinds of things. Beyond that I think the budget is a very powerful set of levers that you have got and, of course, we know what happens locally in terms of complex discussions around … what are incentives and where you invest, and so forth. But in principle, you know, a VC leads a set of decisions around the budget which give you very powerful levers”.

3.1.4 ESAs and Job and Person Specifications for VCs

Section 3.2 of this report considers the role of ESAs in the recruitment of VCs. Here the object is merely to examine the insights that job and person specifications used in searches for VCs give us about the characteristics, competences and roles of VCs. ESAs, when used by universities, would usually have a significant role in facilitating the production of the job and person specifications. One of their tasks is to help the university articulate what they want of the VC. ESAs specialising in the recruitment of VCs have a very broad knowledge of what different universities look for in their VCs.

It was thought particularly useful to explore their comments on the characteristics, competences and roles of VCs.

The 32 sets of further particulars we collected were analysed under six main themes, echoing what had been found in the comments from VCs in their interviews:

- Job Specification: Main Responsibilities and Duties.
- Person Specification: Personal characteristics; Academic-related characteristics, including qualifications; Business-related characteristics; Managerial/Leadership characteristics; Previous experience.

Job Specification: Main Responsibilities and Duties

A content analysis of the data describing the overall role and main responsibilities of future VCs fell, broadly, into the following three main categories:

- Internal Management; this also includes some very specific areas of management;
- External Leadership;
- Business-related (including fundraising and commercial activity) versus Academic-related.

Not surprisingly, these categories map onto the three main categories of: leader versus manager; academic versus business; and internal versus external; used to describe how a sample of current VCs perceived their roles in relation to the competencies they require.

Figure 5 (overleaf) shows the main responsibilities and duties reported most frequently by universities in their job specifications broken down by pre- and post-92 classification. While a lower percentage of the pre-92s mention any one of these roles, the profiles of the two are not markedly different.

The key observations made under each of the three main categories are as follows:

Internal Management.

For the purpose of this analysis, the main category of management has been defined as ‘internal’ on the basis that the responsibilities and duties described within this category tended to refer to maintaining something that was ongoing and within the university.

A key theme originating out of the ‘internal management’ responsibilities was ‘relationships’, with one of the main duties and responsibilities of VCs being to promote new,
and maintain ongoing, relationships across all areas of the university. More specifically:

- chairing meetings and liaising with Senate or Academic Board, the Board of Governors and other executives;
- fostering and maintaining high standards of performance. This included both academic as well as business performance;
- maintaining and promoting a vision, mission and/or strategy;
- making proposals, and implementing and delivering agreed plans and decisions;
- taking overall accountability as the ‘university’s Chief Executive’;
- being responsible for the ‘general well-being, organisation, administration, finances, and health and safety issues’;
- management of information systems;
- ensuring quality and diversity;
- promoting excellence;
- people and community, e.g., fostering ‘a set of behaviours across the institution to draw out the best of [the university’s] students and staff’; ‘widening participation and attracting and retaining appropriate numbers of students by ensuring the highest possible experience’; and maintaining student discipline; and
- risk management.

Duties specified by two universities (who also happened to have been supported by the same ESA), included ‘maintaining an inclusive and positive approach to dialogue with the key Unions’. Indeed, it was quite common to see the same phrases and wording being used for university positions being supported by the same ESA. This may simply reflect commonalities across the universities they serve or it may reflect a house style within the ESA.

**External leadership**

Leadership has been referred to as ‘external’ here on the basis that the responsibilities and duties described tended to relate to VCs not only acting as managers of existing situations (both within and across the university), but also as leaders and ‘ambassadors’ for their university ‘outside’.

As suggested, a key theme here was for VCs to be both ambassadorial and responsive. In relation to ‘ambassadorial’ duties, job specifications described looking for candidates who could ‘represent’ and ‘develop’ and ‘promote’ the university ‘locally, nationally and internationally’; the need
for universities to be ‘global’ was dominant. Taking a more ‘business-like’ approach, there was also emphasis on having a ‘collaborative and partnership-led ethos’, with VCs having to ‘respond to new demands’ to make their universities more ‘visible’ to the outside world ‘with a view to enhancing its standing and influence’. ‘Making proposals to the Board… about the educational character and objectives of the university and for implementing the decisions to the Board’ was quoted by five different universities.

The specific duties described within this category included:

- ‘Providing leadership and strategic direction to the university’
- ‘Maintaining close links with government and government agencies, employers and regional community’; and
- Leading ‘the consolidation of existing partnerships and, more importantly, the creation of new ones’.

Business-related versus Academic-related

Linking, in many ways, with the duties under ‘external leadership’, a further common theme throughout the job specifications suggested that universities want to behave in a more business-like manner. Several references were made to how VCs needed to be financially aware, able to prepare annual estimates and balance sheets, and be able to manage ‘budgets and resources within estimates approved by the Board subject to compliance with Financial Memorandum and Financial Regulations’. Linked to this, VCs needed to play ‘a major part in the university’s fundraising activity’ and in the ‘development of initiatives consistent with the aims, objectives and ethos of the university’; a commercial theme was apparent. Words relating to the encouragement of ‘third-stream activity’ (i.e. knowledge transfer and commercial exploitation) also featured quite heavily in the phrases used.

In contrast to the business-related activities, however, as the leader of a university, VCs also needed to be responsible for the ‘academic programme’ and ‘promoting excellence in research and teaching’; terms such as ‘academic credibility’ or ‘academic standing’ featured very highly.

Person Specifications:
The specifications reported in this section fell generally into five main categories:

- Personal characteristics (i.e., those characteristics that have many commonalities with those required of leaders of any types of organisation, not just universities);
- Academic-related characteristics; this includes academic qualifications;
- Business-related characteristics; this includes professional qualifications;
- Managerial/Leadership characteristics, and
- Previous Experience

FREQUENTLY REQUESTED PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

![Graph showing frequently requested personal characteristics for pre-92 and post-92 universities.](image)
The key findings for each of these are summarised as follows:

**Personal characteristics:** Figure 6 (overleaf) shows the most frequently stated personal characteristics. As shown, compared to post-92s, pre-92s appeared to place more emphasis on appointing a VC who is energetic (e.g., has ‘enthusiasm, energy, drive and determination’) and motivating (e.g., ‘the ability to inspire and motivate colleagues’ or the ability to ‘inspire, motivate and galvanise activity and commitment’).

In contrast, compared to pre-92s, post-92s appeared to be more likely to ask for a VC who is a good ambassador (e.g., has a ‘high level of ambassadorial and interpersonal skills’; or ‘the ability to advocate the university to the outside world’) and negotiator (e.g., has a ‘high level of negotiation, interpersonal and presentation skills’; or can act ‘as an effective and persuasive advocate for the university’). There were less apparent differences in the frequency of asking for the VC to be inspirational, and similar levels of emphasis on being a good communicator which, across both university types was emphasised the most (i.e., 86% versus 83% for pre-versus post-92 respectively).

**Academic-related characteristics:** With emphasis being made by ESAs upon the importance of attracting candidates ‘external’ to the higher education sector, this was certainly not made apparent in the person specifications. For example, whilst phrases such as ‘candidates may come from academia, government or business’ or ‘applicants who have made their careers outside the higher education sector’ did appear, it was also a requirement for candidates to be able to, either ‘demonstrate … academic credibility and a strong understanding of the issues facing higher education generally’, or have ‘a deep understanding of what is required to lead a successful research-focussed university, with empathy for all branches of learning and research’. Indeed, it could be suggested that most of the specifications for VCs appeared tailored for candidates from an academic-related background. The main explanation for this appeared linked to the need for future VCs to be able to command ‘respect of the academic community’ they would head. Apart from those institutions which ‘demanded’ otherwise, however (e.g., a School for Speech and Drama, which stated a preference for candidates with a passion for ‘Drama, Theatre and Performance’), no preference for any particular area of academic expertise was stated.

Linked with academic expertise, 29% of pre-92s compared to 67% of post-92s described wanting a VC who had sympathy with ‘university values’. For example, sympathy with the university’s values of widening participation, promoting diversity and fostering equality of opportunity.

**Business-related characteristics:** Whilst appearing ‘secondary’ to academic credibility, what was also interesting in terms of preferred qualifications for candidates was the additional emphasis made by universities on having ‘professional’ qualifications and ‘evidence of continued professional development’. There were, however, no apparent requirements for candidates to have any specific ‘professional’ qualifications (e.g., MBA). There was also no obvious difference in these requirements between pre- and post-92s, which suggests that both types of universities may be thinking along similar lines.

**FIGURE 7**

MOST FREQUENTLY STATED BUSINESS-RELATED CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>% of Sample</th>
<th>pre-92</th>
<th>post-92</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial/Fundraising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Links with community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Strategic vision</td>
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Figure 7 (overleaf) presents the most frequently stated business-related characteristics. As shown, in this instance, differences between pre- and post-92s did exist with pre-92s appearing to be more likely to state they want a VC with financial and fundraising experience, and evidence of ‘strategic vision’. Both types, however, placed the same emphasis on appointing somebody who has the ‘skill to engage with the wider regional and local community’, with universities needing to forge links with the wider community, both globally as well as locally.

Managerial/Leadership Characteristics: A distinction between management and leadership was made. In terms of management, half of both pre- and post-92s made reference to requiring a VC who was a manager. They required, for example, a ‘successful administrator and manager’ with ‘strong management skills’. There was also a common emphasis on candidates with an ‘open, consultative and inclusive’ style. In particular: ‘authoritative but consultative’; ‘empowering’; ‘open, consensual and collegiate’; ‘open and unbureaucratic’; and ‘collegial, consensual and inclusive’.

In terms of leadership, 36% of pre-92s compared to 55% of post-92s made direct reference to requiring a leader. They required, for example, a VC with ‘determination, energy, commitment, enthusiasm and motivation’ to lead, who is ‘committed to the values of higher education and to the achievement of excellence in teaching, research and all other facets of the university’s work’.

There was also some emphasis on requiring a manager/leader who is a ‘good’ and ‘skilful’ team-builder. Twenty-nine percent of pre-92s compared to 39% of post-92s stated this. Whilst needing to remain ‘overall accountable’, there was also an apparent preference for appointing an ‘empowering’ individual, who could ‘motivate and ‘delegate’, suggesting the position would not suit somebody whose style was to micro-manage or to be dictatorial.

Experience: Figure 8 (below) shows the most commonly required types of prior experience. Around half are explicit that they want someone with experience of the higher education sector in some form; just less than half want someone who has worked in a similarly complex organisational structure. Less pre-92s are likely to state that they require someone with financial management experience but they are more likely to say they want commercial experience. Interestingly, pre-92s do not call explicitly for experience in managing resources.

Given the rate and significance of change in the higher education sector, it is not surprising that the change agenda

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**FIGURE 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequently Required Types of Prior Experience</th>
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<tr>
<td>% of Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE sector, or similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisation structure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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33
featured quite heavily in the person specifications: 36% of pre-92s and 44% of post-92s made reference to wanting to appoint VCs with experience of change management. For example, to ‘demonstrate a proven track record of strong and successful leadership with a large-scale organisation, which must include leading significant organisational change,’ or having ‘an ability to change sensitively, encouraging innovation and improvement.’ This emphasis on change also links to the emphasis placed on having experience of the multi-dimensional ‘organisational structure’ and the ‘complexity’ of universities.

This numerical analysis of the most frequently demanded characteristics and competences that appear in the further particulars for VC posts tends to oversimplify the message that is actually carried by the package of information generated about these posts. The person and job specification is invariably embedded in a document that describes the university – often including its history, current strategies and even listing its problems (sometimes in obscure terms). The overall effect is to contextualise the bald statement of the characteristics and competences required of candidates. The message is a subtle one which relies on the constellation of qualities called for and the situation of the university at the time. Potential applicants are being offered a way of checking whether their profile matches that of the university. It is an important feature of the search process for VCs that many potential applicants will not proceed with an attempt to get the job after reading the further particulars because they recognise the “fit” is missing.

The simple content analysis of the further particulars for these posts also fails to take into account the role that the ESA plays in many cases in interpreting them for potential applicants. There will often be exchanges between the ESA and the potential applicant which “flesh out” what is required and whether what is on paper is all that an applicant needs to know.

It may be self-evident but it may also be worth stating that further particulars are unlikely to state explicitly things which are supposed to be common knowledge or to be taken for granted. Some attributes that will be required of a candidate will not appear in the person specification because it will be assumed that they are inevitable or obvious requirements. These might include for instance an assumption about age or nationality. The analysis performed here cannot expose the unwritten assumptions.

**Perspective of ESAs:** The ESAs we interviewed were asked what they perceive to be the key characteristics and experience required of future VCs. All were clear that each university required someone somewhat different but they acknowledged that there were commonalities. They felt in general that ‘if one is purely considering a vice-chancellor, then it is highly unlikely in the present climate one will find a candidate with the requisite gravitas and desired level of academic excellence from outside the sector’. Yet, they emphasised that ‘the skill set to run a university is very different to being a brilliant academic’, with a ‘very limited number of senior academics who are also high competency executive managers’. The higher education sector was described as being different from others – ‘and incidentally considers itself to be different’ – but it was felt that the same basic criteria for leaders apply to all types of organisation: Candidates need to appreciate it is a high intellect environment …. However, basic professional management ability is still the key requirement to be applied with logical, pragmatic reasoning and the need to clearly define, monitor and manage realistic KPIs for all aspects of the institution within carefully controlled budget parameters. This is actually little different from a multi departmental major organisation in the public or private sector. Another ESA described how you ‘can make comparisons between the kind of leadership qualities that are coming through and being expressed in higher education against, say, what is going on in ASDA, for example, or Tesco’.

The question of making appointments from overseas’ universities was raised and one ESA described how they only focussed on candidates from old Commonwealth and US universities when searching for British VCs because of the ‘greater levels of compatibility’ with British higher education. Another ESA talked about being particularly interested in the ‘reverse brain-drain’ when looking overseas, concentrating on ‘those people who left the UK in the 1980s because of the attrition in the sector [who] have made very successful careers overseas and are now interested in returning’. The point was also raised, however, that whilst ‘knowledge of the UK environment is important …, not to think more laterally about alternative options would be unnecessarily restricting’, especially as there are ‘many superb universities elsewhere in the world and the ability to bring significant added value and experience from another environment could be highly beneficial’. In contrast, one ESA ‘fundamentally disagreed’ with the ‘assumption than an existing VC from overseas is better than a rising star in the UK’. This ESA, who had much
experience searching for VCs, also commented on how ‘one of the things we have observed about UK higher education is that, increasingly, the kind of leadership that is emerging in UK higher education is amongst the best in the world by virtue of the change that higher education has undergone’. They also described how one of the things they look for is ‘someone’s ability to really handle the whole wide sector of interactions and aspects in any given decisions for a specific university context’; this point highlights the specificity of skill set required by different institutions. It was also felt that a person from overseas should only be recruited ‘if they are the best person to put forward for that job’ and that for some assignments ‘it is obvious that a person from the UK is most appropriate’.

Whilst having international experience was generally seen as being ‘an advantage’; after all ‘academia is an international market place’, greater emphasis was placed on having experience ‘external to the academic world’. The point was also raised about how VCs need to find appointments as non-executive on non-higher education boards. However, it was also emphasised how VCs ‘need to take responsibility for making it happen for themselves’ and not simply wait to be invited by a company board to join them. Overall, the ideal candidate for VC was described as being someone with both academic and commercial experience: ‘that you have academic credibility, but that you also know how to manage in a competent way’. The decision as to whether to appoint an ‘outsider’ or not, was considered to be dependent on the candidate and ‘their level of understanding of the higher education sector’. In particular, ‘the subtlety of the segmentation of the sector, and the fact that no two institutions are alike in organisational structure and priority’; this was seen as something which outsiders often find difficult to get their heads around. The ‘power’ of academics in the selection process was claimed to be a deterrent to making appointments from outside higher education. One ESA reported how they may be able to get a university to consider an outside appointment, but that the final decision was made by ‘academics in the committee room’, who tended to ‘make sure that they [outsiders] were put to one side’.

Several other more personality-focussed characteristics were seen to be requirements by ESAs. One ESA described selecting someone with ‘natural leadership’ – ‘gravitas’, ‘forceful personality’ or ‘confidence’; ‘I am talking about people that have a natural authority and it is not that they even question their authority, nor are arrogant. It is that they bring a personal authority to any meeting that they have’. Statements about needing to be ‘a good ambassador, proficient in networking and fundraising’, ‘a good communicator’ were made. In orientation, candidates for VC needed to be ‘amazingly political, capable of horizon scanning and several steps ahead of competitors when looking at markets’. Other characteristics included having ‘big personalities’ and liking ‘being out there’; one ESA even described VCs needing to have a ‘tiggerish-like bounce’. It was also important for a VC to be ‘present’, ‘visible’, and not act like an ‘absentee landlord or landlady’. They also needed to have a genuine interest in universities and realise that their core purpose is ‘to last for generations’.

ESAs commented on the prior experience and training that VCs need. As one ESA reported, ‘the area of training for future VC’s is a whole subject in itself and is seldom covered by succession planning as nearly all universities seem to think internal promotion is inappropriate and someone from another institution is the only way to proceed’. ESAs were asked whether they felt VCs could benefit from formal training. Like current VCs we interviewed, the ESAs tended to believe formal training could not ready an individual for the role. One ESA said: ‘there is no formal training for the role other than VCs from lesser institutions who have done a good job being appointed to larger or more prestigious universities’. Having an MBA was seen as being a useful way of ‘breaking out’ into senior management but it was also described as being ‘neither a good panacea for good leadership, nor proof of managerial competency’. The benefits of having attended a Top Management Programme (TMP) were also discussed. In general, TMPs were viewed in a positive way, ‘seem [ing] to raise up some questions and some networks that have been valuable for people’. They were also described as being ‘a good way of meeting people and mixing with others from other sectors’. TMPs were also described as being good for increasing confidence and ‘starting to get people noticed’. However, it was not considered ‘really what is necessary in order to generate the characteristics needed for a VC’. It was also stated how, just because somebody has done a TMP, doesn’t mean they will be automatically considered. One ESA even suggested that institutions only send people on TMPs if they feel they need to be ‘improved’. However, a second ESA took the approach that it is only people of value who are sent on TMPs.

### 3.2 The Selection of VCs

It seems to be recognised that it would be useful to understand how VCs are sought and selected99. However, our literature search showed there to be very little published empirical evidence. Here we examine the search and

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selection procedures that were used to appoint VCs in service 1997-2006 through reference to data from the semi-structured interviews with our sample of representatives of ESAs and 13 VCs, plus our content analysis of the job and person specifications for 32 vice-chancellorships advertised during September 2004 to February 2007 inclusive.

It should be noted that search and selection are both parts of the recruitment process. Search entails the identification of likely candidates; selection entails identifying the right appointee. Recruitment is, however, more that just search and selection. It also entails the capture of the best person for the job – the process of negotiation and establishing the psychological contract with the desired incumbent. This study focuses upon search and selection rather than capture.

3.2.1 Who Chooses the VC?
Markham\(^{100}\) reported that the methods used in the appointment of VCs in commonwealth universities can usually be placed in one of six categories. The VC is appointed by:

- The head of state or his/her appointed Chancellor without consultation with the University Council
- The head of state or his/her appointed Chancellor after formal consultation with the University Council
- The Government from a list of nominations put forward either by University Council or a specially convened selection committee
- The University Council but the appointment must be approved by the Government
- The University Council, which has a substantial number of Government representatives (i.e. more than 33%)
- The University Council or other university body, on which there is little or no Government representation.

Markham uses “University Council” to refer to the institution’s governing body. Markham suggested that the last two methods are those used in UK universities. This most likely allowed for local government representatives on governing bodies to be counted as “government representation”. However, it would be more accurate now to say that the sixth method is dominant in the UK.

The further particulars we analysed showed that the administration of the processes of search and selection were delegated by the university governing body to a smaller committee (the search committee). This committee will typically then make a recommendation of a candidate for appointment to the governing body. It is rare that the governing body is offered a choice between candidates. The significance of the search committee should not be underestimated. Its membership should be a matter of some concern to an institution.

Often these search committees are brought together solely for the purpose of recruiting the VC. Typically, the majority in the committee will be lay members of the governing body. The required membership structure for the committee will often be laid down in the university’s regulations. However, the details of the membership structures of these committees vary considerably across universities. They particularly differ in the extent to which employees of the university are included as members. The committee will normally be completely free (within the constraints of legislation) to decide what recruitment process it adopts. They vary enormously in the extent to which they engage the university community in the recruitment process – in either search or selection. Typically the committee will be responsible for choosing whether to use an ESA and, if one is used, which one.

Sometimes (in 2 out of the 32 cases studied here) the search committee will not involve an ESA, choosing instead to advertise the post directly through the university’s usual channels (i.e. national newspapers like the Guardian, the Times Higher Education Supplement, etc.) and often contacting a broad range of individuals or organisations to invite them to make recommendations of people that should be considered. There have also been cases where the search committee has firm ideas about their target candidate(s) and the object is to recruit. However, these approaches are increasingly rare and the use of the ESAs is common. Commenting on the practice, one VC interviewed described how he felt the old methods produced a range of candidates which was ‘too limited’ and universities could benefit from using ESAs to expand the variety considered. He commented that ESAs often had information about people which an entirely internal selection committee may not be privy to.

3.2.2 The ESAs and the University Market
It was reported above that a small number of ESAs dominate the market in search for VCs. Four of the ESAs represented in our sample had considerable experience of appointing VCs. The ESAs we interviewed were carrying out 4-6 searches per year for VCs but would never undertake more than 2 or 3 at a time. One commented: ‘at this level it is crucial for the
consultant to be able to focus on the role and the client and to be available at all times. The size of the higher education sector is a factor in shaping the scale of ESA activities. One ESA described how the higher education sector was ‘not the biggest money earner’, but ‘I have sort of kept it quite discrete and it was my feeling that we shouldn’t go too big… if we are doing too many you can’t then go back in and seek people inside of where we have just put a vice-chancellor’ and ‘you certainly can’t seek the vice-chancellor out.’ Another described being increasingly careful about making sure that the portfolio of clients (universities) they have ‘in the round’ are ideally those that don’t typically compete with each other’. Competition is avoided by choosing them to have ‘a different geographical focus, international profile or brand profile’. Some ESAs stated how working for too large a pool of universities might be ‘considered to be a conflict’ by others. The common theme was that ESAs wanted quality over quantity; the need to ‘build lasting relationships’ with clients was very clear. One ESA described how part of the reason they ‘set the whole business up was because we wanted to focus on long term relationships with fewer clients in each sector’. He also described ‘genuinely looking for long term partnerships’. Another described how, although the ESA had tried to work for the newer universities, they seemed to have a bigger presence in the older ones: ‘other companies are more present in that market’. The same ESA also reported having repeat business, but was clear to elaborate how ‘each of the appointments was treated as a fresh project and the fact that they had recently appointed to an institution would not mean that they participated in shortcuts to get the next head’. This treatment of every appointment as a fresh project was heavily emphasised by most ESAs. As one ESA said: ‘there is no such person as a one-size fits all Chief Executive, and we would not assume that because a candidate was, or was not, suitable for one institution, the same applied to another’.

Given the primacy of four ESAs, it is perceived by other ESAs that it is very difficult to break into the university VC recruitment market – even when they are very active and successful in recruitment of chief executives in other sectors or even when they are already working with universities to recruit to lower level posts. It is argued that universities are ‘loathe to take a risk’ on an ESA that has not yet appointed a VC elsewhere. They say this contributes to a narrowing of the field of potential candidates that can be offered, particularly from outside of academia, because the ESAs with expertise solely outside of academia are not chosen by universities to search for VCs.

3.2.3 The Role of ESAs in the Search for VCs

The nature of the relationship between the ESA and the search committee varies very significantly across universities. In our interviews with ESAs with vast experience of searching for VCs, it was clear that the spectrum ran from the search committee wishing to oversee and determine every element of the search and selection processes to the committee wishing the ESA to manage the entire business. Responding to where the committee sits on this spectrum is an important feature of the way the ESAs work. They have to detect the requirements of the committee and work to optimise their own input given the expectations of the committee. It seems that the interaction between the ESA consultant and the chair of the search committee (who will frequently be the chair of the university’s governing body) is vitally important in determining whether the right sort of candidate list is brought forward. The chair must ensure that the ESA is accurately briefed on what the university needs and would accept.

There are varying views among VCs about when the role of the ESA in the process should stop. In terms of how universities should use ESAs, one VC interviewed described how they should only be used as information providers, involved in the ‘tiresome stuff in the early stages and, maybe, approaching the people who you don’t want to approach yourself for fear of giving the impression that it is all a bit of a done deal’. Once a ‘reasonable kind of long list’ has been produced, the same VC then described wanting to ‘take over’ and not liking their ‘involvement thereafter’.

There was general consensus among the ESAs that these search committees do not know how to use ESAs to their best advantage. They do not adequately think through how they will instruct or consult the ESA. In fact, the use of large search committees by universities was also seen as problematic by ESAs – militating against speed of action within the selection timetable, confidentiality for candidates, and willingness to be adventurous in choice of shortlist. ESAs were clear that their job was to do ‘sufficiently perceptive and original research’ on candidates that appointment committees would be willing to look beyond the ‘same old people’ that are regularly recommended. Nevertheless, the ESAs emphasised how the clients making the appointment must ‘own it’: ‘they must have ownership of both the process and the outcome of it, or there is the risk that as soon as there is a contentious issue, they will become disenchanted with the appointee and the relationship will break down’.
Overall, ESAs felt that universities don’t really understand how much the ESAs are selling universities when they conduct the search process and that this includes creating ‘the goodwill, how these people are treated and whether they come back for more afterwards’. There were indications that ESAs thought universities can be ‘very bad in their treatment of candidates’.

The interviews with ESAs highlighted the different facets of the role they perform in the search process:

• providing selection panels with ‘a menu from which they can choose, rather than imposing a choice upon them’; to increase the pool of candidates: ‘what we are looking to do is to provide clients, at a final panel interview, with a good breadth of candidates’;
• giving the client confidence ‘to seek out advice and act on that advice’ and ‘to consult and, by doing so, provide very positive, objective and reasoned advice, and not just agree with the client’;
• to point out skills, not background, required of the post holder: ‘I think we do this in all assignments regardless of who the clients are, is to look at skills as opposed to backgrounds’;
• helping them define and clarify the role of a VC: ‘our discussions say you want someone from the private sector, but let’s be very real about where this person might sit in private sectors…… For instance, is it pharmaceuticals, is it rail, is it financial services, is it the outsourced services sector. And that would all depend on the nature of the challenges and the sort of skills they might bring forward. So we would help with the definition of that’;
• providing them with an opportunity to rethink and objectively look at the role: ‘it is also an excellent opportunity for the client to rethink the scope and responsibilities for that role… And the start of that process is an excellent time to do that’; helping clients ‘understand how they can change without destroying what is good within the past’;
• to observe and gain useful insights about the client; to actively listen to, understand, analyse, interpret and reflect back what the client says: ‘I think we are hairdressers to the stars… we are there to listen and make other people look great’.

Most ESAs perceived their roles as being ‘facilitators’ and ‘informers, as opposed to directly making the final appointment decision; they wanted to ‘challenge’ the client’s thinking and enable the institution ‘to think critically about its own thinking and objectives’. One ESA also described it as their ‘responsibility to test their thinking and push them a bit’. However, they knew universities can only do this after they have gained adequate ‘trust’ in the ESA, and felt prepared and confident to take some risks. In particular, this applied to considering appointing ‘rising stars’: ‘And there are some superb rising stars in the sector, and let’s see them come through. I think that if the university’s committee has been willing to take a risk on a rising star, then they might get a better appointment’. This, according to another ESA, also meant ESAs sometimes having to ‘push the recruiting institution to look at non-academic applicants’ something, which in their experience, ‘some institutions lack confidence’ in doing.

It should be acknowledged that the VCs we interviewed generally regarded ESAs as doing more than providing facilitation. They reported experiences of ESAs that were very proactive in shaping the expectations and standards that universities have. They suggested that this may have been more possible when the use of ESAs by universities began (not least because there were even fewer ESAs to choose from). The four that dominate the market now are also very knowledgeable about the sector and about the pool of potential candidates that exist. Offered such expertise, several VCs argued that it is inevitable that universities will be tempted to be overly reliant upon the ESAs. It may be concluded that ESAs have to keep in balance two requirements: the need to find the sort of person that the university believes it wants and the need to introduce the university to possibilities that it does not yet know that it wants.

3.2.4 Methods of Search Used by ESAs

Methods used across ESAs were similar. It should be noted that typically a university search committee will invite two or more ESAs to tender for the VC appointment assignment. Their proposal, whether written or a verbal presentation, will usually outline the search method they will adopt. The search committee may choose to have some input into the method adopted by the firm they choose to use. So there are variations in the method used even by one ESA across different clients. Nevertheless, as one ESA commented: ‘we purposefully structure our firm so that we work at only senior levels across all of the sectors. So you will find that we go from doing the same in, say, a search for an international director for OXFAM, to a global chief executive search for the George clothing business for ASDA, and then we are doing, say, the VC of a particular university’.
The first stage of any search for most ESAs, however, was described as the ‘establishing a profile’ phase. This profiling related to both the organisation and the part to be played by the person who will lead it, and involved several different tasks. The prime task was to obtain a thorough briefing on the institution by spending time with the key stakeholders, from both within and outside the organisation. The people involved in this were seen to vary. Some ESAs reported spending time with the HR Director, Chair of the governing body, other senior managers and executives and, in two cases, some also talked to the students. Another described how there is usually a Registrar or PVC, who has ‘the administrative responsibility for leading the process’. The reported time spent with key stakeholders ranged from 2-3 full days, with meetings held either in small sessions, or one on one; the type of meeting held depended on ‘whether people trust you’. Another ESA reported how they ‘try to speak to as many people as possible to give ourselves a really rounded view of what they are looking for’. This comprised having a two hour briefing meeting with all the members of the selection panel, to ‘test out …. their thinking around the job, their thoughts around the search, their thoughts around salary, their thoughts around personality type, who would fit and what wouldn’t’. Quite often, ESAs might also talk to about 4 or 5 other people ‘if they’ve got partner organisations who need to contribute’. This task includes getting to understand the university mission statement and strategy, its culture and immediate challenges, why the position has become vacant, and identifying what did and didn’t work well in the past. Does the university want someone who was similar, or very different, to the current VC?

The next stage, the outcome of the briefing and data collection, is the production of an information pack. As described by one ESA, the role of this pack was to ‘sell’ and to give the process ‘transparency’: ‘the role of this information pack is, really to, one, sell the opportunity. Sometimes to sell the organisation, depending on the audience, and then to provide a clear understanding of what the role is, what people need to bring to the position, to be considered. So a clear job description, a clear person specification, and then the terms and conditions of the job around salary package, and then a very clear understanding of what the process is. And that is all about transparency to make sure that there is equal opportunity and fairness for everybody in terms of carrying out the process’. Another ESA, with more experience of searching for senior executives for the other public and private-sectors, described how ‘a real sense of getting under the skin of the job’ from the profile would enable them to think about where that ‘type’ of job might be found if you just look at the basic principles of it in other sectors. The answer to this would then determine where the job would be advertised and how the advert would be drafted. This ESA also emphasised how the location of the advert and how it is advertised can determine, not only who is selected, but who may also be excluded: ‘The advert can actually speak a lot about your organisation, both in terms of the length of it, the types of words used, what the focus and emphasis is’. To attract individuals from outside higher education, the advert needs to avoid ‘higher education jargon’. It was suggested that one of the reasons why so few appointments of VCs are made from outside the higher education sector is because potential candidates, particularly at the top executive level, currently know and are told very little about how challenging and diverse universities have become. This, the ESAs suggested, is compounded by the use of unimaginative adverts, written in an academic style and published in a limited range of publications. According to one ESA, universities ‘need to change the face of the sector in the eyes of others who are looking in’.

In general, the job advert may actually say very little about the role itself, its main purpose being to attract those people who are ‘interested’ and ‘excited’ by the ‘sort of challenge’ they see, and may want to apply for further information. Generally speaking, these people would either be ‘outsiders’ to British higher education, or ‘insiders’ who may not already have been ‘considered’. Overtly responding directly to the advert is only one way to gain the information pack. As soon as the ESA has accepted an assignment, it will be using its contacts (not just in the higher education sector) to identify who should be given the information pack. Names of possible candidates are often put forward to ESAs or to the university concerned, with those people being invited to apply, either by the search committees themselves, or other representatives of the university. Indeed, our interviews showed that current VCs would not respond directly to an advert. They would expect to be invited to apply. The third task for the ESA is to make informal contact with all those potential candidates that might be serious contenders for the job but who would not wish to be seen to respond to an advert or may not even be reading the adverts since they are not actively looking to find another job. Explaining the attractions of the job and inviting the potential candidates to consider themselves for it is one of the main elements in this stage of the search process.
The next stage usually comprises formal interviews with the ESA of those who have been long-listed. The long list will usually have been chosen following a presentation of all actual and potential candidates to the search committee by the ESA. In terms of numbers of candidates invited to interviews, one ESA described that typically they would see between 10 and 12 people for a ‘long list interview’. During this interview with the ESA, they described how each individual would undergo a rigorous period of ‘testing’, which is probably more rigorous than the final panel interview and often catches people out: ‘we put them through it – about an hour and a half testing out their skills and experiences, but also their …, particularly if they are from outside the sector, their understanding of what it is like to work within a university. What are the key issues are? Some forward-looking questions, like, if they got the job what would they do? So we are trying to form a judgement, not only on their technical skills and competencies and ability to do the job, but also their management skills. And also their interpersonal skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence..’ The aim of this particular approach to a long list interview was to ideally provide a: ‘short list of candidates … who would all be able to do the job, would all be able to bring something to it,’ giving the selection panel a choice on the day, which may come down to fit or personality, or whether they like the person, or whether they ultimately decide to, sort of, bring someone in from the sector or from outside of the sector, so they would have a choice of appointing candidates. In short, the part played by the ESA was described as being to identify all of the required skills and experiences, even verifying claimed qualifications, leaving the selection panel to make a choice based on a more personal ‘fit’.

A report of the findings from the long list interviews would be written for the client. The ESA would then expect to meet up with the client again, make recommendations, and then a short list of, between, 3 and 5 people. One EAS, with considerable experience of selecting for the higher education sector, described how they would recommend that universities have two rounds of interviews: ‘What I always recommend is that the university has two rounds. We will have done interviews before that, and I think it is terribly important that by the final interview the candidate really has been in the scene. They know what they are accepting. They have met the people that they know are going to be working with. They know what the contract is going to be. They have seen a draft contract. There are no surprises: They also suggested that ‘the Chair and wife/husband, perhaps, .. meet with candidates and their partners, and whatever, and see them socially as well as across the table’. The structure of the final interview varied. Often the candidates would be asked to make a formal presentation, lasting 10-15 minutes, before the questioning began. Typically the presentation topic focused upon what the candidate saw as the main challenges facing the university and what s/he would do about them if appointed. Some ESAs liked to be present for the final interview; others felt this was not necessary.

A comparison of what ESAs with great experience of searching for VCs and those who had little or no experience said about methods of search indicated that there are minimal differences in those used. The methods (and stages of) used in the search for other CEO roles echo those used for VCs. The difference may lie in the sophistication of the bodies that use the ESA about the process. The governing body in a university will have relatively limited experience of this type of search. Even with the relative increase in turnover of VCs, most universities are engaging in a search perhaps every 7-9 years. Given the turnover in lay members of governing bodies, it will be entirely possible that the participants in the search committee will never have had the experience of appointing a VC before.

3.2.5 Perspectives of VCs on the Selection Process
All of those VCs interviewed had been invited to apply for the post they occupied. As one said: ‘people no longer expect to apply for a VC’s post – you expect to be phoned up’. Most of the VCs interviewed had either been approached by key people or the network associated with the appointing university, or by ESAs brought in to assist them. Describing the approach made to him by ESAs, one VC described how he was flattered into applying: ‘… and [the head-hunter] said, “I think you are probably the only person in the world who can do this”. Another described being targeted: ‘.. they got to know me and whenever they had a job that was coming up, they would actually be harassing me to be interested in it’. Another VC said: ‘…[you] have got to remember that they [head-hunters] are contractors who do two things. One is to find a successful candidate, two is to supply a shortlist. You have got to work out whether you are on that list because you are the successful candidate, or whether you are one of the other five that they put up because they have to produce the short list’.

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In general, these VCs felt that the appointment of a VC was described as ‘the most important decision a university governing body makes’. However, on the whole, it was also described as something universities still ‘go about in an incredibly amateurish way’. The VC who said this added that ESAs appointed to search for candidates are ‘often very ill-informed about the real nature of the job… they are well-meaning, they do their best, but I just don’t think there is the adequate kind of background, let alone training, to do a thorough professional job’. A similar criticism has been levied about the search for AUPs. Another described the recruitment process as being too limited: ‘It is a recruitment process which I am not absolutely sure draws in to that process the full range of people who might be qualified. Because, I think if one looks objectively, this is not a very deep pool at the moment…’; and while it was acknowledged that people passing through TMPs would make this pool ‘richer’, it was suggested that universities had to keep their options open: ‘There is a point in this process where you should keep your options open. I think, probably, you should see more people. I think, probably, structurally this division where the head-hunters will shave the long lists, and it means, therefore, that the selection committee may, in some institutions, see only three or four people. And only three or four people may actually see the institution. That may, just in process terms, be one of the things which need to be fixed’.

It was also made clear that current VCs need to be more proactive in the selection process generally, spending more time identifying candidates who they feel might make valuable VCs of the future: ‘VCs need to be better at identifying those who are in their senior team or, perhaps, not in their senior teams. You know, who might be running a huge research group or … who would make a good VC. Spend serious time with them discovering whether they want to do it… if you have got good VCs identifying people who might become good VCs, and then feeding them into good preparatory processes, whether they are roles within the institution or appropriate training. I think being more proactive about that would help’. One VC described how one of his roles for lower level posts in the university had been effectively to act as an ESA, ‘scouring the world to recruit good staff’. He also described how he had got ‘personally involved’ in putting together the whole relocation package ‘in order to get the right person to come’. This particular VC also believed that, with so much ‘fishing’ going on within the same pool, ‘it is quite normal to be going to Europe, Australia and America to hire people’. He also believed that the appointment of candidates from overseas was one way to fill the ‘skill gaps’ in this country.

Whilst most VCs maintained the view that successful university leaders need to have academic credibility, it was also suggested that universities need to have a better ‘interface with people… who might come from outside the sector’. This is where using ESAs was beneficial: ‘The head-hunters have a list of people who are coming out of the corporate sector, big parts of the voluntary sector, other national institutions, or whatever’. Attracting external candidates was also seen to require better marketing by universities: ‘actually, these people themselves probably don’t know whether they would or would not make a good VC, and the extent to which their skill set might be transferable. And so I think that there are probably things that we ought to put in place. I am talking about programmes that would enable people, very confidentially because, you know, you are in an exposed position, to spend a bit of time understanding the higher education sector. A bit of time understanding the VC role, to know whether or not you think you might want to make that move. So that we dial-out the very speculative, generic people from the list, and we dial-in people who are, you know, who are just the kind of people to make that transition’.

Opinions about the general effectiveness of ESAs were mixed. On the one hand they were considered to be effective because they saved VCs time: ‘You know the list of people you would like to phone up to ask them whether they are interested in the job, … but I don’t have the time to sit down and phone them up’ They also enable a degree of confidentiality to be maintained: ‘If you place a call as a VC to somebody, it is a bit difficult for you to say that you are phoning up to find out the cricket score. I mean you … it blows the gaff on confidentiality’. According to one VC, they also fill in a knowledge-gap of the search committee and the governing body: ‘What I mean by that is, you know, the Board relies on the VC to run the place correctly. Once they have got to do something like recruit a new VC, they go everywhere, right? You know, they don’t want to make that move. So that we dial-out the very speculative, generic people from the list, and we dial-in people who are, you know, who are just the kind of people to make that transition’.

On the other hand, concerns about the ways in which ESAs operate were raised and a degree of cynicism expressed. For example, one VC described how he felt that the promises ESAs make to keep ‘all candidates in the process until the end’ were ‘without the authority of the institutions they are working for’. A second was concerned about their lack of ethics: ‘I do think that what they tell their clients and what they tell their applicants is often quite different’. A third was
concerned with how they ‘will take the whole process over if you let them’. The methods of search used by ESAs were also considered to be too restrictive by some and, potentially, ‘damaging to the sector’: ‘And the head-hunters, to make their job easier, have got to a mode where they say “have you been a head of department?”’, and that is not unreasonable. “Have you been dean, have you been PVC and were you Senior PVC in that process, because if you haven’t you are not even in the frame’. I don’t think that is at all helpful. In fact, I think it is damaging to the sector. We should be much more willing as a sector and, therefore, appointing committees, to look at the unconventional; the professor who has not been a dean or PVC but who has, nevertheless, the right skill set – personality, academic ability, and so on - to actually be a vice-chancellor without going through the steps. Because all that head-hunters do is use it as a filter to minimise their work’. Indeed, one VC suggested that ESAs should have a code of conduct to ‘clarify their role on both sides’. Another, with a mixed view of ESAs, however, did acknowledge that whilst he didn’t think head-hunters think broadly enough and know enough about universities, a portion of this blame may lie with what VCs and universities tell head-hunters about the role of a VC and what a university wants: ‘It is quite interesting thinking about my successor because head-hunters came to see what you think. You know, just a conversation. And it is quite difficult describing what you think you do and what you think the university wants…’
4. DISCUSSION

Taken together the findings of this study suggest that the leadership role required of the VC now in UK universities is complex. It combines the need to provide academic and business direction for the institution. Since both the academic and business activities of universities are increasingly multifaceted, lodged in global marketplaces with demands from many competing stakeholders, the VC’s task is growing in the range of requirements it places upon the incumbent. The VC must maintain the role of key academic decision-maker but this is exercised normally within a scholarly community that expects to be consulted and to participate in all major institutional issues. However, the VC is also responsible for the financial viability of the university, for its physical infrastructure and for its compliance with legal and political requirements, nationally and internationally. The job is really rather difficult. There is no single way in which the job is done. However, there are clear expectations that emerge from our study of the characteristics that individuals need to have in order to do it. The list is quite long:

- Academic credibility/sensitivity to academic community
- Being open, participative and collegiate
- Financial awareness and literacy
- Intellectual stamina
- Physical stamina, energy, drive, determination
- Political acumen
- Presence – a forceful personality
- Socially skilled
- Self-Confident
- Fundraising capacity
- Being networked or able to create networks
- Planner on long timescales – strategic vision
- Skill as a team-builder
- Inspirational and a motivator
- Easiness with working across international/cross-cultural boundaries

This listing is not exhaustive but gives the sense of what is sought and expected. It is notable that – with the exception of the emphasis upon academic credentials and credibility – this list is not dissimilar from one that would be compiled for the leaders of other large, politically significant, complex businesses. We have no evidence that the profile expected of a VC has been changing over the last decade.

The model of leadership style implied is one which is multilayered. The VCs interviewed rejected the idea that their approach to leadership could be captured or classified in terms of discrete leadership styles. Rather it seems characteristic that their approach is situation-specific but pulled together by strong individual value-systems and consistency in personal objectives (linked to institutional values and goals). There is coherence in the approach to leading the university but the way the leadership is evidenced day-to-day will change according to the task in hand and the group to be mobilised for action. VCs will have a wide repertoire of leadership tactics and strategies. Selection of the right one for the task in hand will be part of the art of being an effective VC. This suggests that to look for a single VC leadership style would be pointless. Individual VCs will differ in emphasis and proclivities among the tactics and stratagems but most VCs will be able to assume most of the range when needed.

The model of leadership suggested here is one of reflexive choice – the individuals are all highly trained analysts of problems and usually of people and social systems – they have the capacity to match tactic to task. Perhaps what selection panels should be seeking above all is this reflexive capacity. This is, of course, over and above the specific technical competencies that are inevitably needed (e.g. financial and political).

Given this, it is hardly surprising that the dominant tendency is for VCs to be chosen from within the higher education sector. The intimate knowledge that the internal candidate has of the whole academic system, often following 35 years of exposure before they are considered for a Vice Chancellorship, does make it more likely that they will be able to “prove” to a selection panel that they will satisfy the internal and many of the external stakeholders. There are many studies that suggest this. Goodall (2006) of course found that top research universities tend to go one step further, seeking to be led by VCs who are internationally renowned in their own right. In such senior academics, managerial experience can be taken for granted as part of the career pathway to the top. While the acquisition may not be intentional and systematic (as desired by AUPS, ACE, 2007) it is there.

The rarity of recruitment of candidates external to higher education may not just be a matter of choice. It is possible that externals are dissuaded from coming in: the selection process itself may discourage them or fail to interest them.
but the relatively low pay of VCs compared with CEOs in other sectors (e.g. in 2004 VCs in Australia were paid 60% less on average than other CEOs) may also be a factor.

It would be an error to think of all universities as similar in their preferences for VCs. There is a clear dichotomy in the sector between pre and post 92s. Pre-92s are more likely to recruit VCs from other pre-92s, who are more likely to have a science background, and take fewer women and are twice as likely to choose someone with Oxbridge experience. However, more appointments were made to pre-92s from outside the sector. Post-92s account largely for the increase in numbers of female VCs. They also account for the apparent increase in age of appointment of VCs evident in our data. It would seem that post-92s are changing the background of their leaders more visibly than pre-92s. It is possible that this is a result of the greater changes in the structure of post-92s and in the breadth of their mission over the last decade.

The selection process adopted by universities is typically unsophisticated. This is not to say the ESAs are unsophisticated, quite the opposite. They offer a highly professional service to their clients, the universities. However, the universities can be unready to optimise their use of this service. Typically the university will endeavour to find a new VC only every decade and so it is rare for the same people to appoint two VCs. The search committee is thus likely to be inexperienced. The attempt to make it representative of the institution in some sense sometimes occurs and, when it does, inevitably results in it having people with not only no experience of choosing a chief executive but also most will have no experience of being a chief executive or seeing one work close up. The selection process is thus being directed by a group who may only know what they want “intuitively” or via stereotypes. The ESAs try to help the group to refine their specifications but the group itself can coalesce around the institutional preoccupations, often with the desire not to have in the next VC whatever they have had before. Everything in this study suggests universities need to learn how to use ESAs optimally and to arrange their interaction with candidates optimally to elicit information needed in their decision. This is an area where there is a major opportunity for improved governance.

The trend for VCs to have more than one incumbency may be an important factor in the selection process. Second-time VCs come into the selection process with a visible profile of performance at this level. In one sense, this makes the selection process potentially easier and also more evidence-based. However, it can also mean that the candidate will desire greater levels of confidentiality through the selection process and this can hamper access to useful information about the candidate or for the candidate from the institution. Of course, there has been no examination of the relative effectiveness of first-time and second-time VCs. The second-time VCs interviewed emphasised how much quicker they were able to get into the job the second time as compared to the first. Their networks were usually transferable. Their skill-based intuitions could be generalised. These advantages have to be weighed against the benefits that the first-time VCs would say they bring in terms of desire to prove themselves, freshness and energy. Undoubtedly, some universities now regard appointing someone who has already been a VC as a signal of their importance. It is an element in the complex system of signs that reflect a university’s position in the status hierarchy. Nevertheless, it would be valuable for search committees to be very clear about the implications of seeking a second-time VC at the outset of their selection process. This certainly needs to be worked through with the ESA if one is being used.

All of the findings of the study suggest that universities could use ESAs more effectively. The ESAs in our sample described the services they offer and suggested that, in many ways, universities are still unaware of the value they provide. Yet there have also been concerns raised by VCs who have been involved in the process themselves as to whether ESAs claim to be delivering more than they actually do – for the institution and for the candidates. The process of understanding what the university needs seems to be something that could be improved. Whilst ESAs emphasise every search is ‘fresh,’ our analysis of the job and person specifications suggests significant commonalities in what is sought (perhaps not surprising given the similarities across institutions in what they want). Similarly, there is a question about the ‘freshness’ of the sources that ESAs and universities may use to arrive at a long list. A key way ESAs identify potential candidates by asking informed sources who they think would be a sensible candidate for the job. The range of informed sources is limited. Serving VCs are among them. Whilst some VCs described the need for VCs to become more involved in the selection process, identifying and recommending strong candidates to be put forward should a suitable position arise, this clearly has the potential to generate an inward-looking self-perpetuating hierarchy. Even though it is likely to be difficult in practice, some further diversification of sources would seem to be necessary.

Having identified that there are only four key ESAs used by universities with, commonly, only two or three people within
each ESA who specialise in appointments at VC level, it may be that institutions are vulnerable to a ‘single point of failure’ problem. If, for whatever reason, these specialists are unavailable or inappropriate the impact on universities could be far reaching. Aspiration shaping within the search and selection process is something we still know very little about. Yet ESAs can intentionally or unintentionally shape aspirations, either to make the university more attractive to a candidate, or vice versa. Those that work with the sector over time are also likely to shape aspirations in the sector as a whole. Both the ‘single point of failure’ and the ‘aspiration shaping’ concerns suggest that it might be advantageous for the HE sector to diversify in its use of ESAs – even though this carries its own risks and added demands.

This study has described the demographic characteristics of VCs during a turbulent era in UK universities. In doing so, it has not explored whether the right people were chosen for those jobs, and has not linked characteristics to performance in role. With one VC during our interviews raising some concern about the lack of performance indicators available to tell them whether they are doing a ‘good’ job or not, this must be the next step in carrying this work forward. To model the relationship between characteristics and success is perhaps the holy grail of this type of research. Selection panels would certainly like to have such a model. It seems to us that attempting to provide such a model is the next requirement for researchers in this area.
5. CONCLUSIONS AND SOME IMPLICATIONS

Several significant conclusions that require action emerge from the study. Some of these are actions on the part of potential VCs, some on the part of incumbents, some for governing bodies, some for ESAs, and some for those organisations, like the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, who support good governance in the sector.

Given the complexity of the characteristic and competence profile required of a VC, all concerned should recognise the need to ensure aspirant VCs and incumbents have access to opportunities to acquire the skills that are required. These will include financial skills, the skills of building and refreshing a senior management team, and the social skills revolving around effective communication. There are changes in the demands levelled at VCs during the term of their office. This life-cycle entails different competencies at different points in its cycle, preparation for the variability in the demands of the job over time is necessary. This means that the preparation for being a VC does not end when someone becomes one. Of course, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education already provides a significant range of programmes that potential VCs may use but there may be further scope for the provision of upskilling particularly for incumbent VCs.

Given that the sector wants VCs who combine the best of academic credentials with the skill set expected of the best business leaders, gaining experience outside higher education in some systematic way may be a value for future VCs. There are various mentoring and shadowing schemes that are available which allow senior academic managers to work with those in other sectors, but this is an area where further innovations are needed.

ESAs are not being used optimally. Universities need to learn how to use the ESAs more effectively and a set of practical guidelines (perhaps generated through discussion between a number of ESAs and representatives of CUC/UUK) could be useful. The analysis in this study does not consider the role of the university HR department in recruiting the VC. Any practical guidelines would need to consider this. In addition to providing support for institutions in their management of the recruitment process, the guidelines might be used to explicitly introduce prospective VCs to the peculiarities of this sort of search and selection process.

This study has generated a database on the characteristics of current VCs. The prime value of such a database will be realised if it is maintained and updated over time so that significant trend analyses can be done. In the US, ACE is conducting studies of the changes in the characteristics, roles and core competencies of university and college presidents that will allow comparisons over time. Something similar may be useful in the UK.
6. REFERENCES


O’Meara, B. (2002). The recruitment and selection for Vice-Chancellors for Australian universities. Deakin University, Geelong Victoria.


Thompson, M. D. (2000). Gender, leadership orientation and effectiveness: testing the theoretical models of Bolman and Deal and Quinn. *Sex Roles, 42*(11/12), 969-992.


APPENDIX I:
RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Characteristics, Roles and Selection of Vice-Chancellors

Prof Glynis M Breakwell
September 2004 – Revised July 2005

Background

The proposed research would follow work done by Breakwell in 2003-04 as a small project for the Sino-UK HE Leadership Network Development Programme (sponsored by HEFCE, British Council and the Ministry of Education in China). That project was designed in consultation with Prof Zhan Tao, President of Shandong University. The project initially focussed upon identifying what competences are required in a university president (vice chancellor) and how the senior management of the university is structured. Our intention was to compare the UK and Chinese HE sectors in their expectations of presidents (vice chancellors) and in the nature of the senior management team.

The methods used to gather data in the UK were:

i. Semi-structured interviews with a small number of vice-chancellors about their role (N=12), the core competencies required and the organisation of their senior management team; with a particular emphasis upon what they regarded to be the changes which are occurring and the major levers they use to achieve organisational change.

ii. Examination of published data on the “person profile” required by universities in their adverts for vice-chancellorships and the methods used in selecting vice chancellors (for posts advertised in the period 2002-04).

iii. Collation of published data in university reports and websites on current university senior management team structures.

Some of the preliminary results were presented to the May 2004 Sino-UK HE Leadership Programme Workshop. A short paper summarising the results was produced at end of June 2004 and submitted to HEFCE for use by members of the network. A further presentation of the results will be made at the CEAIE conference in Beijing in October 2004.

Discussion at the workshop (and subsequently, particularly with HEFCE and Leadership Foundation members) suggests that the project has produced some interesting findings but could profitably be extended in a number of directions in order to provide material that could be used to inform the development of guidance on the selection/recruitment of HE senior managers and to provide courses for HE leaders with substantive data on current practice.

Objectives of the New Research

The objectives of the new research would be to:

i. Create an interactive electronic database that summarises key characteristics of VCs. These data would be collected from archival sources.

ii. Extend the detailed examination of VC characteristics (competencies, career structures & trajectories, training for management, etc.) by both increasing the interview sample size (to minimum N = 25) and representativeness and the range of data collected.

iii. Examine changes over time in required VC characteristics (the length of time would be open to negotiation but would be ideally in the period from 1992 to 2006) – this would entail a systematic review of other studies of the role of the VC in the UK (dating back to early 1980s), notable amongst these is the book published by Bargh, C., Bocock, J., Scott, P., & Smith, D. (2000) and the exploration of archival material.

iv. Explore the changes in methods of recruitment of VCs in the period 1992-2006 (particularly examining the current role of head hunters and the manner of the decision-making concerning the appointment within university governing bodies), taking in account the guidance now emerging (e.g. UUK, SCOP, CUC, ECU, UCEA, UCEA, 2004).

The project would also identify priorities for further research on HE leadership processes, using respondents within the VC population as a source. The project will serve to highlight deficits in current educational provision for HE senior managers.

The project should be extended to encompass international comparative data. The comparisons with the Chinese system have already been valuable. However, the timetable and pricing below does not include the international comparative component. That would need to be considered additionally. Links have already been made with researchers in the USA and in Canada who are engaged in empirical studies of heads of HE institutions and there is a strong possibility of collaboration in the future.
Of course, the detail of the project proposed here should also be expected to evolve in the light of other projects that the Leadership Foundation chooses to initiate coterminously. The projects in the programme should be expected to take advantage of having a common focus to achieve added value through exchange of data and active debate.

Meeting the Leadership Foundations Mission and Objectives

The Leadership Foundation has identified that it requires an empirical foundation for the programmes that it will develop for leaders in higher education. This evidence-based approach requires high quality research by experienced researchers who are respected in their field. The Leadership Foundation has established as a key element in its agenda the need to understand the process of becoming a leader, including career trajectories and selection processes. It has also emphasised the importance of data on evolution of roles, structures and cultures. The proposed project addresses precisely those issues and it will deliver:

- A clear picture of the status quo with regard to the characteristics of leaders in UK universities and the changes in role that are occurring
- A comprehensive interactive electronic database with details of the current profile of VCs in the UK (including the available historical record dating back to 1992). This will be open to maintenance subsequently and allow ongoing re-examination for purposes of trend analysis
- A rigorous analysis of recruitment and selection methods in use currently for VCs – not available elsewhere. The focus on selection will be prime in this study and that the role of search consultants will be thoroughly examined.
- Material of a type that has proven relevance and interest for potential HE leaders (i.e. tested in the Sino-UK project group)
- Findings presented in such way that they can be used in designing training programmes

In addition to the direct contribution this research is designed to make to the Leadership Foundation programme development, it will contribute more broadly to the field of leadership and governance research. There has been little systematic research on leaders in HE (despite some notable exceptions, e.g. Bargh et al, 2000). The proposed research has the opportunity to contribute to developing a template for systematic data collection in this area. It can be used to test various current theoretical models of leadership practice.

Methods and Approach

a. Methods

The project would use an integrated methods approach. Data from VCs (present and past) will be collected through semi-structured interviews and group sessions. Archival material will be used as appropriate on VC job specifications, VC career structures, etc. Participants in recruitment and selection of VCs (e.g. lay members of governing bodies, HR specialists, head-hunting firms, etc.) will be asked to provide statements of their procedures. The experience of the Sino-UK project suggests that there will be no resistance to providing data. Data will be subjected as appropriate to all qualitative and quantitative analytic approaches.

b. Approach

A project of this sort will yield results in phases. There will be considerable merit in having regular feedback of results throughout the project. It is suggested that, on a roughly 5 monthly basis, a report of findings is produced – this can be in a variety of forms (written short reports, workshops, verbal updates – as required – see timetable and deliverables section below). These can then be used to shape educational provision for HE senior managers and to inform the development the research agenda. It will also mean that the direction of data collection within the project can be refined following feedback on its initial findings.

Timetable and Schedule of Deliverables

The project will take 24 months to complete. It will start on 1st September 2005 and it is on this assumption that the schedule for deliverables is based. Each of the interim reports will provide updates upon the analysis of the accumulating data (from interviews and archival work) but also each will have a special focus relevant to the Leadership Foundation agenda:

Interim Report 1 - February 2006: Brief Report providing critique of available research in the field, highlighting important areas for Leadership Foundation research development.

Interim Report 2 - July 2006: Report with verbal briefing – focussing upon changes over time in the characteristics of VCs and likely implications for future training of VCs.

Interim Report 3 - December 2006: Workshop/seminar on findings from VC interviews and recommendations on implications for Leadership Foundation programme requirements (for incumbents and potential VCs).
Interim Report 4 - April 2007: Brief Report on changing patterns in recruitment methods and selection procedures, highlighting areas where those participating in the process may require Leadership Foundation support (through course or publications or research).

Final Report – September 2007: Written report bringing together all findings and recommendations. This should be written with a view to wider publication. In addition an electronic database with details of the current profile of VCs in the UK (as well as the available historical record) will be delivered. This will be open to maintenance subsequently and allow ongoing re-examination for purposes of trend analysis.

References


Prof G M Breakwell
10th September 2004
Revised 4th July 2005
### APPENDIX 2:

#### FIELD NAMES AND DESCRIPTION/DEFINITIONS OF CONTENTS IN DATASET USED FOR QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

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<th>DESCRIPTION/DEFINITION OF CONTENTS</th>
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¹⁰⁶ Only if available. Depends on availability of photograph in public domain.
### Categories of University


**Ancient university**: Medieval and renaissance universities founded pre-1800

**Civic university**: Universities founded from 1800 – 1949

**Plate Glass university**: Refers to one of the several universities founded in the 1960s since following the Robbins report.

**Post-92s**: those formed post 1992 but not including those formed post 2003


### Field Name Description/Definition of Contents

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<td>MainWorkField</td>
<td>Options: HE/FE/Education; Other Public sector; Private Sector; Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>FormerPosition</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>ClassOfFormerPost</td>
<td>Class of position prior to current VC position. Options: Ass/Deputy/Pro: VC/Principal/Provost/Rector/Director etc; Director-Other; Director/HE; VC/Principal/Rector/Provost/Director/CE etc; CE-Other; Chairman; Secretary; Assistant Secretary; Other Snr Management; Ass Director/Deputy Director; Dean/Professor/Head/Chair; Lecturer</td>
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<tr>
<td>PlaceOfFormerPosition</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>FormerPlace1</td>
<td>Type of place of former position: OldUni; OldRussellUni; New92Uni; New2000Uni; Overseas Uni; UK Other; Overseas Other; Funding Council; Research Council; FEI/HEI; Polytechnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position after VC</td>
<td>Location of position after VC: CE; Chairman; Emeritus Professor/Fellow or HE related; Other; retired. <em>Excludes moves to new UK VC role</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PostVCPPost</td>
<td>Options: HEUK; HEOseas; Other Public Sector; Private Sector; Overseas non HE</td>
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<tr>
<td>PostVCLocation</td>
<td>Options: HEUK; HEOseas; Other Public Sector; Private Sector; Overseas non HE</td>
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APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR THE VCs AND ESAs

1. Interview Protocol for the VCs

What experience do you have as a Chief Executive?
In HE - Dates? Background? Training?
In Non-HE - Dates? Background? Training?
How were you recruited to the VCship? What are your experiences of ESAs?
How would you define the role of Chief Executive in a University?
  • Key responsibilities – inside and outside the university
What are the core competences required to be effective as a VC?
  • Talent
  • Skills
  • Personality characteristics
  • How could these core competences change over time
  • How do they compare with those required in other sectors
How would you characterise your own leadership style?
What are the major levers for organisational change available to a VC?
What do you think are the major issues of the governance of the institution?
  • Executive vs non-executive roles

2. Interview Protocol for the ESAs

When was your company established?
What is the size of the business? Based solely in the UK? Annual turnover?
What are the backgrounds of the people your employ?
What is your own background/education?
How long have you worked here?
How many searches overall would you do in a year?
How many would be for a CEO position?
How many for a VC of a university?
Do you have a pool of universities/companies that you work for?
Please tell me how you would go about searching for a VC. I am particularly interested in how you determine the characteristics of the candidate that are required by the university?
What characteristics do you think a VC needs?
Do you have a firm list of characteristics in mind for every appointment that you make?
In universities, do you think the candidate should come from HE or can people transfer in?
What are your thoughts on recommending candidates from overseas?
What do universities do badly when seeking their new VC?
Are there peculiarities about working with universities?
How do you see your role in the selection process?
Do you find you are allowed to influence the selection process?
What training do you think is necessary for the role of VC?
BIographies

**Professor Glynis Breakwell**

**Vice-Chancellor, University of Bath**

Professor Breakwell took her PhD from the University of Bristol and DSc from the University of Oxford. In 2003, in recognition of the significance of her contribution to the social sciences, she was awarded an honorary doctorate of laws from the University of Bristol and in 2004 became an Honorary Professor at the University of Shandong in China.

She is a psychologist specialising in research on leadership, on identity processes, on risk communication and on military cultures. She has been a Fellow of the British Psychological Society since 1984 and is a chartered health psychologist. In 2002, she was elected an Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences. In 2006, she became one of the Honorary Fellows of the British Psychological Society.

After her Prize Fellowship at Nuffield College, University of Oxford, Professor Breakwell moved to the University of Surrey where she became Head of the Department of Psychology in 1990 and subsequently Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise).

Professor Breakwell was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bath in 2001. As Vice-Chancellor, she is both the academic leader and chief executive of the university.

She is a member of the International Committee of the Royal Society, Chair of the National Cataloguing Unit for the Archives of Contemporary Scientists, a director of Universities UK, a member of the Science and Industry Council South West and a member of the HEFCE Leadership Governance & Management Committee. She has been a director of the Theatre Royal, Bath, a director of the New Swindon Company and a trustee of the Holburne Museum. In 2006 she became Chair of Higher Education in the South West, Chair of the Bath Festivals Trust and in 2007 she became a Board member of the Higher Education Career Services Unit.

Prof Breakwell has published more than twenty books and hundreds of journal articles. Her research has resulted in Prof Breakwell acting as an advisor to a number of government departments, including the Department of Health, the Department of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Defence, HSE and DEFRA, besides many multi-national corporations and not-for-profit organisations. Most recently, she has been a member of the Royal Society and Academy of Medical Sciences study on Pandemic Flu.

**Dr Michelle Tytherleigh, C.Psychol**

**Former Research Fellow to VC, University of Bath**

After ‘several’ years working in industry, Michelle started her academic career in 1994, doing a BSc (Hons) in Psychology at Liverpool, followed by a PhD in Health Psychology at Bristol. The subject area of her thesis was the effects of stress hormones on memory.

Her first role as a post-doc was at the University of Plymouth, where she ran a three and a half year HEFCE-funded study investigating occupational stress in UK university staff. In this role, Michelle also became closely involved with other researchers investigating occupational stress in Australian and South African universities, with whom she still maintains regular contact. Michelle’s most recent position has been working with Professor Glynis Breakwell, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bath, on this Leadership Foundation-funded project looking at the characteristics, roles and selection of University Heads of Institutions (Vice-chancellors). She is also an Associate Lecturer for the Open University.

Having been awarded her Chartered status by the British Psychological Society in July 2007, Michelle has now returned to the North West with her family where she is planning to continue her work as a health psychologist on a freelance basis.
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