

**Public policy for higher education in Chile:
A case study in quality assurance
(1990-2009)**

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Abstract

An early adopter of external quality assessments, Chile stands out as an example of innovative reforms in higher education policy across the developing world. Much less is known, however, about the local factors that affected the formation, implementation and consequences of quality assurance policies. This study examines the interplay of structural and agency factors, tracing variations in this policy domain from a longitudinal perspective. Through semi-structured interviews with policymakers, higher education leaders and experts who were directly involved in advancing reform at different stages, the study documents the rise and decline of quality assurance through a twenty-year span (1990-2009) covering four consecutive terms of government — from the reinstatement of Chilean democracy to the last year in power of the same centre-left coalition that conducted the political transition from military rule.

The study begins tracing the origins of Chilean higher education and the revolutionary changes it started to experience from 1980 toward, embracing greater competition and privatisation. Later, the theories that inform the thesis — Anthony Giddens's structuration and Margaret Archer's morphogenesis — are presented along with the methodological design chosen for the study. Supported by this background, a case description is introduced in three parts, each of them pertaining to different reforms: the introduction of licensing in 1990, the formation of course accreditation pilots in 1999, and the creation of a comprehensive quality assurance scheme in 2003.

The analysis provides a comprehensive exploration of the structural properties — enrolment expansion, competition among providers, an elitist policymaking style, and the quality assurance discourse — behind these reforms and their mutation over time. Likewise, the changing position of leading policy players is examined as well as their manipulation of existing structures to influence the design and implementation of policy changes. By confronting agency and structural interaction, policy trajectories emerge, allowing a better understanding of policy dynamics in Chilean higher education.

The study unveils the growing centrality of quality assurance within the policy architecture and the substantial efforts universities have made to limit its impact in their core business and to maximise their competitive advantage in complex and dynamic environments. The analysis suggests that, incrementally, these tensions are

highly correlated with the declining utility and legitimacy of the existing quality assurance scheme. It advances that quality assurance can, however, play a significant policy function in reassuring the fundamental values of higher education if greater participation in external assessments is granted and financial incentives attached to quality assurance are removed.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

- (i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD;
- (ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text of all other material used;
- (iii) the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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Abbreviations

AFD	Aporte Fiscal Directo	Direct Public Contribution
AFI	Aporte Fiscal Indirecto	Indirect Public Contribution
ASOFAMECH	Asociación de Facultades de Medicina	Medicine Schools Association
CAC	Comisión de Autorregulación Concordada	Authorised Commission for Self-regulation
CAE	Credito con Aval de Estado	Government-backed student loans
CEES	Comisión de Estudio de la Educación Superior	Commission for the Study of Higher Education
CINDA	Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo	Inter-university Development Centre
CNA	Comisión Nacional de Acreditación	National Commission for Accreditation
CNAP	Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado	National Commission for Undergraduate Education Accreditation
CNED	Consejo Nacional de Educación	National Council for Education
CONAP	Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Posgrado	National Commission for Graduate Education Accreditation
CONICYT	Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica	National Commission for Scientific and Technologic Research
CRUCH	Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades Chilena	Council of University Rectors
CSE	Consejo Superior de Educación	Higher Council for Education
CPU	Corporación de Promoción Universitaria	University Development Organisation
FLACSO	Facultad latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales	Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences
FONDECYT	Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Científico y Tecnológico	National Development Fund for Science and Technology
IESALC	Instituto Internacional de la UNESCO para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe.	UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean
INQAAHE		International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
LOCE	Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza	Organic Constitutional Law of Education
MECESUP	Programa de Mejoramiento de la Calidad y Equidad en la Educación Superior	Program for the Enhancement of Quality and Equity in Higher Education
MERCOSUR	Mercado Común del Sur	Latin American economic integration agreement
MINEDUC	Ministerio de Educación	Ministry of Education
PUC	Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile	Pontifical Catholic University of Chile
UA	Universidad Austral de Chile	Southern University
UdeC	Universidad de Concepción	Universidad de Concepcion
UCH	Universidad de Chile	University of Chile
UCV	Universidad Católica de Valparaíso	Catholic University of Valparaiso
UN	Universidad del Norte	Northern University
USACH	Universidad de Santiago de Chile	University of Santiago
UTE	Universidad Técnica del Estado	State Technical University
UTFSM	Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María	Technical University Federico Santa Maria

FIRST PART

Chapter 1:

Introducing a policy change study in Chile's higher education

1.1 The study: aim and scope

Targeting the implications of a reform agenda started in 1980, the thesis examines the evolution of quality assurance policy in Chilean higher education over twenty years: from 1990 to 2009. It focuses on three pivotal moments that led to the introduction of three distinct external quality assurance schemes — licensing, course accreditation and institutional accreditation — in a cumulative fashion. In particular, the study unveils the group of factors behind these developments and explains how they have shaped the direction of change and policy outcomes. By doing that, it traces the forces and agents behind one of the most radical transformations ever experienced by Chilean higher education.

The period covered in the study overlaps with other prominent political transformations in the country. It is not an accident that the study concentrates on the so-called transition to democracy — the first four elected governments supported by the stable political coalition that followed the end of the military rule in 1990. During these seminal years many of the practices that have moulded contemporary Chilean democracy were established, affecting the ways in which people participate in politics, redefining the structure and operation of the state bureaucracy, and legitimising the market-oriented model of development forged during Mr Pinochet's tenure.

Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions: What factors have caused changes in quality assurance policy in Chilean higher education between 1990 and 2009? How have these factors influenced the direction and opportunity of change? What are the main consequences caused by quality assurance reforms?

The study of quality assurance evolution in Chile is timely. Once considered an innovative policy for enhancing institutional coherence and responsiveness in higher education, quality assurance's effectiveness is now under question. Reviews have pointed to urgent areas for improvement (Consejo Asesor Presidencial para la Educación Superior 2008; OCDE and Banco Mundial 2009). Higher education leaders have called for a comprehensive assessment of the existing quality assurance arrangements and the Ministry of Education responded suggesting an international

assessment in order to identify areas of concern in the current scheme and to advance possible solutions. As a result, a recent OECD review (2012) has pointed to several areas of concern that require urgent action, though no reform has taken place.

A prominent feature of the recent reform wave, quality assurance¹ has provided new avenues in overseeing national systems of higher education. Over the last two decades, it has channelled important government aspirations: to increase tertiary education's responsiveness to the challenges of society, the economy and the labour market. Often translated into calls for greater effectiveness, external assessments have been instrumental in reconfiguring strategic planning and managerial systems in universities.

Whether in sequence or independently, quality assurance's most frequent manifestations — i.e. accreditation, academic audit and licensing — have contributed to the adjustment of competitive patterns, resource allocation, and academic standards across the sector. External assessments have also been used to justify transformations in research productivity schemes and in institutional organisation for teaching and learning.

Its repercussions have radiated throughout policy, institutional and disciplinary circles facilitating the formation of alliances and new forms of communication and participation. Brennan (1997), for example, has argued that disagreement about quality assurance in higher education conceals three key controversies: in relation to the language and values of the management theory it brings to the sector; about who is in control of quality assurance and how it helps to redefine the balance of power in universities; and in regard to its ability to facilitate organisational adaptation within a changing environment. A closer connection between quality assurance and the government, for example, often leads to greater

¹ Quality assurance is a term commonly used to refer to policies and schemes for conducting external assessments in higher education. From a normative perspective, Vlasceanu, Grunberg and Parlea have described quality assurance as '[a]n all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programmes. As a regulatory mechanism, quality assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement, providing information and judgments (not ranking) through an agreed upon and consistent process and well-established criteria. Many systems make a distinction between internal quality assurance (i.e. intra-institutional practices in the view of monitoring and improving the quality of higher education) and external quality assurance (i.e. inter- or supra-institutional schemes assuring the quality of higher education institutions and programmes). Quality assurance activities depend on the existence of the necessary institutional mechanisms preferably sustained by a solid quality culture. Quality management, quality enhancement, quality control, and quality assessment are means through which quality assurance is ensured. The scope of quality assurance is determined by the shape and size of the higher education system.' (2007:74-75).

accountability demands for universities, understood as ‘the obligation to report to others, to explain, to justify, to answer questions about how resources have been used, and to what effect’ (Trow 1996:310).

As with many other contemporary reform agendas, quality assurance has been subject to different research traditions and multidisciplinary approaches. A specialised literature has emerged to describe quality assurance concepts, systems, mechanisms, and practices (Harvey and Williams 2010). Economics has examined its potential role in addressing information asymmetries in the higher education market and in assisting allocation of public monies (Teixeira et al 2004). Organisational theory has studied its impact on universities’ structures, processes, and cultures (Stensaker 2008). Policy analysis has pointed to its implications for higher education systems and interactions with other policy sectors (Shattock 2008). Quality assurance has also been used to illustrate policy borrowing and policy change in higher education (Trowler 2002).

Significant implications of quality assurance’s effectiveness remain under-documented. Stensaker (2008) has summarised available information in relation to what quality assurance has brought to higher education: greater institutional leadership, an increasing professionalisation of the work related to quality, the use of quality assurance processes as marketing and branding tools, and enhanced transparency for society. If anything, these findings say little about the role quality assurance plays within the higher education policy architecture — in particular it does not say much of the policy intermediation function quality assurance policy performs when it is linked to access to funding.

Quality assurance research has shifted its focus in recent years from addressing the tensions between quality assurance and quality enhancement to describing the functional features of accountability systems (Filippakou and Tapper 2008, Stensaker and Harvey 2011). These developments may indicate that existing quality assurance arrangements are not fulfilling societal expectations, viz. addressing unintended and persistent consequences attached to the widening of participation and to the expanding private provision in higher education (Neave 1994, Power 1997). They also highlight the importance of achieving a better understanding of what impact quality assurance has at the system level and the forces that are moulding its operation.

The study traces a comprehensive exploration of the fundamental forces that prompted changes in policy. It reveals how universities have actively reacted to

changes in regulation. By mapping policy change and institutional adaptation, this research depicts the intersection of specific structures and forms of agency in the evolution of quality assurance policy and its outcomes. It suggests that the continuous expansion of enrolments, the need for greater distinction among universities, the quality assurance discourse, and an elitist policymaking style have played an important role in explaining how interactions in diverse policy spheres determine changes in policies. Their influence in determining choices between different policy options is a function of existing power arrangements in the sector, as the Chilean case illustrates.

The study uncovers the growing centrality of quality assurance within the policy framework for Chilean higher education and the substantial efforts universities have made to limit its impact in their core business and to maximise their competitive advantage in complex and dynamic environments. The analysis demonstrates that these tensions are highly correlated with the declining utility and legitimacy of the existing quality assurance scheme. It is argued, however, that quality assurance has a significant policy function in reassuring the fundamental values of higher education through its ability to interpret and apply assessment criteria to specific institutional situations in a consistent fashion.

In documenting the rise and decline of quality assurance, this research covers a twenty-year span. It draws on policy documents, reports and interviews with key policy actors, stakeholders and observers to examine the growing interest in quality assurance within policy circles and to address a variety of regulatory issues.

The study confirms that quality assurance agencies have helped to secure a basal level of quality in higher education, accommodating innovation and preserving institutional autonomy at the cost of increasing market competition in the sector, accommodating vested interests in higher education, and tempering the basic collegial model of the university by reinforcing managerial values and practices.

As will be shown, the current struggle of quality assurance agencies to regain legitimacy and relevance in the sector is not exclusively correlated to the high expectations placed on their performance and to their centrality within the policy architecture. Collectively, universities have also played a substantial role in the current state of affairs by isolating quality assurance mechanisms from their essential processes and by holding a great deal of control in quality assurance agencies' decision-making bodies.

This study questions the assumption that the adaptation of the basic quality assurance template to Chilean higher education has been adequate for addressing challenges in quality across the sector (see Lemaitre 2004). Key contextual features — such as the limited capacity of the government to regulate and steer the system, the dominant position of the private sector, both for- and non-profit, in providing undergraduate education, and the substantial proportion of higher education costs borne by students and their families — have not been subject to proper consideration in the design of quality assurance mechanisms, even though they have played an important part in informing incremental change in quality assurance policy. The study argues that the greater emphasis quality assurance arrangements have placed on enhancing managerial practices within a highly privatised environment has not been fully effective at limiting unwanted consequences attached to economic competition and profit-seeking behaviour in higher education. This emphasis on the corporate university enterprise, the study demonstrates, has contributed neither to a better allocation of public funding in universities nor to enhancing Chilean society's understanding of higher education and its performance.

Quality assurance needs to be reconsidered if it is to continue performing its function within the higher education policy. Special attention needs to be paid to the values embedded in the assessment criteria and to the ways they inform evaluation procedures. As a powerful vehicle for communicating expectations and encouraging dialogue, external assessment schemes provide an invaluable space where the internal operation of the university can discuss the functions carried out and expectations of performance directly with stakeholders. Likewise, they can contribute to counteract the negative effects attached to the growing managerialism in Chilean universities by reinforcing essential collegial values — such as academic participation in institutional decision-making — through assessment criteria.

1.2 Quality assurance policy in Chilean higher education

Over the last three decades, higher education in Chile has been in constant flux, as a result of a comprehensive reform agenda launched in 1980. From the outset, the reformers focused on sharing the cost of higher education with the private sector and on introducing resource competition among universities. To enhance their responsiveness and effectiveness, and to reduce their political influence, the two

existing multi-branch public universities were divided into smaller units.

Diversification and expansion of higher education provision were pursued. New types of institutions were incorporated into the sector and provisions for facilitating the formation (and monitoring the functioning) of new private universities were passed.

The drastic reconfiguration of public universities and the implementation of new funding guidelines preoccupied policy debate throughout the 1980s. Public funding of the sector focused on the existing universities and declined in absolute terms over the decade. There were sizeable and continual increases in tuition fees. To provide financial assistance to middle- and low-income students in traditional institutions², a loan scheme was started in 1981. Gradually, new private institutions proliferated and enrolment expansion had gained momentum by the end of the 1980s.

Over the years, major policy adjustments have been introduced to higher education, yet the pillars of the 1980s reforms prevail to this day. Quality assurance was one innovation brought to the sector to solve the perceived ineffectiveness of existing arrangements in securing a basic level of academic quality among new private providers.

Initially conceived as a broad but temporary supervision regime launched in 1990, licensing became quality assurance proper with the introduction of assessment cycles in 1992. Since then new universities have been subject to comprehensive evaluations for fixed terms. Annually, they are asked to conduct self-assessments against a set of basic criteria that an autonomous (i.e. fully licensed) institution must meet. In addition, peer review teams perform external assessments. With all this information, the Higher Council for Education (CSE), the agency in charge of licensing, passes judgements on their progress (or lack of it) towards autonomy, commenting on areas that demand further action.

Although structural limitations and regulatory loopholes³ prevented licensing from having a greater impact on the emerging group of private institutions, a great deal of criticism has pointed to its lack of coordination with other policy instruments

² The notion of *traditional* universities refers to those institutions that existed *in some form* (whether as universities or parts thereof) prior to the creation of the new private sector. Different to *new* universities, they were granted institutional autonomy immediately upon their incorporation in the regulatory framework that emerged from the 1980 reforms. See section 2.4.3.

³ An old examination system remained available for universities created before 1993, should they choose to avoid licensing. Other higher education institutions obtained exemption from examination or entered into permanent supervision regimes. Under such conditions, they were not granted full autonomy and their freedom to open new programs was severely restricted. The licensing of vocational education institutions was a direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

(Lemaitre 2004). New universities have often been pushed abruptly from a highly regulated environment to a self-regulatory stage, helping intensify market competition in the sector. Nonetheless, in the view from the sector, licensing and the licensing agency have performed a pivotal role in socialising managerial values and practices within universities, in training reviewers and quality assurance professionals, and in validating the quality assurance approach to higher education policy. These perceptions have cemented the reputation of key senior officials at CSE among university leaders, allowing them to be very effective in advocating for the introduction of an accreditation scheme for autonomous institutions a few years later.

Pursuing this agenda was possible because the democratic restoration of 1990 considerably altered previous patterns of policymaking. Sectoral dynamics gained traction and their influence on the government and the political system could not be ignored. After years of direct intervention, publicly funded institutions recovered their autonomy and their voices on policy matters. In parallel, vested interests in the private sub-sector — mainly entrepreneurs and religious groups that organised, controlled and, in some cases, profited from new universities — continued to grow as enrolments expanded and with these the economic and political influence of those institutions. A community of experts built up throughout the 1980s managed to garner an important role in policymaking as well.

From having been active in reform, the government became a reactive force. Legal restrictions to modify education policies, a legacy of junta leader Augusto Pinochet's regime, prevented the newly elected government from introducing dramatic adjustments in regulation without wider agreement across the political spectrum. The government's lack of conviction to alter the core of the 1980 reforms also informed its approach to the sector. In this context, the government focused on addressing the main unwanted consequences of the reforms — such as the proliferation of low quality provision and the undersupply of funding to universities — and on dealing with emerging issues in the sector. A large space was thus left for institutions and other actors to loom large in policymaking.

1.3 Understanding quality assurance policy and its transformations

There is a sizeable literature describing the 1980 reforms and their main implications for Chilean higher education, primarily in terms of expansion and diversification of

the sector, the evolution of its regulatory framework and the adjustments introduced to funding structures (Levy 1986, Brunner 1986a, 1997, 2009, Cox 1996, Bernasconi and Rojas 2004, Brunner and Uribe 2007).

Yet important consequences of this transformation still remain under-examined. The evolution of quality assurance policy has not been subject to systematic enquiry, even though its trajectory is tightly coupled with important transformations in the sector. On one side, shifts in patterns of expansion, competition and diversification in higher education have contributed to the justification of new forms of external evaluation in universities. On the other, once introduced, these assessment schemes have helped to reconfigure the ways in which those processes are carried out at the system level by influencing institutional responses to regulation and accountability — the modest proliferation of the branch campuses nationwide during the last decade is an evident example of the role of accreditation in dimming institutional attempts to expand their enrolments rapidly after years of uncontrolled expansion.

Quality assurance policy has evolved in three main phases, each of them responding to emerging challenges under different agencies. Introduced in 1990 under the responsibility of CSE, licensing took aim at addressing quality concerns attached to the marked proliferation of new institutions in the late 1980s. Accreditation pilots starting in 1999 sought to mitigate the unwanted consequences caused by growing competition among autonomous universities (both old and new) to expand their operations. In this context, the National Commission for Undergraduate Education Accreditation (CNAP) and the National Commission for Graduate Education Accreditation (CONAP) shared the task of designing, testing, and introducing accreditation mechanisms at the program level. They also put forward a proposal for establishing a comprehensive quality assurance scheme for the sector. Finally, the introduction of a system-wide student aid scheme and the growing impact of institutional accreditation pilots (started in 2003) offered a timely juncture for implementing a permanent quality assurance scheme with the aim of enhancing accountability and transparency across higher education. The National Commission for Accreditation replaced all previous agencies with the exception of CSE (now revamped as the National Council for Education [CNED]), which continued to be in charge of licensing.

An investigation of quality assurance's evolution from a policy change perspective offers an opportunity to explore two interconnected dimensions. At one level, there is a combination of key factors that have had the ability to trigger changes in this policy domain and which are idiosyncratic to Chilean higher education and its reform. At another level, higher education institutions' reactions to changes in quality assurance reflect an additional set of strategies influencing policy implementation. Together, these dimensions shed some light on the forces that have shaped policy outcomes and that inform the role that quality assurance is performing within the sector's policy architecture.

Various factors have influenced the evolution of quality assurance policy and its interaction with the changing context of higher education. The escalating economic and reputational competition in a sector under continuous expansion, the growing consensus towards neoliberal ideology among policymakers, the extensive lobbying power of universities, the statutory limitations on changes within the sectoral regulatory framework, and the high level of privatisation within Chilean higher education have all played key roles in informing policy change and its incremental trajectory in quality assurance. These factors reflect structural properties at play in the process of change (Giddens 1984). They explain why actors from inside and outside the sector have taken action to protect or advance their own interests or to proffer policy solutions addressing perceived challenges.

Since 1990, policymaking in Chilean higher education has typically been pluralistic but elitist. Higher education leaders, scholars, commentators, students and personnel from quality assurance agencies have played prominent roles in championing, supporting or opposing, modelling and implementing changes in quality assurance. Yet few of them have exerted a decisive influence in policy formulation and implementation. Models and ideas taken from other higher education systems and regulatory experiences have been adapted to fit the Chilean context. Although groups within the government have always initiated policy transformation, compromise and negotiation have consistently typified engagement, causing, in all cases, major transformations to proposed changes at various stages of the policy cycle.

Throughout the implementation process, universities have found similar strategies for addressing changes in quality assurance policy. Often a matter of concern among lower prestige institutions, the incremental pathway of change in this domain — in terms of scope and consequentiality — has usually been subject to a

common pattern of response from the university side: an initial predisposition towards institutional learning and cooperation with quality assurance agencies in developing external assessment exercises would, in turn, lead to the formation of internal assessment superstructures. These arrangements have served higher education institutions in enhancing their compliance with external evaluation requirements and in isolating their core educational and research functions in order to protect them from external interference (Ewell 2007).

Yet a small group of universities with strong political connections adopted a rather different approach: they plainly rejected any initiative to expand quality assurance policy. They actively avoided participating in the accreditation pilots and stonewalled against the introduction of the new quality assurance regime, making it a long, painful and uncertain process. Because they distrusted the government and the experts in charge of quality assurance agencies, they failed to acknowledge the potential of quality assurance for legitimising their own managerial orientations. They started to adopt the internal mechanisms necessary to submit to accreditation with the exclusive purpose of complying with regulation and only when no other choice was available.

In the latest policy phase, however, universities have gone even further in the quest to control the outcomes of quality assurance: they influenced policy circles with the aim of excluding key experts — who led previous quality assurance agencies — from guiding the implementation of the National Commission for Accreditation (CNA). This strategic manoeuvre marked a virtual ‘takeover’ of the agency and signalled a departure from the more merely technical acumen acquired through previous experiences of external assessment in higher education.

Factors influencing policy change and institutional strategies to address its consequences provide a useful template to reconsider the function quality assurance is performing in Chilean higher education. Thus, we might suggest that quality assurance has performed a critical role for both market competition and regulatory oversight in the sector. On the market side, it has provided a mechanism for validating prestige differentiation among universities, helping them to enhance or allowing them to diminish their competitive stances. Competitive pressures have incrementally brought about new forms of prestige differentiation because quality differentiation has tended to decline gradually due to institutions’ sustained efforts in obtaining equivalent quality assurance badges. On the regulatory side, quality assurance has

provided a threshold function by determining universities' access to different streams of public funding. Additionally, it has given the government a vehicle for identifying, exposing and curbing unwanted developments in higher education institutions.

Are the control and the prestige recognition roles compatible? Quality assurance's dual function reveals its centrality within the sector's policy architecture; a) reflecting the tensions at play in shaping higher education dynamics towards competition and regulation, and b) providing a mechanism for accommodating variations in them. By so doing, quality assurance helps to adjust the existing policy framework to the fluidity of modern systems of higher education.

This duality also informs the basic decision-making patterns within quality assurance agencies⁴: if agencies emphasise control and the establishment of new monitoring structures and procedures, it is because government officials' technical and managerial rationality prevails; if they pay more attention to performativity and the effects of their decisions on competitive dynamics in the sector, higher education representatives' tactical considerations rank higher in decision-making. The trajectory of the Chilean case demonstrates a gradual departure from the first pattern towards the second. Yet both approaches illustrate the dialogical and interpretative nature of decision-making in quality assurance agencies. In a similar fashion to the judiciary, these agencies link standards to concrete cases by adjusting their meaning for the sector in the process. Defining, applying and interpreting abstract principles and standards for highly diverse settings demand a focus on building consensus within a vast community of practitioners. It is through this process that quality assurance policy is gradually adjusted in practice to the changing reality of higher education, including variations in sectoral and government interests.

Theories of policy change in higher education inform this study (Cerych and Sabatier 1986, Meek et al 1996, Kogan and Hanney 2000, Reed, Meek, and Jones 2002, Gornizka, Kyvik and Stensaker 2005, and Bleikie and Kogan 2006). Giddens (1984), Archer (1995), and Stones (2001) complement this approach by shedding light on agency and structures coming together to determine changes in policies. In the background, literature on higher education systems (Clark 1983, Becher and Kogan 1992, Teichler 2008) provides analytical lenses for identifying structures and processes in which policy change operates.

⁴ The governing boards of the Chilean agencies have pluralistic compositions, mostly filled with government officials and higher education representatives.

The central assumption on which this study is built on is that a comprehensive examination of the pivotal factors and processes at play in the trajectory of quality assurance policy provides a broader framework to appreciate its function and performance. The underlying rationale of this research is that a better understanding of the role of quality assurance policy will emerge by matching the configuration of multiple schemes developed to address quality concerns with the drivers and conditions that trigger changes in policy and the sector's responses to policy development. An alignment between factors influencing change, the policy structures created to accommodate it, and the consideration of previous reactions to quality assurance may predict greater effectiveness in enabling shifts in policies but not necessarily shifts leading to better policy outcomes, which depend on a combination of environmental factors.

Acknowledging the forces at play in the functioning of quality assurance and its main roles within the policy architecture of higher education may lead to the adjustment of existing mechanisms and institutional arrangements to address perceived drawbacks. If quality assurance policy can alleviate the effects of market competition in the sector and disseminate the traditional organisational values attached to the university, its normative function — attached to the capacity of passing judgements through applying abstract criteria to specific cases under assessment — can offer a valuable channel for adjusting the existing policy framework to new developments in Chilean higher education.

1.4 The structure of the study

The study uses a policy analysis framework adapted to higher education research. It provides theoretical lenses to describe causes and responses to policy change in a particular context. The methodological approach used for this research is the case study. It has been deployed in numerous policy studies in the field of higher education where contemporary events are reviewed. The research design has considered a single-case approach focused on one unit of analysis (Yin 2009).

The thesis is organised into three different sections, each of them including a few chapters. Although Part I covers the methodology of this study in depth, a brief summary of the choices made for this research is useful at this point. Acknowledging Wieviorka's (1992) suggestion as to the need to strike the right balance between a

comprehensive historical account and the penetrating explanatory power of social science, structure and agency factors pertaining to the evolution of the quality assurance policy are analysed.

The design of this thesis is a reflection of this tension; the historical background information and theories that guide this study are presented first, followed by the full exposition of the thesis in Part 2. Historical and policy studies, policy documents and semi-structured interviews, informing every phase and stage of policy evolution, are the main sources of evidence in this study. With the aim of accommodating and reducing the number of alternative explanations and accounts, their consistency has been analysed through triangulation.

The third and last part of the thesis has a different approach. Integrative in nature, it attempts to reconsider and critique the roles of quality assurance policy within Chilean higher education as a result of the changes introduced to it. From an advocacy perspective, it also offers some ideas for adjusting existing policy to serve a different but essential function in the context of the case studied. Even though case studies always allow comparisons, it is important to keep in mind that the main purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Chilean higher education policy evolution.

First Part (Chapters 1, 2 and 3)

Part 1 introduces the main argument of the thesis and the theoretical issues upon which the study is built. It begins by presenting a detailed historical overview of Chilean higher education. Tracing the historical roots of higher education in Chile, this section describes the revolutionary but divergent reforms of 1967 and 1980 and their contrasting effects according to key indicators and statistics. The long shadow cast by the 1980 reforms on the democratic governments elected between 1990 and 2006 is analysed in detail in regard to its effects on policy, and the sector's key features and dynamics. From reluctance to enthusiastic adoption, the changing position of the democratic governments from 1990 regarding the core ideological principles of the 1980 reform is illustrated.

Additionally, it examines quality assurance status as a prominent phenomenon in contemporary higher education policy. In detail it covers pertinent theories about policy change in higher education and related concepts. They are integrated in a

coherent framework for analysing policy formation, implementation and assessment. Specific attention is given to the processes and forces that define the content and timing of changes in policy. After emphasising the need for exploring in depth the policy-context nexus to advance consistent analysis, this part closes with the presentation and defence of the methodological approach taken for this study in the field of policy analysis.

Second Part (Chapters 4, 5 and 6)

Having introducing the theories that support this study and key contextual information, Part 2 unpacks the new data collected, informing the case description. First, the trajectory of the quality assurance policy is broken down into three separate phases: licensing, experimental accreditation, and comprehensive quality assurance. The incremental character and cumulative effects of this policy evolution are emphasised and the milestones for each phase are clearly identified. Then, essential factors of change are described in every phase along with those policy networks active throughout the period in question. Processes of policy borrowing and local adaptations of policy are established. A detailed account of higher education institutions' reactions to policy change is provided. Perspectives from different actors in the sector in relation to the impacts and challenges emerging from the different stages of this evolution are presented.

Third Part (Chapters 7 and 8)

Based on the findings from the previous chapters, Part 3 delivers a deeper integration of the factors and dynamics that brought change to quality assurance policy and their influence on the policy direction taken as a result of the reforms introduced. Additionally, this final section explores the functions it has performed in the Chilean case and how its current implications depart from stated goals at two different levels: within higher education and within the policy architecture for the sector. It argues that the communicative properties of quality assurance procedures can offer a chance to address persistent challenges in the sector, as the Chilean experience reveals. The interpretative nature of quality assurance is also highlighted as a useful tool for the

gradual adjustment of the policy framework for higher education. Lastly, the principal conclusions of the study are presented in summary.

Chapter 2: **The historical trajectory of Chilean higher education**

2.1 A Latin American background⁵

For more than 470 years, universities have been shaping and reflecting the transformations experienced by national states that have emerged from Spain and Portugal's American colonies, which are generally understood as 'Latin America'⁶. Originally established under colonial rule to serve the state and the Church, in nature they were neither public nor private, yet both (Levy 1986)⁷.

Their main function was fostering religious education under close Royal and Pontifical surveillance (Schwartzman 1993) — few of them granted degrees. In most cases, their organisation followed the University of Salamanca's cathedral school model. The University of Santo Domingo (founded in the current Dominican Republic in 1538), the University of San Marcos (Lima, 1551), and the Royal and Pontifical University (Mexico City, 1553) were the first three out of twenty-five institutions that existed at the end of the colonial period (Levy 1986:28); a considerable higher education system was in place before English settlers began to develop North America.

Colonial universities in Latin America did not change much under Spanish rule. A number of academic centres acquired a strong influence across the region — Mexico City and Santo Domingo were prominent among them. A few accidents and intrigues altered this stable environment. After 1767, the crown dissolved those universities affiliated to the Jesuit order — Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola in Cuzco, Peru, being a prominent example — and their members were expelled from all Spanish dominions including the Latin American colonies.

The regional higher education landscape experienced noteworthy variations once colonies began to secure their independence from Spain. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the emerging national states of Latin America sought to develop

⁵ See appendix 1 for a comparative review of the current state of higher education in Latin America.

⁶ Excluding some places that might, strictly speaking, be considered 'Latin' once, still, again or otherwise now — e.g. Quebec, Haiti, French Guiana, much of the West Indies, parts of the United States that were once French or Spanish dominions and even newly Latino areas of the United States today.

⁷ Portugal founded 'royal' and other academies and higher schools rather than universities per se in Brazil.

their own university systems. In the same vein as the late colonial regime, they increased their control upon universities by marginalising other forms of authority upon them. Old colonial institutions were closed down or drastically transformed. Clerics were evicted from the professoriate and Theology faculties were often closed. New institutions were created. The new national universities were now public, ‘in the sense that they were created, funded and governed by the state’ (Bernasconi 2008:27).

The French Napoleonic model was chosen for organising the new institutions. This design was heavily influenced by Enlightenment ideals — rooted in a growing secularism — and the appreciation of technical knowledge (Schwartzman 1991). Aiming to provide training for civil servants building the new state infrastructure, universities focused on professional education, mainly in the fields of law, medicine and engineering. New and reformed colonial institutions were organised around loosely coupled faculties. Prestigious practitioners within the liberal professions were appointed and served as faculty chairs (Bernasconi 2008).

Yet the Latin American translation of the French model missed out some of its core elements: universities often obliterated individual rationalism and citizenly values. Instead, egalitarian solidarity prevailed among students and academics in relation to financial, political and institutional power, weakening individualistic cultures and their intellectual and pedagogical content (Schwartzman 1993).

Although their quality did not match the best French professional schools, national universities prevailed across Latin America throughout the nineteenth century (Schwartzman 1993). Some of them succeeded in establishing a tradition of competent work. This was especially true for those institutions that strengthened their links with European universities by importing professors and researchers as happened in Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Sao Paulo (Brazil).

In spite of their egalitarian claims, public universities had made little progress or effort in addressing wider social demands by the early twentieth century. In practice, they were serving the small elite that had access to primary and secondary education — mainly through private schooling. As late as 1960, 3.1% of the relevant group age was enrolled in higher education across Latin America.

Over time, however, the monolithic position of public universities would face serious challenges. Levy (1986) has explained this process as a sequence of state failures. First, public institutions failed to divert pressures towards their expansion. Economic growth and population expansion across Latin America increased the

demand for broader access to higher education among the children of the middle and lower middle classes. After World War II, national universities and polytechnic institutes in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico experienced a sustained expansion building upon the rapid growth of secondary education experienced by various countries.

Probably the most robust national system of the day, Argentinean higher education reached a participation rate of 15.2% in the relevant age group by 1975. Soaring enrolments, however, lowered the status of higher education in its own right. In most countries, leading institutions experienced a dilution of their academic ethos as a result (Schwartzman 1993). A credential crisis followed as the multiplication of academic and professional diplomas undermined privileged access to scarce rewards.

Additionally, public universities failed to avoid — indeed incubated — the turmoil of radical politicisation. The roots of this can be found in the 1918 Cordoba Reform that fully granted students' rights of participation in university governance in Argentina. This so-called co-governing was coupled with greater autonomy for universities. Progressively adopted in public universities across the continent, these reforms opened the door for students' demanding sweeping changes within universities and so in wider society. By the early 1960s both students and academics' groups engaged in radical leftwing politics, especially in Peru and Colombia where Marxist guerrilla movements — like Sendero Luminoso and Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) — were gaining momentum.

Lastly, political failure led to economic failure. Expansion and politicisation were hurting universities' ability to deliver high-quality professional training. Public institutions were compromising their capacity to deliver instruction in in-demand areas by neglecting job- and business-relevant fields. Additionally, they often failed to follow adequate pedagogical methods, particularly in applied disciplines (Levy 1986). Students from higher and upper middle class backgrounds faced mounting pressure to find suitable alternatives to foster professional studies away from political turbulence.

All of these perceived failures — social, political and economic — of public universities in Latin America contributed to the rise of the private sector in higher education. Levy (1986) has described three consecutive waves of private higher

education across the region. With little variation⁸, most countries followed similar evolutionary trajectories, going back to the late nineteenth century.

First, Catholic institutions were created to regain ascendancy for elite social classes across the young republics — political reasons prevented Colombia, Mexico, and Costa Rica from following this trend. Yet, in their aspiration for offering an elite alternative to public universities, first-wave Catholic universities were usually perceived as private yet ‘national’ institutions. In their quest for academic and political legitimacy, Catholic universities eventually developed similar traits to national universities in their quest for academic and political legitimacy — especially in regard to student participation in governance.

As Catholic universities started to resemble national institutions, business and industrial elites created their own universities. This second wave of private institutions was not run by traditional conservatives but by modern enterprise capitalists. That said, these industrialists and financiers respected traditional values; new private universities were essentially rationalised, depoliticised, selective, and secular pro-business organisations with a strong focus on economic utility. The proliferation of military regimes throughout the 1960s and the 1970s facilitated this development to a point, as has been well documented in Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela.

The third wave of private proliferation addressed a very different problem (Levy 1986). Rather than enhancing distinctiveness, the task was how to offer a solution to mounting demand for greater participation in higher education. Extraordinary population growth, rising rates of completion in secondary education and a renewed interest in higher education among the middle and low-middle classes have swept the region since the late 1960s. Resource limitations and ideological preferences — whether to protect public institutions or to limit their influence — prevented governments from offering open admissions for secondary school graduates in public universities. Central governments in Brazil and Colombia effectively placed restrictions on growth for public institutions. The new private institutional type emerged with the explicit purpose of absorbing existing demand for tertiary education. Some of these became universities, offering professional courses. Others

⁸ Religious yet modern enterprises, and non-selective private universities remain typologically elusive in their character as they exhibit distinctive traits attached to more than one wave (Levy 1986).

adopted new organisational templates and focused on vocational and technical education. They aimed to provide mass access but the results were uneven.

2.2 The origins of Chilean universities

After securing independence from Spain in 1818, the nascent Chilean republic focused on expanding the government's institutional platform. As in most Latin American nations, the university was a key element on the government's agenda.

Established in 1842, Universidad de Chile (UCH) was the first public university in the nation but not the first higher education institution of the land⁹. As happened with many public universities emerging in Latin America during the nineteenth century, the French Napoleonic template inspired its organization and function.

UCH was part of the state apparatus and aimed to offer undergraduate education in Law and Political Science, Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Medicine, Philosophy and Humanities, and Theology. With a clear professional orientation, it was organised around five faculties. Each faculty appointed its own academics and distinguished practitioners were usually elected as deans.

From there, UCH experienced sustained but moderate growth over the next forty or so years. By the end of the century, however, Chilean higher education was about to experience important changes to accommodate greater diversity. Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC) was formed in Santiago in 1888 as a reaction from the Catholic elites to the growing secular influence of the state through UCH.

As Levy (1986) has illustrated, the subsequent proliferation of new universities was necessitated largely by logistical concerns. Chile's is a long but narrow territory, and many prospective students were located just too far away to reach the capital city of Santiago and the UCH and PUC campuses. From the turn of the century, growing secondary education completion increased the pressure for establishing new universities. Resource limitations, however, prevented the government from doing so.

⁹ UCH's immediate predecessor, the Royal University of San Felipe, existed in Santiago between 1757 and 1839, teaching courses in the fields of Law, Mathematics, Medicine, Philosophy and Theology (Levy 1986). However, its influence had already diminished substantially by the late Eighteenth Century. Established in 1813, a National Institute offered an alternative for primary, secondary and tertiary education (Brunner 1986). Prior to the formation of the University of Chile, it offered professional courses in the fields of Engineering, Law, Medicine and Theology.

Between 1919 and 1956 local elites undertook a key role in establishing and supporting private universities in important urban centres. Universidad de Concepción (UdeC, created in Concepción in 1919), Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (UCV, established in Valparaíso in 1928, and eventually receiving the honorific ‘Pontificia’), Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María (UTFSM, formed in Valparaíso in 1931), Universidad Austral (UA, organised in Valdivia in 1954), and Universidad del Norte (UN, launched in Antofagasta in 1956) were created in response to growing demand for higher education in the regions.

In parallel, the government would charter the Universidad Técnica del Estado (UTE) in 1952 as the successor of Escuela de Artes y Oficios – a state post-secondary vocational institution established in 1849. It was later renamed as Universidad de Santiago (USACH) due to the metropolitan location of its main branch. It sought to introduce vocational courses into higher education, which previously were part of the secondary school system.

UCH retained its primacy in the sector — other universities modeled themselves after it. Yet UCH was distinctive among them due to its prominence at the national level. Its prestige attracted the brightest aspiring politicians, intellectuals, and scientists in the country. Its academic outputs were higher than all other institutions combined (Brunner 1986a).

Up to the 1950s, all Chilean universities were single-campus institutions, apart from UCH, which had a notable law school in Valparaíso. This distinctive feature started to change gradually by the end of the decade. Influenced by the junior college system incorporated by the California public system, UCH initiated a nation-wide proliferation plan through regional colleges to tackle the unmet and potential demand for undergraduate education. These colleges taught vocational courses in several disciplinary fields and were conceived of as regional hubs to feed UCH main campus with well-prepared students.

Later, other metropolitan institutions — UTE and PUC — replicated this experience. By 1965, 19 branch campuses, located in 12 different cities, were operating nation-wide (Brunner 2009).

A snapshot of enrolments within Chilean higher education in 1967 may help to make sense of these successive transformations. 55,653 students, including 21,738 freshmen, were enrolled that year in the eight existing universities, as Table 2.1

shows. The two public institutions captured the largest share of student population (64.9%). Female participation reached 40.4% system-wide.

Table 2.1: Enrolments in Chilean universities by 1967

Institution	Enrolments
Universidad de Chile	27,060
Universidad Católica de Chile	7,162
Universidad de Concepción	5,189
Universidad Católica de Valparaíso	4,286
Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María	484
Universidad Técnica del Estado	8,482
Universidad Austral	1,028
Universidad del Norte	1,413

Source: Brunner (1986a)

All universities focused on undergraduate professional education. Courses in Education (28.8%), Engineering & Technology (22.1%), Social Sciences (15.2%), and Health Sciences (13.1%) accommodated most students. Only the University of Chile was offering doctoral programs by 1967 and just 4.7% of even its academic staff held doctoral degrees (Brunner 1986a; 2009).

Despite the meritocratic discourse prevalent at the time, Chilean universities were preponderantly serving elites (Levy 1986; Brunner 1986a). Close to 6% of the relevant age group were attending higher education in 1967, mainly from upper and middle class backgrounds. Admissions were selective and mainly based on the results of a standardised entrance test introduced that year — 70.7% of applicants secured matriculation.

UCH served as the state regulator of the system. By 1967, in it were concentrated 48.6% of enrolments and it attracted 57% of all public funding for higher education. Besides being the oldest, most prestigious and largest university in the country, it also certified professional elites and provided the basic template for institutional governance imitated by all universities before the reforms of the 1980s, reflected in the limited inter-institutional differentiation exhibited by Chilean higher education (Levy 1986).

UCH has played a leading role in the sector through the Council of University Rectors¹⁰ (CRUCH). Formed in 1954, this collective body was created with the purpose of providing an avenue for institutional coordination across the system. CRUCH helped to develop and articulate the national admission system attached to

¹⁰ A rector being a chief executive, like a vice-chancellor or president in other countries.

the new entrance exam, which was under the administration of UCH (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004).

Conversely, private universities were for many intents and purposes assimilated into the public sector. Resembling what Geiger (1986) has described as ‘parallel’ public and private higher education sectors, all of them were mainly funded by the government in a unique example of private-public homogeneity in Latin American higher education.

The Chilean government provided most of funding for both private and public institutions: 82,4% of the higher education budget came from government appropriations in 1967 (Levy 1986). Annually, universities received incremental funding from the higher education budget. Funding distribution was ‘loosely arranged according to institutional size, enrolments and additional costs generated by research and postgraduate programmes’ (Brunner 1993a:71).

2.3 The Reforma Universitaria movement and its aftermath

Chilean universities confronted an inexorable demand for democratisation in 1967. This came to a head from two different domains: institutional governance and enrolment expansion.

Students launched full-scale demonstrations and strikes that put into question traditional governance arrangements, especially at PUC (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). The elite appeal of PUC ensured significant attention from the media. The Catholic Church had not envisaged the crisis and was ill-prepared to negotiate with the student unions.

Influenced by the interwar Cordoba reforms and more recent developments across Western Europe and the Americas, student unions demanded democracy within university affairs — protesters pushed for greater student participation in decision-making. They secured strong support from academic staff. The riots were propagated from one university to another. In a relatively brief period, two university rectors were forced to resign.

University governance structures were reformed as a result (Brunner 1986a). University rectorships, deanships and even the leadership of departments and institutes became elected positions, whether by institutional votes including those of

students, or by appointment through academic councils. Academics retained core decision-making power, yet suffrage was granted to students and administrative staff.

Compared to public institutions, private universities experienced greater changes as their linkages to external stakeholders weakened. The close ties between PUC and the Church were not the only casualties. UdeC and UTFSM experienced a similar distancing from their local industrial communities.

The result was greater homogeneity across higher education. All institutions adopted similarly revised governance models (Levy 1986). Yet universities retained their traditional autonomy from the government to conduct their own affairs.

The reform movement of 1967 brought a new wave of transformation to Chilean universities. Academic structures were modernised and university facilities enhanced (Brunner 1986a). Reflecting a new emphasis on research and service, chairs were replaced or complemented by departments and institutes. A larger full-time academic workforce was hired. Research productivity and service-related activities were boosted. Additionally, overhauls were conducted to increase curricular flexibility and to bring together teaching and research.

Enrolment climbed from 55,653 to 146,451 students between 1967 and 1973 — the latter year is widely acknowledged as the end of the *Reforma Universitaria* days due to the dramatic demise of the democratic government and its replacement by military rule. According to Brunner (2009), the preceding expansion flags the beginning of the transition from an elite to a mass higher education system in Chile — although there would be considerable backsliding in the 1970s. By 1974, 16.4% of the relevant age group was enrolled in higher education (Levy 1986).

With the notable exception of Catholic institutions, university enrolments almost trebled — see Table 2.2. At the end of the period, public universities retained the largest proportion of students (67%) within the system (Brunner 1986a).

Table 2.2: Evolution of enrolments in Chilean universities (1967-1973)

Institution	1967	1973
Universidad de Chile	27,060	65,845
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile	7,162	11,299
Universidad de Concepción	5,189	19,436
Universidad Católica de Valparaíso	4,286	7,185
Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María	484	2,031
Universidad Técnica del Estado	8,482	32,273
Universidad Austral	1,028	5,857
Universidad del Norte	1,413	5,857

Source: Brunner (1986a)

This significant growth brought some shifts in enrolment patterns by field of study. Courses in Engineering & Technology (29.7%), Education (27.4%), Social (15%), and Health Sciences (11.4%) attracted the majority of students by 1973. The prominent expansion in Engineering & Technology numbers was linked to the introduction of shorter programs offered at regional colleges.

The government financed the expansion of the higher education system through the *Reforma Universitaria* years (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). The government's contribution to higher education funding almost doubled during this period. Both private and public institutions benefited from additional support, with few strings attached. Private support to universities did not experience noteworthy variation, thus dropping at the aggregate level from 17.6% to 8.3% over the period (Brunner 1986a).

Regardless of the impressive achievements brought by *Reforma Universitaria*, universities did little to improve their efficiency in those years. Coordination problems and task duplication were common bugbears in university administration.

Additionally, politics and ideology played key roles in shaping the higher education landscape of the day. Students and academic unions were highly politicised and the new governance arrangements magnified the influence of partisan politics within university administration. The social and political unrest that prevailed across universities between 1967 and 1973 was a reflection of the growing radicalisation of national politics (Levy 1986).

By 1973, the sudden seizing of power by a military junta brought revolutionary changes to higher education in Chile (Brunner 2009). In the view of the junta, universities were snakepits of left-wing radical politics. It blamed the 1967 reforms for corrupting governance structures that prevented universities from becoming centres for ideological indoctrination and political action — these activities were even perceived as incompatible with scientific research and professional training.

Drastic measures were adopted to restore balance. Governance reforms of the late 1960s were abolished. The election of rectors was discontinued in all universities. Trusted rectors drawn from military ranks, with full executive powers, were appointed to replace them. University councils and senates were dissolved. Academics and students associated with the toppled left-wing parties were expelled.

Several Social Sciences departments and institutes were closed or restructured (Brunner 1986a). Autonomy and freedom of speech were severely restricted. Universities were under constant surveillance as State control over higher education spread (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004).

Enrolment reversed its previous expansion. Between 1975 and 1980 the student population shrank by 19% — from 147,049 to 118,984 — reducing participation in the relevant age group to 10.5% by 1980 (Levy 1986). The number of annual applicants dropped from 102,439 to 60,897 over the period. UCH, UTE, and PUC experienced massive losses of students and academics.

Aside from courses in the Humanities and Social Sciences reducing their enrolment by 60%, the enrolment composition did not experience great proportional changes during the initial years of military rule.

The government kept contributing to the support higher education. However, the funding level dropped in alignment with an overall reduction in public expenditure (Cox 1996). More than reversing the marked expansion of higher education funding between 1970 and 1973, the reduction of the public contribution to the sector was significant. Higher education received 1.16% of GDP by 1970. Ten years later, in 1980, its share was a mere 1.05%.

Between 1974 and 1980, universities introduced tuition fees and expanded their private income from 8.4% to 26.9% in order to balance their budgets — yet part of this aggregate increase can be explained on the grounds of curbed government appropriations (Brunner 1986a).

Throughout those years the junta was still considering what to do with universities. Although negative views on higher education were common among the ruling generals, they envisioned a strategic role for higher learning institutions to perform in society. However, no clear pathways for reform emerged beyond the ongoing political and administrative intervention. By 1976, an attempt to reduce institutional autonomy with the aim of forging a uniform and integrated system failed (Brunner 2009).

2.4 The 1980 reforms

2.4.1 Causes and aims

As in many nations, the Chilean higher education system emerged gradually as a cumulative effect of disparate public and private actions over a hundred years and more. Prior to 1980 a broad regulatory framework for higher education did not exist in Chile (Brunner 1993a). The very idea of higher education was somehow novel and individual universities — with differential influence on society — were viewed as the main poles of attraction and platforms within the public sphere.

After seven years of indeterminateness, the military finally unveiled its revolutionary agenda to reform higher education in 1980. Different to the past, the junta wanted to set common foundations in place to shape the sector's future. As Eisemon and Holm-Nielsen (1995) have suggested, this was an important innovation in terms of higher education policy and planning.

Two distinctive groups from PUC quietly crafted this agenda within the government. One was linked to *Gremialismo*, which was a movement created in 1967 that, among other things, rejected the politicisation of the university — including equal participation in university governance — and other ideas pushed forward by *Reforma Universitaria*. Nicknamed 'the Chicago boys', the other group consisted of influential economists trained at the University of Chicago and at other leading US universities in the 1960s and 1970s (Harvey 2005). Inspired by the emerging neoliberal philosophy, they designed legislative reforms to take steps towards deregulating key economic sectors (Brunner 1986a).

Both groups agreed that the state of affairs in the sector required decisive action to address mounting issues allegedly associated with *Reforma Universitaria* (Brunner 1986a): diminished quality caused by universities' inorganic and rapid expansion; ineffective and highly politicised governance at the institutional level; lack of accountability in spite of substantial public subsidy to the sector; limited capacity for the government to steer the system due the strong autonomy granted to universities; and the cartel-like behaviour of existing institutions, limiting competition in the sector and preventing the rise of new providers.

Initially, a comprehensive regulatory framework was designed to deal with all these problems simultaneously. However, concurrent complexities attached to them

inclined the reformers to target key changes through separate pieces of legislation (Brunner 1986a). Thus, rationalising the existing system, reconfiguring and diversifying its funding scheme, and introducing diversification and competition in higher education were pinpointed as strategic priorities for reform.

Three different lines of argument were used to support this transformation (Brunner 1997). First, from an ideological viewpoint, the ‘free market’ solution was considered the right answer to address inflexibility and inefficiencies observed in the sector due to the self-regulatory power of market competition. Additionally, from an economic perspective, the government would not expand its contribution to cover higher education’s escalating costs. Thus, it decided to spread the costs of higher education expansion over a mixture of public and private sources.

Furthermore, from a political angle, existing universities were perceived as potential enemies in the context of authoritarian rule. Their power base and their resources had to be reduced. In contrast, new private institutions — run by junta supporters, if possible — would offer training opportunities for government and business.

Therefore, a number of pieces of legislation were passed between 1980 and 1981 to reform Chilean higher education inspired by the essential structure of American higher education (Levy 1986; Vogeli 1979).

First, in December 1980, all existing universities were declared to be subject to restructuring. A substantial rationalisation of public universities was consequently carried out. As metropolitan institutions, UCH and UTE were perceived as big octopuses extending their tentacles over provincial, rural and distant areas to secure influence and resources (Leihy and Salazar 2012).

Using the existing platform of regional colleges, new public regional universities were created in those regions where critical mass of students was available. Initially, six regional universities were considered — in Arica, Antofagasta, La Serena, Talca, Valdivia, and Punta Arenas. Each of them should be ‘small enough to work cooperatively (like family-owned companies) but big enough to support an efficient operation’ (Vogeli 1979:84). The new institutions required new funding arrangements and articulation pathways between courses to foster student mobility nation-wide.

As Brunner (1993a) has pointed out, this decision also sought to reduce the political influence and power bases of UCH and UTE across the nation. This

motivation goes to explain the decision of separating teacher education faculties and vocational schools from public universities even though they were located in metropolitan areas.

Finally, twelve regional and two metropolitan colleges were stripped off from existing public universities and established as autonomous institutions funded by the government (Brunner 2009)¹¹. Accordingly, proportional budget cuts were enacted in UCH and the University of Santiago, Chile (USACH), as the metropolitan core of UTE was to become.

Governance arrangements in public universities were adapted to imitate the US land grant model, introducing boards of trustees in all public institutions — though their power to appoint university presidents was only enacted in 1989.

Greater flexibility and autonomy were granted to public universities. Yet student participation — along with freedom of speech — was severely restricted and political activism banned with the aim of preventing further political interference in universities. Different to the public sector more generally, public universities were able to set their own salary structures.

Higher education finance experienced marked transformations as well (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). Block funding was replaced by different allocation mechanisms in 1981.

First, under strict historical budgetary considerations, smaller block funding allocations — called the direct public contribution (AFD) — were distributed among traditional universities¹². Initially, AFD channelled close to 77% of the public subsidy for higher education but this was intended to decrease over time.

Additionally, universities were expected to transfer part of their actual teaching expenses to students by charging higher tuition fees (Brunner 1993b). Resources previously attached to block funding were now channelled to feed a new need-based student loan scheme introduced to support students to deal with

¹¹ Although originally six of them adopted the professional institute structure, over time all public institutions acquired university status by 1992 (Cox 1996). Apart from UCH and USACH, the 14 new public universities were: Universidad de Tarapacá, Universidad Arturo Prat, Universidad de Antofagasta, Universidad de Atacama, Universidad de la Serena, Universidad de Valparaíso, Universidad de Playa Ancha, Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana, Universidad de Talca, Universidad del Bio-Bio, Universidad de la Frontera, Universidad de los Lagos, and Universidad de Magallanes.

¹² See section 2.4.3 for the concept of ‘traditional university’.

substantial fee increases. By 1982, the student aid system concentrated close to 13% of higher education appropriations.

Third, additional resources were made available to be distributed annually among universities that enrolled any of the top 20,000 applicants, measured by their performance in the national entrance test. Accordingly, each university could obtain a variable income based on the proportion of the top students they could enrol, giving priority to some courses — Medicine and programs in the field of Technology. This mechanism was named the indirect public contribution (AFI) and covered 9.83% of public funding for the sector by 1982.

Finally, a national endowment for science and technology — Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Científico y Tecnológico, FONDECYT — was created to support research on a competitive basis using a peer review system.

In the view of the government, a diversified group of providers responding to a condign set of incentives via competition could transform higher education better to serve society's needs. Universities could mobilise their resources to hire academics with the aim of attracting the brightest applicants, thus, enhancing quality as a result. To secure this outcome, institutional autonomy was fully granted.

To reinforce these organising principles the government opened the door to expanding higher education provision. If in the past universities were often first created in enterprising spirit and later recognised as universities insofar as they followed implicit norms, now they could be created and recognised simultaneously. Hence, statutory provisions were introduced for regulating the formation and licensing of new higher education providers, facilitating the enlargement of the existing private sector (Brunner 2009).

Furthermore, another two types of higher education institution were officially acknowledged within the sector with the aim of increasing its diversity (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004): professional institutes and technical training centres.

In this new regulatory environment universities were expected to provide long cycle undergraduate programs (5 years) leading to licentiate degrees and professional diplomas. They were also expected to award undergraduate and graduate academic degrees. Professional institutes, in turn, were expected to grant professional diplomas through four-year programs — excluding twelve prestigious professional diplomas to

be exclusively awarded by universities¹³. Technical training centres were expected to deliver vocational courses only through shorter cycle programs (2 to 3 years) leading to technical certificates (Cox 1996).

Different to existing private universities, new providers would have no access to public funding. They could only support their operation by charging tuition fees, selling services, and attracting private contributions (Brunner 1993a). For-profit provision was authorised for professional institutes and technical training centres while universities were to remain not for-profit.

Although the regime for establishing new private higher education providers introduced by the 1980 reforms has been characterised as one of low entry barriers (Brunner 2009; Cox 1996), a key mechanism aimed at preventing unwanted institutional proliferation was included in its design. That is, new private universities and professional institutes were subject to an initial political veto by the government. Under a temporary provision — planned to exist up until 1986 — the junta held a mandate to prevent the formation of private universities or professional institutes that, in its opinion, might posit potential risks to national security or to social order. This power was extensively exercised between 1983 and 1987.

2.4.2 *Effects on expansion, differentiation, and funding*

The reforms of 1980 had a profound impact on restructuring higher education — Chilean higher education experienced revolutionary transformations at the system level, as Table 2.3 illustrates.

Table 2.3: Chilean Higher Education before and after the 1980 reform

Before	After
1. One tier, one sector: low institutional differentiation	1. Three tiers, two sectors: high institutional differentiation
2. No tuition fees but selective access according to school performance and achievement in national standardised academic test	2. Tuition fees charged by all institutions. Selective access maintained in the sub-sector with institutional public funding. In private institutions: open access limited by family income
3. State financing on the basis of incremental funding	3. Reduced level of state financing and establishment of multiple competitive sources of funding

¹³ Being in the fields of Agriculture, Architecture, Biochemistry, Chemistry, Civil Engineering, Dentistry, Economics, Forestry, Law, Medicine, Psychology, and Veterinary Medicine — more or less ‘the professions’ as then understood in Chile.

4. System coordination provided by state authority and institutional oligarchies	4. System coordination provided by the market and state-policy regulations
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------

Source: Cox (1996)

In a relatively short period, the effects of the 1980 reforms were clearly visible across three distinctive domains: in expansion and differentiation of the institutional base; in growth, segmentation and diversification of enrolments and educational opportunities; and in the configuration of funding arrangements.

As Table 2.4 shows, the number of recognised higher education providers (or, in any case, university-led umbrellas) jumped from 8 in 1980 to 310 in 1990 (Brunner 1993b). A product of the rationalisation of existing universities, the number of traditional institutions expanded from 8 to 20 over the same period. This group experienced additional growth as all publicly funded professional institutes acquired university status. By 1993, 25 universities populated this ‘traditional’ sub-sector.

Table 2.4: Higher education institutions in Chile, 1980-1990

	1980	1985	1990
<i>Universities</i>			
With public funding	8	18	20
New private, no public funding		3	40
<i>Professional Institutes</i>			
With public funding		6	2
New private, no public funding		19	80
<i>Technical Training Centres</i>			
With public funding			
New private, no public funding		102	168
Total	8	148	310

Source: Brunner (1993b)

In contrast, the new private sector experienced uneven growth over the decade. Initially, universities proliferated at a slower pace mainly owing to the use of the government’s political veto. The number of professional institutes expanded at a moderate rate while technical training centres experienced staggering growth.

The latter phenomenon was an evident consequence of the changes introduced into the legislation. The new regulatory framework made it possible for numerous post-secondary organisations devoted to vocational training — previously labelled as academies, centres, and schools — that had existed outside any concept of higher education proper to gain formal recognition as technical training centres and, thus, to be bestowed with the power to grant official vocational diplomas (González 1990).

By the end of the decade, however, the number of new private universities experienced a significant increase, mainly explained by the lifting of political restrictions. A similar development accounts for the propagation of professional institutes. The lowering of entry barriers contributed in making visible the large unmet demand for higher education that assisted recently created providers in swiftly establishing themselves in the sector. Yet, since 1990 the number of private higher education institutions has experienced a slow but sustained decline, especially among technical training centres.

Cox (1990) has illustrated that not all of these institutions were independent of one another. Whether pursuing strategies to increase their coverage incrementally in the sector or to offer tailored courses for targeted populations in diverse environments, some providers formed clusters of higher education institutions of different type and level of selectivity. By 1990 at least seven of these groups of institutions were operating in the new private sector. They were sharing resources and facilities. I have documented how, fifteen years later, this strategy for institutional growth was still frequently used system-wide (Salazar 2005).

If publicly funded, multi-campus universities dominated the sector prior to the reforms of 1980, private non-university institutions were by far the largest and most populous group by 1990 (Brunner 1993a). As higher education was turning increasingly heterogeneous, great variations in size, function, core values, and location emerged between different providers.

A substantial enlargement of higher education providers brought a boost for educational opportunities. In the 1980s enrolments doubled, led by the new private sub-sector (Table 2.5). Between 1980 and 1985, enrolments grew by 61.9%. During the second part of the decade student figures continued to grow, albeit at a less intense pace: the entire system expanded by 24% between 1985 and 1990. Relevant age group participation increased from 7.43% to 14.4% over the decade (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). Although the distribution of participation was highly unequal by 1990, all socio-economic groups have benefited from this enlargement (Table 2.6).

Table 2.5: Higher education enrolments in Chile, 1980-1990

	1980	1985	1990
<i>Universities</i>			
With public funding	116,962	113,128	112,193
New private, no public funding		4,951	19,509
<i>Professional Institutes</i>			
With public funding		18,071	6,472
New private, no public funding		14,565	33,534
<i>Technical Training Centres</i>			
With public funding			
New private, no public funding		50,425	77,774
Total	116,962	201,140	249,482

Source: Brunner (1993b)

Table 2.6: Net participation in higher education by socio-economic group, 1990

	1990
Quintile I	4%
Quintile II	6.3%
Quintile III	10.4%
Quintile IV	17.7%
Quintile V	33.2%

Source: Brunner (2009)

The vast expansion in participation experienced by Chilean higher education brought structural adjustments in the sector. Mirroring changes in quantity and type on the provision side, public universities lost their dominant position in the sector in relation to enrolment concentration. This was a remarkable transformation, considering that five years earlier public universities had accounted for 63.21% of enrolments system-wide.

The growing prominence of private higher education followed a clear pathway through the 1980s. By 1985, 55.5% of matriculation was concentrated in private institutions whether old or new. In 1990, 71% of all students were attending private higher education¹⁴. This was a clear departure from the enrolment pattern that Chilean higher education had exhibited for a century and a half (since the ‘nationalisation’ of the once sole university).

Additionally, universities experienced modest gains in student numbers while professional institutes and, especially, technical training centres accommodated most of the enrolment growth.

To some extent this growth was the product of the reconfiguration of higher education rather an expansion of educational opportunities per se. Just the year before

¹⁴ Enrolment figures for traditional universities do not reflect enrolment figures of six of these institutions temporarily included in professional institutes’ statistics, which roughly accounted for 5.4% of enrolments in the publicly funded sector.

the implementation of the 1980 reforms, an estimated 66,000 students were attending the post-secondary vocational institutions that would become technical training centres (González 1990). Both institutions and students benefited from the higher status of vocational education. By the 1990s, technical training centres held 31.1% of enrolments system-wide.

A combination of factors can be noted as influencing how different groups of institutions responded to the reform. Different to the new private sub-sector, traditional universities remained selective (Brunner 1993a) — this was especially true for private universities, for UCH and for USACH.

Although secondary school completion rates were expanding, the number of applicants taking the standardised admission test shrank from 119,245 to 114,343 between 1983 and 1990, limiting the ability of traditional universities to expand their student bodies. By 1990, most traditional institutions maintained enrolment sizes below 6,000 students — only two universities enrolled more than 10,000 students (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). In addition, the 14 recently restructured public institutions were conducting comprehensive processes to redefine their undergraduate offerings, limiting their expansion chances (Rojas 1996).

Private universities proliferated by the end of the decade but achieved low-size enrolments. By 1990, most institutions matriculated less than 1,500 students and only 2 of these universities had total enrolments of more than 5,000 students (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). Professional institutes exhibited similar enrolment patterns. Their expansion was primarily constrained by their ability to grow — their limited experience in the sector and narrow access to funding prevented them from conceiving of large-scale development plans.

The expansion in participation brought important changes to enrolment distribution across fields of study, previously greatly concentrated in the fields of Education, Engineering, and Social Sciences (Table 2.7). Student numbers following courses in Education shrank sharply over the 1980s. In contrast, courses in Business Administration became highly popular among undergraduate students. A probable effect of sector growth, enrolments started to diversify during the decade.

By 1990, enrolment distribution was far from homogeneous (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). Technical training centres courses were highly concentrated in the fields of Social Sciences and Technology while courses in new private universities and professional institutes were moderately concentrated in the fields of Business

Administration, Education, Law, and Social Sciences. Distinctively, institutions in the traditional sub-sector exhibited a more diversified enrolment, with large courses in the fields of Engineering and Technology, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Law.

Table 2.7: Distribution of enrolment by field of study, 1980-1990

Field of study	1980	1990
Education	28.4%	10.5%
Humanities	3%	4.8%
Fine and applied arts, architecture & town planning	4%	5.9%
Law	2.3%	3.8%
Social and behavioural sciences	12.5%	9.8%
Business administration		21.8%
Natural sciences and mathematics	2.8%	2.6%
Medical and health-related	12.3%	6.3%
Engineering and technologies	29.8%	27%
Agriculture	4.9%	7.5%

Source: Brunner (1997)

Originally, the government sought to achieve two goals in relation to higher education funding — one subordinate to the other. First, it replaced block funding with a combination of diverse public sources of income available to the sector with the aim of increasing effectiveness and quality through competition.

To make this possible, additionally it sought to enhance the public contribution to higher education by 50% according to a five-year plan (Table 2.8). The new monies could be allocated through indirect grants (AFI) and the new student loan scheme to compensate a bold reduction in direct grants (AFD) over the period.

In the minds of the reformers, this funding scheme would assure their cost recovery strategy by gradually transferring higher education's financial burden to students. In addition, these changes would provide for an adequate environment for new private providers to engage in sectoral dynamics.

**Table 2.8: Planned public contribution to higher education in Chile, 1980-1986
(Base=100 for the year 1980)**

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
AFD	100	100	90	75	60	50	50
AFI	0	0	10	25	40	50	50
Student loan scheme	0	7	15	23	30	40	50
Total	100	107	115	123	130	140	150

Source: Lehmann (1990)

However, a severe recession hit government finances in the early 1980s, hitting university budgets hard (Sanfuentes 1990). Higher education expenditure experienced a significant contraction throughout the 1980s as a proportion of GDP, from 1.28% to 0.52% (Lehmann 1990). In real terms, government contributions to the sector declined by 41.5% over the 1981-1989 period — AFD dropped by 86% and AFI by 14%. Funding per-student fell by 50% in traditional institutions.

In contrast, student aid funding increased by 59.2% throughout the decade to assist students in covering tuition fees (Lehmann 1990) — its share of the sector's income jumped from 4.4% to 13.48% between 1981 and 1987. Funding per student loan experienced a bold increase (71.4%) during those years.

Although marginal during the first half of the decade, research funding through FONDECYT experienced robust expansion from 1986 — previously it had provided less than a 1% of the total funding for the sector. Between 1981 and 1989 research funding grew by seventeen times. In practice, however, these financial resources were mostly captured by a group of four universities¹⁵ that already possessed sufficient research infrastructure (Comisión de Estudio de la Educación Superior 1990).

Gradually, traditional institutions diversified their funding sources (Brunner 2009). Cost recovery and income generation became crucial for their survival. Universities started to display their own entrepreneurial capabilities and strengthened their linkages with the private sector. Consulting services and technical assistance gained in prominence — 28.7% of their income came from those sources by 1987. Tuition fees and donors' contributions became important sources of revenue as well.

Yet these additional financial resources did not compensate for the drastic reduction of the public subsidy. Most universities were forced by the circumstances to borrow from the financial sector. Likewise, they reduced their expenditure. While the number of academic and staff positions in the system remained steady, salaries decreased by 23% in real terms throughout the 1980s (Lehmann 1990).

Without access to public funding, new private providers engaged in competitive behaviour to cover their operational costs. Because they were at the bottom of the pecking order, they had limited chances to diversify their sources of income — these institutions primarily relied in their ability to enrol new students able

¹⁵ Those institutions were UCH, PUC, UC, and UA.

to pay tuition fees. Nonetheless, a large unserved demand for undergraduate and vocational courses helped them to consolidate their position within the system in a few years (Brunner 2009).

By 1990, higher education funding was completely transformed (Table 2.9). Brunner (1993b) has estimated that national expenditure in the sector represented roughly 1.6% of GDP that year. According to Cox (1996), 30% came from the government, 36% from tuition fees, and 34% from mixed sources. The sources of public contributions to the sector were diversified but AFD remained as the higher proportion of public funding (Table 2.10). AFI and the student loan scheme expansion fell short. Research funding did not compensate for budget cuts.

Table 2.9: Estimated expenditure in higher education in Chile by sources, 1990

	US\$ (millions)
<i>Public sources</i>	
Public treasury allocations to public institutions	125.6
Public treasury allocations to private institutions	2.6
National Research Fund	11.8
<i>Private Sources</i>	
Private philanthropy to public institutions	4.9
Private philanthropy to private institutions	1.5
Tuition fees paid to public institutions	81.6
Tuition fees paid to private institutions	77.4
<i>Public/private sources</i>	
Other income	159.4
Total	464.8

Source: Brunner (1993a)

Table 2.10: Public expenditure in higher education, 1990

	US\$ (Millions)
AFD	104.8
AFI	33.8
Student loan scheme	29.4
Research funding (FONDECYT)	17.4
Total	185.4

Source: Cox (1996)

Reflecting on these figures, Eisemon and Holm-Nielsen (1995) have suggested that private sources decisively contributed to higher education expansion over the decade. Probably for that reason, tuition fees in Chilean higher education rank among the most expensive worldwide in terms of the average burden borne by students and their families (Brunner 2009) — they have come to cover a substantial part of direct costs in most institutions (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004).

In this context, Cox (1996) and Sanfuentes (1990) have raised concerns in relation to the lack of sufficient mechanisms system-wide to support low- and middle-income students. Structural limitations of the student loan scheme — the exclusion of students attending privately funded institutions, high administrative costs, and low recovery rates — constrained access for low socioeconomic status (SES) students into the traditional sector.

The severity of the funding problem forced the government to introduce some changes. After unexpected consequences from enrolment pathways, AFI priority for selected courses was abandoned. Instead, five levels of achievement in the standardised national entrance test were set. Accordingly, differential financial rewards were available for universities that enrolled high-achieving applicants (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). Likewise, the number of top students that generated AFI contribution was expanded from 20,000 to 27,500.

Student aid experienced some changes as well. Intake quotas — to be set annually — were introduced to limit the demand for student loans due to resource limitations. In addition, the government transferred student aid management responsibilities to universities with the aim of increasing loan recovery. The student aid system continued to be exclusively available for traditional institutions and recovery levels remained below 25% (Brunner 2009).

The government also capitalised on the situation, deepening its encouragement of competition in higher education by introducing new financial incentives. New rules were passed for AFD allocation, coming into effect in 1989. Although 95% would be distributed following the same pattern used in the previous year, the remaining 5% would be assigned to reward gains in performance. Performance indicators were introduced to measure and compare a number of variables in relation to teaching capacity (student/ faculty ratios), faculty (qualification levels and productivity), and research output among universities.

AFI distribution was expanded beyond traditional institutions, yet its impact was marginal as the top students continued to apply to selective, prestigious universities in the traditional sub-sector. FONDECYT experienced a similar transformation. Now private universities were able to apply for research grants. Their success in securing them was negligible, though — 94.5% out of 2,589 research grants approved between 1982 and 1989 were assigned to pre-1980 universities (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004).

Finally, a new development fund — under the Economics Ministry — was created to support greater effectiveness in institutional governance among public universities. This funding mechanism channelled greater financial resources into public universities than did research grants between 1988 and 1989.

2.4.3 The traditional/new private divide

The transformative effects of the 1980 reforms went well beyond new patterns of participation and funding. As the provision side expanded, higher education gained in diversity. New competitive and collaborative dynamics emerged, bringing more pluralism, but with the byproduct of greater stratification (Bernasconi 2010).

Mission differentiation contributed to the building of distinctive institutional identities among new providers, often articulated around linkages to economic sectors, geographical areas or philosophies. New institutional categories — the university joined by the professional institute and the technical training centre — reinforced public perceptions of higher education's new diversity.

Function and prestige provided the basis for stratification. They assisted in the formation of distinctive but interrelated subsectors within the new higher education sphere. Due to their exclusive focus on vocational instruction, technical training centres were at the periphery of the system. Professional institutes were situated in an intermediate position as they did provide some professional training — often in technical disciplines with lower standing than ‘the professions’. Universities were obviously located at the notional centre of the higher education enterprise by virtue of their comprehensiveness and their higher status claims.

Universities made for a diverse group, though. Some institutions were older, bigger, metropolitan, and research oriented. Others, in contrast, were new, small, provincial, and concentrated their educational efforts in the teaching of undergraduate courses. Between these two basic templates, numerous combinations arose.

Bernasconi and Rojas (2004) and Bernasconi (2006) have offered abundant criteria for classifying universities and other higher education institutions in Chile. Yet, the most radical differentiation that emerged within the new scenario of higher education was historical in nature. Accordingly, institutions can be categorised into two main groups: traditional and new private universities.

The former includes those formed from the chief campuses of the eight pre-1980 universities and the independent institutions that were formed from their branch campuses and schools. 16 of these are public universities, and 9 private — 6 affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church and 3 non-Church regional universities¹⁶. The new private group was a residual group including all private universities created under the statute introduced by the 1980 reforms. Their number has fluctuated over the years, as new universities were created and older providers have disappeared. However, since the mid 2000s their number has stabilised at around 35 universities.

Status differentiation is an evident outcome of this classification. Traditional universities have an aura of academic prestige, institutional complexity, and a strong commitment to the public good. These attributes are clearly present among leading universities; other traditional institutions enjoy the same aura by association, yet they exhibit important variations in these three attributes.

In contrast, new private universities have much more diffuse identities — most of them are still in the process of building their own distinctiveness. They enjoy the core status attached to the university in the Chilean mindset, yet few individual institutions have provided evidence as to their own distinctive contribution to the sector. Overall theirs do not match traditional universities' reputations, though important variations among them hinder broader generalisations regarding their status.

Regulation has exacerbated differences between traditional and new. Until recently, traditional universities had been the sole recipients of government funding, including student aid. They are members of the Council of Rectors (CRUCH) and participate in the unified national admission system that utilises the standardised entry test. Having faced much interference under military rule, they have been fully autonomous since the beginning of the 1980 reforms.

New private universities did not have any of those prerogatives. Eventually they could acquire their autonomy after long periods of external monitoring of their academic quality. According to the examination regime introduced in 1980, traditional universities provided external supervision for new private providers on a contract basis that allowed established institutions to collect fees. Curricular review

¹⁶ UC, AU, and UTFSM.

and student examination were the main supervision mechanisms included within the regime (Brunner 1993a).

Curricular review regulated the disciplinary content and pedagogical soundness of higher education courses. External student examination sought to provide evidence of adequate curricular coverage and of the application of acceptable levels of rigour in teaching and assessment methodologies. Combined, both mechanisms were expected to maintain satisfactory academic performance levels system-wide.

2.4.4 Effects of the 1980 reforms on privatisation, competition, and deregulation

The traditional/new private divide reflects a process in which new groups of institutions emerge in higher education without necessarily fusing with the existing institutional base. This development has had important implications for the operation and shape of the sector in three dimensions: privatisation, intra-sector competition, and deregulation. The results suggest a broader process of restructuring triggered by the new foundations emerging from the 1980 reforms.

Brunner (2009) has pointed to the especially high degree of ‘privatism’ exhibited by Chilean higher education in a comparative perspective. Privatism can consist of different configurations of private funding sources, private ownership of institutions and for-profit operation — Chile enjoys the first two in abundance, and the more than occasional indulgence of the third among universities, despite it being technically illegal. Whether an intended consequence of the reforms or an outcome of the sector's muscular expansion, private actors and actions outperform public authority in shaping the system's functioning.

By and large, most institutions are privately owned. Only 16 universities are public and they share less than 25% of the sector's enrolment. Public subsidy of higher education is scanty — on average, the government contribution to public universities only provides for about one third of their operational expenses, forcing them to engage in revenue-seeking activities.

Roughly 84% of higher education funding comes from private sources. Institutions depend primarily on tuition fees, as well as consultancy and other fee-for-service activities, for their survival — tuition fees in Chile are higher than in most

developing nations and comparable to US and Australian levels despite its gross domestic product per capita being substantially lower (Brunner 2009).

Robust enrolments in the private sub-sector and the modest levels of public contribution to higher education have given a special character to the Chilean system. Consumer choice and competitive provision have exerted greater influence in coordinating the system than the government (Brunner 2009). Public and private providers have adapted to this situation by creating structures and developing practices to engage effectively in various forms of competition to secure adequate level of resources.

The distinctiveness of Chilean higher education in a comparative perspective lies in the structural function that market competition performs in coordinating the system. Compared to Brazil — another South American nation with advanced privatism in terms of the private contribution to the sector's funding — Chile exhibits higher enrolments in private institutions, thus enhancing privatism's prominence in the sector (Brunner 2009). Only South Korea — and to some extent Japan — exhibit similar traits in enrolment and funding and these have substantially different economic, social, and cultural backgrounds.

The rise of the new private sub-sector is correlated to the declining hegemony of the public university. The historical prominence of public universities diminished as they were divided into a number of autonomous units and subjected to considerable political and administrative scrutiny.

Although UCH has retained its flagship position, PUC experienced substantial gains in academic standing and influence over the junta years due a successful market-oriented strategy and special consideration from the government (Bernasconi 2005) — it ranks *primus inter pares* among traditional private institutions.

Both universities have been national leaders in teaching and scholarship and concentrate more than 50% of the research output in the country (Bernasconi 2011). However, whereas UCH has been perceived as in a state of moderate stagnation due to a combination of factors — statutory restrictions for effective management, a high degree of decentralisation, and the intermittent and ambivalent financial and political support it has received from the government — PUC has enjoyed a promising run due to its strong elite linkages, long-term planning, and its steering capacity. In addition, PUC has seemed to encompass a set of values highly regarded across the most productive sectors of the economy, such as innovation, effectiveness and adaptability.

Because they were highly prized by the late 1980s, these values offered compelling alternative narratives for legitimising private institutions. Instead of engaging in research or being truly academically selective, most of these institutions attempted to enhance their reputations by being responsive to external demands and through embracing values attached to neoliberal modernisation — i.e. free enterprise, flexibility, and the use of new technologies — embraced by ever wider sections of society by the end of the military rule.

Whilst some failed to build sound reputations, others achieved consistent progress. In a matter of a few years, a small group of new private universities attained elite status (albeit with no formal badge), reinforcing their ability to cater to social and economically elite students. This increasingly plural stratification exhibited by Chilean higher education saw a small group of private providers overween even some of the traditional universities in prestige (Bernasconi 2010).

Competition has been another fundamental feature in the higher education landscape that would emerge from the reforms of 1980. As higher education expanded and became more private, institutions invested heavily in enhancing their competitive stances. In the views of various commentators, market competition has increasingly been pivotal in coordinating Chilean higher education (Cox 1996, Brunner 1997, Bernasconi and Rojas 2004).

This is hardly a surprising development — it is a predictable outcome of greater privatisation and diminished public contributions to higher education. In the minds of the reformers, competition would bring greater efficiency, excellence, and relevance to higher education, along with more diversity and innovation (Brunner 1997). The impact of competition has been uneven, though. It has been a structuring force that has effectively reshaped undergraduate education. Its influence has been less prominent in moulding the research infrastructure, mainly because research and consultancy capabilities are heavily concentrated in a handful of universities.

Competition is one of the key elements of economic markets yet its implications are broader than wealth accumulation and resource allocation efficiency (Marginson 1997a). In the field of higher education, competition adopts many forms. From the supply-side, it has been used to capture revenues, market share, respectability, and influence. Competition adopts three basic modes in higher education.

Transactional competition, which refers to selling education and research. It focuses on short-term operations — at least by higher education standards — and its metrics pertain to counting outputs.

Academic competition points to the recognition given to scholars, departments or faculties due to the consistent quality of their performance in education, research and/or scholarship. Because this requires cumulative achievement, academic competition can only be effectively pursued by academics and academic units with robust disciplinary trajectories.

Positional competition suggests that universities compete for enhancing their reputations, and the reputations of those they serve and hope to serve. A higher prestige implies a better position within higher education's pecking order. It affects an institution as a whole and has an effect on the standing of their brands. Building a good reputation is a long-term process and it is not surprising that older institutions are often in better shape for prestige contests. Taste is a somewhat elusive metric of positional competition since brands achieve purchase via connotations of preferability.

All these modes of competition are deeply ingrained in Chilean higher education. The funding scheme for the traditional sub-sector relies on transactional and academic competition — the attainment of higher levels of public subsidy attached to AFI and to research funding explicitly dependent upon them (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004).

Institutions in the new private sector invest heavily in advertising to gain visibility among potential applicants (Brunner 2009). Their success in attracting large student populations has dragged traditional universities into transactional competition (Brunner 1997). However, a small group of private universities have emulated traditional universities' selectivity in order to enhance academic quality in certain disciplines. This strategy has allowed them over time to compete with their traditional counterparts in securing research funding from the government.

As the system expanded, universities have reacted in different ways to secure and/or to expand their market share by targeting specific student populations. Described as positional goods, credentials provided by higher education institutions are hierarchical in the sense that they award differentiated status positions available in limited supply for purposes of social leadership, labour market destination, and income earnings (Marginson 1997a).

Much of the positional value of higher education diplomas resides in institutional reputations. They assist in shaping student and parental choice to a greater extent in highly segmented markets. Built upon a combination of past performance, wealth, social influence and self-promotion, institutional reputation sets an institution's position within the esteem hierarchy and exerts significant influence in defining competitive strategies for universities (Brunner and Uribe 2007).

By combining higher and lower organisational status with higher and lower enrolment volumes, diverse institutional strategies for competition have emerged in Chile (Brunner and Uribe 2007). Higher status and higher volume strategies focus on controlling input quality and enhancing institutional reputation. In contrast, higher status and lower volume strategies focus on building specialized and selective institutional niches. Low status and higher volume strategies point to expanding enrolments towards market segments with lower academic readiness. Finally, lower status and lower volume strategies focus on a survival mode, this being the sole approach available to vulnerable providers.

Having these strategies in mind, Brunner and Uribe (2007) have identified prominent features of the undergraduate education market in Chile. In their observation, a large number of providers participate in this market, though differences of type and size account for its considerable diversification. This is possible because the market has been expanding consistently over the last thirty years driven by growing demand for higher education. Additionally, competitive strategies account for market segmentation, as universities compete directly with one another when they have comparable levels of esteem and target similar populations. Finally, due to the peculiar geographic configuration of the country, an imagined national market is broken down into a number of asymmetrical local markets where competition is shaped by physical proximity.

By analysing undergraduate student selectivity¹⁷ as a proxy for institutional reputation, Brunner and Uribe (2007) have described stratification patterns in Chilean higher education — perhaps the main outcome of existing competitive patterns. They group institutions in six different clusters based on their selectivity. Accordingly, in a pool of 60 universities, only 4 of them were located in the two upper clusters. Their selectivity was expressed in terms of the required rankings of matriculants as falling

¹⁷ Based on the results of the national entrance test for 2005.

between the sixty-first and ninety-ninth percentiles. At the other end of the spectrum, clusters 5 and 6 included 37 institutions ranked and operating below the threshold of selectivity — requiring scores between the first to twentieth percentiles. Within the middle clusters — numbers 3 and 4 — are grouped 19 universities that exhibit moderate selectivity. The analysis suggests strong levels of stratification coupled with tight competition among providers of similar selectivity in the system.

It is important to note, however, that competition has not increased institutional efficiency as the reformers had expected (Brunner 1993b). Similarly, the expansive pool of higher education providers has not brought innovation to the sector (Eisemon and Holm-Nielsen 1995). To a greater extent, imitative behaviour has shaped new providers' strategies in engaging in sectoral competition.

Lastly, deregulation has been a significant outcome of the 1980 reforms. It has reinforced both competition and privatism within the sector. Not an unexpected outcome, deregulation surfaced as the result of two separate processes. In one hand, the regulatory framework introduced an expanded private sector by setting minimal requirements for the operation of new providers. Because it solely focused on student performance, the examination system introduced to control new providers' quality paid no attention to institutional governance, competitive behaviour or market orientation.

Additionally, the 1980 reforms deregulated the traditional sector by emphasizing institutional autonomy and self-regulation — including the recently created public regional universities. With the exception of the diploma structure, no provisions were passed for regulating academic processes, leaving decisions such as the creation of new courses or branch campuses to institutional management.

Institutional autonomy's redoubling was one key innovation brought by the reforms (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). Covering academic, managerial and financial affairs, it gave substantial and procedural independence to universities, professional institutes and technical training centres. Reflecting the reformers' philosophy, limits to student participation in institutional governance and the ban on political activism in higher education were among the few restrictions imposed upon autonomous institutions.

Not all institutions, however, enjoyed autonomy equally. Public universities have been subject to procedural, staffing and financial controls akin to public service agencies (Zolezzi and de los Rios 2008). New private institutions did not have the

autonomy to conduct their academic affairs from the get-go, since they were subject to quality control mechanisms. They could only acquire full autonomy when consistent evidence of adequate performance was provided (Brunner 1986a).

These approaches to regulation in the traditional and in the new private domains have had broader implications for the deregulation of higher education. They have provided the foundations for enabling diverse forms of competition in the sector. The government became more of an observer rather than a leading actor in the sector — its main function has been the distribution of public subsidies. To a greater extent, variations in price, quality and availability of undergraduate education system-wide have both reflected and influenced these unregulated and competitive interactions (Brunner 2009).

Chapter 3:

Methods

3.1 Introduction

From the Second World War on, governments have consistently recognised the importance of higher education in fostering economic, social, and cultural development (Premfors 1991:1909). Yet, as Burton Clark (1986[1983], 1984:9) has suggested, the growing political prominence it acquired since the 1980s is correlated with new ways to conceive of higher education. Instead of a group of individual universities, higher education started to be understood as a complex system populated by organisations that shared similar patterns of work, sets of beliefs, and structures of authority. This new perspective has allowed governments to reconsider their approach to universities: higher education systems can be coordinated or steered towards common goals at the national, regional, or local levels.

Policy has performed an evident central role in the regulatory landscape that emerged from this conceptual shift. Policy has been the vehicle for communicating expectations and for shaping universities' behaviour through a plethora of funding and regulatory instruments. This growing complexity has an obvious impact on policy analysis. A Sabatier has indicated, policy analysis often 'requires a knowledge of the goals and perceptions of hundred of actors throughout the country involving possibly very technical scientific and legal issues over periods of a decade or more...?' (1999:4).

Existing policy analysis frameworks offer pathways for simplifying the examination and interpretation of real-life reform cases. This chapter explores their possibilities and limitations in addressing policy change in contemporary higher education.

Although most approaches benefit from some degree of theoretical eclecticism, existing frameworks aiming to capture the essence and typify reform can be grouped into three main categories. From the political science perspective, different approaches focus on the policy cycle and the political process (Anderson 1994, Ball 1997). From sociology, diverse traditions have provided competing theoretical lenses for interpreting the meaning and implications attached to changes in

policies (Ball 2006, Bastedo 2007, Rizvi and Lingard 2010, Saarinen and Ursin 2012). Lastly, social theory and political philosophy have advanced integrative frameworks that situate policy change phenomena within the continuum of forces shaping social systems (Simons, Olssen and Peters 2009).

The conspicuous absence of frameworks developed by economics in this classification may puzzle the reader. After all, economics has consistently provided the leading frameworks for policy analysis and policymaking (Simons, Olssen and Peters 2009). Yet the reason for this omission is rather simple: no specific framework has been developed within economics addressing policy change phenomena. The lack of a specific theoretical explanation has not prevented economics from being at the centre of the process of change: it has offered the main narratives for justifying the introduction of policy changes in higher education in recent decades — human capital, new public management, and the knowledge economy remain to this day highly persuasive discourses for introducing new policies and regulation in regard to university modernisation.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that this is not the only way available to organise frameworks for the study of reform. For example, Simons, Olssen and Peters (2009:14-15) have distinguished three groups of frameworks for the study of educational policies: the economic approach (including public choice, welfare economics, information processing theories, and managerial perspectives), the organisational theory approach (encompassing neo-institutional frameworks, perspectives on decision making, and managerial and rational choice theories), and the critical theory approach (covering critical ethnography, qualitative curriculum evaluation, the action research movement, and interactionist ethnography). Yet this divergence feeds on the selfsame classifications' purpose — Simons, Olssen and Peters have attempted to organise available frameworks for the study of education policy with a specific focus on reassessing the significance of critical theories¹⁸ in this domain.

The task of differentiating between frameworks developed for the study of policy change goes beyond the disciplinary roots of each theory. Essentially, existing

¹⁸ According to Simons, Olssen and Peters (2009:36), critical theories share three features: 'acknowledgement of the educational, moral and social concerns in debates on education, the focus on power, politics and regulation in education, and the adoption of a specific form of critical advocacy towards society and policy'.

theories of reform support dissimilar ideas as to what policy is and the purpose of policy analysis (Young 1999).

From the political science tradition, Anderson defines policy as ‘a purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors dealing with a problem or a matter of concern’ (1994:5). This way of conceiving policy is tightly coupled with the function policy analysis is supposed to perform: to provide specialist knowledge to improve both policymaking and policy outcomes (Simons, Olssen and Peters 2009). This take on policy analysis suggests the instrumental perspective advanced by Premfors — who has advanced that the aim of policy analysis is ‘to contribute to the solution of public policy problems’ (1991:1907).

In contrast, Ball (1994) observes that policy can be differentially described as *discourse* or *text*. Discourses depict and help to frame reality. As text, policies are subject to bargaining and contestation through the different stages of the political process. Given that compromise is required for progressing towards change, policy encodes the multiple values, attitudes, and agendas held by different groups. Thus, it is hardly surprising that policies are not often clear, closed or complete (Ball 1994).

Rizvi and Lingard (2009:7) have adopted a similar perspective by endorsing Easton’s classic formula — that policy implies an authoritative allocation of values — in order to emphasise the origin of policy within the sphere of government. In this perspective, the function of policy analysis ‘involves the decoding texts, in relation both to the context in which they are embedded and the context they construct, and the effects they have on practice...’ (Rizvi and Lingard 2009:12).

Additionally, it is important to note that the idea of policy encompasses very different types of decisions (Anderson 1994). Policies can be dually symbolic and material, whether they entail have commitments for implementation or not. They can also be rational or incremental. In the latter case, they are built on previous policies and assume that change occurs step by step. Rational policies, in contrast, are prescriptive, as they direct policymakers toward a number of stages in a linear fashion to address an issue fully. Finally, policies can also be distributive or redistributive. While the former is self-evident — policies can distribute all sorts of resources — the latter seeks ‘to intervene against disadvantage through positive discrimination...’ (Rizvi and Lingard 2009:11).

The chapter is organised into six sections. This introductory section is followed by typologies developed to identify levels and forms in which policy

changes manifest. Later, the group of theories developed by policy scientists is presented. Considering the perceived stagnation of these approaches within the study of policy change (see Rizvi and Lingard 2010:2), this section basically systematises the reasons that justify the exploration of different theoretical solutions. The presentation of sociological theories addressing policy reform follows. These interpretative frameworks are also open to criticism, given their tendency to rely on reductionist accounts of policy transformation or due to their indeterminateness.

Given the current theoretical uncertainty surrounding how best to address the policy change problem, it is not surprising that this chapter selects a combination of theories from the social theory domain for the examination of the evolution of quality assurance policy in Chilean higher education. These theories will be described. The chapter closes introducing the methodological approach adopted for the study — a case study methodology — and the steps taken to secure its application in the examination of quality assurance reforms.

3.2 Typifying policy change

The study of policy change in the contemporary higher education landscape often demands taking into consideration the level and content of reforms (Capano 1996). Within national systems of higher education, transformation may occur primarily in three different levels: basic units (department, faculties), organisations (universities, colleges), and coordinating structures (governments and regulation). At any level, reforms target one or more dimensions, seeking to alter their content. Premfors (1992) has suggested six constitutive policy choices (or dimensions) for the sector that may experience shifts: size, location, sectoral structures, governance arrangements, admission requirements, and curricula.

Hall (1993) has provided an influential template for distinguishing between evolutionary and revolutionary reforms. In his observation, the extent of change can be measured by looking at the policy elements subject to reform. First-order change points to the calibration of policy instruments. It attempts to introduce small-scale adjustments to existing policies while institutional and instrumental parameters remain unchanged. Second order changes feature attempts to substitute prevailing policy instruments with others emerging from the same policy regime. In this case, the extent of change is larger, yet within the confines of the same policy paradigm.

Lastly, third order changes represent a radical departure from the previous hierarchy of policy goals — an emergent agenda makes existing policy instruments superfluous. Furthermore, Hall links first and second order changes with evolutionary reforms. They are often the result of adjustments within the policy subsector. Third order changes, however, imply a departure from the previous policy paradigm caused by exogenous forces.

Howlett and Cashore (2009) have reformulated Hall’s approach by distinguishing between policy ends and policy means (or requirements). They have identified six policy dimensions subject to change, as can be observed below (see Table 3.1). This revised taxonomy of policy change processes aims to reflect both policy content complexity and the multiple dimensions of change.

Table 3.1: A taxonomy of policy components

Policy focus	Policy Content		
	High level abstraction	Programme level operationalization	Specific on-the-ground measures
Policy ends	Goals What general types of ideas govern policy development?	Objectives What does policy formally aim to address?	Settings What are the specific on-the-ground requirements for policy?
Policy means	Instrument logic What general norms guide implementation preferences?	Mechanisms What specific types of instruments are utilised?	Calibrations What are the specific ways in which the instrument is used?

Source: Howlett and Cashore (2009:39)

Capano and Howlett (2009) posit four basic criteria for describing the nature of policy transformation: time-space, mode, scope, and directional logic. While the time-space criterion refers to the speed of change (quick or slow), the mode criterion points to the nature of transformation in relation to the degree of departure from the existing status quo (i.e. marginal or radical, incremental or paradigmatic). The scope dimension denotes the amount of change a given policy sector is experiencing. Transformation can be broad or narrow depending on how many specific policy elements it touches. Finally, the directional logic criterion ‘indicates whether changes are cumulative (thus leading to radical transformation) or adaptive (thus simply maintaining the inherited policy equilibrium and adapting it to the new external pressures) or random’ (Capano and Howlett 2009:7).

Capano and Howlett suggest that all these criteria have to be applied and interpreted in relation to a specific context in order to make sense of any causality

chains. They have also warned against policy analysis that does not take into consideration that policy change is a process involving multiple conjunctions through different stages and arenas.

Other factors add to the list of basic choices for the study of policy change in higher education. The observation of any reform requires a chronological dimension to appreciate variations through different stages. Trying to describe shifts in policies, Smith (2006) has provided a great deal of criticism of policy change conceptualisations. Whether synchronic (a in-motion snapshot) or comparative and static (e.g. 'before and after' scenarios), she has suggested that the main approaches for understanding transformation in policies have failed to reveal the actual process of change, because its pace, its multidimensionality, and its ambiguity are somehow downplayed.

Smith has offered a diachronic view of change, as a 'video panning' following an object's trajectory within a given time and space location. This dynamic approach, she has suggested, allows explorations of patterns in change over time. Such patterns can be evolutionary or revolutionary. While the former refers to long term, cumulative and directional change, the latter alludes to rapid and profound transformations. Both evolutionary and revolutionary changes are interwoven, as long periods of stability are often interrupted by times of sudden change that, in turn, lead to new eras of stability. However, even revolutionary changes retain some elements from the past, while evolutionary change can lead to significant transformations over time. Trying to capture such complexities, Smith defines policy change as a dynamic and fluid phenomenon 'in terms of the ebb and flow of particular tendencies and counter-tendencies that may shift considerably — whether gradually or rapidly — over time' (Smith 2006:522).

Streeck and Thelen (2005) have suggested that, under the influence of liberalism, institutional changes have followed a non-disruptive path, fostering significant transformations within national economic structures without dramatic commotions. However, different to previous studies of incremental change, they offer a distinctive analysis of policy change by differentiating between the process and the result of change. Thus, shifts can be abrupt or incremental from a process viewpoint while such processes can cause continuity or discontinuity in relation to their outcomes.

Although policy change scholars have tended to couple disruption with discontinuity, disruptive processes have led to significant shifts due to the ability of reactive and adaptive behaviour to prevent discontinuity, protecting institutional integrity. To the contrary, Streeck and Thelen (2005) have suggested that apparent stability can foster substantive reconfiguration, as sustained cumulative change may affect institutions to a great extent.

Streeck and Thelen (2005) have described five forms in which substantial evolutionary transformations take place:

- *Displacement*: New models surface and spread, calling into question existing institutions and practices. Alternatively, latent resources are rediscovered and activated or practices from elsewhere are assimilated. Whichever way, those changes take place without an explicit assessment or amendment of existing arrangements. Because institutional frameworks are never fully coherent — due to the inner ambiguity of norms, the cognitive limits of policymaking, the subversive or unintended deviations of social regulations, and the limited ability of existing agencies to prevent deviation — displacement occurs through deflection, in a process in which institutional incoherence creates a space for political manoeuvring and active cultivation of a new logic of action.
- *Layering*: ‘New elements attached to existing institutions gradually change their status and structure’ (Streeck and Thelen 2005:31). Layering works through differential growth in which new elements can become prominent. Because existing arrangements within institutions are not at risk, little resistance is usually found for political manoeuvring, allowing different possibilities for siphoning out their core functions in favour of the new arrangements.
- *Drift*: the erosion by atrophy of existing institutions’ outcomes due to the lack of active maintenance in a changing context. Ewell (2007) has offered an illustration of how higher education accreditation in the US has been permanently adjusted to prevent this effect. Drift occurs through purposeful neglect in order to adapt institutional arrangements to new contextual conditions.
- *Conversion*: Different to the other types of incremental change, conversion takes place through redirecting existing institutions (and their resources) to new goals or functions to cope with new environmental challenges or to serve the needs of new actors. An increased gap between rules and enactment is assumed in this hypothesis due to the limits of the institutional form, the intended ambiguity of institutional rules,

reinterpretation of institutional rules from above, and change in contextual conditions (Streeck and Thelen 2005).

- *Exhaustion*: A complete institutional breakdown takes place over time through depletion due to three different causes: self-consumption (a institution undermines its preconditions), diminishing returns (extended changes in cost-benefit relationships), and over-extension (when an existing institution experiences expansion beyond its possibilities for growth, depleting the resources needed for its continued operation).

Capano and Howlett's framework provides a useful tool for identifying the content and focus of reforms, facilitating comparisons between different changes. By definition this approach is of particular importance for longitudinal studies that usually require contrasting key events within the same chain of successive changes. Likewise, Streeck and Thelen's typology of incremental transformation of policies provides valuable guidance for examining the ways in which cumulative change is possible in two simultaneous directions: the status of the previous policy and the accommodation of the new one.

3.3 Frameworks emerged from policy studies

Divergent perspectives on the policy process offer a starting point to explore the varied dimensions of change. Although pertaining to the study of the policy cycle, they often pay considerable attention to the ways in which reforms are designed and carried out throughout the policy stages (i.e. formation, implementation, and assessment).

Inspired by Pressman and Wildavsky's groundbreaking work on policy implementation (1973), Cerych and Sabatier (1986) have attempted to determine whether societies are capable of planned change in higher education. Using the top-down approach to policy analysis, they synthesised a list of factors and conditions affecting policy implementation in their review of national experiences of higher education reform in Europe: clarity and consistency of legal objectives; adequacy of causal theory; adequacy of financial resources provided to participating institutions; degree of commitment to program objectives among those charged with its implementation; degree of commitment to program objectives among legislative and executive officials and other affected groups; and changes in social and economic conditions affecting goal priorities or the program's causal assumptions.

Cerych and Sabatier also developed a multidimensional framework to conceptualise the scope of change in higher education that contradicted conventional knowledge. It suggests that change in higher education can only be incremental. By differentiating the degree to which a new policy implies a departure from existing values and practices (depth of change), the number of functional areas in which a given policy is expected to transform (functional breadth of change), and the specific target of the reform (level of change), they attempted to describe viable approaches to policy change. Thus, Cerych and Sabatier conclude that '[p]olicies implying far-reaching changes can be successful if they aim at one or only few institutional areas of the system or an institution...[and] a reform can succeed more easily if it affects a single institution rather than a system as a whole' (1986:245-246). In contrast, they found that reforms projecting a very low degree of change both in terms of depth and functional breadth are often unsuccessful, mainly because they 'do not galvanise sufficient energy to overcome inertia in the system' (1986:248).

Cerych and Sabatier's approach to higher education policy has been highly influential (see Gornitzka, Kogan, and Amaral 2005) yet it has also attracted substantial criticism. Kogan (2005) has pointed out that far-reaching changes are not necessarily more difficult to achieve than those targeting one of two functional areas and that systemic transformation can be easier than creating new universities. The rise of the New Public Management policy agenda and the formation of binary systems of higher education stand out as prominent counterexamples of Cerych and Sabatier's theory.

Sabatier (2005) has questioned the policy cycle model from which this approach emerged. The sequence of stages it suggests (agenda setting/formulation and legitimation/implementation and evaluation) has proven to be inaccurate in practice and comprises no real causation theory. In addition, it has a strong legalistic bias that '... oversimplifies the usual process of multiple, interacting cycles involving numerous policy proposals and statutes at multiple levels of the governments' (Sabatier 2005:18).

Other critics of the top-down perspective to the policy process — from which Cerych and Sabatier's framework emerged — have pointed out that policy implementation is not a technical procedure that 'could be centrally controlled and steered if just the number of relevant variables and their interconnectedness were disclosed' (Gornitzka, Kyvik, and Stensaker 2005:41). In addition, the listed factors

for an effective implementation proved to be unrealistic (Majone and Wildavsky 1978, Cerych and Sabatier 1986): few policies have clear and consistent objectives (and, when they have them, are not better implemented solely for that reason) and their causal theory is often unclear due to political and scientific reasons. Conditions prescribed for effective execution do not specify a model for implementation (O'Toole 1986).

Furthermore, the top-down approach offers limited utility in contexts of multiple government directives and actors when none of them have a dominant position (Sabatier 1986). Because it 'neglects initiatives coming from local implementing officials and tends to underestimate the strategies used by street-level bureaucrats and target groups to divert central policy to their own purposes' (Sabatier 2005:22), this perspective on policy analysis does not provide a good conceptual vehicle for explaining real-life implementation processes and, thus, change.

All these reasons militate against the application of Cerych and Sabatier's approach to the evolution of quality assurance policy in Chile. Alternative models for studying the policy process have been grouped under the bottom-up banner, as they attempt to reflect the complexities of social processes and real-life implementation (Elmore 1985, Hjern and Hull 1982). These studies have confirmed the key role of bargaining in policy formation and the natural displacement of policy goals throughout the implementation process.

In an evident methodological and conceptual departure from the hierarchical and rational planning assumptions held by top-down theorists, Hanf, Hjern, and Porter (1978) focus on describing the goals, strategies, activities and contacts of actors involved in service delivery. This methodology allowed them to trace the networks of actors involved in implementing policies at local level, which they called the 'implementation structure'. Instead of framing issues from policymakers' viewpoints, Hanf, Hjern, and Porter's approach offers a wider repertoire of perspectives on how policy problems and solutions are perceived at the local level.

Yet bottom-up approaches have also exhibited important limitations (Sabatier 2005). They tend to exaggerate the ability of the periphery to frustrate the centre and have not provided an explicit theory of the factors that structure perceptions, resources, and participation among potential actors. These elements are of particular interest in longitudinal studies where actors' roles and resources often experience important variations over time.

Attempts to synthesise top-down and bottom-up models through a dual focus on legal instruments and socio-economic conditions for policy implementation have gained little traction (see Elmore 1985, Matland 1995, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). Divergences in scope (e.g. a narrow legalistic process versus a broad process without a decision or end), the nature of the policy process (a sequence of stages or a continuum), and the criteria for evaluate policy accomplishment (enforcement versus participation) have raised questions around the implementation approach to policy as a whole, in terms of ‘its theoretical pluralism, its restrictive nature and for being non-cumulative’ (Gornitzka, Kyvik, and Stensaker 2005:46). This critique has played an important function in the evident decline of policy implementation studies and has discouraged its application to the examination of quality assurance in Chile.

The bottom-heavy nature of the higher education enterprise presents additional challenges to policy process analysis (Cerych and Sabatier 1986). Diffusion of authority among autonomous actors gives policy-related issues a highly interactive and pluralistic character. More recently, Kogan (2005) has questioned the very possibility, in so culturally saturated an area as higher education, of a comprehensive implementation theory — perhaps the single most important contribution of higher education studies to policy science (Premfors 1994:1912). In his estimation, national policymaking and implementation systems are just too different to one another to allow broad generalisations.

Problems attached to policy implementation are not the single challenge for policy science in higher education — theories of policy formation are controversial elsewhere. In his comprehensive review of the American literature, McLendon (2003) has presented a synthesis of the dominant theoretical perspectives in higher education policymaking. In his appreciation, the Multiple Stream framework, the Punctuated Equilibrium framework and the policy innovation and diffusion frameworks offer promising vistas for exploring the black box of higher education policy. However, as they tend to focus on different elements of the policy process, McLendon has pointed out that these frameworks do not yet offer compatible explanations of the process of change.

In the Multiple Stream Theory, government decision-making often experiences problematic preferences, unclear means, and fluid participation — not very different to universities’ organised anarchy. In this context, change happens when three independent streams (problems, policies and politics) align, creating a

policy window (Kingdon 1995, Zahariadis 1999). Whether actively fostering this alignment or just by taking advantage of it, policy entrepreneurs are capable of pushing changes in policies when they can attach specific solutions to given problems within a favourable ‘political mood’. The evolutionary or revolutionary pathway of change is conceived here as a function of the nature of interests served by policy entrepreneurs.

Although some aspects of this framework require substantive reconsiderations (i.e. the streams seem to have some degree of interdependence and policy windows’ functioning remains obscure), in the few cases in which it has been applied to the study of higher education the Multiple Stream Theory has yielded greater explanatory power than competing theories (McLendon 2003).

In contrast, the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory attempts to explain why stability and incrementalism are the typical patterns for policymaking and why they occasionally generate rapid and sweeping transformation (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, True, Jones and Baumgartner 1999). Accordingly, incremental change is the effect of adjustments made by specialists’ communities located within higher education subsystems in response to shifting circumstances. On occasion, however, expert groups are not able to rule policy discussions in the sub-sector as issues jump into the macro-political agenda under the influence of emerging policy pictures — i.e. how policy is understood and discussed — leading to comprehensive transformations. Often, these variations are associated with changes in the intensity of interests (McLendon 2003).

The innovation and diffusion frameworks seek to explain the origin of new policies by looking at internal determinants and external influences for policy development (Berry and Berry 1999). Different to invention, innovation refers to the initial adoption of a policy in a given jurisdiction, and not necessarily to original ideas. Internal determinants are the socio-economic and political characteristics of a group that may push for new approaches to policy in some states. In contrast, the Policy Diffusion Framework suggests that the adoption of a new policy may have something to do with governments emulating their peers. Regional proximity and economic pressures have been tested as causes for explaining policy diffusion. National networks of public servants have also provided shortcuts for finding solutions to deal with existing problems (McLendon 2003).

These frameworks have been applied to the study of higher education occasionally (Bastedo 2007). Most of them have been developed in the United States, necessarily considering varying federal and state realities for policymaking, which are difficult to extrapolate to other cases where government is unitary or subject to regional governance schemes. Additionally, as McLendon has pointed out, they focus on different aspects of policy formation — Multiple Stream Theory attempts to explain how reforms are enacted while Punctuated Equilibrium Theory links different reform outcomes with the people in charge of shaping them, and Innovation and Diffusion frameworks concentrate on the conditions under which policymakers imitate the solutions (i.e. policy content) provided by other jurisdictions — limiting their potential for delivering alternative explanations.

Yet the main limitation these theories have is their scope. A longitudinal case requires a framework capable of tracing, explaining and connecting major developments. At their best, they offer a detailed account of very specific types of event. This narrow scope limits their ability to appreciate larger-scale policy trajectories critically.

3.4 Sociological perspectives and their limitations

In recent years, theories drawn from sociology have assisted in expanding the investigation of higher education policy (Bastedo 2007). Though they partially overlap with the frameworks emerging from social theory, sociological perspectives on policy change are narrower in their scope and have a clear orientation toward empirical research. In an effort to summarise current approaches, Kyvik (2009) has described three distinctive paradigms for addressing change: *structural*, *cultural*, and *interest group* explanations.

Structural explanations look at the impact on society of shifts in organising human activity as a result of ongoing large-scale technological transformations, the accumulation of wealth and the rise of the middle classes. Broad technological, economic and social changes permeate higher education systems by bringing new demands and problems to existing structures and pushing for their adjustment. Cultural explanations study the role and impact of values and norms in changing higher education systems. Isolated or in combination, long-entrenched orientations for action such as social equity, equal opportunity, efficiency and quality have justified

numerous reform initiatives in the sector. In addition, some cultural change theories are concerned with ‘the drift of ideas and the subsequent institutionalisation of similar organisational forms and values across countries’ (Kyvik 2009:28). Finally, interest group explanations present change as the outcome of conflicting human interests between relevant actors in higher education at different levels throughout the political process.

From a slightly different perspective, Saarinen and Ursin (2012) have organised dominant approaches to higher education policy change into three different categories: structural, actor, and agency approaches. Defined as ‘socially constructed entit[ies] in which similar patterns and relationships interact’, structures are both vehicles and results of practices within social systems (Saarinen and Ursin 2012:145). Although actors are important in this approach, structural views observe that higher education policy change occurs inside structures and levels where actors are bounded. The actor approach focuses on the ‘driving force of policy change within a given structure’ (Saarinen and Ursin 2012:147). Whether individually or collectively, actors bring purpose and intention to action. They are goal-oriented and hold values concerning, and interests in, supporting or rejecting change. Finally, the agency approach looks at the interactive process of transformation between multiple actors and domains and within ephemeral structures.

For different reasons, both Kyvik’s and Saarinen and Ursin’s attempts to summarise policy change theories in higher education fall short in providing an alternative template to the actor/structure duality. In Kyvik’s case, the problem lies in his definition of cultural approaches to change. Both norms and values have traceable connections to structures and actors. Cultural norms and structures are not distinguishable entities because social structures essentially depend on institutions to exist and organise human activity. As explained below (see section 3.4.2), institutions are sets of norms (and resources) that govern behaviour in society. Because norms and structures are implicated through institutions, their separation into independent categories is not as clear-cut as Kyvik has suggested. Furthermore, Kyvik’s distinction between values and interests — or, for that matter, between cultural and interest-group explanations to transformation — overlooks that both are deeply intertwined, as Kisby (2007) indicates.

Saarinen and Ursin’s classification offers some challenges as well. Yet, here the burden is less conceptual than methodological in nature. Their review of

frameworks for the study of policy change in higher education is limited to three journals in the field. Albeit prominent, these journals¹⁹ partially illustrate the application of alternative approaches. Stensaker's article 'Outcomes of quality assurance: A discussion of knowledge, methodology and validity' (2008) has received 44 citations so far²⁰ for his rendition of the impact of external quality assurance systems. In the article he advanced the idea of moving from implementation to translation to explore their implications, applying a discourse analysis approach. Dickhaus (2010) has applied a similar framework for comparing accountability regimes in Chile and South Africa. These examples suggest that Saarinen and Ursin's separation of existing and emerging approaches is less grounded than may appear. Furthermore, as Walsh (2007) has shown, network analysis has been used in higher education policy studies for some time. Thus, it is difficult to support its inclusion among 'emerging' approaches. Finally, Saarinen and Ursin provide no justification for including combined models — such as Bleiklie and Kogan's — among actor approaches while Marginson and Rhoades's hybrid²¹ 'glonacal' heuristic stands apart in Saarinen and Ursin's account.

Hence, this section presents the main analytical perspectives on policy change. First, it covers those approaches that explore the messiness of the policy process from an actor perspective. Then, it describes the models that stress the influence of norms and structures in shaping policies from a structural angle. Then follows a third group of heuristics seeking to move ahead from the functional/structural divide. Their shared inspiration in post-structuralism sees them conflated under this banner.

Lastly, an additional cluster is presented. It points out attempts to combine agency and structural models to enhance their explanatory power. Kyvik (2009) has advanced that the complementary nature of these perspectives lies in the different functions performed by diverse factors in explaining change. Saarinen and Ursin (2011) support Kyvik's advocacy of integrated models for the investigation of change in higher education policy. Both observe that structural and cultural shifts condition and constrain the transformation of the sector, 'but the particular adaptations to these

¹⁹ *Studies in Higher Education*, *Higher Education*, and the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*.

²⁰ According to Google scholar on 23 January, 2013.

²¹ The application of key notions (such as the agency, agencies, and levels) retrieved from structural and actor approaches to change in higher education suggests a strong combinatory direction in Marginson and Rhoades's heuristic (see Vidovich 2004).

changes are the outcome of interactions between actors in this field, be they individuals, groups, organisations or institutions' (Kyvik 2009:31).

3.4.1 Actor-centred approaches

The idea of a policy network conveys a broad framework for describing government/interest group relationships throughout the policy process. Networks are a constitutive part of the policy change process, as they have the ability to penetrate and influence governments at different levels, whether to promote, prevent or offer alternatives for shifts in policies. This is especially prominent since both network structure and agency tend to influence policy outcomes (Marsh and Smith 2000). In a number of sectors in the UK, for instance, policy communities have tended to foster incremental change in policies (Rhodes and Marsh 1992). From a number of constitutive networks elements, Atkinson and Coleman (1989) have identified specific factors conditioning policy network outcomes: the extent of the participation of interested parties in the policy decision-making at the state level; the degree of autonomy of the state from stakeholders; and the level of mobilization of the policy community to take part in decision-making.

The network metaphor has emerged in the policy analysis field to characterize state-industry relations (Katzenstein 1978, Hecló 2010[1978]). However, policy network theory has provided concepts and typologies to explain private-public interaction over time at sectorial level (Van Waarden 1992). Networks have been defined as 'forms of interest intermediation' (Rhodes and Marsh 1992:186) or as 'modes of coordination of collective action characterized and constituted through the mutual recognition of common or complementary agendas...[functioning as] strategic alliances forged around a common agenda (however contested, however dynamic) of mutual advantage through collective action' (Hay 1998:38).

Nevertheless, it is important to take into consideration the complexities attached to the network-interest linkage, because the distinction between ideas and interests is far from clear (John 1999, Kisby 2007). Ideas can be conceived as relatively discrete packages of measures capable of being selected as policies, but they can also be thought of as systems of ideas or ideologies. Interests work at different levels, as well. They refer to gains to be made by an individual as a result of

following a certain course of action (or inaction) but additionally they can be understood as projects or preferences pursued by agents.

Reflecting on their UK study, Rhodes and Marsh (1992) have described diverse characteristics for differentiating networks. By looking at membership (in terms of number of participants and type of interests), integration (considering the frequency of interaction, continuity and consensus), resources (as resource distribution within the network and across participating organizations) and balance of power, they have described some broad characteristics of policy communities and issue-based networks as the opposite extremes of a continuum. Accordingly, policy communities have ‘a limited number of participants with some groups consciously excluded; a dominant economic or professional interest; frequent interaction between all the members of the community on all the matters related to the policy issues; consistency in values, membership, and policy outcomes over time; consensus, with the ideology, values and broad policy preferences shared by all participants; exchange relationships with all members of the policy community having some resources; bargaining between members with resources; and the hierarchical distribution of resources within the participating organizations so that leaders can guarantee the compliance of their members. There is a balance of power, not necessarily one in which all members equally benefit but one in which all members see themselves as involved in a positive-sum game’ (Rhodes and Marsh 1992:187). Issue networks are defined by contrast, though several deviations from this ideal model are anticipated. In Rhodes and Marsh’s view, both types of network are not even mutually exclusive as both can coexist in the same policy sector or sub-sector.

Van Waarden (1992) has pointed to the central dimensions of policy networks (number and type of societal actors involved, major function performed by networks, and balance of power) to offer a wider taxonomy, including statism, captured statism, clientelism, pressure pluralism, parentela relationships, iron triangles, issue networks, sectoral corporatism, macro-corporatism, state corporatism, and sponsored pluralism. In contrast, Atkinson and Coleman (1989) have suggested five categories of network — pressure pluralism, clientele pluralism, corporativism, concertation, state direction — to illustrate different modes of collective action that can exert influence on policy.

Epistemic communities are one type of policy network not covered in those categories. While they share several elements with policy communities, they refer to a ‘network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular

policy domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area' (Haas 1992:3). This type of network offers an insight into the role of 'scientific information and learning processes in the development of (international) regimes, and explicitly address the mechanisms by which new ideas and knowledge about problems, cause-effect relationships, and policy options may enter the arena and influence policymaking' (Meijerink 2005:1063). Although they can perform roles similar to advocacy coalitions, epistemic communities are knowledge-based, in contrast to value-based coalitions. In Kisby's words, they provide the 'ideational framework within which programs of action are formulated' (2007:81).

The policy network perspective provides an exploration of a number of issues for policy analysis in higher education. In the vein of some landmark comparative higher education policy studies (Meek et al 1991, Capano 1996, Kogan and Hanney 2000), this perspective can shed some light on existing networks' characteristics and their ability to influence policy formation and implementation. Likewise, it can point to policy diffusion across jurisdictions and to the growing importance of international non-governmental or multilateral organizations pushing a quality assurance agenda into national systems of higher education (True and Mintrom 2001, Walsh 2007).

Evolutionary transformation of policies and institutions has been closely associated with networks. Smith has suggested that tightly networked sectors 'ought to tend towards incrementalism, and conservatism in sectors with more cohesive policy communities' (2000:97). Whether through bargaining coalitions, the actual influence of communities of specialists, or effective leadership of policy entrepreneurs, policy change theories have used different images to account for collective human action towards non-disruptive shifts in policies (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999, True et al. 1999, Zahariadis 1999).

Bleiklie has advanced that policy change can be observed as a policy regime. Defined as 'the network of actors and patterns of influence that are particular to a policy area or an entire polity' (2006:40), policy regimes have the ability to influence the process of bringing reform. They differ from policy networks in a number of key attributes. Policy regimes are dynamic, in the sense that actors and relationships among them can vary. They are not exclusively engaged in interest politics and have the ability to contain any action that may have bearing on policies. Additionally, policy regimes are not driven by rational goal-driven behaviour.

The distribution of influence among actors and their cohesion — that is, how tightly related actors are to one another — are two important dimensions of policy regimes (Bleiklie 2006). They inform the way in which policy regimes are structured and, more importantly, shed some light on how policies are modified. Bleiklie observes that policy variation may be the result of shifting influence distribution in policy regimes over time and across nations. Outcomes are determined by the preferences of a new dominant coalition. Furthermore, policy change can also emerge from variations in the cohesion of policy regimes. Shifts in the shared values and normative conceptions that define how policymaking communities are constituted also have the ability to alter policy regimes' outcomes.

Regulatory state theory explains how the role of government has changed in fostering higher education. Briefly described, regulatory state theory illustrates how governments increasingly delegate their authority to independent agencies for market control, market enhancement and social protection in a context of a growing 'reliance on private forms of supply and organization, and the use of markets and competition for promoting consumer choice and efficiency in public services on the grounds of a neo-liberal perspective and due to the fiscal crisis of the welfare state' (King 2007:9).

In the context of a regulatory society — where 'the power of the government has been weakened from above (by a supra-national relocation of sovereignty), from below (by marketization and networks), and sideways (by the spread of executive and regulatory agencies' (King 2006:3) — policy communities and sector networks have increasingly performed an important role seizing (and mediating) authority from the state and developing an increasing interdependence between them, as both networks and governments constantly influence one another and exert that influence on the performance of autonomous agencies, many of them funded and/or endorsed by the state.

Based on his research in the UK, King (2006:15) has described four different forms adopted by the regulatory state:

'(a) a profession-state regulatory continuum, with movement generally from practitioner self-regulatory bodies to more state-backed, and often statutory, regulators;

(b) a profession-industry continuum based on the extent to which commercial or practitioner interests predominate in a sector's organized economic arrangements, with "industry" and "market" characteristics becoming more common in previously highly professionalised domains;

(c) supply-side and demand-side market policies, focused on whether seeking private entrants or private funding is the key governmental policy instrument for generating competition and choice; and

(d) a global-local continuum, reflecting the impact of global relative to national regulatory influences in a domain, with increased movement to international standards-setting’.

In addition, King describes how regulatory intermediation has influenced quality assurance policy outcomes in the UK. Defined as ‘the process by which external regulatory activity is distributed and modified through local, organizational and professional perspectives by key groups that occupy the regulatory space between regulator and regulated’ (King 2006:11), regulatory intermediation points to the interpretative function of auditors in implementing quality audits. As members of the higher education community serving on review committees and making judgements as to institutional quality, auditors are influenced by how they — and their communities and networks — understand assessments’ purposes, criteria and context. The implication of this is that quality assurance regulation has been developed to accommodate accountability aims together with perceptions of quality within the higher education community, increasing its adaptability.

Only limited accounts or applications of regulatory state theory are available in the field of higher education studies. Yet it is noteworthy for analysing policy development in the sector, according to Filippakou and Tapper (2007). King (2006) refers to the higher education regulatory state to explain quality assurance and funding arrangements in the sector. In his view, organizational infrastructure and delivery mechanisms for quality assessments share a number of the regulatory state’s characteristics, as higher education institutions and the state are inseparably connected to one other. Thus, regulatory state theory can provide some tools for a better understanding of the institutional arrangements for quality assurance; can expand the implications attached to the steering from a distance mode of coordination of higher education systems²²; and can offer room for analysing regulatory intermediation as members of the higher education community assume active regulatory roles in quality

²² Steering from the distance refers to a mode of coordinating higher education systems, in which universities are granted with greater autonomy to conduct their affairs but their performance is externally assessed ex-post against the criteria provided by the government or by quality assurance agencies (Marginson 1997b).

assurance processes through appointing board members for existing agencies and by serving on peer review committees (King 2007).

In despite of its contribution to the study of policy change, actor-centred approaches exhibit noteworthy limitations for addressing reform processes in the developing world, as in Chile. First, most of this research has been conducted in Anglophone-majority, Westminster nations and reflects their common cultural heritage in dealing with public affairs — the UK in particular has been subject to intense scrutiny in this regard. The idiosyncratic features of the elite policymaking style prevalent in England are clearly reflected in this tradition of research (Rhodes and Marsh 1992). As cultural features are taken for granted, they are internalised into theory: a network's characteristics are of focal interest in actor-centred theories because they are the dependent variables that explain policy outcomes. Contextual elements and dynamics are filtered through the network image limiting the analytical possibilities available for researchers.

Likewise, policy network theory suggests that there is an inevitable connection between pluralistic policymaking and incrementalism and conservatism that is hardly compatible with the revolutionary changes governments and governance have experienced in recent decades worldwide. These global transformations imply a larger and more complex repertoire of factors and dynamics influencing policy change that are not properly addressed in these frameworks. In particular, the rise of international epistemic communities and networks suggests the emergence of different paradigms and models in policymaking that are reshaping the assumptions behind actor-centred approaches to policy change (Christensen 2006).

3.4.2 Structural approaches

The assertion that organisations are dependent on their environment has exerted a powerful influence on the study of higher education (Gornitzka, Kyvik and Stensaker 2005). Consequently, policy analysis has borrowed a number of frameworks and heuristics from organisational theory to expand its theoretical toolkit. Resource dependency theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) and neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Hall and Taylor 1996) have proved particularly apt for addressing change and stability issues in relation to higher education policy. As Gornitzka (1999) has suggested, both perspectives share the assumption that external

pressures and demands limit choice and action in organisations. They differ, however, in estimating the range of action available for organisations to react to changes in the environment and in explaining how organisations take action to deal with these transformations.

Resource dependency theory describes how organisations relate to other actors in social contexts. Rather than self-determining entities, organisations are subject to a great deal of influence from others in their constant struggle with constraints and external control (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Yet they are reactive, not passive. Organisations make constant choices to handle their dependency and to control access to key resources. To some extent, their success depends on their ability to adjust to shifts in the environment. Retrieving information and learning from (or dictating) the context are essential tasks that shape their adaptation. Internal units compete with one another to lead these processes.

Universities are capable of influencing their social context (Gornitzka 1999). They are in a position of interdependency as they control access to resources that other organisations need. Organisations are also capable of manipulating their dependency through different strategies.

To make sense of organisational adaptation to the environment, ‘it is not enough to investigate the “objective” resource dependencies and interdependencies. In addition it is necessary to examine the way organisations perceive their environment, how they act to control and avoid dependencies, the role of organisational leadership in these processes, as well as the way internal power distributions affect and are affected by external dependencies’ (Gornitzka 1999:9-10).

Neo-institutionalism is an umbrella term often used to refer to a group of theories that examine the function of human agency in the interaction of organisations and their environments (Bleiklei and Kogan 2006). *Actor-centred institutionalism*, or rational choice, defines institutions as a set of rules that restrain actors’ utility maximising behaviour. In that context, it suggests that individuals and groups act strategically and instrumentally to achieve their preferences. *Normative or sociological institutionalism* conceives of institutions ‘not just [as] formal rules, procedures or norms, but the symbol systems, cognitive scripts, and moral templates that provide the “frames of meaning” to human action’ (Hall and Taylor 1996:947). Rather than limit human behaviour, here institutions model it. Finally, *historical institutionalism* defines institutions as ‘formal and informal procedures, routines,

norms and conventions embedded in the organisational structure of the polity or the political economy' (Hall and Taylor 1996:938). It is a broad conception able to encompass both the calculus and the cultural approaches embedded in other breeds of the institutional theory.

Whereas actor-centred institutionalism explains change in organisations as a mechanism to minimise transaction, production or influence costs, normative institutionalism suggests that organisations adapt to changes in context to enhance their social legitimacy. In contrast, historical institutionalism emphasises the historically situated role of institutions in producing paths to structure responses to new challenges (Hall and Taylor 1996:941). '[C]hange occurs in (and through) the *same time* inter-relationship between strategic action and the strategic context within which it is conceived and instantiated, and in the *later* unfolding of its intended and unintended consequences' (Hay and Wincott 1998:955, emphasis in the original).

For institutional theory, however, changes in institutions are the product of external causes (Hira and Hira 2000). Institutions change as a result of new economic factors that affect prices and preferences. They also change in reaction to innovation brought by 'entrepreneurs', who exploit openings inside the institutional system.

Institutional isomorphism is a key feature of the neo-institutional framework (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). It advances that 'the survival and success of organisations depend upon taking account of other organisations in the environment' (van Vught 1996:53). It leads to increasing organisational similarity and reduces system diversity. Three different mechanisms cause this reaction (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Coercive isomorphism refers to pressures applied in the environment by other entities (such as governments and regulations) upon which an organisation is dependent. Mimetic isomorphism operates 'when organisational technologies are poorly understood... when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainties' (DiMaggio and Powell 1983:151). Under such conditions, organisations tend to replicate other organisational models from perceived successful or legitimate organizations. Normative isomorphism rises from professionalization. When organisations' members have the same professional training and participate in professional networks, they tend to behave similarly.

Systems populated by several organisations competing for scarce resources tend to move towards structural isomorphism (van Vught 1996). This form of isomorphism is closely related to resource dependency theory. It posits that conditions

for competition enframe analogous organisational responses and, thus, an increase in environmental homogeneity. This effect is amplified by organisations' ability to influence their own environments. The introduction of changes in regulation to accommodate emerging sectoral interests is a concrete manifestation of this power.

Nevertheless, the application of environmental theories to the study of higher education requires one important qualification. As Meek et al. (1996) have claimed, it is hard to find examples of defunct higher education institutions due their lack of adjustment to the environment. In most higher education systems, universities are unlikely to be subject to the 'adapt or perish' imperative due to their essential public character, which determines their access to variable levels of government funding. Thus, the study of change needs to acknowledge that political feasibility and ideological motivations are important parts of the policy landscape that structure higher education differently to other organisational ecologies.

Dill (2003) has explored the institutional framework for addressing transformation in higher education. Instead of the organisational theory perspective on institutions, which focuses on the organisational level, Dill has investigated system-wide effects of institutions using the framework developed by North (1990). Accordingly, he defines institutions as 'those rules, norms of behaviour, and their enforcement characteristics, which shape human action' (Dill 2003:673). This definition assumes that individuals have preferences and act instrumentally to maximise those preferences. Institutions condition individual choices, in terms of the nature of preferences and the pursuit of them. Yet institutions are not static, as institutional frameworks evolve as a result of the action of diverse agents. In his study of academic quality policies from an institutional perspective, Dill has identified four institutions affecting academic behaviour: 'government regulative activity directly affecting the outcomes and processes of academic work, the nature of the competitive academic markets, the norms and practices of the academic profession, and the rules of the university' (2003:674).

Structural analysis has been pivotal in describing the tectonic transformations higher education experiences worldwide. Yet for all the standardising influence that environments exert upon universities, important variations can be observed in the way institutions react to their surroundings — see Brunner and Uribe (2007) for the Chilean case. This variation in the way organisations anticipate, interpret and

internalise change suggests that structural forces can only partially explain reform outcomes in the long run.

Changes in regulation merely confirm this general pattern. They are brought about by a concatenation of circumstances that are loosely coupled with structures. The political factor, for example, is prominent in policy formation and implementation. The configuration of a new policy — and its enforcement — depends more on how vested interests and the voices of other influential actors are accommodated in the process than on the sole recognition of existing structural pressures at play. A case study in policy change requires a framework that is able to retain its analytical openness in order fully to capture the process of change, its causes and timing.

3.4.3 Post-structural approaches

Trying to move on from the agency/structural divide in explaining policy change, scholars have explored post-structuralist ideas in the attempt to study higher education policy. Ball's ideas, in particular, have attracted some attention in recent years (see Trowler 2002, Vidovich 2007, Rivzi and Lindgard 2010). Instead of assuming instrumental rationality, Ball conceives of policy cycle as a messy process.

Decentralised power relationships have been largely absent from policy analysis. To address this shortcoming, critical policy analysis has advanced the idea of a continuous policy cycle emerging from policy's recontextualisation through four distinctive and partially coordinated policy contexts: '... the context of influence (where interest groups struggle over construction of policy discourses); the context of policy text production (where texts represent policy, although they may contain inconsistencies and contradictions); ... the context of practices and effects (where policy is subject to multiple interpretations and recreations); ... [a] context of outcomes, which is concerned with the impact of policies in existing social inequalities, as well as a "context of political strategy", which is concerned with identifying strategies to tackle the inequalities' (Vidovich 2007:289-290).

Ball's approach has attracted a great deal of criticism due to its strong emphasis on agency in transforming educational policy. In order to acknowledge the influence of forces beyond the individual on policymaking, Vidovich (2007) has

suggested some modifications for its application to the study of higher education that remain to be tested.

From a different perspective, Stensaker (2008) has advanced an analytical strategy to make sense of the messiness attached to the process of transformation. As an alternative to implementation, he has described change as a translation by focusing on organisational learning and on actor interaction to account for contextual elements influencing outcomes. Translation assumes an active interpreter rather than a linear and mechanical process (Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa 2007). In Stensaker's view, translation happens 'through active engagement and matching of external demands and internal needs' (Stensaker 2008:8). Dickhaus has pointed out that the contested and multidimensional character of the process of translation involves selectivity. From this perspective, selectivity operates at the structural and agency levels. Structural constraints 'provide opportunities for some actors, and reward actions compatible with the reproduction of existing institutional arrangements and power relations' (Dickhaus 2010:259). In this context, actors aspiring to bring change need to calculate those constraints and develop strategies to gain transformative power.

In a recent attempt to redress the balance between structure and agency in policymaking, policy design theory has pointed to changes in the social construction of reality to explain the evolution of policies (Schneider and Sidney 2009). Accordingly, when people no longer believe, accept or take for granted those constructions embedded in policies, they begin to change. Thus, special attention is devoted to exploring who constructs policy issues and how the public (or target population) perceives such issues as real, connecting power and knowledge.

Although promising, post-structural approaches tend to overemphasise the influence of ideology and power relations in modelling change outcomes. These are indeed forces that evidently require a careful consideration while examining reforms. Yet there is a risk of filtering out other factors behind policy change by committing solely to the lenses of power. Policy contestation can be easily reduced to ideological struggle, losing much complexity attached to reform processes. In addition, post-structural theories are yet to fulfil the criteria advanced by Sabatier (1999) for selecting mature frameworks for policy analysis — there is little evidence available of their application to the study of reforms in higher education.

The risk of overemphasising the political dimension of policy changes is particularly high in the Chilean case. The evolution of quality assurance policy is framed by the political struggles that shaped much of the long transition to democracy. Interpreting the trajectory of higher education policy in such a way presents the danger of reducing the analysis to a two-dimensional perspective: one party supporting and the other rejecting Pinochet's reforms. Apart from losing sight of much of the reconfiguration of the sector due to emerging structural factors, such analysis presents the threat of reducing the study of reform to documenting unattainable motion-passing quorums and fluctuations in the balance of power in the parliament.

3.4.4 Combined approaches

Contemporary attempts to address change in higher education have sought to combine the two most common explanations to policy change (see Bleiklie 2006, Kogan 2005, Bleiklie and Kogan 2006, Kyvik 2009). Whether an outcome of fluctuations on preferences among actors, of shifting power constellations between actors with different preferences or of the outcome of variations in values or value constellations, policy transformation seems to be perceived as an effect of tectonic displacements in the sector (Bleiklie 2006).

By understanding globalisation as a process in which 'the shrinkage of distance and time-delay in communications and travel, [is] leading to increasingly extensive and intense global relations' (Marginson and Rhoades 2002:288), the glonacal agency heuristic provides analytical tools to capture and describe how organizations and people are actually influencing relevant policy decisions at different levels (global/national/local) and within diverse domains (politics/economics/higher education) in a non-hierarchical and simultaneous fashion, whether these comprise local solutions inducing global developments or global agendas affecting institutional policies.

The glonacal agency heuristic can work twofold in policy analysis. First, it may identify an expanded repertoire of actors, as both organisations (agencies) and collective human action (agency) count for influencing higher education on three separate levels. Second, it can expand the ways to look at how influence is delivered by agencies or through agency from one level to another, by paying attention to the

specific modes (intersections/interactions/mutual determinations) in which ideas and interests can transit from one point to another within the world system. Additionally, Marginson and Rhoades describe a number of dimensions (reciprocity/strength/spheres of influence) that can affect the ability of a specific relationship to carry out any potential transformation, and have suggested the idea of layers and conditions to refer to historical structures and current conditions that affect interaction within and among diverse levels, domains and dimensions, providing a social and institutional context to frame higher education interaction.

Although Marginson (2004) and Vidovich (2004) have provided valuable examples of how to apply the glonacal agency heuristic to the study of higher education change, its full potential is yet to be explored. Because it has been designed to trace flows of policy solutions into distinctive levels and domains rather than to capture the process of transformations, its application to the study of policy change may require some conceptual clarification as well. Saarinen and Ursin (2011) have criticised the lack of clarity of the glonacal heuristic in relation to the roles of ‘collective human action’ and ‘organisational agencies’ in addressing flows of policy interaction.

This lack of clarity conspires against the application of the glonacal heuristic to the Chilean case. Tracing flows of activity at different levels can be highly useful for the study of reform. Yet without a model capable of linking agency and historical and current structures, the synthesis of the main dimensions attached to the reform process remains to be established.

Kogan (2005) has advanced a strategy for integrating diverse factors in explaining policy change in higher education. In this approach, the study of change focuses on the period of time when emerging reforms begin to coalesce and generate social and political support: the ‘issue emerging stage’. The study of change, hence, behoves identifying and describing the group of factors influencing change at that stage. With the aim of constructing a sound causal theory, Kogan distinguishes between underlying factors and factors that trigger change.

Building upon Kogan’s approach, Bleiklie and Kogan (2006) have developed a model for studying change in higher education. First, they introduce the concept of field of social action, which combines Powell and DiMaggio’s notion of ‘organisational field’ with Bourdieu’s ‘social field’, to situate the higher education sphere. It is defined as ‘an institutionalised area of activity where actors struggle

about something that is important to them' (Bleiklie and Kogan 2006:11). In the recognisable higher education area, they have observed multiple forces working together to form a system through an existing formal hierarchy. Yet, their model is non-hierarchical in the sense that chains of events do not connect levels (as the top-down and bottom-up approaches to change assume).

Such forces can be grouped into two separated systems for regulating the field: the government and academia²³ (Bleiklie and Kogan 2006). While the government provides regulation and funding through central policymaking and bureaucracies that allow universities to maintain their own identities and niches, academic groups allocate prestige and legitimacy through their own idiosyncratic structures and decision-making mechanisms. These systems work independently but possess strong linkages to one another — research funding through academic councils is a prominent example of this. Combined, their reach defines the fields of social action for higher education politics: national politics, education institutions and academic work within different disciplinary settings.

Bleiklie and Kogan's model attempts to explain change across those fields using two independent sets of variables. First, rationally bounded actors pursue their own interests through specific goals. Actors' preferences must be identified empirically since they are not exogenously given. Second, the institutional context in which they act does matter. This contextual framework is institutional in the sense that norms and values simultaneously shape and constrain goal-seeking behaviour. A description of the constellation of actors (and their objectives), resources, norms and values at the starting point for the reform period is followed by an analysis of 'the reform process itself, focusing on actor behaviour the choices they make and how successful they are' (Bleiklie and Kogan 2006:14). A description of the resulting situation is then provided. These separate accounts make it possible to compare the pre- and the post-reform situations to observe changes in human agency and institutional characteristics.

Bleiklie and Kogan (2006) have suggested that differences in scope and timeframe are relevant for weighting independent variables in the analysis. When the scope and timeframe are larger, institutional factors are especially important in explaining change. In contrast, human agency prevails in explaining reform in smaller

²³ Bleiklie and Kogan advance this generalisation for analytical purposes, yet they acknowledge that in practice each nation has its own particular characteristics.

ranges and shorter periods. Furthermore, they introduce the idea of gradual change to reflect interactions between actors and institutions in shaping higher education. In their observation of reform, new structures and values are nestled within existing arrangements through a process of meandering and sedimentation. Often, they conjecture, the complex and ambiguous character of policies and institutions can be attributed to their process of formation.

Bleiklie and Kogan's framework exhibits important strengths. It is simple but comprehensive, accommodating structural and agency factors involved in the process of change. It has been specifically developed for the study of higher education reform, acknowledging the particular features of the sector while retaining its comparative appeal. The framework advances an analytical model for the study of reform, singling out the main ingredients behind policy development. Lastly, it suggests a set of hypotheses to be tested in relation to the differential causal influence of the type of factors involved in the process of change.

Yet for all its persuasiveness, Bleiklie and Kogan's framework exhibits some limitations as well. For a longitudinal examination of policy trajectories, it does not provide sufficient support in addressing the problem of making sense of the reform process itself. Although it provides a pathway for tracing the overall dynamics of policy transformation, this framework does not invest much effort in explaining the operation of the reform process and the mechanisms that facilitate or constrain its conclusion. Additionally, this framework has not been tested beyond the authors' application to the study of higher education reforms in Europe.

Regardless, Bleiklie and Kogan have provided an integrative framework that is useful for an initial approximation of policy reforms at the national level. Operating as a mapping tool, it can assist in tracing the main factors implicated in policy changes. Because it does so in a comparative fashion, it can facilitate description of ex-ante and ex-post reform scenarios. For those reasons it has been tested in this investigation of the quality assurance policy saga²⁴ in Chile.

²⁴ This expression is used here and henceforth to designate the evolution of quality assurance policy in the same sense applied by Burton Clark in his well-known article titled 'the organizational saga in higher education' (1972).

3.5 British social theory and its possibilities

Although a number of theoretical frameworks have been developed over time to support the investigation of policy change, none of them seem to offer an adequate solution for a comprehensive study of higher education reforms. As has been discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, policy science has not been able to integrate the perspectives that emerged after the contestation of the stages heuristic framework²⁵ — as Paul Sabatier has ironically suggested (2005:30-31), there is perhaps something irreducible about higher education reforms. Likewise, most sociological frameworks offer partial accounts of the reform process or require extensive testing to refine their analytical models.

This unsatisfactory state of affairs demands the exploring of other theoretical traditions that have confronted similar issues and have developed innovative conceptual frameworks to provide sound explanations to the social change problem. For more than a century, social theory has accommodated diverse schools of thought that have competed in advancing alternative explanations to social change. Symbolic interactionism, psychoanalysis, and hermeneutics, for example, have all stressed the decisive role of the individual's agency in fostering social transformations (Elliot 2010:86). Functionalism and system theory, in contrast, have long emphasised the significance of structural conditions of society in causing and preventing changes in social institutions.

Action and structural approaches have disputed the prominence of diverse factors in explaining social change. The former conceives of actors as free agents making real choices and so determining social life; the latter observes that actors and structures are 'instruments of history' with a marginal or illusory capacity to make any choice (Bryant and Jary 2001:12). Not surprisingly, structures are subject to similar disagreements. While action theorists think of actors and structures as 'revisable products of free agents' (ibid.), structuralist sociologists treat them as essential social entities that determine, shape or heavily constrain behaviour.

Over recent decades, however, other frameworks have attempted to provide more detailed accounts of how structure and agency inform transformation and stability in social systems. One of them has been Pierre Bourdieu's use of habitus

²⁵ 'Stages heuristic' refers to the interpretation made by Sabatier (1991) of the policy cycle framework developed by May and Wildavsky (1978).

(actually a mediaeval, and to some lesser extent Aristotelian, notion). This habitus focuses on ‘the institutionalised process by which well-practised habits bridge individuals and the wider social things of which they are part’ (Elliot 2010:97). So, habitus refers to ‘... the structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices, but also to a structured structure’ (Bourdieu 1984:170).

Habitus is a flexible, open-ending configuring system that provides individuals with creative strategies to deal with unanticipated social structures. ‘[T]he habitus apprehends differences between conditions, which it grasps in the form of differences between classified, classifying practices (product of other habitus), in accordance with principles of differentiation, which being themselves the product of these differences, are objectively attuned to them and therefore tend to perceive them as natural’ (Bourdieu 1984:172). The habitus operates within a field, ‘the structured space of positions in which the individual is located’ (Elliot 2010:99). Bourdieu notices diverse fields — cultural, economic, educational. They precede the individual and possess different properties and characteristics.

The notion of habitus has been criticised on the grounds that it overemphasises the containment of cultural dispositions within social structures (Sewell 1992:14). Habitus seems to underestimate the capacity of individuals to alter existing social systems through creative action. Because of its reproductive bias, it seems to explain better how social practice and social stability are sustained rather than how they are transformed or replaced. A further investigation of the role of habitus in explaining social change is limited by this consideration.

In contrast, British social theorists have provided promising frameworks for the investigation of change by redefining the role of agency and structure in the shaping of social systems. Since late 1970s, Anthony Giddens and Margaret Archer have provided competing interpretations of the reproduction and transformation of social systems (King 2010). Sharing the same ontology, Giddens’s structuration and Archer’s morphogenetic theories have shaped much of the social theory conversation in the UK and beyond.

Inspired by Piaget and Gurwitsch, Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory suggests that ‘social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution’ (Giddens [1976], cited by Bryant and Jary 2001:11). This duality of structure — action being constituted structurally and structures constituted through action — is the central tenet of structuration theory,

which is offered as an alternative to the dualism of agency and structure. Accordingly, ‘structure is the medium and the outcome of the conduct it recursively organises’ and ‘actors are knowledgeable and competent actors who reflexively monitor their action’ (Bryant and Jary 2001:12). In Giddens’s appreciation, ‘structure is not to be equated with constraint but it is always both constraining and enabling’ (1984:25).

Giddens observes that structuration occurs in social systems. As Bryant and Jary (2001:12) summarise in their concise rendition of Giddens’s thought, social systems are ‘the situated activities of human agents’ and ‘the patterning of social relations across space and time’ that have an actual existence. In contrast, structures (or structural properties) are ‘rule-resources sets, implicated in the articulation of social systems that only have a virtual existence — they only exist in the memory of knowledgeable agents as instantiated in action’ (ibid.).

Structuration involves ‘the communication of meaning, the exercise power, and the evaluative judgement of conduct’ (Giddens [1977], cited by Bryant and Jary 2001:13). Hence, Giddens (1984:29) identifies ‘three corresponding types of structure: structures of signification, domination and legitimation’. As signification, structures ‘involve semantic rules; as domination, unequally distributed resources, and as legitimation, moral or evaluative rules’ (ibid.). Signification structures are attached to symbolic orders or modes of discourse; domination structures are linked to political and economic institutions; and legitimation structures are closely connected to legal institutions (Giddens 1984:31).

How does structuration work in practice? Giddens observes that agents draw upon social structures through reflexivity. Reflexivity allows an agent in a situation of power to access to existing structures of domination, legitimation, and signification. Situated in a social system, agents draw upon structural properties virtually available to them through their instantiation in social practices. Thus, individually or collectively, agents in situations of power instantiate structural properties based on their own judgement and constrained by existing structures — signification structures in particular play an important role in the process as they are ‘crystallised in the form of interpretative frames and norms within the memory traces of the agents’ (Stones 2001:186).

Additionally, Giddens (1984:244) explicitly addresses the problem of change in the context of structuration theory²⁶. Based on the observation that all social life is episodic, Giddens suggest all episodes involve a sequence of events that have a clear beginning and end. The study of change, therefore, requires the consideration of four key dimensions: the origin of the episode, its type — that is, how intensive and extensive it is —, the rapidity of change or momentum, and its trajectory — the direction of change, whether evolutionary or revolutionary.

Because structures are multiple, Sewell (1992:16-19) has advanced a number of hypotheses that implicate them in causing change. First, he has pointed to the transposability or generalizability of schemas (rules), which authorises the application of one structure across a range of circumstances. Likewise, Sewell has observed that change could emerge from the unpredictability of resource accumulation and from the polysemic nature of resources. Finally, he has suggested that change could arise from the intersection and overlapping of existing structures.

Structuration theory has been contested on two main grounds: the way it defines and situates structure, and its lack of a temporal dimension (Stones 2001). The first problem refers to defining structures as rules and resources without presupposing any social structure to accommodate them (Willmott 2001:10). Furthermore, the virtual character of structures challenges the pre-existence of material and cultural conditions in which action takes place (Archer 1995:132). The decision upon which rules and resources will be instantiated through action is left to the agent — a theoretical choice that does not withstand a reality check, argues Giddens's theoretical sparring partner Archer.

The second problem pertains to the process of change. Giddens did not devote much time to investigating how agency and structure shape one another over time (Stones 2001:180). Hence, structuration theory does not 'allow one to investigate this interplay, to trace or unpick the linkages and interconnections between: structural conditions, with their emergent causal powers and properties; social interaction between agents on the basis of these conditions; and the subsequent structural changes or reproduction arising from the latter' (ibid.).

²⁶ Giddens's structuration aims to address a vast array of issues related to the organisation and reproduction of social systems and institutions (King 2010:253). Its use in the context of this study is far more modest: it solely refers to a methodological device aiming to explain specific social change situations, leaving other theoretical implications apart. The same applies to the alternative framework: Margaret Archer's morphogenesis.

From a critical realism perspective, Margaret Archer's morphogenesis theory (2010 [1982]) advances a competing framework to structuration. It authorises an investigation of 'the temporarily interplay between structure and agency' through three relatively independent cycles. First, her analytical dualism — aiming conceptually to separate agency from the cultural and social conditions that are implicated in the change process — focuses on structural conditioning (time 1), next examining social interaction (time 2) and then its outcome (time 3), and then to review the resultant structural elaboration (time 4) (Archer 1995:193-194).

In the morphogenetic perspective, structures have a real existence — they operate as cultural and material conditioning that objectively frame social interaction (Stones 2001:180). Temporal resistance of structures assists them in shaping the behaviour that seeks their transformation. The interplay between structure and agency is possible because they are separated from one another (Archer 1995:149). This analytical dualism allows a focus on the stringency of constraints in preventing or stimulating change (Archer 2010[1982]:231).

In despite of Archer's claims about the epistemic incompatibility of structuration and morphogenetic theories, Stones (2001:181-183) has suggested that structuration and morphogenesis theories can be successfully combined — an idea that has also been recently endorsed by King (2010). Stones has argued that the virtual existence of structures does not imply that they are ineffective in explaining social transformation. Structures do exist objectively at the time an agent draws upon them and they do limit his or her range of options²⁷.

Additionally, Stones advances that the analytical duality adopted by Archer is clearly possible within Giddens's framework — he observes that 'the structure enters into the person (or corporate agent) such that we can say *both* that agency is a part of the person and that social structure is part of the person' (Stones 2001:184, original emphasis).

Finally, Stones observes that structuration theory is fully compatible with Archer's methodological sequencing. This is possible because Giddens did not advance an alternative. Instead, he concentrated on the moment of agency, which tends to coincide with times 2 and 3 as proposed by the morphogenesis theory.

²⁷ To prevent further confusion, Stones proposes to describe structures as potentials rather than virtual.

The adjusted version of structuration theory advanced by Stones can be applied as an intermediate theory because it ‘offers concepts, frameworks and formulations of intermediate complexity — something beyond piecemeal bricolage but short of the kind of comprehensive theoretical systems which theorists love to interpret and contest’ (Bryan and Jary 2001:57). Although structuration theory was not intended to be a theory of anything, Giddens (1991:204-205) has suggested that it might be effectively used to trace trajectories of change in modern institutions.

A framework that effectively combines a review of the factors involved in bringing change and the examination of the stages attached to the reform process offers rich analytical possibilities for the study of the evolution of quality assurance policy in Chile. It allows the identification of the factors implicated in each of the reforms that quality assurance policy has experienced, along with the strategies applied by empowered agents to foster change. Furthermore, it demarcates the stages through which change is activated, resolved and accommodated in Chilean higher education. As the process can be repeated for each instantiated reform, Stones’s framework authorises comparisons and analyses of trajectories that are crucial for understanding the Chilean case, which combines a great deal of dynamism with stability in structural properties and substantial variations in the power positions occupied by different agents.

3.6 Study design

This study adopts a case study method. Described as a pathway for reviewing a set of decisions to be unveiled in terms of ‘why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result’ (Schramm [1971], cited by Yin [2009:17]), the case study methodology offers multiple possibilities for investigating in-depth phenomena within real life contexts, as an alternative to historical, behavioural and experimental research in the social sciences. The case study is particularly suitable for tracing the causes and outcomes of a given phenomenon (Flyvbjerg 2011:314). It also provides an analytical opportunity to make sense of the context in which a phenomenon has occurred. By definition, each case is ‘bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time’ (Creswell 2009:227).

Due to its distinctive ability for coping ‘with a technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulation fashion, and as another result benefits from prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis’ (Yin 2009:18), the case study approach is especially apt when research (a) addresses broad and related explanatory questions, (b) focuses on contemporary events, and (c) does not require control of behavioural events.

Case studies are also suitable for longitudinal studies, which focus on the same case through two or more points in time. They allow the observing of ‘how certain conditions change over time’ (Yin 2009:49). Likewise, a case study facilitates the specification of time intervals associated with the manifestation of changes in relation to previous stages.

The study of the evolution of quality assurance policies within Chilean higher education has been particularly suitable for the case study methodology, given its historical nature and distinctive unit of analysis. This methodological choice has also allowed a careful observation of factors at play in the different processes of change without losing the broad context in which they have taken place. The rich description that emerges from this design has provided a better understanding of the policy trajectory and has shed new light on the operation of licensing, course accreditation, and institutional accreditation in Chile.

Although pivotal to understanding the transformations the sector has experienced since 1990, the trajectory of the quality assurance policy for Chilean higher education remains poorly documented. The sole attempt at reviewing this evolution (Lemaitre 2004) has focused on the diverse instruments applied to address quality concerns in universities.

A prominent quality assurance practitioner, Lemaitre has identified three landmarks for the external quality assurance saga that correspond with the same number of mechanisms implemented through regulation. While the first, licensing, pertains to the evaluation of new private institutions during the massification era (1990-1998), the second, course accreditation, would address the consequences

attached to the increasing ‘autonomisation’²⁸ of the system and to the second wave of expansion this brought to higher education. Last in her account, institutional accreditation was the solution provided by external assessment agencies in response to the government’s concerns about the effectiveness of mission monitoring mechanisms in universities.

The Lemaitre analysis describes all major external quality assurance mechanisms available in the sector²⁹ and provides insightful clarifications as to their operational features. Lemaitre also documents the ways in which quality has been defined in higher education and delineates the units and foci considered for its appraisal. Furthermore, her examination brings to the fore the instrumental character of quality assurance mechanisms, emphasising causes and effects attached to them. From her perspective, quality assurance has been at the centre of a policy agenda aimed at addressing key tensions in higher education, attached to the confluence of increasing participation, rising market pressures, and greater accountability demands.

Lemaitre’s account, however, is far from conclusive. Quality assurance policy was in transition to adopting a new scheme at the time her study was delivered. A new quality assurance framework was released two years later, in 2006. The new scheme included all existing mechanisms but introduced salient variations in the institutional framework in which they were placed. Pundits in the sector believe that there is a correlation between these structural adjustments and prevailing criticism of the functioning of quality assurance regime (OCDE and Banco Mundial 2009).

In addition, the evolution described by Lemaitre highlights three important changes within Chilean higher education (namely expansion, privatisation, and competition) but provides little information on how they have affected the configuration of the sector and the functioning of quality assurance policies. In contrast, Brunner (1993a) has suggested that the 1980 reforms brought vertical (different institutional types) and horizontal (traditional and new sectors) differentiation to higher education. Market competition, on the other hand, has contributed to reducing institutional differentiation over the years as most institutions engaged in similar competitive strategies to benefit from enrolment expansion — their

²⁸ According to Lemaitre (2004), ‘autonomisation’ refers to the increasing number of private providers securing their autonomous status and, hence, their complete release from any form of supervision or external assessment.

²⁹ The sole exception was the external assessments attached to the performance-based contracts introduced by MECESUP 2 in 2004 for traditional universities only.

primary source of income. Course and branch campus expansion, along with the sector's heavy investment in advertising, are widely acknowledged as consequences of this trend, which are tightly coupled with the evolution of quality assurance policy (Brunner 2009).

The process of policy change remained veiled in this account. The formation and functioning of external quality assurance systems in higher education have an obvious political dimension that it is often overlooked (Lemaitre 2002, Skolnik 2010). The origin of these policy alterations received little coverage in Lemaitre's explanation, as well as the constellation of actors involved in securing or challenging their design and implementation. Likewise, the effects of the quality assurance reforms on universities' ability to influence policy and to lead transformations in the sector were not documented in her study.

Considering all these aspects from a policy analysis perspective, the present study focuses on the evolution of the institutional framework for quality assurance. It covers 20 years of policy development organised into three distinctive phases: the rise of quality assurance in the context of the licensing scheme (phase 1, 1990-1998), followed by pilot experiences in course accreditation that led to the formulation of a policy proposal for accommodating a large-scale quality assurance system (phase 2, 1999-2002), and concludes with coverage of the the discussion around and implementation of the new quality assurance scheme (phase 3, 2003-2009).

In each phase, the action of a different agency — or group of agencies — is prominent. Thus, CSE is located at the centre of the licensing scheme analysed in phase 1, CNAP and CONAP constitute the gravitational axis for the experimental accreditation initiative developed in phase 2, and CNA is particularly prominent in the context of the comprehensive quality assurance scheme covered in phase 3.

While special attention is paid in phase 1 to the constellation of actors — and their ideas, values and networks — involved in legally enacting and implementing the licensing mechanism, in phase 3 the focus shifts towards the structural factors influencing the forging and implementation of the new quality assurance scheme. Between them, phase 2 digs into the strategies applied to secure the soundness and legitimacy of the pilot accreditation processes conducted between 1999 and 2003. In addition, it is important to note that shifts in attention from one institutional framework to another do not necessarily imply the end of the previous mechanism or

of the agency in charge but rather to their centrality in regulating the sector at the given stage.

The utility of organising this policy evolution in such a fashion resides in its versatility, which is also highly compatible with the theoretical model selected for the study — taken and adapted from Bleiklie and Kogan (2006), Archer (2010[1982]), and Giddens (1984). By focusing on the introduction and implementation of different quality assurance regulatory frameworks, rather than in specific mechanisms, it facilitates an exploration of how diverse structural and agency factors influenced their configuration and functioning. With a richer depiction of each of the stages of this evolution, a broader account of the transformation of the inner dynamics of the sector also emerges. Similarly, this perspective facilitates observing the trajectory of quality assurance policy over a 20-year span.

Three domains intersect in this analysis: actors, structures and policy content. First, actors in the sector play an obvious central role in policy development. They take and shift positions, forge alliances, and undertake strategic action towards advancing, pushing, supporting, or resisting policy change. The values, norms, and interests they hold inform their attitude towards reform to a great extent. As with many other regulated sectors, higher education is a contested policy arena in which universities are often far from neutral. They tactically mobilise vast resources and influence to affect policy outcomes. Government officials, university leaders and scholars actively engage in multifarious interactions to communicate expectations, to trade information, or to achieve compromise through various policy stages. Yet in a heavily fragmented and issue-driven policy environment, institutional positioning is variable. Some actors aim to anticipate policy results in the expectation of adjusting to the new regulatory scenarios swiftly. Others assume primary policy roles, whether by serving as delegates of stakeholder groups or by reclaiming the upper ground in debate. The recent proliferation of institutional clusters in higher education, however, has increasingly brought some degree of patterned participation in a sector still absorbing the multiple effects of structural reforms.

Second, structural factors inform the setting in which policy change unfolds. Resources, ideas and regulation assist in shaping basic institutional choices through signalling what is feasible and legitimate for universities to do. By conditioning institutional behaviour, these factors also inform a repertoire of viable strategies for survival and success. As selective accounts of local and global developments,

tradition and cultural norms help to define and adjust both power allocation and arrangements for the distribution of functions within the sector. In the Chilean case, the 1980 reforms triggered key dynamics that reconfigured the sector to a great extent (Brunner 1997).

Reduction of government support to higher education and the rise of the new private universities brought enrolment expansion. Deregulation and the rise of new ways of conceiving of and managing higher education organisations reinforced economic and positional competition among universities. Even the most prestigious institutions have been dragged into adopting competitive tactics. Once a highly homogenous system, institutional differentiation struck Chilean higher education heavily. The number of universities expanded from 8 to 60. Previously excluded from tertiary education, other higher education providers — focused on vocational education — arose and mushroomed. In such an environment, competition has been carried out at the expense of students, who have had to pay ever-increasing tuition fees. With less certain standards for undergraduate and vocational education, erosion of public trust in higher education has prompted mounting accountability demands. In this context, universities have had to deal increasingly with numerous pressures for disclosing key performance data and for submitting external assessments to reassure their status.

The third and final domain considered in this approach pertains to policy content. Quality assurance policies have focused on introducing new external mechanisms for evaluating the quality of higher education institutions and their courses. Although quality assurance policies have pursued multiple and often inconsistent objectives, their formation and implementation have always implied new tasks to be assigned among policy actors. The choices to be made include: the basic characteristics of the new mechanisms (evaluation target and focus/criteria for assessment/type of procedure to be used) and their place in the policy architecture of the sector (agency in charge/incentives attached/eligibility criteria/consequences attached to the evaluation). Adopting one set of preferences is far from neutral. Shifts in policy configurations demonstrate variations in power distribution across the sector and new forms of interaction with external stakeholders.

The guiding assumption of the study is that some patterns of interaction between actor constellations (first domain) and institutional contexts (second domain) are likely to cause policy change (third domain). Yet, departing from structural

approaches to policy analysis, it conjectures that reform essentially depends on the power that policy players have to bring change, on their understanding of needed transformations, and on their knowledge (and interpretation) of suitable policy solutions. Once implemented, reforms are prone to generate competition, adjustments in power and authority distribution and collaborative dynamics across the sector. These expectations are aligned with previous findings in the literature. In their rendition of systemic reforms in England, Norway, and Sweden, Maurice Kogan and colleagues (2006) have highlighted the patterned interaction of agency and structural factors in explaining similar trajectories of policy change in national systems of higher education. By combining Anthony Giddens's and Margaret Archer's ideas, Stones (2001) has suggested a methodological device to observe and analyse that interaction.

As in other national systems, specific combinations of actors' activities and contextual factors are potentially likely to facilitate substantive transformations within Chilean higher education. The examination of three consecutive reforms in quality assurance provides an opportunity to uncover agency/structure patterns that led to changes in policy and in the sector. This analysis demands mapping actors' activity and structural forces at the root of every mutation experienced as a result of quality assurance policies. Then, it interrogates these independent sets of events to describe path dependencies in policy change as each shift in policy causes realignments in the sector that eventually led to the formation of another actor/context pattern that thus may cause further policy transformations. Lastly, it calls for comparing different policy change events within quality assurance in order to trace policy trajectories. By doing so, this approach illustrates how coordination dynamics have been reconfigured within Chilean higher education over time since the introduction of the 1980 reforms.

The evidently incremental scope of quality assurance policies allows the review of the same cycle at different times — the three phases of the quality assurance saga covered in chapters 4, 5, and 6, respectively — authorising comparisons and contrasts that, in turn, illustrate the evolution experienced by the whole higher education system from the perspective of a single policy domain. This task is facilitated by the size of the Chilean system, which provides a relatively small conceptual distance between policy formation and implementation and involves a limited cast of policy players.

The investigation of the Chilean quality assurance evolution lends itself to what Maguire and Ball have defined as elite studies (1994:279). Such an approach focuses primarily on the upper echelons of the government to unveil the ‘working of the state apparatus’, relying on historical data. In this tradition, the framing of the policy problem, possible solutions, and the formation of the reform agenda are observed here through the lenses of the policy elite — mainly senior officers at the Ministry of Education, higher education leaders and the members of quality assurance agencies. Rizvi and Lingard (2010:60) have observed that this type of approach has been frequently applied to the study of ‘changing policies over time’.

The thesis has relied on data pertaining to policy formation and policy implementation from multiple sources that, in turn, have allowed corroboration through data triangulation. This includes official reports — both from central government and from quality assurance agencies — minutes from parliamentary discussions and policy documents pertaining to quality assurance policies. This information has helped to document the formal policymaking process.

When available, archival records from press releases and media reports have to be considered. Quantitative data gathered from secondary official sources further illustrates the evolution of Chilean higher education.

Key evidence has been collected from interviews with selected senior officials conducted to expand the available information about the evolution of quality assurance policies and to account for people and organizations that influenced policy formation and implementation.

Policymakers from the Congress serving on education committees (2 persons out of 14 senators and representatives serving on those committees), government officials from the Ministry of Education and quality assurance agencies (14 people including board members and senior staff of the main three quality assurance agencies and senior officials from the Ministry of Education), and higher education leaders from a range of institutions (12 interviewees, half of them from the traditional sector, the others from the new private universities) have been interviewed. This sample is not comprehensively representative but it does cover many of the actors that actively participated in the three-stage process of change covered in the study. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed. All interviewees provided their informed consent prior to the interviews and were protected against any harm coming from the study,

including their privacy and confidentiality, following Australian guidelines for ethics for research to be conducted with participants located overseas.

The number of interviews was decided upon in order to cover all major policy players, considering the relatively small scale of Chilean higher education and the elite patterning of policy development. The limited pool of individuals actively involved in reforming quality assurance policy also helped to reduce the list of potential interviewees. The selection of interviewees was made considering the following criteria:

- Significant participation in quality assurance policy formation
- Experience in implementing quality assurance policies
- Witnessing of such processes from relevant position as leaders in Chilean higher education organizations

The study has applied a combined strategy for data analysis. It has relied on the theoretical propositions that helped to shape the case and to define the research questions for organizing evidence in different categories (see chapter 1). In addition, a case description based on the collected evidence was developed including both qualitative and quantitative data, which is presented through chapters 4 to 6.

The theoretical framework presented in this chapter has guided further analyses. Accordingly, agency and structural factors involved in the process of change have been reviewed for each of the phases of this policy evolution. Later, individual analyses provided the basis for examining policy trajectories — a comparison of the ways in which these factors intersect with one another in the different phases of this policy saga.

The emerging picture revealed the direction and intensity of change throughout the policy evolution. The analyses have also been pivotal for testing the theories chosen for the study. The typologies advanced in section 2 of this chapter assisted in characterising the transformations experienced by quality assurance policy in Chile.

Finally, alternative explanations for the case have been examined to test the results of the analyses. Special attention was paid to determine the robustness of the causal relations in each phase of policy formation and implementation.

...

With some variation in emphasis, the organisation of the following chapters describes and analyses the same fundamental issues in three different stages. First, they start with an overview of the elements that constitute each phase of the quality assurance policy evolution and the key developments of the period. Later they trace the origins of the phase, in terms of crucial actions, situations, and processes that directly contribute to the formation of the specific policy under review. It is important, however, to consider that due to the historical nature of the study, the significance of this particular section varies from chapter to chapter. The need for contextualising the emergence of quality assurance policy makes it more prominent in Chapter 4 rather than in Chapter 6, which exposes a brief summary of the developments subject to previous chapters.

The constellation of actors engaged in discussing the introduction of a new policy is analysed in the next section along with their roles, beliefs, and agendas. The following section unpacks the process applied for adopting the new policy, including its key steps and implementation. It also sheds some light on the sources and level of participation received and the extent to which consultation efforts were carried out. Differences in outcomes can be largely attributed to the nature of the policy formation process, as the following chapters show. An inevitable descriptive pause is required, as the next section exposes the content of the different quality assurance policies under analysis. The implementation process is considered afterwards. Here the focus is on the actors who led its execution and the perspectives they adopted to fulfil their mission.

Finally, the closing section of each chapter sheds new light on the implications of quality assurance policies. Moving from micro to macro analysis, it focuses on examining how the introduction of new policies, combined with dominant dynamics in the sector, led to the reconfiguration of the regulatory framework for higher education. Likewise, the section traces the influence of the new policies in altering the distribution of power within the Chilean case along with emerging realities in a sector still adjusting to revolutionary reforms.

A comparison of the processes of policy reform subject to Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provides the basis for explicating the ways in which path dependencies structure change patterns and policy trajectories. The argument of the final chapter is that specific alignments of contextual conditions and agency are prone to trigger changes in policies as they reflect emerging transformations in the sector and its coordination.

SECOND PART

Chapter 4:
Discovering quality assurance
(1990-1998)

4.1 The 1990s: introduction and prehistory

Tuesday 27 February 1990. In just eleven more days, President Pinochet's mandate will expire according to the constitution he helped to approve. The new president, Patricio Aylwin, is leading the political coalition that defeated Pinochet in the first general election held since 1970. Today, the five judges of the Constitutional Court, chaired by Marcos Aburto, give the final green light for a revolutionary piece of legislation. Intended as a symbolic legacy of the Pinochet government, the Organic Constitutional Law of Education (LOCE) aspires to complete the groundbreaking reforms towards privatisation initiated in 1980. This new legislation is meant to provide a clear, comprehensive, and stable regulatory framework across all educational levels, from primary to post-secondary.

Senior officials at the Ministry of Education congratulate themselves. The task has taken more than seven years, conducted under great secrecy and amid strong disagreements between different factions inside the regime and fierce resistance by the political opposition. The incoming government would be constitutionally obliged to implement the legislation. Among other innovations, this legislation introduces a licensing regime for higher education providers, so launching the quality assurance era in Chile.

This chapter analyses the first stage of quality assurance policy evolution within Chilean higher education. Although it devotes considerable attention to the perceptions and agendas that emerged from the operation of the examination regime throughout the 1980s (see sections 4.2 to 4.5), the chapter essentially traces the development of the licensing scheme³⁰ for new private institutions from 1990 to its gradual implementation in considerably changed circumstances up until 1998. In this period, a new agency, the Consejo Superior de Educación (*Higher Council of*

³⁰ Licensing was originally called accreditation. Its current name was officially adopted in 2006 when the new quality assurance scheme was enacted. However, the introduction of accreditation pilots in 1999 has caused considerable confusion, as both schemes bear the same name. Likewise, the original accreditation deviated greatly from the essential features that accreditation connotes in the comparative perspective. For those reasons, throughout the thesis is retained the later usage to avoid greater confusion.

Education, CSE), was to create its own quality assurance model out of a cryptic regulatory framework. The chapter builds on the background and analytical template introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. Here the 1980s regulatory framework, the examination scheme, and the policy climate of that time will be constantly revisited in order to explain the rationale and thrust of the new approach.

The chapter depicts the formation of the structural properties that have informed the evolution of quality assurance policy. Likewise, it traces the emergence of the group of knowledgeable actors able to acquire the agency to influence this policy trajectory through their power position. Thus, a cast list of policy players, both active and passive, then illustrates the parties and forces involved in passing and enacting LOCE. An exploration of the structural and normative influences that conditioned their agency provides a broader picture of actors' involvement in the policy process. The analysis accounts for the formation of consensus among the main players as to the need for supporting the development of the new private sector through effective supervision.

The implementation of the new licensing regime was a complex process framed by the transition to democracy. The interplay of the new structural arrangements and the consequences of the actors' activity would inform policy change. The chapter builds to an account of the outcomes and ongoing effects of the licensing scheme envisaged in 1990.

4.2 The examination regime (or the origins of licensing)

Designed to limit expansion and privatisation's negative impacts on the quality of education, student examination in the 1980s was a way of monitoring academic performance in non-traditional universities and professional institutes. Accordingly, each new private institution was required to engage an older 'examining' university (Sanfuentes 1988)³¹. Agreements of this kind were prescribed for each course³². New

³¹ Although in theory any autonomous university was eligible to perform the examiner function, in practice only traditional institutions were able, due to the statutory autonomous status conferred on them by law (Brunner 1986a). Only a handful of universities obtained their autonomous status through examination. Universidad Gabriela Mistral, Universidad de los Andes, and Universidad Bernardo O'Higgins were prominent among them due to their ideological affinity to the Pinochet government.

³² Twelve professional diplomas were originally considered university degree courses in different fields: Law, Architecture, Biochemistry, Dentistry, Agronomy, Civil Engineering, Economics, Forestry, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Medicine, Psychology, and Pharmacy. In the case of

institutions could only offer programs approved by an examining university. Furthermore, students enrolled in such courses were to undertake annual external assessment in all classes and in degree completion exams. New universities were able to secure autonomy — in academic, financial and administrative affairs — only after five cohorts of students had been examined by external academic panels in three different courses, with more than fifty percent of students obtaining passing grades. They remained under examination until such progress was achieved.

Yet examination was not just to protect academic standards. Reflecting its neo-liberal inspiration, this regime allowed each new institution to engage one or more traditional partner(s) *of its choosing* to approve their courses and examine their students based on its own set of preferences (Ministerio del Interior 1980).

The government was fully aware of the restrictions that the examination regime would impose upon new institutions — in terms of its adverse effect on curricular innovation and administrative burden — but some protection of students (and standards, real and perceived) was imperative. Examination was conceived as a transitional scheme towards a more sophisticated model broadly inspired by American accreditation (Prieto 1988, Garrido 2011). A senior policy adviser at the Ministry of Education of that time recalls the rationale applied to the introduction of examination:

The first approach was: "Let's control the results; the final product is what really matters. If students perform well, the whole process has to be right." But who knows how to do that? Well, the older universities do. So, who is going to do the examining? Them. They will educate the new institutions...' (Interview R3)

Although examination functioned well in its initial years, drastic changes in the sector put the regime under significant pressure (Muga 1990). The end of the veto for authorising new providers in 1987³³ led to a rapid proliferation of new providers: the number of new universities jumped from 3 to 40 between 1988 and 1990. Professional institutes expanded even more, from 19 to 80, over the same period (Brunner 1993b). This sudden expansion in the number of institutions — and courses, and students — brought an unexpected increase in the demand for examination.

professional institutes, all their professional courses were subject to the same procedure (Brunner 1986a).

³³ See section 2.4.1 for information about this veto power.

A group of traditional universities — mainly public regional institutions — found in the examination fees some mitigation for the drastic budget cuts they experienced. Bernasconi and Rojas (2004) have reported that, by the end of the 1980s, five universities were examining between 20 and 32 different courses from between 12 and 14 different institutions each. Traditional universities, however, could not address the exponential growth in demand for examination, and soon other solutions were implemented. Authorised by the Ministry of Education, some institutions started to examine courses in which they had limited or no academic experience at all (Lemaitre 1993).

Specialised professional institutes proved often difficult to examine. Some providers experienced trouble finding examiners for courses in niches such as graphic design, advertising, public relations, and information technology. Many of these courses were released from examination, an option originally included in the legislation and extensively used by Ministry of Education by the end of the 1980s.

From the perspective of the new universities, examination implied that they had to follow, more or less, curricula from examining institutions. There was little room for curricular innovation or to adjust courses to specific populations (Fried and Abuhadba 1991). Furthermore, examination agreements imposed heavy financial burdens on new universities. By 1985, 7% of gross income of one prominent private university — one of the few created between 1981 and 1987 — was consumed by examination-related activities (Sanfuentes 1988).

The perceived legitimacy of examination was in sharp decline by the end of the 1980s. Structural deficiencies were evident (Brunner and Briones 1992). Bernasconi and Rojas (2004) have suggested that the absence of coordination or control mechanisms caused a de facto relaxation of examination standards, affecting the credibility of the system. Another commentator has indicated its limited scope: a focus on academic results did not protect quality through key institutional decision-making processes (Muga 1990). Cox (1994) has pointed to its demand-driven nature. ‘Weak’ universities were highly sought after as examiners. Their examination panels had lower reputations and could be leant on by the academics of the examined institutions. As this bargaining led to higher passing grades for students, it served as an incentive for other new providers to engage in similar arrangements.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that examination remained a useful tool for universities wanting to minimise their risk exposure — and indeed some of them

remained under examination once licensing was introduced. If they were able to cover the costs attached without compromising their operations, examination offered them limited and stable external control; particularly appreciated by universities attached to religious organisations. Entrepreneurially oriented providers found that they could shift from one examiner to another if the exam results were not satisfactory, without risking any punitive action.

4.3 Policy players

Situated in diverse policy settings, three distinctive groups of actors took active roles in shaping this reform. Their values, interests, and resources evidently informed much of their participation in enacting licensing. First, university leaders wanted to retain as much institutional leverage, income or regulatory stability as they could. Meanwhile, inside Pinochet's government, two factions vied for influence over higher education policy, inspired by opposing regulatory philosophies. Lastly, scholars and professionals from so-called independent academic centres — *centros académicos independientes* — sought to introduce adjustments to the 1980 reforms to limit and reverse the negative effects of deregulation.

In addition, other groups in the sector did not engage fully in policy development at this stage, despite active involvement in politics at the time. Their remaining outside higher education policy debates sheds some light on the exceptional character of that era.

4.3.1 University leaders

Universities, professional institutes, and technical training centres group into further subclusters along institutional lines, owing to economic, historical, and structural factors (Brunner 2009). The whole idea of an overall 'system' has remained elusive since the 1980 reforms. Linkages among different factions are weak and the integration of the sector has often been hampered through regulation. Coordination,

and even competition, between institutions from different groups occurs rarely, which explains the spread of free-rider issues³⁴.

Throughout the 1980s, new private institutions remained marginal players within the higher education landscape, as their academic reputations were yet to be established. Their enrolment sizes were fairly modest and academic workforces weak. Research outputs were insignificant or non-existent and an overwhelming portion of their income came from private sources — mainly tuition fees. Regardless of their limited involvement in policy development, many private universities had strong connections and ideological affinities with the military government (Cox 1996). Some were organised by senior advisors to the regime while others hired prominent government officials when military rule ended in 1990. This political clout served them well in advancing their interests during the implementation of licensing. The option given to universities created before 1992 to remain under examination is a clear indication of their success in securing a safer alternative for supervision not subject to political interference.

New private universities' approaches to supervision were ambiguous if not ambivalent. They needed it because of their lack of academic legitimacy, which was an important factor in validating themselves in the public eye. However, they barely tolerated any form of external intervention and initially tried to avoid the transition to licensing. According to a CSE member

'Private institutions rejected [licensing] fiercely... They argued that this was another attempt to replace the role of the market in "cleaning" the sector. They said: there is no reason to worry about quality because bad quality institutions will die out. The remaining institutions will prosper and become stronger through competition, etc.' (Interview R14)

Universities with close ties to opposition parties distrusted the elected government's intentions. They were afraid of the new regime because it could be used as a tool for political surveillance. A former senior official in the Ministry of Education during the Pinochet's years elaborates

³⁴ Private universities adopted curricula and hired faculty from traditional universities. They also benefited from using admission test results applied by traditional institutions to shape their own recruitment systems.

'My closest associates within the new university sector – I'm talking of Universidad Gabriela Mistral, Universidad Finis Terrae, and Universidad Mayor – were expecting a great deal of control through bureaucratic processes. They were saying at the time: little by little [the new government] will reverse all we have done.' (Interview R15)

However, the administrative, academic, and financial burden examination was imposing on new institutions was becoming increasingly difficult to deal with. As one administrator of a larger private institution recalled, examination costs were cause for concern

'I think it was an issue for larger institutions with many courses. Another problem was that some examiners were of really bad quality and some new universities really wanted to find an alternative. And there were some institutions that genuinely believed in this concept of a relatively pluralist and transparent council. I think all these factors were relevant, but the issue of the [examination] fees was really decisive. Keep in mind that we are talking of institutions one twentieth of their current size. Then, this issue was very sensitive. And differences in fees were huge, huge, huge.' (Interview R2)

The desire of a group of private universities³⁵ to demonstrate their quality was pivotal to the massive migration from examination to licensing. Competitive advantage dictated that universities under licensing had a better chance to increase their reputation (Interview R14).

In contrast, the introduction of licensing and the rapid expansion of the new autonomous universities were relatively minor issues for the traditional sector; they did not affect them. Although they shared the university tag with the new providers, the leaders of traditional institutions did not consider the others as genuine members of the higher education community. Having lengthy agendas — primarily focused on funding and institutional governance — they paid little attention to the introduction of the new supervision regime (Cox 1996).

Yet traditional universities did worry about examination. For the elite institutions, the declining legitimacy of the scheme was a potential risk for the reputation of the whole sector. Additionally, for a small group of public regional universities, revenue from examinations was substantial. The survival of examination

³⁵ Universidad Diego Portales and Universidad Central were prominent among them.

eased the transition for examining universities as they sought other sources of revenue.

Overall, however, a great deal of scepticism defined traditional universities' approaches to the new private sector and its supervision. To them, expanding higher education — and, by extension, the number of private providers — was not very realistic. A former senior official in the Ministry of Education remembers:

'Juan de Dios Vial, the rector of Universidad Católica and a very articulate man, once told me: "Our problem at the university was that we never thought that so many middle and lower-middle class people were willing and able to pay for private higher education".'
(Interview R12)

4.3.2 *The Pinochet administration*

The alliance forged by *Movimiento Gremial* and the Chicago Boys was pivotal for the introduction and implementation of the 1980 reforms (Salazar and Leihy 2013). The former was an influential network of conservative politicians — mostly educated at PUC — led by Jaime Guzman, the main ideologue behind the constitutional regime enacted by Pinochet. The Chicago Boys were a prominent group of economists trained at the University of Chicago responsible for key reforms to liberalise the Chilean economy.

Their collaborative work provided technical and political clout to pass key pieces of legislation. Their aim was to redesign higher education policy completely. The reformers wanted to introduce greater competition and deregulation in the sector — a decisive action to make possible the formation of new higher education providers. Subsidies for traditional universities had to be reduced as well.

Although the reforms were rapidly enacted by the regime, many inside the government remained unconvinced of their philosophical orientation and potential benefits. Military personnel in particular were highly concerned with the prospects of lesser involvement of the government in education. In their view, the liberalisation of higher education was a matter of great concern due to potential consequences for quality.

This divide between military and civilian personnel in the government was instrumental in delaying an effective course of action to meet the educational

challenges of the day (Interview R15). It also explains the inability of the government to address the issues that emerged during the implementation of the reforms throughout the 1980s. By the end of Pinochet's tenure, most reformers had left the government and relocated to private universities.

4.3.3 *Independent academic centres*

Throughout the 1980s, different independent academic centres³⁶ promoted social reform agendas (Brunner 1985). The Organisation for University Development (CPU) and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) were prominent among them in advancing higher education studies.

Emerging from the Christian Democratic Party in 1968 with the financial support of the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation, CPU focused on the formation and expansion of networks across the sector with a hands-on approach to policy discussions. Among their colleagues at CPU, Iván Lavados and María José Lemaitre performed a key role in advancing this agenda. While Lavados had been working since the early 1970s in building university networks to enhance cooperation across Latin America, Lemaitre, a sociologist, had been developing a number of thematic templates to structure policy discussions in relation to higher education.

'...CPU was the privileged meeting place for that sort of conversation. It was the only venue in which you could have in the same table people like [PUC vice-rector for academic affairs] Hernán Larraín and [the academic] Manuel Antonio Garretón, for instance.'
(Interview R10)

With the mission of advancing Social Sciences in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNESCO had created FLACSO Chile in 1957. It was part of a network of 17 national centres across the region aiming to conduct research and to provide technical cooperation at the national level. Although FLACSO's research agenda covered a wide variety of topics and issues, a small team led by José Joaquín Brunner devoted attention to the evolution of Chilean higher education. Their contribution to

³⁶ During the military intervention in universities, a sizeable number of Social Science departments closed (Brunner 1986a). With the support of international cooperation, academics in this field relocated into independent centres. By 1985, there were 35 of these employing roughly 300 researchers (Brunner 1985).

the study of higher education policy was significant — perhaps the most advanced in the country at the time. Largely informed by key comparative literature in the field, they produced a massive body of highly regarded publications.

CPU and FLACSO had strong links to the political opposition. Evident ideological differences prevented them from being invited by the Ministry of Education to discuss the implications of the 1980 reforms and possible policy adjustments. In particular, they aired suspicion as to the motives of the government's moving from the examination regime to a new way of authorising and supervising private institutions:

'I may say that the objective — what they wanted to achieve — had nothing to do with accountability or quality assurance but rather with providing public legitimacy to the private sector... If you look closely at LOCE, it could be applied in a very formal and superficial manner.' (Interview R10)

Contrary to expectations, however, CPU and FLACSO did not flatly oppose the 1980 reforms. They exhibited a great deal of ambiguity in their endorsement of traditional academic values yet their sympathy for some of the changes introduced from 1980. Throughout the decade, they played a pivotal role in convincing the political opposition to shift their approach to higher education policy (Interview R26). For example, between 1984 and 1987 the Christian Democratic Party went from denouncing to endorsing the new governance arrangements in public universities (Cox 1989).

Rather than advocating a reversal and a return to the pre-1973 situation, leading scholars in these centres called for the modernisation of higher education (Brunner 1988). Partly, this was the consequence of their engagement with emerging higher education scholarship and the new reform ideas coming from the UK and the Netherlands (Interview R14, Brunner 1986b, 1990). Partly, it was the result of their awareness of reform agendas among international development agencies. Inspired by the 'evaluative state' approach to higher education policy (Neave [1988], observing the situation in France), they thought that steering universities from a distance would enhance institutional autonomy and avoid unnecessary government intervention (Brunner 1990). However, this approach could only be effective if market competition and external quality assessments were part of the agenda (Cox 1989). In a de-centred

system of this kind, the function of the government is to provide performance-based funding aligned with external monitoring schemes.

Nonetheless, scholars saw some negative consequences of the reforms (Brunner 1993b). The rapid proliferation of new private universities, professional institutes and technical training centres followed the growing deregulation of the system. Recently formed universities were not expanding research capacity in the sector. The lack of effective supervision for new private providers was undermining higher education quality. Unending funding reductions in traditional institutions were cause for concern, as well.

4.3.4 *Idle actors*

Student unions and academics in traditional universities were conspicuously absent from most policy discussions during this era. The political opposition — including affiliated student unions — concentrated more globally on demonstrating against the regime or planning for the political transition to democracy. Academic unions were more active. A handful of university-based public intellectuals engaged in education debates but their influence among their peers was modest. Professors of Economics and Law at PUC, however, had their own ways to influence policy through their association with the Chicago boys (Bernasconi 2011).

The overwhelming majority of academics in public universities shared a narrow policy objective: abolishing all reforms and returning to the pre-1973 situation. They sought to regain the autonomous status of their own institutions and to negotiate funding directly again between individual institutions and the government.

Politicians sought to use non-government channels to address social issues without investing much in them. They could rely on support from the independent academic centres to forge their policy agenda on social issues. As Cox (1989) and Brunner (1992) have documented, this connection is central to understanding policy evolution during the decade, from a total rejection to partial acceptance of the 1980 reforms. It became clear that the examination regime was simply unsustainable.

The plan of a government formed from a coalition of centre and left-wing parties to support Aylwin's administration clearly reflects the influence of CPU and FLACSO in relation to higher education policy (Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia 1989). The plan stressed two core principles. To achieve a truly

diversified system, the government had to guarantee institutional autonomy and academic freedom. In addition, to make competition possible, system-wide coordination had to be established. This called for the introduction of technically and socially sound mechanisms for institutional accreditation and course assessment under a new agency (Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia 1989:23).

4.4 Situating policy players within the policy process

A delineation of the actors involved in adopting and implementing LOCE advances the empirical building blocks for the analysis and allows a closer examination of the configuration of the policy process. The forms of influence available to them and the broad contextual conditions in which they operated were crucial. Combined, these factors structured the policymaking mode that prevailed through these years.

4.4.1 Channels of policy circulation

Policy players had differing capacities to influence policy but all shared basic legitimacy in the sector. They each represented distinct and important constituencies. In this initial phase of quality assurance evolution, although they relied for influence mainly on their access to mainstream politics — usually organised under the government/opposition duality.

Academics and student unions had long-established channels at their disposal to impact upon the policy process — with linkages to the media and the parties, and a capacity for collective action — even in the transitional climate of the late 1980s and the early 1990s. But their voices were clearly less prominent than others in informing quality assurance policy at this stage. Views from new private institutions were rarely canvassed.

The schools and departments profiting from examination had limited political clout — tight government control of traditional universities through administrative intervention prevented them from contesting the changes (see Schachter 1988).

The small group of university leaders and academics engaged in advancing policy conversations supported existing agendas within the political domain. They were linked to elite higher education circles penetrated by CPU and FLACSO and had some currency in the political parties.

Although few people outside policy circles were aware of their influence, former government officials linked to the Chicago boys and now in the new private sector competed with scholars from the independent centres to lead the overhaul of examination. Their respective credentials were long-established political affiliations and ‘technical competence’. Only these two groups held the policy knowledge and the power needed to influence effectively the implementation of licensing.

4.4.2 Other structural and normative conditions

A convergence of normative and structural factors shaped the change from examination to licensing. They obviously affected policy players’ goals and positioning. Their collective action was limited. In contrast, a select group of individuals benefited from these circumstances. They established and consolidated privileged positions of influence over policy.

The shift from military rule to a democratic regime — colloquially, ‘the transition’, referring to the late 1980s and early 1990s — was also important in the introduction of external quality assurance.

The full enactment of the new legal and constitutional framework introduced by Pinochet heavily restricted the possibility of the new government reforming any major aspect of how the new democratic regime could operate³⁷. Without major alterations, however, the program of government of the new coalition was simply not achievable.

³⁷ Among others, Angell (1993), Rahat and Sznajder (1998), and Wilde (1999) have provided complementary accounts of the Chilean transition to democracy. Their descriptions of the arrangements made to secure the survival of the institutional order created under Pinochet into the new democratic era are of particular prominence.

The electoral system aimed to concentrate popular representation in the strongest parties by distributing parliamentary seats between the two leading candidates in each electoral district. In practice, this secured both the government and the opposition equal parliamentary representation, which effectively prevented any reform without securing broad consensus. In addition, one third of the senate was not elected but rather appointed by different branches of the state during Pinochet’s last year in power.

The armed forces enjoyed great autonomy and power. The president could not relieve their chief commanders of duties. They shared the power to appoint 4 members of the senate, controlling 10% of the vote in this legislative chamber. Their budget was excluded from annual budgetary discussions in the parliament and their income was secured independently by giving them a fixed proportion of the revenues of the main income sources for the state.

Lastly, although Pinochet was no longer the president, he retained a great deal of control over the affairs of the nation in his position of chief commander of the army, which he remained for the next 8 years.

To introduce key changes in strategic areas — such as democratic governance and tax reform — decision-making power was concentrated in the upper echelons of the coalition parties. They imposed strict control on the policy agenda and engaged in closed-door negotiations with the heads of opposition parties. This approach cemented policy incrementalism as a fundamental orientation for governments since 1990.

The transition caused much turnover in public servants and policy makers. The reorganisation of the Ministry of Education in early 1990 created the Higher Education Division to deal with all sorts of issues in the sector, yet its powers were limited and it was poorly staffed. LOCE defined and regulated key issues (such as the formation process for new universities and the extent of institutional autonomy) and could only be modified through an overarching agreement of all political parties in the parliament.

No longer Cold War military rule nor yet a fully democratic system, the transitional period concentrated policymaking power in few hands. Today's elitist character of Chilean politics owes much to this development (van der Ree 2007, Burton 2012). Narrow pathways of influence, the constant involvement of political leaders, and the prominent position of bureaucracy are the main consequences of this development.

Additionally, the 1980s reforms had diminished government responsibility in coordinating higher education. A sharp decline in the public contribution to higher education caused universities to compete for private support. Tuition fees gained prominence and currency in the minds of administrators and the recruitment of larger cohorts of undergraduate students became a widespread priority. Greater exposure to the emerging higher education market increased accountability and necessitated modernisation agendas in institutions.

Even to the more enthusiastic, competition between the new privates and the traditional institutions was hard to see at first. Status differentiation conspired against new private universities, seen as peripheral in the higher education community. Points of contact with traditional universities were scarce. The new privates were excluded from key processes such as formal links to the Research Funding Council (CONICYT) and the design, review, and implementation of the national university entrance exam. They could not join the Council of University Rectors (CRUCH).

The above factors are closely related in explaining and structuring the influence each group had in enacting and implementing changes in policy — framing much of their policy influence.

The 1980 reforms inaugurated a new world in which traditional policy actors commanded far less power. University leaders, academics, and students in traditional universities now had only marginal influence in policymaking. This was of course an explicit goal of the reformers. In any case, traditional higher education was far more concerned with the transition to democracy than the regulation of private providers' supervision.

In contrast, scholars from the independent academic centres — now in government — and the neoliberal groups that served under Pinochet (relocated within the new private sector) drove policy development. Adversarially, they helped to configure an elitist policymaking style in which the circle of debate and the flow of ideas became restricted to those at the top of the pecking order in the 1990s.

A key feature of this landscape is the perception that the foundations of the policy framework cannot be altered. Since departure from the framework was not possible, a more participatory approach to quality assurance policy was futile. This was amenable to both groups, sharing as they did the core vision of a modernised higher education system departing substantially from its historical trajectory. Whether through speaking the new jargon of transformation that filled policy discussions over this phase or honing political connections, their legitimacy to lead the course of the new supervision regime was cemented.

4.5 Adopting a new policy

Although blatant social engineering, the 1980 higher education reforms did not provide a fully developed framework. They touched on all of the key regulatory elements of higher education — including institutional types, university governance, sector funding, system coordination, and new providers' supervision — but most of the solutions they brought were provisional and, thus, subject to review.

Little is known of the licensing system's backstory. Policymaking was fairly unpredictable and secretive under Pinochet. Fragmentary evidence suggests, however, that the enactment of examination was a contested issue. Many inside and outside the

government thought that this supervisory regime should be overhauled or reversed at the first opportunity.

Neither a reformation attempt in 1983³⁸ nor the mounting criticism from independent academic centres brought direct change to the examination regime, but policy players' awareness was piqued (Prieto 1988).

The scope of the policy problem was reduced to finding the right opportunity to introduce a robust regulatory system for new providers, before examination became too entrenched. The moment came under Juan Antonio Guzmán's tenure as Minister of Education in 1987. One of his aides recalls:

'Everything is re-activated when the economy regains impetus by 1987 — when the Minister of Finance, Mr Buchi, provided the resources and the leadership to conclude the unfinished higher education legislation.' (Interview R15)

The systematisation of the basic regulatory framework for education was identified as a pending issue in the Constitution approved in 1980³⁹. 1987 offered the chance to address the concerns caused by examination. The government opted for considering the introduction of a new supervisory regime for private universities.

Although higher education was not the focal point in these discussions, it had attracted considerable attention by 1988, when a new licensing system began to be discussed. The main problem for Guzmán was how to balance deregulation and competition, the pillars of the higher education policy, with a more intrusive form of supervision for the private sector (Muga 1990). Institutional and course accreditation were considered with this conundrum in mind.

Virtually no-one from the higher education sector was involved in these discussions. The independent academic centres tried to monitor policy discussions without much success

'We knew the new law was coming. Nobody knew its exact content and we should have had access to it. We never knew whether we were studying the latest version or not. We had a

³⁸ Education minister Mónica Madariaga proposed to readdress the balance between regulation and competition in the sector. Central to this objective was the substitution of external examination by a new regime. The initiative lasted briefly due to strong opposition from neo-liberal groups within the government and the rectors in traditional universities — who wanted to retain discretionary powers to reshape their institutions. Influential media outlets channelled their concerns into the public domain. After the resignation of Madariaga, the proposed legislation was soon forgotten (Cox 1989).

³⁹ That is, the aforementioned LOCE of 1990.

couple of meetings in which these preliminary versions were discussed by locals and international experts with a focus on the implications of licensing.’ (Interview R10)

Originally, the proposed licensing aimed at assessing new providers at three different levels: institutional, course, and student performance (Cox 1989). Although course approval and student examination remained almost unchanged, new institutions also had to demonstrate sufficient educational, financial and infrastructure resources to sustain higher education courses. Traditional universities were to carry out these evaluations. Their decisions, however, would be reviewed by a new independent agency, CSE.

Yet a fundamental change in the model was soon introduced into prospective legislation. Instead of making examiners responsible for carrying out assessments, such responsibility was allocated in the new council, abolishing examiner status for traditional universities. By way of compromise, the examination regime was allowed to continue, but only for those new institutions created before 1992. One interviewee recalls:

‘Many shared this idea of pushing further, of imposing more controls on the sector. There was another group that supported the freedom to organise new higher education institutions. There were these two groups. Hence, they compromised and decided to keep the examination regime while the new licensing was operating.’ (Interview R3)

The original configuration of Chilean licensing did not resemble the other evaluation regimes of the day. It was neither an audit system like the one introduced in the UK by the 1988 Educational Reform Act nor was it an accreditation system as regional agencies oversee in the US (Bauer and Kogan 1997, Ewell 2007). American higher education was, however, a significant source of inspiration for the Chilean experiment.

‘The regulation sought ambitious expansion and the United States was the country with the highest participation levels. It was the model to follow.’ (Interview R15)

Approving the new framework was an ordeal. The regulation covered a wide variety of complex issues — from the essential concepts and guiding principles of the sector to the introduction of a national curriculum for compulsory education and the

degree structure for higher education, from regulating private provision of primary and secondary education to the limitations of university autonomy. Yet it was completed on time⁴⁰.

4.6 Policy content

Squella (1990) provides one of the first authoritative accounts of LOCE, reflecting the range of contemporary opinions about its content and implications. Licensing was part of the set of provisions for establishing new private universities and professional institutes. It was mandated that new higher education institutions would have to register their constitutions with the Ministry of Education to acquire legal university status.

Accordingly, they would submit a development plan to CSE — along with their academic and professional curricular plans — and demonstrate the resources needed for implementing it. Only having met all these requirements are new institutions officially acknowledged as higher education providers and, thus able to offer academic courses.

The evaluation process is twofold (Squella 1990). A first round assessment results in recommendations. Then, the institution has to re-submit its case, addressing all recommendations. The revised plan and courses are then subject to a second round of evaluations. In this case, changes made to address original concerns are subject to scrutiny. Finally, CSE decides whether to approve or reject the development plan and each of the courses.

Although licensing starts with this evaluation, it mostly focuses on monitoring the progress of a new institution's educational plan through a number of key areas — such as academics, courses, pedagogical strategies, infrastructure, resources and funding. In particular, CSE verified the implementation of the development plan.

Annually, the council submitted a report to each university and professional institute under licensing in regard to its progress (Squella 1990). This cyclical report would include observations on performance and would frame ways for institutions to address them. CSE was also invested with additional powers: it could conduct focused

⁴⁰ The new legislation was enacted on Sunday 10 March 1990, when it was finally published in the official gazette.

assessments, request any kind of documentation, and perform selective examinations through subjects and courses.

Reactive or ineffective institutions were subject to an escalating scheme of sanctions. Unmet observations could prompt full examination of selected courses or even the suspension of admissions to all programs. Repeated failure to meet observations could result in the rescinding of licensing.

After six years of supervision, universities and professional institutes could be released from licensing (Squella 1990). Autonomy would result from a well-implemented development plan — allowing them to operate without any further surveillance. If not, the licensing process could be prolonged for up to 5 additional years, after which inadequate performance may result in the withdrawal of official recognition.

4.7 Implementing licensing

4.7.1 Searching for alternatives to LOCE

By March 1990 neither the old nor the new administration had provided plans for implementing the new supervision regime. The constitutional nature of LOCE prevented changes in the legislation without the agreement of opposition political parties⁴¹. Wanting to expand the palette of policy options, the new Minister of Education, Ricardo Lagos, implemented the Commission for the Study of Higher Education (CEES), an idea emerging from the new ruling coalition.

Introduced in May 1990, CEES aimed to advance sectoral policy and to suggest changes in the regulatory framework to mitigate troublesome consequences attached to the 1980 reforms (Comisión de Estudio de la Educación Superior 1991, Bernasconi and Rojas 2004).

Chaired by José Joaquín Brunner (with, as deputy, Iván Lavados) CEES consisted of 22 members nominated directly by President Aylwin, mainly academics, university managers, and distinguished professionals. Most members were connected to the new regime, but there were significant ideological differences among them

⁴¹ A supermajority of 4/7 of members' votes in both legislative chambers was required to pass any reform (Squella 1990). Although they had won the congressional election of 1989, the parties in power fell well short of reaching that target. This gave the opposition, who wanted to preserve the legacy of military rule, an effective veto power over any attempt to reform LOCE.

(Bruner 1991). Alfonso Muga, the new head of the Ministry's Higher Education Division, was appointed as CEES secretary.

Deep divisions surfaced throughout the deliberations. Two contrasting ideological views in regard to the future of higher education were clearly articulated:

'...the main issue within the Commission was whether, after the restoration of democracy, the institutional status of "private university" would be preserved or not. There were two diverging perspectives in regard to this issue within our political coalition. In this context, I think, a vision that combined freedom and regulation prevailed over another that would reclaim higher levels of government intervention. José Joaquín Brunner and Manuel Antonio Garretón led these factions [respectively] ...' (Interview R17)

The CEES report, titled 'A Policy for the Development of Higher Education Through the 1990s', was released in January 1991 and made public two months later. The report organised its proposals around six pillars⁴². For each of these the report described the issues considered by the commission and advanced specific recommendations.

Though covered third, quality is described as a top priority, with other policy targets depending on it. In the context of the report, however, quality is defined solely in terms of key inputs into the educational process such as aims, content and structure of curricula; academic training and employment conditions; and scholarships and support for graduate students (Comisión de Estudio de la Educación Superior 1991:25-34).

Nevertheless, the report tackled a variety of other quality-related issues. Acknowledging the rapid proliferation of new higher education providers, CEES called for introducing higher entry barriers to the sector (Comisión de Estudio de la Educación Superior 1991). Thus new academic, financial, and institutional standards for approving and evaluating new and existing private universities and professional institutes⁴³ were endorsed under a new agency. In addition, the report asked for

⁴² Securing the system's institutional base; advancing qualitative development of enrolments; assuring quality and equity; promoting scientific research and artistic creation; enhancing and diversifying funding in the sector; and reviewing the higher education regulatory framework (Comisión de Estudio de la Educación Superior 1991:1).

⁴³ The supervision of the new technical training centres was conceived of as a responsibility assigned to the Ministry of Education in the CEES report (Comisión de Estudio de la Educación Superior 1991:11).

terminating the examination regime by making licensing mandatory for all non-autonomous institutions.

Despite all the careful work done to secure a broad consensus in the sector and to gather support from political circles, the government did not implement the CEES report. Doubts as to its political feasibility sealed its fate.

‘... Ricardo Lagos, who was the Minister of Education at the time, had no interest in changing LOCE. He was aware that reforming Section III might lead to difficulties with the right wing people. At the same time, it might affect his public image as an open-minded and modern socialist, making him look less tolerant of freedom and autonomy.’ (Interview R26)

According to Brunner (2009), the CEES report was a landmark that influenced the policy agenda heavily in the following years. It offered a framework for policy formulation in an incremental fashion. One interviewee reflects on its significance:

‘The question was whether we are going to build a regulated model or to fight a long ideological battle, leaving things to take their own path. I think we did what was politically pertinent. I'm not quite sure if it was ideologically acceptable. I believe that the current pragmatic approach to public policy started to be developed from there.’ (Interview R17)

Higher education policy now depended on the government’s ability to accommodate its ideas within the existing policy infrastructure. The broad policy agenda advanced by CEES was reduced to its bare bones.

‘What remained was quality assurance because, in a way, it was already regulated. What we did was to add the key elements advanced by the commission – its conclusions – to implement the new council.’ (Interview R10)

4.7.2 Enacting CSE

Initially, the new government had shown little sympathy for CSE and licensing because of the wider perception that it was a legacy of Pinochet and his authoritarian regime.

'...[T]he purpose was to make it fail. That was the original political intention of the founding group. At some point, however, they started to realise its potential and the policy objective changed.' (Interview R2)

In many ways, the implementation of CSE exemplifies the policymaking style brought in by the new elected government. More than a planned approach, it emerged from a convergence of several factors: the political climate of the early democratic years, the policy agenda of the government, the state of the sector, and the personalities of the people involved in the process.

An elitist approach to policy brought by the transition was applied to higher education through CEES. It attempted to endorse the policy ideas advanced by FLACSO and CPU but also to enhance their legitimacy in the sector through its selective membership. This strategy did not pay off and the CEES report failed to produce consensus on key proposals.

This was not the only reason behind its failure, though. The difficulty of navigating the emerging political order underlay the outcome. This came from a combination of several factors. First, LOCE had been recently enacted and its implementation was pending. Since it claimed to solve examination problems, its reformation was simply not a priority for the opposition.

Second, the government did not hide its ambition to replace LOCE with a fully comprehensive regulatory framework for higher education. This was a direct attack on one of the fundamental pieces of Pinochet's political legacy. The strong commitment of the parties in opposition to protect this legacy made futile any attempt to engage in full-scale negotiations.

Third, no incentives were available for the opposition parties to enter into negotiations with the government. Direct talks between the government and just one party were not an alternative, either, because of the supermajority required for introducing changes in LOCE.

Fourth, because the existing constituencies of higher education were disconnected from key decision-making actors and their interest in changing policy was not a high priority compared to institutional issues, they failed to apply pressure for reform.

Finally, the CEES effort did not involve the new private sector in their discussions. Although potentially useful for the reform initiative, the new private sector

linkages to the political opposition were not exploited. Their lack of trust in the new government and their doubts in regard to the implementation of the new system were immense obstacles to gaining their support.

Interestingly, the enactment of CSE followed a similar pattern to the failed attempt to reform LOCE. The government wanted to use the new council as an alternative way to enforce regulation upon new universities. The goal this time was to build an independent, reputable academic organisation closely aligned with the government's objective on licensing: bringing order to the sector.

Perhaps because it was a modest endeavour, the results were very different. To produce in-sector legitimacy, the new council had to convince senior university administrators of licensing's value in both the traditional and new sectors. This implied the simultaneous achievement of two different goals: an effective protection of higher education's overall prestige and the assurance of a fair opportunity for new providers to join the sector. Given the rapid proliferation of new, barely regulated institutions at the end of the previous government, the task had some urgency.

By then prominent higher education policy experts, Brunner and Lavados were appointed to serve on CSE as they had on CEES. Neither of them, however, was directly nominated by the government. Closely steered by the Ministry of Education⁴⁴, their appointments were proposed by other organisations. Applying a similar procedure, prestigious university administrators were carefully chosen to expand the council's reputation within disciplinary and intellectual circles.

The Minister of Education declined the presidency of the council, a sign of the enhanced independence of CSE. This formal concession was balanced by more subtle channels for exerting ministerial influence. Alfonso Muga — the head of the Higher Education Division — secured a permanent seat on CSE. María José Lemaitre — a close associate of Brunner and Lavados — was appointed executive secretary. These appointments smoothed the coordination between the Ministry and CSE in planning and operational tasks

⁴⁴ The Minister of Education served as the president of CSE in his own right. The other members had to be nominated by different institutions: public universities (one member), autonomous private universities (one member), autonomous professional institutes (one member), the academies of the Institute of Chile (two members), the Higher Council for the Sciences (one member), the Higher Council for Technological Development (one member), the Supreme Court of Justice (one member) and the Chief Commanders of the Armed Forces (one member). In the president's absence, his delegate could participate in the Council. A vice-president, elected from the other CSE members, had the responsibility for chairing meetings when the Minister was not present.

'[A]ll this group – Brunner, Lavados, Lemaitre, and Muga –... shared a common understanding that allowed them later to provide a clear sense of direction to CSE.'
(Interview R26)

The additional appointment of Brunner as vice-president secured a second layer for coordinating CSE/government work. In case of need, he could consult on critical decisions directly with the Minister. A de facto president, he made important contributions to forming the Council's modus operandi. An early decision adopted by CSE shed some light on his philosophy. Aware of possible external interference from the organisations nominating the Council members, Brunner succeeded in convincing them that they were participants on an autonomous board and not representatives of the organisations that nominated them. In practice, this decision protected CSE from external interference, while simultaneously enhancing its autonomy to forge the licensing scheme.

With the aim of enhancing its legitimacy, CSE wanted to include the academic community in policy discussions. One of its members recalls:

'...we had an orientation that strongly emphasised the use of persuasion and diffusion... Applying a punitive approach would not get us far.' (Interview R14)

These measures, however, reflected some degree of authoritarianism in organising CSE. By design it was an organisation conceived to be accountable to its members and to the Ministry of Education. Academic leaders and administrators were not considered *active* contributors in formulating the new regime. An endemic feature of Chilean policy making, authoritarianism was not new to the higher education landscape: CRUCH has enjoyed of a similar privilege since its introduction in 1953 (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004).

The inaugural session of CSE took place on 19 July 1990 (Consejo Superior de Educación 1998). The Deputy Minister, Raúl Allard, delivered the inaugural speech stressing the critical functions that the council had to perform for the sector and the government's determination to support its operation. At the same time, he reassured its members of their complete independence in decision-making.

4.7.3 Structuring licensing

Once enacted, CSE was to implement licensing. A handful of directives presented themselves in the regulations for implementing the scheme — most of them focused on demarcating key procedural elements — i.e. purpose, timing, and possible outcomes. Several aspects required further clarification to allow a functional system. No explicit principles, goals, guidelines or models for implementing the new licensing scheme were available. None of the people involved in the passing of LOCE were now working in the government.

Once the prospect of applying its inconclusive legal framework directly was discarded, CSE embarked in a more ambitious project: to advance its own licensing model. Great discretionary powers imposed on it dissuaded new private institutions from attempting any initial challenge.

‘If you were to review LOCE carefully, you may realise it could be severely implemented, I think. I mean it could be rightfully used to justify shooting all institutions down if we had wanted to...’ (Interview R10)

CSE adopted a three-stage strategy to develop its own model to produce a robust framework (Consejo Superior de Educación 1998). First, it would explore international external assessment experiences to find suitable mechanisms and procedures. Next it would develop the model in consultation with the sector. Lastly, further adjustments would follow the same decision-making pattern. The resulting model, however, had to be adapted according to LOCE requirements and the ideological perspective already put forward by CEES — including the validation of new private universities.

‘José Joaquín [Brunner] and Iván Lavados said: this is an opportunity to build a robust and serious private sector...’ (Interview R10)

The strategy required a consistent discourse on what licensing should be and how it should operate. Likewise, it demanded key resources to be devoted to facilitating its implementation. To gain the support of new university managers, it had to be an innovative and flexible tool to assess and enhance internal processes. Ideas

borrowed from Europe or the US would lessen politically motivated criticism from university leaders in the new sector. Lastly, to be sustainable, it has to be supported — or at least not explicitly rejected — by the leaders of elite, traditional universities.

Initial investigations were misled by the name given to the new scheme and did not produce valuable results. Even at the institutional level, American accreditation was not a comprehensive assessment system for authorising and supervising new universities during a fixed term. The corresponding American structures — i.e. state-run licentiate or recognition schemes for higher education providers — was essentially overlooked and disregarded as too bureaucratic.

In contrast, the encounter between CSE and Herbert R. Kells opened an entire world of possibilities for nascent Chilean licensing. Endorsed by Brunner for his affiliation to the global network of higher education researchers⁴⁵ and for his use of Burton Clark's organisational approach, Kells suggested to CSE the introduction of a self-regulation model — a collaborative system of quality assurance he had devised.

'We did not know the language, we weren't aware of anything. Step by step we started to get involved. We invited Kells and he came to work with us. Then we started to understand.' (Interview R10)

In his *Self-Regulation in Higher Education*, Kells defines regulation in very specific terms as:

'The informed and periodic process through which a system, institution, program or procedure is attuned over time to expectations (intentions, standards, norms) through choices and actions judged by the regulator(s) to be needed as a result of formative or summative evaluation.' (1992:17)

In Kells's observation, the regulation of quality in higher education consists of three partially overlapping sub-functions and sub-elements as presented in Table 4.1. They are the result of regulatory activities performed autonomously or in coordination at five different levels: government, collaborative university organisation, institution, program/discipline/department, and individual. Yet at the core of the system he finds a self-regulating institution, which has developed a culture of quality improvement

⁴⁵ See, for example, Kells (1986).

and has experienced the benefits of public scrutiny through external validation. In his model, institutional leadership — both administrative and academic — is the key ingredient in cementing a self-regulatory culture.

Table 4.1:
The major elements of the regulatory process

Sub-functions	Sub-elements
Quality assurance	Reporting to the public, government and clients
Quality assurance	Assuring the internal regulatory mechanisms are in place and functioning (meta-evaluation)
Quality assurance/ Quality assessment (evaluation)/ Quality control	Assessing achievement of results in light of stated intentions, standards or norms (accountability)
Quality assurance/ Quality assessment (evaluation)/ Quality control	Assessing the adequacy of inputs and the functioning of programs and services and making readily achievable changes as needed
Quality control	Achieving planned and leveraged change through leadership, other internal strategies and external peer pressure

Adapted from Kells (1992:18)

Even for a supervision scheme, Kells’s concepts and ideas seemed too compelling to ignore. They were of course difficult to absorb in a sector with limited exposure to the notion of a professional management system for universities. Yet they offered a nice chance to cover most CSE goals simultaneously. His willingness to immerse himself into the process by supporting CSE in developing its own template made Kells’s involvement ineluctable. His participation in seminars and workshops on self-regulation made him a valuable asset for CSE in increasing awareness of licensing across Chilean universities.

Some adaptations were needed, though. One CSE member recalls the basic considerations of the council in building its own model:

‘Assessing a whole university against the degree of satisfaction CSE has in relation to it could be very unfair. Alternatively, the use of master development plans as assessment frameworks seemed equally inappropriate: plans could be completely insufficient, preventing CSE from passing judgments on important issues. Introducing assessment criteria seemed an appropriate middle ground.’ (Interview R10)

The development of assessment criteria was one of the few adaptations made to frame the self-regulation model within CSE’s mandate. Conceptually, these aimed

to communicate expectations for the level of complexity and coherence a higher education institution should achieve to secure its autonomy. They could be ‘...interpreted in a particular setting and against a particular set of institutional purposes and goals...’ (Cox 1996:38). The criteria covered twelve essential dimensions⁴⁶ of the higher education enterprise. For each dimension a variable number of core and complementary requirements was stipulated. With the aim of clarifying all criteria, each requirement was followed by an explanation of the different elements and processes linked to it and how those challenges might be met.

Initially conceived to support self-assessment exercises, the licensing criteria could also be used for guiding external evaluations through peer-review teams — another innovation brought by CSE to licensing (Kells 1992). Soon many universities under licensing were conducting self-assessment exercises and reporting to CSE.

CSE relied on three additional tactics to legitimise licensing in the sector. It invested heavily in capacity building, whether in assisting new institutions to deal with licensing-related processes or in preparing experts to support its own decision-making needs. Thus, the dissemination of the new model spread through the sector in a relatively short timeframe.

Additionally, the council carefully monitored and fine-tuned the selection of external reviewers. Professional competency and independence were obvious factors in assembling peer review teams, as well as personal prestige and status within home institutions. Motivated by this new approach to university administration, some attempted to import the same evaluative practices into their own universities and departments.

Finally, in 1993, CSE granted ahead-of-schedule autonomy to two prominent private institutions — Universidad Diego Portales and Universidad Central — sending a powerful signal to the sector about its orientation towards quality enhancement, its political neutrality, and its commitment to working together with the new sector.

Along with the evident cost differential between examination and licensing, all these measures facilitated the transferral to the new scheme of many institutions. By 1992, 21 universities and 18 professional institutes were under licensing (Brunner

⁴⁶ These dimensions are: institutional integrity; mission and aims; governance, administration, and self-regulation; students and academic progress; student services; academics and teaching and learning; courses and academic programs; research; outreach and service to community; pedagogical resources; financial management; and infrastructure.

1993a). Five years later, CSE was supervising 32 universities and 28 professional institutes (Brunner 1997).

The rising star of licensing was a function of CSE's agency — in the sociological sense — and, by extension, of the combined leadership of Brunner, Lavados, and Lemaitre. Their interpretation of its mandate brought policy innovation by adopting and adapting structures developed within the disciplinary community engaged in the study of higher education. This provided the conceptual building blocks to articulate the foundations and core principles needed for the new scheme and equipped licensing with an innovative assessment methodology.

In interpreting the new situation created by its mandate, CSE applied its knowledge to find what was needed to inform its own approach to licensing. Aware of the rules that governed licensing, the council also adjusted the external template to the specific nature of its task. The result was a makeshift mixture that effectively balanced what it wanted to do with the main restrictions⁴⁷ imposed by LOCE. Through the merger of these independent structures, CSE secured legal legitimacy for the values, rules, routines, and concepts that constituted its licensing model.

CSE actively sought to cement its influence in higher education and to marginalise any opposition to licensing. With the goal of persuading key players in the sector of the potential benefits attached to the new scheme, the council invested heavily in networking, which often involved its core members. Kells' involvement greatly facilitated the design process and the dissemination of the new model. He provided the authority of a leading international expert and was decisive in gaining CSE allies in the traditional sector. The growing community of reviewers amplified this message within elite universities.

The pursuit of these independent pathways to legitimise licensing proved to be a very successful strategy. In the appreciation of several observers, licensing was a positive innovation bound to transform universities from the inside out. It was also perceived as a smart, modern way to regulate the sector without reducing institutional autonomy. A senior academic administrator in a private university elaborates

⁴⁷ LOCE set a fixed term for licensing, mandated sanctions in some situations, and defined institutional autonomy in a way that precluded any follow-up activities once this status was granted. These regulations went against the formative nature of external evaluations and the cyclical application of the self-regulation model.

'Licensing was a system inspired by the self-regulation/self-assessment/report sequence of the American model. It also included other supervisory elements such as student examination and financial evaluation.... In addition, sanctions could be imposed on institutions. Assessment cycles were short. On average, university staff reported every two, three years... And the balance was quite effective.' (Interview R2)

Yet, in stark comparison to CEES's failed attempt to reform LOCE, this strategy benefited greatly from contextual factors. At the normative level, the legal framework that prevented changes in regulation did not discourage policy innovation. So long as LOCE provisions were not explicitly ignored, CSE could interpret its mandate to accommodate its own goals in licensing because the blockages enacted to introduce change in policy only applied to existing legal provisions. The evident lack of familiarity in the sector with the concepts and procedures introduced by the council left institutions unable to object to them articulately.

Likewise, the balance of power in the sector facilitated CSE's task. The group of universities and professional institutes subject to licensing had limited policy influence. Their sizes were small, their organisation weak. Lacking prestige, most of them were just starting to build their own standing in the sector. Eventually some institutions felt that they were not receiving fair treatment from the council — especially in regard to decisions over autonomy or extension of licensing — but their connections across the political spectrum were of little utility in this policy arena: CSE had already insulated itself from external interference.

Finally, the disconnection between the traditional sector and licensing implied that elite universities could not interfere with CSE's plans. Since licensing requirements did not apply to them, traditional universities had no incentive to involve themselves in policy formulation. They expected that licensing would impose higher entry barriers for the sector, but the task was not their responsibility.

4.8 Implications and challenges

The CSE approach to licensing proved to be a useful tool for ensuring a basic level of quality, rapidly gaining recognition across the sector (Lemaitre 2004). CSE itself became the key regulatory agency in Chilean higher education (Cox 1996). Its reputation as a reliable and competent quality assurance agency expanded as well

'... I think that some people inside the new private universities started to realise that this was not that fabrication of a interventionist and social-democratic local group but something that this parochial group was, for the better, copying from the United States...'
(Interview R14)

Licensing cemented a reputation in the emerging private sector by sorting the sheep from the goats. While some universities acquired autonomous status quickly, dubious providers had to make dramatic changes or face tough sanctions. As one CSE member describes, it clarified acceptable standards:

'...[W]e had universities that really had experienced solid development. It was worth acknowledging that. Then, their autonomy was granted. That happened with Universidad Diego Portales, Universidad Central and Universidad Finis Terrae. Their example showed the way for others. Yet, at the same time, we shut down very scary institutions. That also contributed to legitimising the system because we were aware of institutions operating without official recognition and people were studying in courses offered by them without any chance of getting a valid diploma...' (Interview R10)

Licensing also rewarded those institutions making progress towards achieving their own goals and meeting the criteria. Their competitive stance improved as their reputation grew. The new private sector gained in reputation as a result (Interview R10).

Expectations among new providers in relation to entry barriers were clarified through licensing. Compared to the examination regime, licensing implied higher requirements (Lemaitre 2004). Yet, because of the lack of previous experience running institution-wide evaluation schemes, institutions had very different ideas about licensing and its implications.

'Some institutions signed up thinking it is going to be very easy to cope with and they found that it was not like that and we closed them down... Other universities went into licensing with a whole different attitude. They said: this is a learning opportunity, a chance to grow up... And there were other universities that did it grimacing and swallowing tears. It was like they were thinking: Ok, we will do as they say, up to the point of having our autonomy granted. Then, we will do as we want...' (Interview R10)

Lastly, licensing emphasised the role regulation can play in structuring basic higher education processes within an expanding and mostly deregulated sector. In particular, the outlook was promising for further regulatory developments in quality assurance.

In its 1998 report, CSE disclosed key indicators of its performance over 8 years of activity (Consejo Superior de Educación 1998). While 7 institutions were granted their autonomy, another 11 were closed down. 31 universities and professional institutes remained under licensing after their first comprehensive assessment towards autonomy. 13 new institutions were authorised to start operations and another 14 were denied. During the 1991-1998 period, 157 peer-review appraisals were conducted and more than 24,000 students enrolled in non-autonomous institutions were subject to some form of external examination.

In spite of all its positive consequences, licensing had its problems. LOCE limited CSE action by setting fixed terms for deciding on autonomy and by defining its extent (Consejo Superior de Educación 1998). Granting autonomy or closing down institutions had been the only choices available to the Council at the end of the 11-year licensing process. One staff member elaborates

'It was a straitjacket. If you had done the job properly, there were no reasons to close down an institution. You had to close it down early. After 11 years, logic dictates that you have to grant its autonomy. Yet you are aware that the institution has a long way to go to strengthen its decision-making capabilities, as was evident from the explosive proliferation of branch campuses and courses created by autonomous institutions. Then, you have this brutal break into the process putting at risk all we have done because institutions were not ready to operate autonomously...' (Interview R6)

Key elements of the licensing model proved to be ineffective for new institutions (Lemaitre 2004). Instead of training in developing self-assessment exercises, most new universities used a handful of basic administrative orientations to guide their operations. Self-assessment was not a useful tool either; it was unrealistic to expect institutions to disclose fully their weak points lest this information be used to impose sanctions on them.

External assessments offered some challenges, as well. Peer-review teams were not always greeted as 'peers' by new institutions (Lemaitre 2004). Occasionally, reviewers' appreciation of the problems experienced by recently formed institutions

— and the possible strategies to cope with them — was greatly influenced by the views and values held within their home universities, limiting the legitimacy and utility of their recommendations.

Closing down an institution was often highly traumatic for all people involved, yet necessary to strengthen quality (Lemaitre 2004). Students, in particular, had to be relocated to another institutions under varying contractual and curricular conditions and graduates faced devaluation of their diplomas.

Contrary to Kells's expectations, the licensing experience did not lead to the development of a quality improvement culture in new universities. Although they acquired basic administrative techniques during their supervision, their motivation to engage in self-regulation primarily was to meet the legal requirements of autonomous status. That motivation did not change throughout the process. This set them apart from the assumptions that guided their introduction into Chilean higher education; they did not follow any of the templates of the traditional university.

Overall, however, licensing has been positively received across the sector. Institutions securing their autonomy received social validation and enhanced their reputation in the competitive higher education market. Licensing also has performed a capacity-building function for new providers and contributed to disseminating good administrative practices (Lemaitre 2004).

Over time, these positive perceptions changed. In part, this is attributed to the ability of the sector to adapt to licensing requirements. Institutions under licensing learnt to keep their master development plan as small as possible to prevent additional assessments, while ticking all boxes according to CSE criteria (Lemaitre 2004). In addition, people in the sector perceived that standards for achieving autonomy were applied less rigorously over the years.

'We could have had Universidad de Las Américas, Universidad Santo Tomás and those that came later under licensing a little bit longer. And that did not happen... Accepting the fact that it could be very hard to achieve, higher standards for institutional autonomy could be much better.' (Interview R2)

By 1998, the people who had developed the licensing model concluded their tenure at CSE. After two terms of four years each, it was impossible to retain key actors in the Council such as Iván Lavados and José Joaquín Brunner. Most members

left the same year. María José Lemaitre, the Executive Secretary, would follow them six months later. Their departure marked the beginning of the decline of CSE and the original licensing scheme.

...

This chapter has introduced the structural properties and agents that began to configure quality assurance policy in Chile from 1990. Despite its non-democratic origin, licensing gained in legitimacy and strength through the skilful manipulation of emerging structures by agency — a process mainly conducted by CSE's experts. Revamped as quality assurance, licensing was a promising area of higher education policy that was strongly endorsed by the government. Situated in a more stable context, these promising results were encouraging new developments in this policy domain. The rising star of quality assurance was a function of a new steering capacity over higher education that the government acquired. Yet other factors intersect in this trajectory, as Chapter 5 explains.

Chapter 5:
The quality assurance experiment
(1999-2002)

5.1 Introduction

CSE's licensing had profound consequences for the regulation of higher education. It offered an attractive solution for supervising new private providers, which seemed lighter and more effective than alternative solutions for monitoring quality in universities. In spite of its limitations, it had established a robust reputation in the sector.

The adoption of similar evaluative procedures — this time targeting autonomous institutions, whether universities, professional institutes, or technical training centres — appeared to be a natural, incremental choice. The challenge, however, implied an attempt to introduce a major reform into higher education regulation. The government did not have sufficient votes in the parliament to secure its approval. The possibility of far-reaching regulation was not attracting much sympathy from the sector, either.

This chapter explores the steps taken by the government to make progress towards the introduction of a new quality assurance framework. Although paying attention to key previous developments, it primarily focuses on the period 1999-2002 — from the design of a strategy to introduce new assessment mechanisms to the formulation of a comprehensive organisational scheme to accommodate final versions of such mechanisms.

The chapter captures the mutation experienced by key structural properties — i.e. enrolment expansion and tighter competition among higher education providers — that facilitated the advancement of quality assurance policy up to the turn of the millennium. It also shows how leading policy actors put into action the manipulative skills they learnt during the previous phase to create a favourable climate for reform under conditions of greater participation. Their strategic engagement in policy formation and implementation conforms impressively to the insights of structuration theory.

An investigation of the origins of the new accreditation model for institutions and courses provides an entry point to understand the institutionalising process for the

new policy architecture. A close inspection of the repertoire of responses adopted by the government to ensure the effectiveness of these experiments provides evidence as to its ability to interpret the environment and to take advantage of favourable conditions. Additionally, the implementation of quality assurance pilots — for undergraduate and graduate courses — reveals the aforementioned factors, actors, and processes at play. It demonstrates the significant impact they had on the competitive dynamics of the sector. Likewise, it sheds some light on the ideological orientations the government gradually adopted during President Lagos's tenure (2000-2006).

The sound success of course accreditation pilots secured much-needed legitimacy for advancing a permanent quality assurance scheme, which was provided by the agencies created to conduct them. The chapter closes arguing briefly about the limitations that emerged from this experience in spite of the apparent victory the government achieved through an innovative policymaking strategy.

5.2 Origins of course accreditation pilots

The new quality assurance regime introduced in 1999 is the result of four loosely connected developments: the rise of quality concerns across higher education, the cumulative repercussions of the licensing scheme, the proliferation of quality-related assessments within universities, and the new policy landscape emerging by 1997. Whereas the first reflects the statutory limitations of CSE to address quality-related issues sector-wide and universities' modest impact in implementing effective quality-enhancement systems, the other three shed some light on the government reliance on those evaluative experiences to push a bold quality assurance agenda for the sector.

The rising esteem of quality evaluations among university administrators and policymakers is the evident result of a growing consensus as to the possibilities of a modernisation strategy based on the self-regulation model first implemented by CSE — signalling the recursive use of a legitimised structure in a slightly different context. CSE's prominence as the key regulatory agency in the sector is correlated to the increasing influence of the people behind this model across policy circles.

In the backdrop of these developments, however, it is difficult to ignore the growing competition and rapid expansion of Chilean higher education throughout the 1990s. These were the main drivers for transforming the structure and the operation of the whole sector.

5.2.1 Growing concerns about quality

The formation of a new cluster of private autonomous universities proved to have important consequences for coordination of the sector. Released from any form of control, many of them implemented ambitious expansion plans (Lemaitre 2004). Universities multiplied their courses and established branch campuses across the nation in a relatively short timespan in order to increase enrolments (Zapata et al. 2003). Competition for new students intensified as a result. Soon traditional institutions vulnerable to these actions — mostly small, underfunded, and regional universities — reacted by engaging in similar tactics to balance their deficit budgets.

In parallel, a growing group of universities started to develop tailored professional programs for specific populations — mainly for municipal public servants in rural sectors (Brunner 2009). Less visible than other expansive and revenue-oriented initiatives, this strategy produced a significant increase of graduates in teacher education by watering down much of their substance. Often qualified professors, basic teaching resources, library facilities, and laboratories were simply not available to these students (Lemaitre 2004). By the late 1990s, universities and the government were increasingly uneasy about the state of affairs in the sector, as a senior academic administrator describes

*‘There was a sense of fiasco, of a complete lack of responsibility from the university system.’
(Interview R2)*

The increasing commercialisation of undergraduate education reflected a new set of priorities that seemed incompatible with the sustainability of the higher education enterprise. The government had virtually no power or means to arbitrate solutions for the emerging conflicts — mostly involving autonomous institutions. Although some form of intervention was urgently needed, finding common ground for regulation seemed implausible. A senior university administrator elaborates:

‘Essentially, there was a great deal of distrust. From the government side, the private sector’s motives for expanding their courses were suspicious. Private providers, in turn, distrusted the government due to ideological reasons. They resented their previous

experience of supervision and were apprehensive about discretionary administrative controls from the government.’ (Interview R7)

5.2.2 CSE, the future of licensing, and quality assurance

The results of the meticulous implementation of licensing began to be evident by the late 1990s. Table 5.1 provides a summary of licensing outcomes during the period 1990-1998. After reaching its peak in 1995, the number of institutions in licensing started to decline slowly due to the growing number of autonomies granted and licences withdrawn. By 1998, 6 private universities and 3 professional institutes had secured autonomous status. As the larger cohort of institutions was reaching the end of their licensing term, those figures were bound to increase in the coming years.

	1990		1991		1992		1993		1994		1995		1996		1997		1998	
	U	PI	U	PI	U	PI	U	PI	U	PI	U	PI	U	PI	U	PI	U	PI
New authorisations	0	0	3	2	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	0
Rejected projects	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
Opted for licensing	2	0	16	10	5	10	1	1	4	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
Licences withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	3	1	0	1	1	1
Autonomy granted	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	2
Annual variation	2	0	19	12	7	11	-1	4	3	0	2	0	-5	-2	0	4	-1	-3
Total in acc	2	0	21	12	28	23	27	27	30	27	32	27	27	25	27	29	26	26
U= University PI= Professional Institute																		

Source: Consejo Superior de Educación (2006)

Although CSE enjoyed high standing in the sector and its licensing was widely accepted, the limitations of the model started to surface. Essentially, the mechanism was not enough to regulate the sector, as one academic manager synthesises:

‘The system went into a crisis because of the “autonomy” issue. This demonstrated that self-regulation only worked for universities insofar as external monitoring was in place. After that, people could not restrain themselves anymore. This made it necessary to rethink higher education regulation.’ (Interview R2)

Another commentator from the sector describes the level of awareness in relation to the limitations of the existing framework

'I have no doubt that the people of the [World] Bank and Jamil [Salmi] made it crystal clear: CSE's function was reaching its limit.' (Interview R14)

The end of the tenure of most of CSE members in 1998 brought an opportunity for the council to raise some concerns in relation to the consistency of the existing supervisory framework (Consejo Superior de Educación 1998). Parallel supervision regimes — associated with the surviving vestiges of examination — were undermining the ability to assure a basic level of quality among new providers. In addition, the absence of follow-up systems was affecting the consolidation of self-regulatory capabilities in autonomous private universities.

With the aim of enhancing its ability to deliver effective supervision, CSE pointed to key reforms to be introduced to licensing (Consejo Superior de Educación 1998): the introduction of new criteria and an open timeframe to grant autonomy, the expansion of its powers to impose a wider palette of sanctions on universities, and the development of new procedures for licence withdraw.

Likewise, CSE advanced further proposals to enhance the regulatory framework of quality assurance across the sector. Drawing on CRUCH's experience⁴⁸, it called for considering the introduction of a cyclical course accreditation scheme on a voluntary basis for all higher education providers. Additionally, CSE proposed the creation of a public information system for higher education to support prospective students and their families.

5.2.3 Previous attempts to expand quality-related assessments from the sector

Although confined to the new private sector, the licensing model implemented by CSE had broader implications. In the appreciation of large cohort of prestigious administrators that had served on peer review committees, its potential was far greater than its regulatory use. In particular, the self-assessment element was a whole new way to run universities, one that emphasised priority setting, encouraging engagement, and fostering improvement.

⁴⁸ Covered in the next section.

As a management methodology, self-assessment implied a shift from vague and fixed purposes to specific and verifiable goals subject to cyclical renewal. Additionally, it required extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders that ensured broad participation and consensus building. It offered substantial room to identify and agree on potential areas for enhancement, including the resources needed to achieve progress. Lastly, follow-up appraisals could certify the level of advancement attained, which also could provide a further starting point for new assessment exercises.

These ideas resonated strongly with administrators in a number of traditional universities. The interaction with Herbert Kells deepened interest in adopting new administrative systems based on self-regulation. A number of pilot exercises followed.

Appointed in 1994, a high-profile committee endorsed the introduction of a self-regulation policy for all departments in Universidad de Chile (Villavicencio 1998). As a result, the Institutional Assessment Committee (CAI) was enacted in 1995 with the mission of structuring a mechanism for assessing academic programs.

Under Kells's direct supervision, Universidad de Concepción embarked on introducing self-assessment by 1993. It aimed to encourage quality enhancement, planning, and innovation across faculties, departments and administrative units (Silva et al. 1997). A special committee was appointed to supervise reviews. Additionally, the Institutional Self-Assessment Office was created to support units through the assessment cycle. Action plans were drafted to tackle key weaknesses — including financial incentives to improve performance. 3 faculties, 11 departments, and 3 units were selected to perform self-assessments and to be subject to external reviews between 1993 and 1997.

These experiences led to important reforms in curriculum, teaching methodologies, and management processes (Silva et al. 1997). Furthermore, they assisted in developing new research areas. A senior academic leader observes:

'It was a nice solution for [Universidad de] Concepción because it did not have strategic planning. It never did have. It was an institution that simply lacked mechanisms for improvement...' (Interview R8)

Encouraged by these experiences, other traditional universities⁴⁹ engaged in self-assessment experiments. The Ministry of Education held sceptical views as to these experiences. One senior official at the Higher Education Division remembers:

'The experiences of Universidad de Concepción and Universidad de Chile were very, very partial. Even if you just check with actors in those institutions, you would realise that these cases had to do with building up an internal rhetoric supported by small groups. These produced few real results.' (Interview R26)

Influential professional and disciplinary associations were also interested in these new self-regulation methodologies. Fuelled by the concern that medical training quality could be eroded due to the proliferation of medical schools among new universities, the Association of Schools of Medicine (ASOFAMECH) advanced a proposal in 1994 to conduct pilots on course accreditation for its membership (ASOFAMECH 1994, Goic 2010).

A convergence towards external assessment in the traditional sector gained momentum during the second half of the 1990s. The introduction of the Authorised Commission for Self-regulation (CAC) under CRUCH in 1995 epitomises the spread of ideas about quality and methodologies for its assessment. It aimed to evaluate new academic courses to be offered by traditional universities. Inspired by CSE's course approval scheme for new universities, CAC developed its own procedures and assessment criteria⁵⁰. Reviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and the recommendations had a non-mandatory nature. Its legitimacy grew rapidly: Between 1995 and 1996, CAC approved 49 new courses and rejected another two. As one staff member at CSE put it, quality assessment seemed unstoppable in Chilean higher education.

'... [T]here were no reasons for universities not to be evaluated, especially when there were no negative consequences attached. Assessments could be oriented towards improvement and they could be linked to additional funding, too. All the incentives were in place for them to sign in.' (Interview R6)

⁴⁹ According to Silva (1998), Universidad del Bío-Bío, Universidad Católica del Norte, Universidad de La Serena, Universidad de Los Lagos, Universidad de Santiago, and Universidad de Tarapacá made some progress in enacting self-assessment throughout the 1990s.

⁵⁰ It covered five fundamental areas: basic features of the course, curricula, academics and other resources, management and department organisation, and economic feasibility (Ossandón 1998).

5.2.4 The new policy landscape that emerged after 1992

After CEES's failure, no significant changes were attempted in higher education policy and the prospect of reforming LOCE was abandoned. Instead, the government focused on implementing CSE and on expanding financial support for traditional universities and their students (Brunner 2009).

Supported by the same political coalition behind predecessor Patricio Aylwin, Eduardo Frei was elected Chile's President in 1993. Although his program of government included the reformation of LOCE, the introduction of a new external assessment scheme for the whole sector, and the creation of a public information system, none of those measures were implemented when he took office (Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia 1993).

Everything changed, however, when José Pablo Arellano was appointed as Minister of Education in September 1996. He introduced a new higher education policy in 1997 (Ministerio de Educación 1997). The new policy targeted two central problems in relation to the coordination of the sector: a prevailing management style focused on short-term goals, and the proliferation of institutions and courses in the context of deregulation.

Quality enhancement was the first priority of the policy agenda. Reasserting the fundamental role of the Ministry of Education in enhancing and promoting higher education's quality, the new policy demanded additional regulatory processes focused on the quality of all courses. Thus, it advanced the introduction of a new course accreditation scheme and the development of minimal quality standards for undergraduate, professional, and graduate education (Ministerio de Educación 1997). To protect students from dubious providers, a public information system had also to be developed.

To balance growing regulation, the government pledged to expand the public contribution to the sector's funding towards proportions that it had not seen since the early 1970s⁵¹.

⁵¹ For the three years from 1998 expenditure in higher education would be expanded at a higher rate than GDP (Ministerio de Educación 1997).

5.3 Policy players

Compared to the relatively small set of policy players engaged in introducing licensing in 1990, the process of designing and testing a comprehensive quality assurance framework seemed a much more complicated affair — it involved a larger cast of participants and a broader dispersal of interests and agendas.

Policymaking became more open and convoluted. Policy players grouped around common goals and priorities, leading to the formation of networks. This was one of the first occasions in which they explicitly attempted to exert their influence through different stages of the political process — including the design and implementation of course and institutional accreditation pilots and the advancement of a proposal for the establishment of a comprehensive quality assurance framework.

Partnerships were pivotal for this process. The new policy aimed to penetrate both to the core power structure and to the periphery of the sector. Because of the bottom-up nature of the government's strategy, securing the support of the most respected and powerful institutions was a basic condition for any success. Capacity building and participation became essential resources for legitimising the new framework prior to its parliamentary discussion. Additionally, trusting all of these activities to an experienced team of experts seemed indispensable for achieving these ambitious goals.

Policy players found themselves in different situations when the new quality assurance agenda was unfolded. While university leaders and administrators were absorbing the new assessment technologies and expanding their influence upon the political system, former CSE members were leading the pilots to test and institutionalise the new evaluative scheme. Government and World Bank officials collaborated closely in enacting the new quality assurance agencies. Now located in a wholly different environment, academic and student unions had considerably less policy influence than in previous years.

5.3.1 CSE's legacy

The Brunner/Lemaitre/Lavados axis was critical in developing the original licensing scheme. Their close associations with powerful political groups and the explicit support they received from the government for implementing their regulatory agenda

for higher education granted them autonomy to innovate in the supervision of new providers (Dickhaus 2011). The licensing model they implemented gained rapidly in legitimacy. The recognition given to CSE reassured their leadership in this domain and validated their expertise in policy implementation.

By the time they ended their tenure at CSE, it was hardly a surprise in the sector that the government recruited Brunner and Lavados again — now to put the 1997 quality agenda into practice through the implementation of MECESUP. In practice, it was a continuation of the elitist approach to policymaking adopted by the ruling coalition⁵². Lemaitre was invited to join the group. Soon all of them were serving at CNAP, the commission they formed in 1999 to run course accreditation pilots and to advance a proposal for introducing a new quality assurance scheme. The design of the new agency replicated the roles they had played in CSE: Lavados chaired the commission, Brunner provided leadership, and Lemaitre — now the head executive officer of CNAP — implemented their decisions and monitored existing programs.

No other group could match their credentials across policy circles (Dickhaus 2009). All enjoyed robust political and academic legitimacy (Geoffroy 2011:62). Brunner was fully engaged in the policy/politics nexus close to the core of the political elite that controlled the transition to democracy⁵³, while Lavados had forged vast networks among university leaders and administrators through CINDA⁵⁴. Perhaps the most prominent local specialist, Lemaitre had established strong links with the group of international experts in quality assurance behind the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)⁵⁵. She was deeply immersed into the global conversation around developing quality assurance schemes and external assessment methodologies in higher education. She also played a decisive role in organising the 1999 INQAAHE conference held in Santiago and

⁵² This continuity was facilitated by the appointment of Raúl Allard as the head of the higher education division between 1994 and 2000. Mr Allard previously served as Deputy Minister of Education under President Aylwin.

⁵³ Brunner served in the government as Speaker between September 1994 and August 1998.

⁵⁴ Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo (CINDA) is a network of universities across Latin America and Europe engaged in policy analysis and capacity building in higher education administration. Created in 1971, CINDA was led by Lavados until 2009.

⁵⁵ Formed in 1991, INQAAHE has been the main global forum for quality assurance agencies. Its ‘Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance’ (INQAAHE 2007) has exerted a significant influence among quality assurance agencies worldwide. Woodhouse (2004) has shown how the rise and expansion of INQAAHE is closely correlated with the growing importance and professionalisation of external quality assurance across higher education systems.

Mendoza (Argentina) that increased the visibility of the global network of experts in quality assurance among Chilean universities.

Brunner, Lavados, and Lemaitre shared the goal of enhancing the regulation of quality and of placing it at the centre of the policy agenda. In their view, external assessment needed to be universal in Chilean higher education — covering all types of institutions at different levels — due to its ability to both assure and enhance quality in the sector (Dickhaus 2009).

To maximise the legitimacy of their project, they attempted a methodology that secured higher levels of participation and social recognition without compromising their ability to steer the new model. Additionally, they deployed sophisticated political strategies to restrain opposition to their agenda. Yet, their lack of influence among the rightwing parties — mainly because of their identification with the ruling political coalition — and their limited involvement on the interest networks that proliferated across the sector throughout the 1990s dimmed their ability to secure a rapid passage for the new regulatory framework.

5.3.2 The World Bank

The involvement of the World Bank in the second stage of the quality assurance saga was limited but influential. It provided a loan and technical assistance for the operation of MECESUP⁵⁶, a program for the enhancement of equity and quality in higher education (Ministerio de Educación 1999). Initiatives of this kind were framed in terms of the bank's own reform agenda to improve quality, efficiency, and access in the sector across Latin America and the Caribbean (World Bank 1999).

Although funding was an important element of this project, the partnership and legitimacy the bank invested in MECESUP seemed crucial to gain the support of several institutional leaders in the sector. Through a series of site visits and direct involvement in assessing the program's progress, the experts hired by the bank helped to validate the government's agenda from an international perspective and to spread quality assurance jargon among university leaders — especially in the traditional sector.

⁵⁶ See section 5.5.1

5.3.3 *The Government*

After the failed attempt to replace LOCE with a more coherent framework in 1991, the government did not embark on further large-scale reform ventures (Bernasconi & Rojas 2004). During the remaining years of President Aylwin's tenure, it mainly relied on fiscal laws to expand available student aid. Other minor changes were introduced into the legislation to address specific problems — the enhancement of public universities' governance and the adjustment of the student loan scheme for traditional institutions were prominent among them.

The rapid transformation of the sector and changes in the government, however, were pushing for a different approach by 1997. In the view of the government, an unstoppable expansion and the growing discharge of private institutions from supervision were rapidly increasing competitive pressures in higher education.

After being elected in 1993, President Eduardo Frei had appointed his cabinet by 1994. Although he was supported by the same political coalition led by Aylwin, changes in the presidency prompted the replacement of senior officials in most government agencies. During the first two years of his mandate, changes in the Ministry of Education did not coalesce well.

A new scenario crystallised when José Pablo Arellano⁵⁷ was appointed as the new Minister of Education. With the support of Raul Allard, the head of the Higher Education Division, he envisioned a new higher education policy that could increase both access and regulation. Different to previous attempts to provide a new direction for the sector, Mr Arellano secured access to additional funding to carry out his reform initiatives.

Sizeable resources were pumped into quality enhancement and quality assurance pilots. These initiatives led to the formation of new regulatory bodies for the sector: the MECESUP coordination unit, CNAP, and CONAP — all of them played a pivotal function in spreading the reform principles and in defining an approach to the implementation of its core programs. The World Bank provided technical assistance in establishing and monitoring the operation of these agencies.

⁵⁷ Economist. Between 1990 and 1996 Arellano served as budget director at the Ministry of Finances and as alternate governor at the World Bank.

In addition, CSE invested its credibility in advancing the same reform orientations supported by Arellano (Consejo Superior de Educación 1998) — particularly, course accreditation and the creation of a public information system for higher education.

This policy infrastructure converged in spreading the same reform message advanced by the Ministry. The plural integration of the agencies — including leading academics and prestigious administrators — helped to establish an initial legitimacy base for the new policy agenda and to prevent resistance among highly influential universities.

The reform agenda introduced by Minister Arellano lasted longer than his tenure in the Ministry of Education, which ended in 2000. The succeeding ministers — Mariana Aylwin and Sergio Bitar — and their senior staff kept on pursuing the same agenda in coordination with the regulatory agencies in the sector. They provided continuous support for the operation of CNAP and CONAP and their accreditation pilots. Their challenge, however, was to push this agenda into a different setting: the introduction of a new quality assurance framework into Congress — the first serious reform attempt in higher education regulation since the return to democracy.

Government officials forged a robust alliance with CSE experts, which satisfied both parties — the government could advance a sound reform agenda and the experts could enhance their influence in the sector. If the association between government officials and quality assurance experts had been strong during President Frei's time, the new impetus brought by the officials appointed during President Lagos's tenure made this bond even stronger. A senior government official describes the new setting:

'The four of us — Iván Lavados, María José [Lemaitre], Mariana [Aylwin], and me — achieved a great synergy working together. [President] Lagos approved of our work because he observed that we were moving in the right direction.' (Interview R17)

5.3.4 Academic managers

Higher education's expansion brought greater complexity, new management systems, and a new type of administrator to universities. Different to the past, this new managerial staff based their authority on either their institutional knowledge or their

understanding of ‘the industry’ but not on their academic records. Their contribution was a new emphasis on administrative efficiency in academic processes and a new value hierarchy that would prioritise financial outcomes.

Although their stronghold was reinforced through financial committees and planning units, the new administrative ranks found in quality assurance a close ally. They were not only fluent in the jargon. Internal quality assurance arrangements provided them with an ideal mechanism to advance strategic planning and to set institutional priorities (Bravo 2004, Silva 2006). It also provided a good excuse to compile massive databases and to gain experience in conducting internal and external assessments — both critical resources that assisted them in enhancing their standing within universities.

The formation of institutional analysis offices symbolised the managers’ new status. Often, these units reported directly to rectorial offices. Their frequent interaction with senior officers and with quality assurance agencies made them a critical resource in facilitating the adoption and validation of quality assurance methodologies (Silva, Reich and Gallegos 1997).

Administrators’ interest in supporting new quality assurance arrangements was evident and served their own interests. Assessment exercises advanced their own ways of framing university affairs; provided them with information and analysis to resolve diverse administrative problems; and offered them internal and external validation for their work. Yet, they were selective in using and communicating data and assessment results to push forward their own interests within universities.

5.3.5 Institutional leaders

Depending on their place in the system, university presidents and other higher education leaders supported very different approaches to quality assurance. From full endorsement to total dismissal, their opinions on external assessments varied as widely as the institutional interests at stake.

Inside the traditional sector, introducing course accreditation ranked high — especially among selective institutions. It could offer a way to sort legit courses from rogue and to regain the higher standing of higher education in society. In a context of mounting competition, this form of accreditation would make evident what only insiders knew: which are the best courses and most distinguished faculties. This could

also insulate high quality courses from the burdens of competition and pump additional research funding to them. Not all traditional universities, however, were enthusiastic about course accreditation. A senior officer at the Ministry of Education explains:

'They were in an uncomfortable situation at the time. They had been endorsing external evaluation in higher education mainly because it did not affect them. In fact, it protected them. Later, they had no choice but to support [the new system]. If not, it could expose their approach to external assessment. It was not acceptable to exempt them from the system, considering that they were the group of the best institutions.' (Interview R6)

Because of the growing competition they were facing from autonomous private universities, other leaders in the traditional sector supported the introduction of new external assessments schemes (Geoffroy 2011). Though it could bring about higher administrative costs and substantial bargaining from faculties and departments — whether to enhance their capabilities for submitting to course accreditation or to address incoming observations from external appraisals — leaders in these universities expected to confirm their competitive advantage over the new private sector. Qualifying for additional funding — through MECESUP's competitive fund — was also a factor in providing their support to course accreditation.

Most private universities observed these developments with reticence. Those enjoying recently granted autonomy considered any attempt to limit their action a blatant transgression of their newly acquired legal status as autonomous institutions — in their perception the burdens of licensing were too substantial to accept meekly a new layer of supervision. Their reaction to changes in regulation, however, varied significantly based on the position of their institutions in competition for new students (Interview R7). In a context in which institutional autonomy was no longer a sorting mechanism, elite providers could enhance their reputation among selective institutions both traditional and new. Demand-absorbing providers could have access to student aid funding, which was congenial to their strategy of rapid expansion. Yet, their potential support for a new quality assurance framework depended on the final configuration of the scheme and the trade-off between possible benefits and risks.

Only those niche universities⁵⁸ that were isolated from competition denounced the introduction of a new quality regime. These had a strong reliance on political connections with rightwing parties to protect them against additional interference from the government. A senior administrator in that group of institutions explains:

‘Those were the last vestiges of an ideology fiercely opposed it. “We will not do it, we will not get in” was the motto endorsed by [Universidad Mayor’s rector] Ruben Covarrubias, my own rector, DUOC’s rector — Marcelo von Chrismar — and the people from [Universidad] Finis [Terra]. They were a group of institutions that decided not to join [course accreditation pilots] because the “voluntariness” of the whole process was just an illusion in their view.’ (Interview R15)

Universities had a key resource at their disposal to influence policy. Throughout the 1990s they had been cultivating close ties with both sides of the political world. They often hired prominent politicians in senior academic positions, or appointed them as board members, to advance their vested interests in the political domain (Monckeberg 2007). However, their chances to avoid course accreditation were minimal because they could not resist being dragged into competition.

‘The impact of the first rounds of [course] accreditation in the market was way higher than its legal consequences — at least among private universities. The things universities learnt from it and the [positive] differentiation they experienced in their competition with other institutions were significant.’ (Interview R7)

5.4 Salient new structural conditions

Compared to the implementation of the licensing scheme, the introduction of a new external quality assurance scheme in 1999 was a problematic challenge. The CSE experience showed the government, to some extent, a way to develop an effective regulatory mechanism, yet the plurality of interests in the sector and the rise of policy networks posed greater difficulties for the task.

⁵⁸ For different reasons Universidad Maritima de Chile, Universidad de los Andes, and Universidad Gabriela Mistral avoided any engagement in the accreditation pilots run by CNAP. Their different affiliation — to the armed forces, to a minority religious order, and to the ideological foundations of LOCE, respectively — helped them to ignore competitive pressures and to reinforce their identity.

This section unveils the structural factors that helped to configure this state of affairs. The proponents of the new policy initiative considered them carefully in the design and implementation of course accreditation pilots between 1999 and 2002. These elements pertain to the reconfiguration of power relations in higher education as a result of its expansion as well as to the new dynamics and tensions brought about by the intensification of competition among providers.

5.4.1 The changing topography of influence in higher education

Throughout the 1990s, the balance of power among universities experienced noticeable variations that affected their standing in policy circles. At the beginning of the decade, traditional institutions dominated economic, political and reputational resources to influence government plans. They had trained most academics, delivered all research output and attracted larger enrolments. PAA, a joint admissions system, delivered them the best students — particularly for UCH, PUC and UdeC. It is not surprising that most policy initiatives in the first democratic years focused on them (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). Only a small group of private institutions enjoyed some political sway through the personal connections of their organisers with the parties in the opposition but those links were not overtly evident.

As the decade progressed, and private universities received their autonomy, they inevitably expanded their programs, campuses, and student bodies. With muscular operation, their political and economic influence grew, causing the realignment of higher education's power structure. Though strong reputations remained mostly confined to traditional universities, private institutions cultivated networks across the political spectrum. They often hired politicians to serve in senior positions after they left public office, allowing them to expand their influence over policymakers (Monckeberg 2007). The Ministry of Education frequently consulted with some of them on a range of issues — from student aid, to the design of specific programs, to quality assurance — establishing strong bonds with the administration. A positive perception of their development allowed the government to consider them to be eligible for specific support programs on a competitive basis⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ An example of this kind can be found in the 'Nuevo Milenium' scholarship; another is the Initial Teacher Education program launched in 1997 (Allard 2000).

The growing influence of the new universities was far from homogeneous, though. Larger institutions such as Universidad Diego Portales and Universidad Andres Bello enjoyed leading positions in the sector. Smaller but affluent institutions as UNIACC, Universidad Adolfo Ibañez, and Universidad de los Andes also secured prominent positions in higher education. Other private universities enjoyed a close ideological association with the government⁶⁰. Less visible groups — elite universities such as Universidad del Desarrollo, Universidad Gabriela Mistral, and Universidad Finis Terrae — were also influential among their private counterparts and enjoyed preferential access to media to voice their positioning on reform prospects.

Private institutions created their own venues for discussing policy affairs and defining common strategies and their positioning to protect their own vested interests. Corporación de Universidades Privadas⁶¹ and CONIFOS⁶² would be prominent in advancing the interests of their membership and in engaging in policymaking.

The growing influence of the private universities is correlated with the ascendance of CSE people in quality-related conversations in the sector. Brunner, Lemaitre, and Lavados enjoyed a powerful platform within policy circles. Because of their experience implementing the licensing scheme, their international exposure, and their connections with similar agencies, officials at the Ministry of Education considered their voice essential in advancing any new quality assurance policy. After their experience at CSE, they became the quality assurance experts par excellence. Universities often asked them for advice in establishing their own quality monitoring systems whether in Chile or in other Latin American countries.

Lastly, academic managers developed their own expert networks in quality assurance (Interview R7). Several received training in this area by serving as members of CSE's external assessment committees. Likewise, conferences and workshops facilitated their mutual understanding and cooperation with the agencies' personnel. Because of their close connection to CSE, they could also ask for support in advancing their agenda for introducing course accreditation (ASOFAMECH 1994).

⁶⁰ Universidad ARCIS, Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, Universidad Bolivariana, and Universidad La Republica, in particular (Monckeberg 2007).

⁶¹ <http://www.cupchile.cl>

⁶² <http://www.conifos.cl>

5.4.2 An expanding market

Throughout the 1990s, Chilean higher education experienced a robust expansion in enrolments. Enrolment figures at the system-level jumped from 249,482 to 424,674 between 1990 and 1999⁶³. As shown in Table 5.2, participation grew accordingly in all SES groups.

Table 5.2:
Variation in net participation (18-24 age group) in higher education by socio-economic group, 1990-2000

Quintile	1990	2000
I	4.4%	7.0%
II	7.7%	11.6%
III	12.4%	22.2%
IV	22.0%	31.0%
V	40.7%	52.0%
Total	15.9%	22.0%

Source: National Household Survey [CASEN] 1990, 2000.

In key areas, however, the system experienced little variation. Gender parity increased marginally as participation expanded — female participation rose from 44.77% to 47.02% during the decade — and the regional distribution of enrolments remained fairly constant — the three biggest urban centres (Santiago, Valparaíso, and Concepción) fluctuating very little in their combined share of enrolments: from 76.9% (1990) to 75.1% (1999).

In other aspects, changes were significant. The number of providers dropped from 302 to 250, primarily due to the decline of technical training centres and professional institutes — 44 centres and 16 institutes lost their official recognition over the period. Their share of enrolments, however, did not follow the same pathway: while professional institutes increased matriculation from 40,006 to 74,456, technical training centres reduced their students from 77,774 to 50,821.

This transformation is mainly explained through shifts in student preference. Vocational courses experienced a net contraction in enrolments — from 80,280 to 76,875 — while professional courses expanded greatly — from 154,741 to 334,775. Courses in Civil Engineering, Management & Economics, Law, and Teacher Training

⁶³ All figures included in this section have been taken from official statistics provided by the Ministry of Education. Available at: <http://www.mifuturo.cl/index.php/informacion-del-sies/compendio-historico>

for Secondary School proved to be increasingly popular among students and easy to offer for universities. Combined, they concentrated 58.17% of enrolments of university-exclusive courses and 16.72% of total enrolments in 1990. With some variations in magnitude — the results for 1999 are, in the same order, 51.66% and 19.33% — this trend remained stable through the decade.

Not surprisingly, but in a clear departure from the modest growth of the previous decade, universities experienced solid expansion through the 1990s — enrolment figures climbed from 131,702 to 299,397. Although private universities led this growth — from 19,509 to 92,821 students —, traditional universities also experienced robust expansion in matriculations — from 112,193 to 206,576 — led by regional public institutions that started to imitate competitive tactics displayed by their private counterparts.

Private universities' ascent is related to their ability to provide a range of still prestigious professional courses with low academic entry requirements. Unlike traditional universities, new privates benefited greatly from a large unmet demand for courses in Social Sciences — especially in Law, Economics, and Psychology. They remained prestigious regardless of entry standards due to their upper middle class clientele (Lemaitre 2004).

In addition, these universities were highly flexible in their approaches to academic offerings. Self-defined as demand-driven institutions, student intake was primarily a function of the number of applications received — enrolments fluctuated greatly from year to year in the overall context of an expanding market. To secure revenues they adopted strict budgetary controls at the business unit level. Their academic force was mainly hired on seasonal part-time contracts. Infrastructure and other resources were also obtained on the basis of short-term contracts.

Regionally segmented⁶⁴, private universities were competing fiercely for resources, prestige and students (Brunner et al 2005). Although they had no limitations to set their own fee and expansion policies, private institutions applied a similar repertoire of business strategies (Brunner and Uribe 2007). Larger institutions relied on high volume strategies. Smaller universities, in contrast, applied specialised

⁶⁴ Brunner et al (2005) have identified five different macro-regional markets nation-wide. Although the proliferation of branch campuses since the late 1990s increasingly blurred boundaries, they have suggested that those markets — labeled as North, Coastal, Centre-South, Austral, and Metropolitan in their classification — have their own distinctive features and local hierarchies. A follow-up study has confirmed this analysis (Brunner and Uribe 2007).

niche or basic subsistence strategies guided by their reputation. Sizeable investments in advertising contributed to consolidating the competitive advantage of the biggest private institutions. In a matter of few years, higher education became the third largest consumer sector of advertising and marketing services nationwide (Brunner 2009).

In the background, public investment remained remarkably low in a fast-expanding sector. This was not evident in official figures: excluding research funding, the public subsidy to higher education doubled during the 1990-1999 period — from 124,224 to 262,257 million in constant Chilean pesos. Yet because they started from a very low base after the savage cuts of the 1980s, traditional universities captured the overwhelming majority of this additional funding leaving very little available for the new sector — by 1999 all non-traditional institutions collectively received only 1.39% of the public subsidy to higher education⁶⁵.

5.4.3 The reputation factor

The enthusiastic support numerous universities showed for course accreditation is closely linked to the evolution of the undergraduate education market. Numerous departments were willing to accept external assessments not only because they were thinking that it could mitigate the dark side of competition or secure a basic level of quality in the sector. As a senior academic officer suggests, much of their support came for its potential to reinforce and enhance reputations

'Inevitably, the competitive ethos of Chilean higher education forces you to exhibit some achievements.' (Interview R26)

An external quality assurance scheme could provide universities with the accreditation badge — a decisive distinction to enhance their competitive stance and to protect their operation. In their appreciation, any form of external appraisal could reassure existing perceptions as to quality and, thus, reward traditional institutions' excellence and penalise newcomers' insufficient records. This drive was so

⁶⁵ Over-reliance on private funding and the vigorous growth of the private sector have helped to categorize Chilean higher education as a clear case of high privatisation, only rivalled by Japan and South Korea (Brunner 2009). The steady expansion of the Chilean economy and the national strategy towards a market economy over the decade helps explain why.

compelling that in some disciplinary fields it precipitated the introduction of course accreditation pilots. A former CNAP officer explains

'This happened by external pressure. [Traditional] Medical schools shared the concern of a declining quality in the profession and growing competition from the proliferation of new schools associated with newly autonomous institutions.' (Interview R22)

After an initial exploration of new niches, the expansion of the private sector quickly turned into competition among providers pursuing similar strategies. In the matter of a few years, the pressure for expanding student intake dragged traditional universities into the competitive quest — public universities located in regions far from Santiago proved to be especially vulnerable to the growing stature of the private sector.

Initially, leaders and managers in the traditional sector shared an understanding of course accreditation that was heavily informed by the CSE experience. By sorting viable from unviable providers, CSE implemented an external assessment scheme that rewarded functional private institutions with autonomy. Its reliance on Kells's self-regulation model — which at the time inspired the introduction of accreditation schemes in a number of nations — gave them the impression that any further development in this area would follow a similar pattern.

Traditional institutions, however, rapidly transited from this notion of course accreditation towards a more utilitarian approach. In their appreciation, quality ought to mean excellence — an outstanding performance that only this group of institutions could deliver in the Chilean context, setting them apart from other providers.

A prominent group of autonomous private providers adopted the same approach quickly. Closely associated to the realities of competition in the sector and supported by the leading higher education institutions, these ideas proved to be a significant influence in the impact of the pilots on course accreditation. They also received marked consideration in the drafting of CNAP's proposal. One of its members illustrates the way in which universities responded to the policy scenario:

'I think it was clear at this stage that [course accreditation] was operating and will continue operating in a similar fashion over the next fifty years or so. The smart thing to do, then, was to attempt to discover the rules for sorting out prestige...' (Interview R14)

5.5 Structuring the course accreditation experiment

A true innovation in Chilean higher education policy, the introduction of the new quality assurance scheme followed a distinctive pathway. Instead of designing a system and regulating its implementation by law, the government attempted a bottom-up strategy aiming to engage the sector in a collaborative partnership.

With an obvious focus on securing greater legitimacy for the introduction of a new regulatory framework, a carefully conceived plan was enacted. It covered funding, institutional arrangements and incentives to involve university leaders, administrators, and academics in conducting pilot evaluative experiences effectively.

The government's most critical decision, however, predated all of these policy choices. It pertained to the selection of the people in charge of leading the process. They essentially brought the vision and the leadership resources that would configure this approach to policymaking.

5.5.1 Implementing the new policy agenda

In what was perhaps the boldest step taken to reform higher education according to the 1997 policy agenda, the government secured a \$241.5 million loan from the World Bank in 1998 (Ministerio de Educación 1999). MECESUP⁶⁶ was the instrument chosen to channel this additional funding into the sector. Specifically, it aimed to enhance higher education's efficiency, equity and quality over a five-year period (1999-2004).

The program had three separated components — one of them exclusively devoted to quality assurance — and a coordination unit. The quality assurance objectives included the creation of a higher education public information system, the introduction of course accreditation⁶⁷ for autonomous institutions only, and to review CSE's licensing — henceforth renamed *licensing* to avoid confusion with the new institutional accreditation initiative and to reflect its purpose better (Ministerio de Educación 1999). A senior official at the Ministry of Education explains the motivation for adopting this approach to quality:

⁶⁶ Program for the Improvement of Equity and Quality in Higher Education

⁶⁷ Including vocational, undergraduate, and graduate courses. The first two were allocated under the same institutional umbrella. The latter was entrusted to a different agency.

'... [Course] accreditation seemed to be the only feasible regulatory model for a highly competitive market that was expanding rapidly because it was a very profitable business. It was the only way to reflect differences among institutions and to provide information [to the public].' (Interview R17)

The origin of the quality assurance component in the context of MECESUP is controversial. In the opinion of some, it was an idea that the World Bank asked to include in the program according to its educational strategy and loan priorities (World Bank 1999:50).

According to other observers, it was a requirement that the Chilean government made in the execution of its own policy and endorsed by the recommendations advanced by CSE (Consejo Superior de Educación 1998:37). One MECESUP official elaborates

'... [T]he government was aware of the need for a new [quality assurance] system but it did not have the support to do so. It could pay the full political cost for the implementation of the reform... In its association with the [World] Bank the government seized both a funding opportunity and a chance to share the political cost with an organisation with robust international experience.' (Interview R24)

Finally, a third and more plausible version suggests that this was the result of the interaction of the Bank staff, the CSE people and the officials at the Ministry of Education — all of them sharing the same language and similar visions towards the importance of including quality assurance in higher education policy. With some variations, two CNAP members support this conclusion

'... [T]he council advanced it as a proposal for change, the [World] Bank accepted it, and the government supported it.' (Interview R10)

'... [I]t was the result of a confluence of a technocracy that considered the time was right to take that step and the [World] Bank agreed — though some people resisted it.' (Interview R14)

Different to most MECESUP activities, which were carried out through the coordination unit, the quality assurance component was assumed to work independently. Why? In the observation of an officer of the Ministry of Education

'... [T]he need for introducing radical changes was so immense that you could simply not achieve them within the existing policy infrastructure because it had so many bureaucratic barriers...' (Interview R6)

\$5.3 million — or 2.2% of the World Bank's loan — was earmarked for the implementation of the quality assurance component. The greater independence given to this component was a clear indication of the influence exerted by people selected by the Ministry of Education to lead its execution: José Joaquín Brunner, Iván Lavados, and María José Lemaitre.

Although the original task they were asked to perform was to design a course accreditation scheme through legislation, plans changed rapidly. A CNAP member summarises the reasons behind this decision:

'[We asked the Ministry officials] what we were to include into the legislation. We just did not know. We did not know what universities want. We did not know how they would react to our proposal, either. We simply did not know those things... [We advised them] we could not institutionalise a process that had not commenced — that had never been attempted — into a piece of legislation. Let's start the other way around.' (Interview R10).

Taking advantage from the existing demand from the sector to introduce course accreditation, Brunner, Lavados, and Lemaitre suggested a straightforward strategy.

'Who wants to be accredited? Let's learn with them... We started with courses because it was simpler and put the discussion around quality at the centre of higher education institutions...' (Interview R10)

They decided to create a new independent agency to carry out experimental course accreditation experiences (Ministerio de Educación 1998:28). In close association with different disciplines, a number of pilots could be conducted prior to advancing a comprehensive proposal to introduce the definitive scheme. Brunner,

Lavados and Lemaitre also suggested the structure of the new agency and its operational arrangements, which replicated CSE's.

The Ministry of Education accepted their advice and formed the National Commission for Undergraduate Education Accreditation (CNAP) in February 1999. Different to CSE, the new agency was chartered directly by the Minister without any legislative approval, although in practice it enjoyed the same level of autonomy — it lasted under four different ministers without experiencing any reorganisation (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:38). Brunner and, then, Lavados chaired the board, which included another 12 reputable administrators and academics nominated by them and selected by the Minister (Interview R10). Lemaitre took the Executive Secretary position.

CNAP spent its first two years planning and setting out the conditions to execute its course accreditation pilots (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:38). Capacity building was a priority in this stage. Study tours to American universities were organised to observe self-assessment exercises and the operation of institutional research offices. Additionally, grants were allocated to 25 institutions for implementing institutional research offices. Furthermore, the agency conducted numerous workshops for the people in charge of these offices and hired international experts to support their implementation.

All these initiatives allowed CNAP to create an extensive network at the cores of universities, which was consistent with its strategy for introducing course accreditation (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:35). A CNAP staff member explains:

'[T]he socialisation process aimed at two goals. It wanted to clarify the purpose [of course accreditation] and to offer safeguards on the efficiency and utility of the process through the supply of quality tools and mechanisms to universities.' (Interview R22)

Managers in charge of institutional research offices became key resources to produce the information needed for conducting self-assessment exercises. They played a central role in legitimising course accreditation from within.

The Ministry also decided to create another independent agency for accrediting graduate courses. This additional agency was named National Commission for Graduate Education Accreditation (CONAP). It was a vehicle to

secure the participation of a group of key stakeholders in the formation of the new framework.

The research community was an elusive target. Centralised quality assurance processes had a limited impact on the operation of research groups. They primarily relied on grants from CONICYT⁶⁸ or other external sources. Additionally, they were subject to a very different accountability styles — grant application assessment and budgetary controls were the traditional ways to monitor their activities.

CONAP was created in September 1999. The government appointed 11 prestigious academics to serve on its board. Erick Goles was nominated president. Yet the agency's operation was a responsibility undertaken by the Vice-president, Eduardo Bustos, and the Executive Secretary, Eugenio Spencer. Different to CNAP, the administrative operation of CONAP was a responsibility of CONICYT.

5.5.2 Applying the right engagement strategies

CNAP used the vast implementation experience of its membership in building a portfolio of incentives to convince university leaders and managers to engage in its course accreditation pilots. In particular, three different strategies applied by the agency proved to be highly effective in capturing the attention of higher education.

First, it noted that course accreditation had the potential to be seen as a 'positional device' (Dickhaus 2011:263). In order to maximise the value of its 'quality seal', CNAP signed up the most prestigious schools in the most visible professional fields to be the first to be evaluated. The obvious choice of Medical schools assured a growing demand for course accreditation among other disciplines. Additionally, it recruited more than 200 distinguished deans and professionals to participate in the definition of graduate attributes and assessment criteria (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:33). The careful selection of members for external evaluation teams also contributed towards increasing the perception that accredited status was a very selective club. Soon, every school that had enough prestige to come close to the leading faculties were asking to participate in the pilots in large numbers.

Second, CNAP managed effectively to convey the message that course accreditation would bring additional funding opportunities, a claim few courses could

⁶⁸ CONICYT is an agency in charge of allocating research funding research and graduate student scholarships on a competitive basis.

resist. Accredited programs could enhance their bargaining position internally. To keep their accredited status, they had to implement improvement plans that often demanded additional funding that university presidents were as good as obliged to provide. In parallel, plans to link public funding increasingly to accreditation acted as a powerful incentive for some courses in fields like Education — in particular for private universities seeking to maintain their matriculation levels (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado & Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Posgrado 2002:29).

Lastly, CNAP consistently communicated the high priority given to course accreditation as a key policy objective — a mantra often repeated by Ministry of Education officials as well. Higher education providers assumed that sooner or later it could become a permanent part of the sector’s regulatory landscape. A senior academic administrator describes the option made by one private institution:

‘[We were sure that] this was coming and hence the best thing a large institution that wants to keep growing can do is to demonstrate that it is doing an effective job. So [we said to ourselves], “let’s stop worrying [about course accreditation] and sign in.”’ (Interview R15)

By engaging in CNAP’s workshops and pilots, faculties and schools could learn in advance how to operate effectively in this emerging scenario, boosting their accreditation outcomes in the future. The experimental nature of the pilots also promised a flexible course accreditation process. It was understood that early participation could bring less severe assessments than those expected under standard conditions (Interview R15).

These strategies proved to be highly effective. Initially, the effects of external assessment were drastic. Universities wanted to demonstrate to the agency how serious they were about it. A former rector of a traditional university describes the impact of course accreditation:

‘One course [in my university] in Preschool Education was not accredited. All academics were replaced. I was inclined to suspend admissions and restructure the whole program. However, I did not proceed in that direction because it could convey the wrong message about the actions implemented for its improvement.’ (Interview R26)

5.5.3 Other factors structuring course accreditation

Two additional processes — largely carried out by CNAP — contributed to making the case for introducing new quality assurance arrangements in the sector. From different perspectives, both helped to argue for the centrality of course accreditation within the existing policy infrastructure.

MERCOSUR-Educativo emerged as one of the initiatives attached to the Latin American economic integration agreement known as MERCOSUR (Verger and Hermo 2010). It aimed to ‘promote exchange among member countries’ experiences in the field of education, to ensure comparable quality standards in higher education degrees, and to facilitate employment mobility within the region’ (2010:112). As an associate to MERCOSUR, Chile participated in 2002 in the creation and implementation of the Experimental Accrediting Mechanisms for University Programmes (MEXA) and engaged in the Network of National Quality Assurance Agencies (RANA). The Ministry of Education trusted both tasks to CNAP because they were similar in intent to its own mission. Lemaitre’s experience as president of INQAAHE in 2001 and her vast international network of contacts among quality assurance agencies were also important factors in that decision⁶⁹.

After developing common assessment procedures and criteria⁷⁰, in 2002 CNAP engaged in implementing external assessments for Agronomy courses offered by Chilean universities. Undergraduate programmes in Medicine, Engineering, Architecture, Nursing, and Veterinary Medicine followed from 2005. These experiences played an important role in providing an additional justification for the introduction of a permanent course accreditation scheme that reached beyond the inner functioning of higher education.

5.6 Developing policy through participation

This section unfolds the design, implementation and results of the course accreditation pilots. The different steps followed by CNAP and CONAP to execute

⁶⁹ CNAP soon became a member of INQAAHE and RIACES, the Iberoamerican Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:61).

⁷⁰ A central aspect of MEXA is that the accreditation granted by a national agency is recognised by the others with the aim of ‘fostering the free movement of actors and resources within the educational system, eliminating the obstacles currently in place’ (Verger and Hermo 2010:113).

this agenda yielded effective outcomes. These experiences satisfied most institutions that had gone through external assessments and provided a strong message to the sector with regard to the emerging role of course accreditation in structuring competition among universities. An academic manager summarises the general mood in the sector:

'It is hard to find leading examples of policy development. It started with pilots followed by an assessment of the results and ended with the passing of new regulation. Traditionally, it always starts with regulation.' (Interview R2)

5.6.1 Structuring course accreditation

The Ministry of Education developed a comprehensive proposal for introducing course accreditation assisted by CSE experts (Ministerio de Educación 1998:17). According to the plan the new evaluative scheme could operate on voluntary and cyclical bases. Additionally, it could focus on courses offered by autonomous institutions grouped by disciplinary affinity.

By design, the evaluation process was centred on reviewing how universities examine their own process in order to determine their ability to fulfil assessment criteria and essential graduate attributes. An autonomous institution aspiring to accredit its courses must demonstrate that it possesses internal mechanisms for assuring their own quality and providing data on a set of performance indicators.

MECESUP set two additional conditions for the design of the accreditation scheme: it should cover public and private institutions and involve the wider participation of academics (Ministerio de Educación 1999:8). Whatever the model, it had to follow those essential directions.

CNAP adopted those orientations and worked extensively in developing a template that could reflect both the best international practices and the idiosyncrasies of Chilean higher education.

Accordingly, the assessment process focused on the level of achievement of a set of attributes that students need to develop at the time of graduation (Lemaitre 2004). In addition, courses had to meet assessment criteria that covered a number of

essential academic processes⁷¹. The evaluation system integrated a self-assessment followed by an external evaluation — conducted by a peer review committee including both local and international experts — and then an accreditation decision to be made by the agency. Along with granting accreditation for the course, it also set the timeframe within which the accreditation be conferred⁷².

In an attempt to conciliate this external focus with institutional priorities, CNAP advanced its own definition of quality. It conflated internal and external consistency. Whilst the former pertained to the fulfilment of the institutional mission, the latter involved the satisfaction of the expectations of the particular disciplinary or professional association in relation to a higher education course. CNAP's accreditation assumed that only courses that met this dual notion of quality could be accredited.

Aiming to secure greater legitimacy for the model — and to take advantage of the existing demand for course accreditation among Medical schools and in other disciplines — CNAP decided to appoint committees to designate the learning outcomes attached to the respective discipline or professional course⁷³. It carefully selected distinguished practitioners and deans from influential schools to maximise the authority of the attributes in each disciplinary field.

Based on that experience, the agency later developed generic attributes for other courses. A CNAP member remembers:

'This matrix was developed when we realised that health professionals, agronomists, and architects were all looking at the same aspects, notwithstanding some minor variations.'
(Interview R10)

⁷¹ The criteria covered the following dimensions: academic results (including learning outcomes, curricula, educational outcomes, and community engagement), operational conditions (comprising organizational structure, human resources, teaching and learning effectiveness, and resources and facilities), and self-regulation (containing institutional aims and integrity, and the self-assessment process and its report) (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:56).

⁷² According to CNAP's guidelines, the accredited status was given to a course for a minimum of two and for no more than seven years.

⁷³ By 2006, CNAP had approved graduate attributes advanced by expert committees in the following areas: Accountancy, Agronomy, Architecture, Biochemistry, Dentistry, Engineering, Law, Management, Forestry, Medicine, Medical Technology, Nurse Education, Obstetrics, Pharmacy, Psychology, Public Administration, and Veterinary Medicine (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:35).

Once the graduate attributes were enacted, CNAP prepared guidelines and forms to support the evaluation process. In addition, it provided training for the experts to serve on external assessment panels — both nationally and internationally.

Having prepared the conditions for implementing course accreditation pilots, CNAP adopted a demand-driven approach. It started with professional courses in Medicine. The active involvement of the ASOFAMECH in promoting and advancing course accreditation secured higher participation of Medical schools in the pilots. Additionally, as a CNAP staff member indicates,

'We worked in close association with the deans. They served as a key link between courses and the institutional infrastructure [within universities].' (Interview R 22)

Professional schools responded to CNAP's course accreditation in large numbers. By 2007, the agency had accredited 364 courses — encompassing 16% of higher education enrolments — and rejected the accreditation of another 14 (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:43).

5.6.2 Graduate education accreditation

A relatively small component of the higher education enterprise, graduate education had been isolated from the expansive pressure that was shaping undergraduate education through the 1990s. With an evident academic orientation, expansion prospects seemed unrealistic. The private sector was too busy and young to risk costly investments in this area. Price competition seemed implausible since tuition fees were mainly covered through scholarships granted by CONICYT.

By the end of the decade, however, graduate education was starting to experience growing pains. The proliferation of candidates for doctoral and masters programs was causing mounting pressure for additional scholarships. Soon, autonomous private universities were considering their options to explore this new niche. In a demand-driven sector, it was evident that graduate education's expansion was around the corner.

The government commissioned CONAP to introduce an accreditation scheme for graduate courses. The mission included the design and testing of an external assessment model.

The task was heavily conditioned by the involvement of CONICYT, which had been conducting assessments on doctoral and masters courses for more than a decade in order to decide on their eligibility for its scholarships (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:67).

Because research communities supported CONICYT evaluations, CONAP had little room for innovation. The agency replicated the CONICYT model for doctoral programs. External committees from the respective discipline were appointed to visit and assess courses and to report to CONAP. Depending on assessment results, courses could be accredited for two, four, or six years (González 2003:150).

CONAP only attempted a timid innovation in accrediting masters courses. Although the conventional form of evaluation was available to them, masters could also be chosen to be subject of an alternative procedure. Along with the external evaluation, on their behalf could be submitted a self-assessment report to CONAP to be considered at the time of deciding on accreditation.

In all cases the assessment process targeted academics, scientific productivity, international academic networks, educational effectiveness, and resources. It was available on a voluntary basis for autonomous universities seeking to be eligible for CONICYT scholarships.

The threshold function CONAP performed secured a high demand for accreditation. 66 out of 75 eligible doctoral courses applied for accreditation and only 36 secured their accredited status — 76% of them for just two years, reflecting the higher standards applied (González 2002:150). Accreditation for masters courses followed a similar pattern. Likely due to the limited supply of masters scholarships, the number of courses signed up for accreditation was significantly lower — 93 out of 364 master courses operating nationwide were accredited by the agency.

Some scholars resented CONAP's hardline approach to academic standards. By supporting a notion of quality redolent of the idea of academic excellence, it seemed to seek limited growth in graduate education. Yet CONAP's interpretation of graduate accreditation requirements was widely shared across academic circles — the robust reputation of accredited doctoral programs reassured the higher value attached to this accreditation.

CONAP was slightly less prominent than CNAP. Compared to the latter, its members had little exposure to international quality assurance networks. Its activity was essentially confined to its academic clientele. Yet CONAP's reputation as a

serious agency strongly committed to academic training was well established across research communities. Certainly, it delivered limited innovation compared to what CONICYT did before. The agency, however, provided a stronger and more reliable evaluation infrastructure that allowed rigorous and consistent graduate accreditation decisions — 16 permanent committees across the disciplinary spectrum supported its operation.

5.7 Envisioning a new quality assurance system

CNAP released a comprehensive proposal for introducing a new quality assurance system in August 2002. Although it was part of the responsibilities the government assigned to the agency in 1999, the timing seemed wrong. CNAP was considering how to develop an institutional accreditation model — a later request from the government that had to be included in the proposal. Institutional accreditation pilots were yet to be started.

The government, however, had little choice. It was expecting to complete the steps to enact the new system before the end of President Lagos' tenure in early 2006. Additionally, MECESUP funding for CNAP was expected to end by 2004.

More fundamentally, the drafting of the new quality assurance arrangements was crucial for the introduction of a new student loan system — a popular policy initiative advanced by the government at the time. This could provide wide access to public funding for private universities, helping them to continue expanding their enrolments. It promised expanded educational opportunities, a strategic policy objective of the government.

The Ministry of Education had communicated clearly its intentions to open the new loan system for all types of higher education providers under two conditions, being that they had to be autonomous and had to be accredited under the new quality assurance regulations. The development of this agenda — the most serious and significant attempt to reform higher education regulation since 1990 — made CNAP's proposal a matter of urgency.

In spite of the agency's remarks in relation to its bottom-up approach, the formulation of the proposal required limited involvement from the sector. Many in the sector suspected that it was already being developed before CNAP commenced any pilots, as a senior official at the Ministry of Education describes:

'...in fact, everything was pretty much conceived from the start. More than applying a bottom-up strategy to build a model, the focus was on its exposition. The main issue was to convince the main players in the sector [of its utility] and to avoid resistance, doubts, and fears. Actors would appreciate the positive side of [course and institutional] accreditation rather than concentrating on its negative aspects.' (Interview R6)

The proposal the Ministry of Education prepared for introducing course accreditation reveals that the main choices for the new evaluative scheme were made long before the pilots started, including the purposes of course accreditation, the evaluative focus, the provision of information to the public, the function of assessment criteria, and the procedures for accreditation (see Ministerio de Educación 1998). Similarly, Dickhaus has suggested that course accreditation pilots were conceived of as a 'forum avoidance' strategy — their aim was to create '... a new status quo, which was difficult to question after QA policies had been implemented' (2010:262). Considering the vast political experience of CNAP people, it is probable that one explicit prerogative (participation) and one implicit (forum avoidance) were at the core of experimental course accreditation simultaneously.

After the successful conclusion of the first cycle of course accreditation, the report was ready to be presented. CNAP enjoyed a strong reputation in the sector, which was pivotal in legitimising the proposal. The additional endorsement of CONAP secured an extra academic legitimacy to the new quality assurance scheme. The scant opposition that the proposal faced at the time can be interpreted as a result of that legitimacy.

In the appreciation of CNAP, its legitimacy came from three primary sources (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:33). First, the voluntary approach applied to the pilots allowed institutions that freely committed to their improvement to participate in external assessments. This common focus on improvement facilitated collaboration between universities and the agency.

Additionally, the process stressed and acknowledged institutional self-determination as a core element of the evaluation experience. It provided a sense of ownership and responsibility among participant institutions that influenced their appreciation of course accreditation's function. Lastly, academics assumed a leading role in self-assessment processes, combining as a fundamental driver for increasing

quality across academic departments. They spread the word in regard to the benefits of accreditation among their peers, expanding the support base for the new system and for the agency in charge of it.

CNAP's proposal introduced a comprehensive framework to assure the quality of Chilean higher education through a combination of control and enhancement mechanisms (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado and Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Postgrado 2002:6-7). Not surprisingly, it called for establishing permanent arrangements to undertake course and institutional accreditation. Likewise it asked for continuing CSE's licensing.

The main policy innovations that CNAP advanced pertained to the creation of a comprehensive public information system for higher education⁷⁴ and to the introduction of professional habilitation. The latter was an evaluation of all individual graduates aiming to practise in a given professional field in order to determine if he or she possess the set of skills required for the profession⁷⁵. Because of the limited discussion of this form of external evaluation, the proposal merely indicated the need for launching an enquiry on that subject.

A new agency — with a similar organisational structure to CNAP — was endorsed to conduct institutional and graduate course accreditation. This agency would also be in charge of supervising the operation of the private agencies to which undergraduate course accreditation was entrusted. A CNAP member describes the reasons for this decision:

'I was supporting the idea of using private agencies for two reasons. One was practical. It was extremely difficult to consolidate a functional system in a reasonable timeframe with this vast demand — as has been the case ever since the introduction of [course] accreditation. Additionally, from an ideological perspective, it was interesting to attempt some decentralisation in the system.' (Interview R14)

Bernasconi has criticised the regulation that emerged from this proposal because it '... reflects a compromise between highly divergent philosophies of

⁷⁴ The public information system proposed would cover three essential dimensions: the identification of a core set of variables on which all higher education institutions have to report, the data reporting mechanisms to be used, and a unit responsible for collecting, analysing and making public the available data.

⁷⁵ According to CNAP, this form of evaluation was needed because of the globalisation of professional activities and the growing number of free trade agreements Chile had adopted with other nations.

regulation' (2007:18). In his observation, the idea of establishing a national, public, and specialised agency (promoted by the government) was in direct confrontation with the prospects of a market of private agencies (supported by the right-wing opposition) — both were included in the final version of the legislation. He does not acknowledge, however, that the solution he opposed was already advanced in CNAP and CONAP's proposal and reflected the ideological preferences of their membership and the government.

Additionally, CSE could continue licensing new private providers and the Ministry of Education could operate the new public information system. A coordinatory aegis — in which the public agencies and units in charge of operating the new system could be represented — was also proposed to synchronise their activities.

With the exception of masters and doctoral programs, all accreditation procedures could use a similar evaluative template to CNAP's, including: a self-assessment, an external assessment, and an accreditation decision based on the criteria approved by the agency. Due to field specificity, professional habilitation and licensing could follow their own assessment procedures.

A pivotal element in drafting the proposal was a thorough review of the quality assurance arrangements existing in Argentina, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, the UK, and the US (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado and Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Postgrado 2002:15-17). Two general conclusions came out of this study. Firstly, CNAP endorsed the idea of retaining a definition of quality as being the internal and external consistency it applied to course accreditation. Now it could be applied to all forms of accreditation. Secondly, the proposal supported the notion of linking funding and institutional accreditation but not the allocation of funding responsibilities to the new agency.

...

Once the proposal was formally delivered to the Minister, the policy formation function of CNAP and CONAP was concluded. They would continue operating in the following years as a de facto accreditation system. CNAP could also attempt to implement its institutional accreditation model through a new set of pilots.

The main function of both agencies was to prepare the sector for the implementation of the new quality assurance framework and to support the government in advancing the proposed legislation. It could also provide evidence to policymakers about the critical function that course and institutional accreditations were performing for the sector. Likewise, it could demonstrate the active engagement of universities in its operation.

Universities could use accreditation results to boost their reputation or for securing their access to additional funding. An emerging pecking order in the sector was drawn from course accreditation results. Longer accreditation terms were understood as ensuring greater quality. These new perceptions had an important impact on institutional positioning strategies and on advertising⁷⁶.

In contrast, those institutions or courses that failed in their attempt to be accredited faced severe consequences. They experienced greater public scrutiny and mounting pressure on their senior administration to introduce effective short-term changes.

The sound implementations of course accreditation pilots brought legitimacy to the new quality assurance agenda in the sector. The robust support it gained among prestigious deans and rectors, however, obscured the fact that key players in higher education heavily resisted the new policy plan. Potential negotiations were neither anticipated nor intended. Alternative policy scenarios or solutions were simply not laid out.

Additionally, the accreditation model proved to be highly functional for well-established courses in traditional universities and elite new private institutions — criteria and evaluative procedures led to consistent accreditation decisions that targeted clear areas for improvement.

This was not, however, the main purpose of course accreditation. Quality concerns that justified the new agenda originated in the accelerated course expansion led by autonomous private universities and from small public universities located in distant regions. For them, the message was clear — accreditation was not an option. Whether the motivation behind the CONAP/CNAP proposal was to force them to close down or to adjust to the new policy, they had little incentive to engage directly in the new evaluative culture.

⁷⁶ The pressure for applying accreditation-related information in advertising during the enrolment season was so strong that CNAP was forced to regulate it in very specific terms.

This chapter has summarised the initial steps taken to advance a comprehensive quality assurance scheme for higher education via course accreditation pilots. Tighter competition among universities — simultaneously caused by decreasing institutional differentiation and greater enrolment expansion — provided the perfect context for mainstreaming accreditation. An alliance between the government, quality assurance experts and university managers facilitated the introduction and the smooth institutionalisation of course accreditation. This alliance succeeded because it was able to serve well the interest of all parties involved. This delicate balance was primarily the result of the skilful manipulation of structural properties by quality assurance experts: they were able to capture and interpret growing stringency in a timely manner. Yet for all their policy savvy, they missed a subtle shift in the correlation of forces among policy actors that proved to have a decisive influence in shaping the outcomes of quality assurance, as the next chapter explains.

Chapter 6:
The uncertain future of quality assurance
(2003-2009)

6.1 Introduction

The third and last phase of the quality assurance evolution focuses on the vicissitudes of establishing a permanent sector-wide scheme — from 2003 to 2009. The chapter reflects the complexities attached to the enactment of a new system through legislation and uncovers the array of factors influencing its implementation. Likewise, it documents the accreditation scheme's ultimate failure to deliver greater accountability and higher quality for Chilean higher education.

Incremental variations in structural properties caused a rapid reconfiguration of the context in which sociological agency operated. Previously compatible agendas shifted, causing the end of consensus regarding the direction of quality assurance policy. Empowered higher education managers took a leading role in guiding the future of institutional accreditation and in controlling the implementation of CNA. They effectively manipulated structural properties in a direction that was functional to their interests in the short-term. Trapped by their own policy design, CNAP experts lost their policy prominence: the centrality they envisioned for their accreditation model worked against them and contributed to the ultimate failure of the new quality assurance scheme. These sudden variations in agency left the government unable to react, and caused a major disruption in higher education policy that remains impactful to this day.

In particular, the chapter pays close attention to growing pressure from the sector on the government to develop a new student-loan program — a central part of the agenda to create the conditions for another wave of enrolment expansion. The prospects of universal access were coupled with a growing market. In an increasingly corporate environment, universities would engage fiercely in competition to enhance their standing in the sector.

Higher education's close linkages to the political system did not preclude the government conditioning universities' access to student aid through institutional accreditation. The final configuration of the scheme, though, was the result of political compromise. The agenda pushed by the epistemic community in quality

assurance also played a key role in configuring and legitimating the new accreditation scheme.

Over the years, quality assurance agencies have played a critical role in both moderating and amplifying competitive behaviour among universities. However, as course and institutional accreditation gained prominence in regulating higher education, vested interests in the sector could not be stopped from gaining decisive influence over the National Commission on Accreditation (CNA), which was created in 2006 with the mission of conducting institutional accreditation and supervising private agencies for course accreditation on a permanent basis. As the independence of the new agency was compromised, the prospects of technically sound solutions to address quality concerns in higher education through course and institutional accreditation dimmed — leaving policymakers with few solutions at their disposal to moderate the effects of the markets in regulating the sector.

The chapter is organised into six sections. This introduction is followed by the presentation of the circumstances that facilitated universities' participation in institutional accreditation pilots started in 2003. The cast of policy players that contributed towards shaping policy formation — including their interests and agendas — are later introduced. The following section unveils the structural factors at play in advancing the new quality assurance framework.

Later, the policy formation process is analysed through two stages: the introduction of institutional accreditation pilots and the legislative process that led to the enactment of the new Quality Assurance Act in 2006 — the first major reform of higher education regulation after 15 years of regulatory stability. In the last section, the flawed implementation of the accreditation agency — the central piece of the new legislation — is analysed. Voices from the sector became especially prominent in the review of these recent developments that have been barely covered in the literature. The lack of available policy alternatives to the current accreditation scheme leaves the end of the chapter with a strong feeling of a closing policy cycle for Chilean higher education.

6.2 The origins of institutional accreditation

By all standards, course accreditation pilots were an important achievement. By the time its proposal for establishing a comprehensive quality assurance scheme was

delivered, CNAP has already completed the first round of accreditation that included professional courses in Medicine and Architecture (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado and Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Postgrado 2002). The selection of these disciplines was a product of careful consideration — CNAP was targeting elite undergraduate courses in selective universities with the aim of maximising the reputational value of accreditation.

Accredited courses in traditional universities could differentiate themselves from competitors. Under standard conditions they would probably not need accreditation to establish their own standing in the sector. However, in the changing environment at the turn of the century, the accelerated expansion of the sector and the rise of the new private universities were putting pressure on them to fortify their positions. As planned, this association with highly selective programs contributed to enhancing accreditation's desirability.

Accreditation transited from being a nice attribute to becoming a must in a relatively short period of time. Courses in direct competition to the accredited ones could not afford *not* to gain accredited status if they wanted to keep up with market dynamics. In just one year, 143 courses were signed up for accreditation and were performing self-assessment reviews to submit to CNAP (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado and Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Postgrado 2002:21).

Although promising, the level of progress the pilots exhibited by 2003 was insufficient for senior officials at the Ministry of Education. They had been heavily involved in creating the material conditions for accreditation to work and in reassuring the usefulness and fairness of its operation within the sector. They were satisfied with the ways in which accreditation had become a prominent element in university planning — deans and heads of department found in external assessment a strong reason to attract additional funding to strengthen the quality of their courses. Enhancement plans proliferated everywhere. Yet these developments were insufficient to assist them in advancing the government's policy agenda. A senior official at the Ministry during that time recalls

I said to María José [Lemaitre]: we need institutional accreditation, not just course accreditation. If you solely continue with programs it will take us thousands of years... [S]he replied to me: institutional accreditation does not fully exist yet, course accreditation has

much more experience to rely on. Nevertheless, we started to work together with that goal in mind.’ (Interview R17)

The Ministry of Education was considering using accreditation pilots — both at course and institutional levels — to support the introduction of two key pieces of legislation: a new student-aid system and a comprehensive quality assurance regime. These initiatives were carefully considered — they were the first major reforms to higher education regulation to be presented to the national parliament since the introduction of LOCE in 1990.

This agenda gained momentum due to a confluence of factors. All of them are tightly coupled to the increased centrality of competition in coordinating higher education and pertain to the search for distinction among universities, the changes in university governance, and the growing expectation in the sector for additional regulation to cancel out market dynamics.

6.2.1 The thirst for institutional distinction

As course accreditation was already demonstrating, external assessments had some potential for enhancing market competition. Accredited programs were able to claim superior quality, which was externally certified according to existing standards. Advertising exploited this attribute extensively⁷⁷.

Having few courses accredited, however, only benefited universities marginally. That condition could not contribute to increasing the standing of all courses. Additionally, linking accredited courses and the quality of the whole institution seemed unrealistic especially for large and highly diversified universities. Accrediting all courses would take too long and could demand vast resources and important risks — some programs might have failed accreditation, putting the entire strategy at risk.

If in the past the mere claim of being a university was enough to reach a clientele, mounting competition in the sector was making it increasingly inadequate. For some time, their autonomous status served private universities to distinguish themselves from other competitors under licensing. As more and more universities

⁷⁷ Due to the intense use of accredited status in advertising, CNAP and then CNA were forced to regulate the set of basic conditions for communicating this situation to the public.

secured the same status by the early 2000s, the positional value of autonomy declined. Private autonomous universities engaged in direct competition had little distinctiveness to offer prospective students.

Greater differentiation turned out to be an important priority for universities — strong enough to force them to attempt all available ways of distinguishing themselves from competitors. By 2005, higher education as a sector was the third largest investor in advertising, only surpassed by retail and the communication industry (Brunner 2009:129).

Institutional accreditation contributed to this scenario. Once they were certain of the possibility of accreditation, universities sought to be accredited. Yet they wanted a scheme able to maximise their standing by giving them the chance to be assessed in their areas of strength. Timing was also a factor. Universities were seeking to be accredited before competitors to benefit fully from this status badge. A former official from the Ministry of Education elaborates:

'If the higher education market could not value accreditation, it could not last longer [than the pilots]. But it established "accredited" as a synonym for being a serious institution. And some institutions were in need of it.' (Interview R17)

Some universities were more prompt than others in signing on for institutional accreditation. Prestigious institutions were obviously in a better position to engage in external assessment. Regardless of any flaws they may have, it was not conceivable they could fail accreditation. Although highly motivated, other universities awaited the results of their leading counterparts — they could not afford to fail external evaluation because of its reputational consequences.

Some observers think that traditional universities were pushing for institutional assessments as a way to make evident their position in front of the group of new private universities. A rector of a private university remembers:

'The traditional world was looking for someone to tell the public that they were different from the new private universities.' (R11)

Others thought they had no choice. A former staff member at CSE recalls

'I think traditional universities supported the new system because they always supported licensing and external evaluation. None of that affected them — quite the contrary, these schemes protected them from competition. If they did not support the new accreditation scheme, they could be exposed to criticism due their lack of consistency. It was also evident that they could achieve the highest results in the external evaluations because of the perception they were the best universities in the nation. They had no excuses for not supporting the new system.' (Interview R6)

Whatever the case, universities perceived the risks of not doing anything to improve their competitive stance and signed on for accreditation in massive numbers.

6.2.2 *The new university governance*

Since the 1980s reforms, Chilean universities had been struggling to adjust their governance structures to a new competitive environment. From the start, private universities applied a strict top/down approach to management. This seemed appropriate for leading small organisations in which academic staff were mainly part-time. Public universities, in contrast, were attempting to conciliate academic participation and strong executive powers while avoiding co-governance — LOCE explicitly banned elected appointments and student participation in university governance.

With the exception of Universidad Católica de Chile and a few other institutions, university administration was largely amateur (Bernasconi 2005:253). Often senior executive officials had divergent understandings of the university enterprise. Limited data was collected and analysed. By mid 1990s, strategic planning was not considered a priority for running an effective university. A senior officer at the Ministry of Education recalls:

'By 1998 universities had no strategic development plans. Universidad de Chile had no strategic planning at all. Strategic plans with indicators attached simply did not exist! Universities had few basic orientations — mainly in the heads of their rectors or entrenched into the organisational cultures.' (Interview R11)

The sustained expansion of the sector and its growing complexity helped to change this situation rapidly. A group of private universities realised that

undergraduate education was a lucrative business and took action to secure the transfer of profit to organisers. Though LOCE forbade profit distribution, it was a standard practice among new private universities — they effected wealth transfer through different legal instruments (Mönckeberg 2007:11).

By 2000, private universities started to be sold. Local and international investment groups were captivated by the significant business potential of higher education. New administrations brought in professional personnel with the purpose of increasing internal efficiency. New managerial methodologies and structures were implemented. Institutions that remained under the control of the original owners implemented similar systems gradually in order to continue to be competitive.

The government used MECESUP to invest heavily in enhancing administrative systems in traditional universities. In particular, the competitive fund mobilised vast resources⁷⁸ at the faculty and department levels to improve performance in several dimensions, including administration. This would continue in the years to come with even more sophisticated arrangements to update university management through MECESUP 2.

The new university governance did not have internal implications only. Universities were fully aware of their need to attract external support. Often private universities had long forged connections with the political parties in the opposition. A group of them were organised by former officials that served during Pinochet's regime. Others had closer ideological affinities with them and with the industrial sector. Over the years few managed to penetrate into the ruling coalition — leading figures from the Christian Democratic Party and the Party for Democracy were recruited to serve executive and board positions in leading private universities (Mönckeberg 2007:13).

With the prominent exception of Universidad Católica de Chile, their traditional counterparts did not achieve a similar success in courting the political system. CRUCH provided them with sufficient support and policy infrastructure to protect their interests within the state apparatus. Private institutions, in contrast, did not feel the pressure to establish an association to push their collective interests⁷⁹. Instead, each university used its own networks to advance its interests.

⁷⁸ 227.4 US million, or 94.2%, of the loan provided by the World Bank to the Chilean government to implement MECESUP between 1999 and 2003 (Ministerio de Educación 1999).

⁷⁹ An association of private universities was created for that purpose but failed to recruit the most prestigious institutions.

6.2.3 An expectation for additional regulation

Brunner et al. (2005:125-133) have suggested that Chilean higher education is exceptional in a comparative perspective because it is mainly coordinated through the market. This is possible because the system exhibits a higher level of privatisation. Universities are autonomous from the government and set tuition fees, courses, and enrolments freely. They operate with a flexible structure and outsource support services. No standards for academic provision apply to them.

Heavily entrenched in the sector's functioning, competition was rapidly transforming universities' operations to the point of becoming a matter of concern among universities by the turn of the new century. In particular, public universities perceived that they were drawn into a tighter competition for new students with uncertain prospects.

This competition was (and still is) heavily segmented by prestige, geographical location, enrolment size, selectivity, and institutional complexity—it has been more intense among universities with similar status, closely located, and targeting the same student populations (Brunner and Uribe 2007:271). Yet competition has infiltrated all corners of higher education.

Applying 'volume strategies', non-selective providers increased their participation through undergraduate enrolments' booming from 37% to 55% between 1999 and 2005 (Brunner and Uribe 2007:217). In part, this was a consequence of the proliferation of autonomous private universities. After completing licensing they seriously engaged in competition to pursue students everywhere (Lemaitre 2004:92).

Probably because of the lack of effective self-regulatory mechanisms, leaders in the sector were calling for additional regulation as a necessary condition for the operation of higher education. They were not endorsing any specific solution, though. Consciously, they were open to discuss policies without compromising any result that could undermine their own universities. One academic leader in the private sector explains:

'The idea of re-addressing the quality issue in higher education started to gain new ground.'
(Interview R2)

The idea of an inescapable expansion of regulation to answer the quality problem gained momentum. Once the government advanced its proposal for introducing institutional accreditation, a group of universities supported the idea immediately. Few competed behind the scenes for influencing the discussion of the initiative. A senior administrator describes the dominant mood in the sector:

'Sooner or later new regulatory mechanisms for controlling the supply side will be introduced... Then, it is better to adapt fast to the new scenario and sign in before it becomes mandatory.' (Interview R7)

6.3 Policy players

The transition from the first to the second stanza of the quality assurance saga — described in Chapters 4 and 5 — have shown the expansion of the cast of policy players in this domain. The third stage of this policy evolution only confirms this pattern.

The exponential growth in the number of actors is obviously correlated to the incremental expansion of quality assurance. The wider its reach, the larger the group of players involved in its formation and implementation. Similarly, external evaluation gained in prominence within the policy landscape as opportunities for discussing it multiplied — from the government to Congress, from funding organisations to quality assurance agencies.

Actors can be grouped into different categories. Yet it is important to keep in mind that they tended to avoid collective action across institutional lines. Although this applies to all actors to some extent, it is especially true for universities. Often senior administrators relied on their own political/religious/family connexions to influence policy. They joined forces with other universities through existing associations or networks in the sector but mostly on an occasional basis.

Different to the previous phases of this evolution, here policymaking includes the participation of legislators in altering the cartography according to which quality assurance policy had previously navigated. Proponents pulled the new policy through additional stages in this phase. Yet the elitist nature of policymaking in Chile suggests that negotiation and compromise happen behind closed doors and involve

unpredictable ensembles of actors and intermediaries, as the processes analysed in the third part of this policy evolution suggest.

The leading role adopted by CNAP in introducing course accreditation now was insufficient for pursuing the more ambitious agenda linked to institutional accreditation. The Ministry of Education became a key player in facilitating CNAP's new pilots and in pushing the proposal for a new quality assurance scheme through the legislative process — the Ministry's officials engaged in several rounds of negotiations and forged alliances with politicians and higher education leaders.

6.3.1 The government

A new cohort of senior officials arrived at the Ministry of Education when President Lagos took office in 2000. Although they were not involved in the formation of the 1997 policy, they faced the challenge of continuing with its implementation. They had a different background to their predecessors. Their expertise was not in higher education policy or management but in political manoeuvring — in particular, Pilar Armanet (the new head of the Higher Education Division) had strong connections across the political system.

Armanet was not alone. She reported directly to Minister Aylwin — appointed in 2000 — and to President Lagos. Sergio Bitar, a former senator, would later replace Aylwin in 2003. He closely worked with Armanet in securing the legislative approval of the new quality assurance framework. She also forged closed ties with the group that was leading CNAP.

The new officials' task was shaped by three convergent agendas. First, they had to conform to the World Bank approach for reforming higher education that was incorporated into the MECESUP program (see section 5.3.2). Thus, the new officials would have to continue the implementation of the different initiatives attached to the program, including the introduction of accreditation at institutional and course levels. Likewise, they had to apply the same set of ideas (i.e. knowledge society) it brought to justify the growing importance of higher education.

Additionally, they had to follow the New Public Management (NPM) principles that informed the government's plans for reforming the state apparatus (Hood 1991). Implemented in 2000, the 'Project of Reform and Modernization of the State' aimed to bring greater decentralisation, efficiency, flexibility, and transparency

to public management (Pliscoff 2009:83). As the leading agency pushing for this agenda, the Ministry of Finance wanted to make sure that the creation of any new public agency would conform to these ideals.

Finally, the new officials had to secure the support of the epistemic community in higher education policy. Influential experts that served in CSE were now participating in CNAP and CONAP. They had advanced two proposals for adjusting the legal framework for external quality assurance, laying out the essential concepts and the institutional infrastructure needed for their implementation (Consejo Superior de Educación 1998, Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado and Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Postgrado 2002).

The new personnel swiftly adapted to this environment. They had a clear ideological affinity with the ongoing higher education reform and redoubled commitment to its course. They were enthusiastic in adopting and legitimising its rhetoric. One official appointed by Lagos recalls her selection:

'[T]hey hired me because they were fully aware of my political credentials and my ideological views. And I have always been a person closely attached to Mr Lagos but a huge liberal too.' (Interview R17)

The appointment of these officials had two significant effects. It expedited the pace of the reform process and, due to their political background, they had greater clarity than their predecessors with regard to how to orchestrate the implementation of this agenda. The implicit goal was to complete the whole reform by the end of Lagos's tenure in 2006.

Additionally, the new officials narrowed down the number of objectives to be pursued by condensing the general policy orientations of 1997 into a handful of initiatives. With MECESUP already operational, two legislative changes were the main focus of government officialdom: one pertained to the new student aid system and the other to the formalisation of the emerging quality assurance scheme (Interviews R17, R25).

The power to define the pathway ahead for prospective regulation was in the hands of the Ministry of Education. Senior officials could not only draft the regulation but also led the negotiations in Congress to secure its approval, and directed its implementation.

Their approach was essentially pragmatic. Instead of attempting to review the existing framework, they focused on introducing new provisions. According to a prominent politician, this was not an innovation but the main reforming strategy applied by the political coalition in power

'As often happened during the [centre-left] Concertación's governments, they avoided targeting structural issues with reform — such as the requirements for creating or closing down institutions. Instead, they wanted to create an additional system for monitoring quality in higher education.' (Interview R23)

Yet diverging from previous stages of the quality assurance saga, the government did not maintain a coherent agenda for higher education policy over the years covered in this phase. The transition from Lagos to President Bachelet in 2006 brought a new generation of government officials to the Ministry of Education that had little in common with the experienced politicians who had succeeded in pushing the proposed legislation through the legislature. After a failed attempt with Mr Zilic — he lasted in his ministerial job for three months — President Bachelet appointed Yasna Provoste as Minister of Education in 2006. Neither she nor Julio Castro (the official appointed as the new head of the Higher Education Division after Armanet) had experience in working with the Congress. They had no original ideas for development of the sector and their networks did not provide them with expert advice on higher education.

Basically, Minister Provoste and Castro inherited a legislative agenda but did not receive any guidance so far as what to do next: Bachellet led the first government that did not have a policy agenda of its own for higher education apart for continuing with Lagos's program (Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia 2005). Eventually, they would succeed in concluding the legislative process for the new quality assurance legislation but would confront important challenges during its implementation that were to have an immense impact in shaping the new scheme.

6.3.2 Congress

Regardless of the interest of the government in advancing its agenda for higher education, people in the legislature were not enthusiastic about the prospects of new

quality assurance regulation. Ideological and political reasons contribute to explaining their positioning.

Some members of Congress were convinced that this initiative had little traction in moderating the impact of market forces, while others were afraid of its potential to distort the operation of the market within higher education. Additionally, quality assurance seemed too vague and abstract to attract professional politicians' attention. A former CNAP staff member explains

'Because this [quality assurance] system had little visibility from a political perspective, members of Congress had little idea of its existence and of the operation of CNAP and CSE. More importantly, they did not have much clarity as to its significance.' (Interview R22)

A member of Congress closely involved in the political manoeuvring of the quality assurance initiative ratifies this perception. Attempts to increase public awareness in relation to the proposed legislation produced scant effect, as this official explains:

'We conducted several activities to engage the press with this proposal and to raise the awareness of its direction through the legislative process. The reaction of the media was minimal. Nobody was truly engaged with the initiative. It made no headway into the public affairs agenda.' (Interview R23)

Some members of the ruling coalition had a critical view of the reform strategy implemented by the government since the reinstalment of democracy. Instead of addressing the structural issues that higher education was facing, the government created parallel schemes to deal with specific issues (Interview R25). Furthermore, they perceived that they had no room for influencing its content. Another member of Congress explains:

'[I]t was the product of a debate and an agreement that happened prior to the introduction of the proposed legislation.' (Interview R21)

The initiative faced the rejection of the parties in opposition. Their negative view upon the proposed legislation was not exclusively grounded in ideology. They

were subject to intense lobbying from a group of universities that perceived it as a growing threat to their development. An elected official describes it thus:

'Once the proposed legislation was presented, impressive lobbying from private universities and professional institutes started... [T]hey were claiming it was ideological persecution against universities, an overt violation of their autonomy.' (Interview R23)

The lobbying of the sector even managed to penetrate into the parties in power. A senior official from the Ministry of Education explains:

'Senators Viera-Gallo and Nuñez presented a joint motion to modify all the content of the proposed legislation. I asked José Antonio [Viera-Gallo]: have you done this? He replied to me: No, I received it from Universidad de Concepción. So, Universidad de Concepción joined forces with its private counterparts in that city and submitted its own ideas about accreditation to the Senator of their region.' (Interview R17)

Neither the ideological objection nor the protection of vested interests in the sector helped legislators form their own judgement about this initiative. The little conviction they had explains why negotiations took so long. A member of Congress elaborates:

'Normally, when convictions are not so strong, the debate is not well structured... Nobody had an alternative to offer, and that had an enormous influence upon the discussion of the proposed legislation.' (Interview R21)

A small group of legislators in both chambers played a crucial function in negotiating this initiative throughout the legislative process (Interviews R17 and R23). On the ruling coalition side, Representative Carolina Toha (from the Party for Democracy), Representative Carlos Montes (from the Socialist Party) and Senator Mariano Ruiz-Esquide (from the Christian Democrat Party) played a pivotal role in monitoring and supporting the government. From the side of the opposition, Representative German Becker (from the National Renewal Party) and Senator Evelyn Matthei (from the Independent Democratic Party) engaged in direct conversations with the government to reach an agreement in regard to the proposed legislation. However, they did not represent all positions among centre-right

legislators. Those who fiercely opposed this initiative found in José Kast (also from the Independent Democratic Party) an eloquent champion to defend their cause.

6.3.3 Universities

Prospects for institutional accreditation quickly captured the attention of higher education leaders by early 2003. Aware of potential consequences for competition and institutional autonomy, universities positioned themselves supporting or opposing government plans for introducing accreditation pilots under CNAP. Their involvement in Congressional discussion for establishing a new quality assurance framework essentially followed the same pattern.

Several factors influenced their approach to this policy innovation. Universities affiliated to CRUCH expected to distinguish themselves from private institutions in terms of their superior academic quality and greater institutional complexity. Leading research institutions like UCH and PUC thought they could contribute to the implementation of accreditation by setting the standard for evaluating other institutions (Interview R2). Public universities could use accreditation to ask the government for additional funding — they had yet to develop the internal infrastructure required for conducting institutional accreditation’s self-assessment phase and to address suggestions for improvement that they had received from the agency.

A group of private universities could use their privileged access to politicians in the opposition to block any potential restriction to their autonomy. Their lobbying power was used intensively to overcome any attempt at passing this legislation without their consent, hence forcing the government to engage in endless negotiations with diverse Congressional groups. Some institutions could negotiate with CNAP or with the government to set the conditions available to them for admittance into the institutional accreditation pilots. Associations of less influential institutions could avoid any engagement due to the potentially damaging effects of accreditation on their members.

Because they could wear more than one hat, universities did not need to be consistent in the way they approached accreditation in different scenarios. Universidad Andrés Bello, for example, was one of the first actors in the sector to sign on for CNAP’s institutional accreditation pilots. Yet this situation did not prevent

it from opposing key features of the quality assurance framework under the consideration of Congress.

Opposing all prospects of accreditation also had important consequences. Several private institutions refused to participate in the institutional accreditation pilots and opposed the new legislation. Their hostility, however, clashed against their expectation of being eligible for receiving student aid from the government, which was conditional upon institutional accreditation.

A member of Congress closely involved in the negotiations of the quality assurance framework describes the positioning of leading universities:

'There were three or four traditional universities that were quite happy about this... [S]maller or more precarious traditional institutions were really afraid — they were lobbying us intensively. All the rest were scared to death...' (Interview R23)

6.3.4 CNAP experts

CNAP experts — José Joaquín Brunner, Iván Lavados, and María José Lemaitre in particular — played an important role in configuring the new institutional accreditation scheme. They led the design and the implementation of the institutional accreditation pilots that helped to legitimise this form of external assessment. They applied similar participative strategies to course accreditation pilots.

However, they did not have vast experience in institutional accreditation — the proposal for a comprehensive quality assurance scheme included insufficient direction for starting pilots (see Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado and Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Postgrado 2002:33-35). Basically, they had to negotiate the rules for the pilots with the universities and the government.

During the legislative process their influence shrank significantly. Their political connexions were also insufficient for leading the negotiations in Congress. Mostly, CNAP experts operated as consultants to the Ministry of Education. They taught the language to the officials in the Ministry and guided some decisions early on through the legislative processes. As the representatives of the Ministry gained in empowerment and the negotiations around the proposal became more political in nature, the role of the experts became in some ways redundant.

Furthermore, their lack of influence among the rightwing parties — mainly because of their identification with the ruling political coalition — and their limited involvement in the interest networks that proliferated across the sector throughout the 1990s would dull their ability to make a contribution to securing a rapid passage for the new regulatory framework.

However, CNAP experts' policy influence was not reduced to zero. They could still support the government with the proposed legislation on request. Their capacity to introduce quality-related issues onto the agenda was also not diminished as their report on branch campuses illustrates.

After an external evaluation of its activities conducted by INQAAHE, CNAP concluded its activities in April 2007. The board of the agency, and in particular Lemaitre, were acknowledged for their contribution to higher education. The government paid tribute to their innovation in policymaking as they opened the door for greater participation and experimentation in producing new policies.

6.4 Structural factors at play

The introduction of a new framework for quality assurance — mediated by institutional accreditation pilots — occurred in a period of many contradictions. The public financial contribution to higher education multiplied but it did not prevent the escalation of market competition. Enrolments expanded steadily as well as tuition fees increasing. The number of higher education institutions kept on shrinking while the authorisation of new providers reduced significantly. A small group of providers increased their participation in the sector — often under the control of investment groups and foreign corporations.

This section presents the structural factors that conditioned these developments during the 2003-2009 period. They reflect both the growing commercialisation of higher education and the emerging concerns of its effects in a context in which policy development followed a fixed pathway that required the involvement of policy players outside the sector. These conditions pertain to the salient features of the market conditions in which Chilean higher education operates, the growing public awareness of universities' functioning, and the practices that inform the functioning of the political regime.

6.4.1 Continuous market expansion

A second enrolment surge for Chilean higher education started in 2000 and continued throughout the decade (Geoffroy 2011). As Table 6.1 illustrates, student numbers jumped from 452,325 to 876,243 between 2000 and 2009. The larger proportion of them would attend universities, though the share of this group of institutions dropped from 70.54% to 65.80% during the period due to rise of the professional institutes that specialised in industry-oriented courses.

Table 6.1: Enrolment evolution by institutional type

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Technical Training Centres	52,643	57,256	61,123	62,070	62,799	63,176	69,933	86,847	95,903	110,021
Professional Institutes	80,593	86,671	91,232	101,674	104,992	114,680	113,134	156,126	162,870	189,622
Universities	319,089	339,355	369,527	403,370	416,987	441,146	478,075	519,557	546,208	576,600
Total	452,325	483,282	521,882	567,114	584,778	619,002	661,142	762,530	804,981	876,243

Source: Ministry of Education

Participation expanded across the socio-economic spectrum. As Table 6.2 shows, low income students (quintiles I and II) grew faster compared to other socio-economic groups. This growth explains much of the rise in participation during the decade — from 22 to 28.9 percent.

**Table 6.2:
Variation in net participation (18-24 age group) in higher education by socio-economic group**

Quintile	2000	2009
I	7.0%	16.6%
II	11.6%	20.8%
III	22.2%	25.4%
IV	31.0%	33.5%
V	52.0%	54.4%
Total	22.0%	28.9%

Source: National Household Survey [CASEN] 2000, 2009.

This time, however, the reason behind the growing matriculation of new students was different. The pool of higher education providers was not expanding. On the contrary, as table 6.3 outlines, the number of institutions dropped by 25% between

2000 and 2009, mainly affecting professional institutions and professional institutes. The number of traditional universities remained constant during the period.

A smaller number of providers was concentrating a larger share of total enrolments. In particular, autonomous private universities were leading the expansion of the system by creating branch campuses across the nation. Zapata and colleagues (2003) have reported that these institutions expanded their campuses from 91 to 116 between 1997 and 2002.

Table 6.3:
Evolution in the number of higher education providers by institutional type

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Technical Training Centres	116	111	112	115	117	111	105	100	90	74
Professional Institutes	60	51	51	51	48	47	43	44	45	45
Universities	64	60	63	63	64	63	61	61	61	61
Total	240	222	226	229	229	221	209	205	196	180

Source: Ministry of Education

Additionally, international corporations started to arrive in the sector. In 2000, Sylvan International Universities — later renamed as Laureate Education, Inc. — acquired Universidad de Las Américas, which had been granted its autonomous status in 1997. Three year later, it also secured the control of another two private institutions: Universidad Andrés Bello and Instituto Profesional AIEP. According to the annual report Laureate submitted to the United States’ Exchange Commission in 2004⁸⁰, the combined enrolment of these three institutions in 2003 was 52,000 students (or 9.16% of all postsecondary enrolments). Following the same pattern, Apollo Group, Inc. entered Chilean higher education by acquiring the control of Universidad UNIACC in 2008⁸¹.

These cases made evident that regardless of their legal status, many private universities were actually for-profit organisations. Soon, local hedge funds took action to enter into the higher education market. Grupo Halcón, for example, acquired minority participation within and the power to administer three private autonomous institutions (a university, a professional institute and a technical training centre) under the Santo Tomás holding in 2005 (Mönckeberg 2007:116).

⁸⁰ Available at: http://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/912766/000110465905010637/a05-2050_110k.htm

⁸¹ http://www.apolloglobal.us/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=75:apollo-global-acquires-universidad-de-artes-ciencias-y-comunicacion-uniacc&catid=46:news&Itemid=32

All of these entrepreneurial institutions pushed hard for expanding enrolments during the following years. Universidad de Las Américas, Universidad UNIACC, and Universidad Santo Tomás were the leading institutions in advertising expenditure by 2006 (Mönckeberg 2007:307) — even considering that advertising expenditure in higher education grew by 64% between 2001 and 2006.

In most cases they achieved their goals. Universidad de Las Américas (31,228 students), Universidad Andrés Bello (39,037 students), Instituto Profesional AIEP (59,217 students), Universidad Santo Tomás (27,803 students), and Centro de Formación Técnica Santo Tomás (29,634 students) were among the 15 higher education institutions with the highest enrolments nationwide by 2012 (Consejo Nacional de Educación 2012:9) — combined, these five institutions would hold 18.07% of total enrolments by 2012.

6.4.2 The public awareness of quality assurance policy

By the new millennium, the growing market competition in higher education had not passed unnoticed. Potential effects in quality could undermine the sector's reputation, limiting its ability to contribute to national development. Located at the weakest point of the chain, students in some institutions were starting to experience serious problems with their educational experience.

Parents were paying tuition fees that were supposed to cover the requirements for proper professional and vocational education, and yet facilities and libraries were often inadequate and faculty had no proper qualifications to teach their subjects. In many cases the money went directly to finance the infrastructure private universities were lacking (Mönckeberg 2007:44). The assumption that all autonomous universities had an acceptable level of quality was not taken for granted anymore. The government did not take direct action to tackle the issue but quality assurance agencies did.

In 2003 CNAP delivered a report on the proliferation of branch campuses nationwide without being externally commissioned (Zapata et al. 2003). It was at once an example of its knack for capturing or encapsulating the pulse-point and a sign of its autonomy from the government. The report provided a robust documenting of two recent trends in higher education that confirmed the problematic consequences attached to deregulation and market competition in the sector.

First, higher education institutions — public regional and new private universities in particular — were escalating their operations rapidly with the aim of expanding and diversifying their revenue sources as of 2000. Because a large number of these new courses were operating on an occasional basis in small towns across the country, they were not reported to public information systems.

Additionally, Zapata and colleagues (2003) found salient differences in quality between branch campuses — some of them were operating in highly precarious conditions, putting the reputation of the sector at risk.

The branch campuses report raised awareness of the extent of the quality problem in Chilean higher education and of the growing segmentation between well-consolidated and doubtful courses (Lemaitre 2004:93). The sector was profoundly affected by the report. The Ministry of Education and CRUCH encouraged the dismantling of many of those campuses. In the view of many university leaders, institutional accreditation seemed to be an effective solution to address these and other quality concerns.

In addition, further steps were taken to secure consumer protection. Using MECESUP funding, the Ministry of Education attempted to create a comprehensive information system for higher education. The assumption was that the expansion and validation of available data would result in more rational decisions to pursue undergraduate studies. Prospective students and their families could maximise their investment, which in turn might produce greater social satisfaction towards higher education.

With these ideas in mind, the Higher Education Division implemented the NEHUEN initiative⁸². Universities resisted the pilot and it ultimately failed. Because of its lack of legal powers, the Ministry could not force them to provide information either. The creation of an information system for higher education became then a priority for the Ministry and was included within the quality assurance framework initiative. A senior official from the Ministry explains:

Information is the only thing you have for gaining some influence upon the system and we wanted to have it here at the Higher Education Division... [I]t was the only way for the

⁸² The NEHUEN initiative was the first attempt of the Ministry of Education to build its own information system for higher education (Allard 1999). The project was folded circa 2002.

government to have some control over management in the sector, to guide policy.'
(Interview R17)

6.4.3 *The operation of the political regime*

Political and legislative systems in Chile have long prevented any substantive reform without an agreement between all major parties. This is the result of an institutional design reflected in the Constitution of 1980 and conceived by Augusto Pinochet's strategists to protect the status quo (Valdés 1995).

In this context, the government has the power to control the legislative agenda by setting the priorities for discussing proposed pieces of legislation in both chambers: the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives. Yet, the electoral system — two representatives or senators are elected in each electoral district from the two most voted-for tickets — and a supermajority vote of 4/7 required for legislating on key matters such as education secure an effective veto power for parties in opposition.

Combined, these two statutory provisions have a significant effect on the way in which legislative affairs are conducted in Chile. Different to a traditional government/opposition dialogue guided by leading political figures, these arrangements had caused an important fragmentation in policy formation. Hence, Ministry of Education officials have to engage in conversations with all political parties holding Congressional seats to convince them of the necessity of introducing any change into the legislation — including the members of the parties that support the government.

This political manoeuvring is time-consuming and requires numerous stages prior to reaching the point of voting on any proposal. Often Congressional commissions receive a mandate to analyse reform initiatives and to inform the discussion. Conducting several rounds of meetings with experts and stakeholders is customary to allow representatives to form positions.

In ideologically contested areas such as education, this process takes even longer due to the large number of interests involved and the awareness of the government of the potential costs of putting much pressure on the legislature. Officials from the Ministry monitor this discussion, clarify the essential aspects of each piece of legislation, and collect observations and suggestions.

Alliances between government officials and members of Congress are often

forged at the preliminary stages. Channels for dialogue are also established early on as groups of representatives or senators informally designate their negotiators. Only when the government is confident of having enough votes for passing a proposal through the floor might a higher priority be given to a discussion.

The process has to be repeated at least four times — two in each chamber, one for deciding the idea of introducing new legislation in a given domain and another for voting on the specific regulations included in the proposed legislation. As progress is made, the discussion transits from the basic conditions for approval to the specific implementation requirements. Often, however, negotiations are less than linear and they are heavily influenced by the broader political agenda and the interests of the press. Attention to each initiative fluctuates dramatically — from much momentum at the time of voting to little interest among political ranks.

The great ideological divide between the parties in the government and in the opposition make even small reforms difficult to achieve in education. Aware of its veto power, the opposition has been consistent in rejecting government attempts to introduce changes into the regulation. The sustained efforts of the Ministry of Education to compromise have produced modest results since the restoration of democracy — which explains why the government opted to create financial incentives in the broader context of annual budgetary discussions to enact its agenda for higher education without clashing with the opposition's veto.

Other obstacles undermine the government's ability to navigate through legislative processes. Officials from the Ministry of Education compete heavily with other stakeholders in their access to members of Congress. Their authority to deal with alternative solutions and to integrate them into a coherent legislative plan cannot always be taken for granted. When necessary, the central government intervenes to redirect negotiations but at the cost of weakening the authority of the officials of the Ministry to reach agreement with members of the opposition.

Likewise, the longer the process takes, the greater the chances of having different people in charge of conducting the negotiations, which in turn has the potential to affect reforms' consistency. The broader political climate has also played an obviously important role in shaping governments' priorities and agendas and in framing pathways for and outcomes of reforms.

In this context, it is not surprising that all the prior proposals to reform education never completed the formative process.

6.5 The enactment of the new quality assurance framework

Two autonomous but related processes contributed to the formation of the SINAC-ES⁸³. First, CNAP implemented institutional accreditation pilots to test the model it had designed and to gain support for new legislation. The pilots pointed at convincing universities of the many virtues of institution-wide quality assessments and to raise awareness of its utility to the public.

In addition, proposed legislation passed through the legislative process and then became enforceable. Throughout three years of discussions, both the government and sectoral networks of university managers competed fiercely to influence legislators in the expectation of forging a scheme suitable for their agenda — they steered the compromise through Congress, which allowed this piece of legislation to be approved.

6.5.1 *Institutional accreditation pilots*

By 2003, CNAP's record was impressive. It had not only designed and implemented a highly effective external assessment scheme, but done this with close collaboration with the sector and so securing a greater legitimacy for its results. In the process, it prompted a great deal of assessment-related activity inside higher education institutions. Deans and academics discovered a whole new managerial language to frame their action and to engage with senior administration, heralding a significant cultural change in universities. Formal statements of expected learning outcomes flourished, increasing the information available to the public and providing much clearer guidance for institutional action (Lemaitre 2004).

Encouraged by the evident success of course accreditation, the government asked CNAP in 2002 to prepare an ambitious new pilot (Espinoza et al. 2006:24). This time, the task aimed at developing an institution-wide evaluative scheme for funding purposes⁸⁴.

⁸³ National Quality Assurance System for Higher Education, later renamed as the Quality Assurance Act.

⁸⁴ Ministry of Education's original intention was to link all access to public funding for higher education to accreditation (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:66).

Expectations were high — the plan was to connect this form of evaluation to a new student loan system, which had the potential to expand enrolments considerably (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional 2005:5). Departing from previous approaches to loan systems — focused on serving students enrolled in traditional universities only — the new scheme was designed to be open to all types of institution as long as their quality had been externally appraised and certified. A senior official explains why the new loan system was so critical at the time:

'The growth curve may not be sustained if people who could not afford higher education were excluded. When people realised that, no opposition to this initiative remained.'
(Interview R17)

Relying on the CSE experience — and taking advantage of its engagement in international quality assurance networks — CNAP developed an institutional accreditation model in a relatively short period of time. The first external evaluations were carried out in 2003. Institutional accreditation was conceived as an academic audit that heavily relied on the notion of quality previously applied to course accreditation (i.e. internal and external consistency). It focused, however, on the systematic application of policies and mechanisms that would enable a higher education organisation to monitor its own quality in key areas⁸⁵. A CNAP member describes their sources of inspiration to build the institutional accreditation model

'...[W]e were reviewing the comparative experience and noted that Northern European nations and New Zealand were working on developing academic audit. This was an interesting idea because it stressed that accreditation was a recognition of the ability of an institution for self-regulation.' (Interview R10)

The prospects of a model without consultation with the sector seemed unrealistic. Yet the elitist approach adopted by CNAP dictated limited engagement with leading institutions — it implied that less prestigious institutions could accept the new model as long as it had been tested on prominent universities. The same CNAP member explains what they did:

⁸⁵ Core areas were institutional management and undergraduate education. Optional areas include: research, graduate education, and community engagement (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:66).

'We presented our ideas to 6 or 7 traditional universities. Initially, we suggested that they focus accreditation on management and education only. They did not like it. Although they agreed with the idea of introducing academic audit, they asked about introducing other areas to allow universities to exhibit other areas in which they had strengths. The elective areas emerged from there.' (Interview R10)

Institutional accreditation pilots were only available for autonomous institutions — whether traditional or private — that met eligibility criteria, including: mission and institutional purposes as formally stated; quality assurance policies and mechanisms systematically applied at different institutional levels; the production of evidence of the operation of those mechanisms consistent with institutional purposes; and the capacity for adjusting operations to make progress towards the achievement of institutional goals (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:66).

Assessment procedures replicated the usual quality assurance template — including self-assessment, external assessment and an accreditation decision to be made by the agency. The participation of an international expert in the external evaluation team was also replicated. The decision included the formal accreditation for the institution in the core areas and the different elective areas it covered, its duration (up to seven years), and recommendations for improvement. The development of the model caused some controversy between the Ministry of Education and CNAP. A board member of the agency recalls

'...[W]e had suggested a fixed accreditation term of ten years. The Ministry replied that it was not an option for consideration. Instead, they recommended seven years. Why? Because Medicine had a seven-year plan of study and we had already proposed that for course accreditation. They also wanted to differentiate the duration of accreditation among institutions by distinguishing the strength of their [quality assurance] processes.' (Interview R10)

CNAP applied exactly the same engagement strategies it used previously for course pilots. Encouraged by the public awareness of course accreditation, 14 universities chosen by the agency responded quickly to an invitation to participate in the first round of pilots (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:38).

Some, however, required additional persuasion, which involved people from the Ministry of Education, as a senior officer describes:

'We lobbied them intensively to convince them to sign up. I would say the most prestigious CRUCH universities — Católica de Valparaíso, Católica de Santiago, and Universidad de Chile — responded well and signed up. It was a top priority to have them in because of CAE.' (Interview R17)

After the initial round of pilots, the demand for institutional accreditation grew stronger. A second round of assessment was quickly implemented over the next year to meet the expectations of another 20 institutions. The agency used these experiences to improve its procedures and criteria — the complementary areas and the wording of the criteria experienced important variations. A CNAP staff member reflects on these experiences:

'Once we had the seven original institutions, the others could not afford not to be part of it. And this started to grow. And grow. We had a lot to learn from the first round of pilots. I'm not quite sure how much universities benefited from them, but these experiences contributed to involvement in institutional accreditation. Later some changes were introduced into the criteria and instruments but not into the procedures.' (Interview R22)

A third and final round of evaluations was therefore conducted in 2005, this time involving another 14 autonomous institutions. By 2006, the new institutional accreditation scheme was fully established. 55 higher education institutions⁸⁶ were accredited encompassing 73.4% of total enrolments nationwide. They were obviously the more prestigious institutions in the system — including both traditional and new universities.

An important element in enhancing the credibility of the new scheme was CNAP's choice of applying higher standards. A group of institutions that submitted to the agency failed to gain accreditation as a result. CNAP's status rose at the expense of those institutions' public credibility — a situation that affected both public and private universities.

⁸⁶ Including 38 universities, 9 professional institutes, and 8 technical training centres (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado 2007:44).

The vast impact of institutional accreditation points to its conjunction with market competition. A senior staff member at CNAP recalls the growing awareness of the pilots:

'... [I]ts impact on public opinion was immense, way bigger than expected, especially in the later assessment rounds. The use of the results in advertising was extraordinary. The level of differentiation achieved [between accredited and unaccredited institutions] was well beyond expectations.' (Interview R19)

Government efforts for making accreditation comprehensible for the public converged with the muscular use of accreditation results for marketing purposes. This partial overlapping obscured much of the CNAP message and turned the 'accreditation seal' into a powerful talisman that universities used to maximise their standing in the undergraduate market. An academic articulates his doubts in relation to the dominant motivations for sustaining accreditation:

'My concern with the model is that I don't know to what extent universities are seeking accreditation according to a genuine quality enhancement motivation and to what extent they are just seeking to obtain a marketing tool.' (Interview R24)

The results, however, pleased the Ministry of Education. In the observations of its officials, institutional accreditation was ready to become the centrepiece of the current policy architecture. An official synthesises:

'I got the impression that accreditation and marketing worked quite well together — as accreditation and the new student loan system did.' (Interview R17)

Soon, the accredited/non-accredited dichotomy was only useful for those institutions competing with demand-absorbing providers at the bottom of the reputational pecking order. It was insufficient for other universities with greater esteem. In this context, the duration of accreditation became a key factor to draw additional distinctions. Originally, it aimed to organise assessment cycles according to the nature of the observations emerging from the external evaluation. In the policy architecture designed by the government, however, it was a proxy for prestige. A CNAP member explains the implication of this decision:

'... [P]eople understood that the duration of accreditation was not linked to the improvement process but to an educational qualification, a mark⁸⁷.' (Interview R14)

The implementation of this decision brought additional complexity to CNAP's decisionmaking. The agency had to consider carefully its decisions in a comparative fashion. The government, however, wanted to retain it because of its vast communicative power. A senior administrator describes the options they faced at the Ministry of Education:

'... [C]alibrating the duration of accreditation was a major technical complexity. However, from the market perspective it has been perfect because it has allowed differentiation.'
(Interview R17)

After the benchmarking of the first accreditation round was complete, universities started to push hard to be accredited for longer periods through upcoming cycles. In the view of several observers, the CNAP model for institutional accreditation was not ready to cope with additional pressure because it was not suitable for this fine-tuning. A senior academic administrator elaborates:

'...[T]he technology we used was not appropriate for that purpose. The self-assessment report and the site visit of a small review committee were functional for course accreditation but not for evaluating complex institutions.' (Interview R2)

6.5.2 The new quality assurance legislation

Between August 2002 and April 2003, the government drafted the legislation required to transform CNAP and CONAP's proposal into law. Though the results followed agencies' recommendations closely, minor adjustments were introduced to enhance the coherency of the scheme — technical training centres' licensing was allocated to CSE and an annual cycle of coordinating meetings among agencies was also established. A professional from the Ministry who participated in those conversations recalls:

⁸⁷ In Chilean education, grades are distributed in a 1 to 7 scale, in which 7 is the top mark. Because accreditation was conceived as an additional assessment tool in the field of education, it was natural for people — from inside and outside the sector — to apply this scale to accreditation results.

'I remember some tensions [between CNAP and Ministry staff], moments of strong disagreement. However, when the bill was ready to be introduced we had a strong consensus behind it.' (Interview R6)

Those tensions signalled an important transformation within the policy formation process. The Higher Education Division was now in charge of leading the negotiations through Congress to secure the passing of the bill. CNAP experts lost control over its content and became casual consultants to the Ministry while running institutional and course accreditation pilots. This shift suggests that the government had a clear awareness of the differential nature of the process. In the observation of senior officials at the Ministry of Education, CNAP's reputation in the sector was not enough to approve the new legislation. Political manoeuvring and networking were then pivotal to assure the viability of the first serious attempt to reform higher education legislation since 1990.

The Chamber of Representatives took another nine months to approve the drafted legislation, which occurred on 20 January 2004. From there, it was sent to the Senate to continue the formative process. For most of the time, the Education Committee of the Chamber — including 15 representatives across all parties — was in charge of analysing the government proposal. The committee met 26 times between April and November 2003 to discuss this initiative. Another 13 legislators joined the committee occasionally during these sessions. Most of the time was consumed by listening to the testimony of university presidents, administrators, and academics; think tank experts; CNAP members; and student union representatives — 48 special guests presented their points of view at these meetings, invited by different committee members (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional 2006:32-34).

Why did they proceed this way? According to a CNAP staff member, the Education Committee decided upon this approach because of the complexity attached to the proposed legislation and because politicians had limited exposure to quality assurance in higher education:

'The overwhelming majority of chamber members had no idea about quality assurance because it had little visibility from a political perspective. They didn't know CSE or CNAP or their activities. They didn't even know whether it was important or not... They only started to have an opinion — because they didn't have any — when they invited higher

education leaders, deans and scholars to talk about the proposed legislation. Mainly because most of these people had a favourable opinion towards it, chamber members realised that this initiative had the support of the majority of the sector.’ (Interview R22)

However, the prospect of a meaningful conversation was discarded early on. From CNAP members’ viewpoints, the political way was the only alternative open to make some progress:

‘There was no chance for a technical dialogue in the Congress — not even in the specialised committees. I attended their meetings and they were pathetic... [N]obody there could really understand anything.’ (Interview R10)

In the perspective of one member of the Education Committee, at the bottom of the debate, the process reflected a sharp divide of interests:

‘Nobody [in the legislature] was really enthusiastic about this proposed legislation, really. It wasn’t part of the [political] agenda. Nobody gave it much importance either. However, from the perspective of the interested actors — higher education institutions and members of the Congress engaged in the debate — it was a highly stressful discussion subject to enormous pressures.’ (Interview R23)

Another member of the committee observed the lack of motivation to enact a comprehensive quality assurance scheme when other fundamental issues remained unaddressed in higher education:

‘Nobody had another alternative to offer... The initiative emerged from a group within the government. It neither reflected a clear demand from society nor from the debate here in the Congress.’ (Interview R21)

The discussion was muddy. A member of the team that attended the Education Committee meetings, suggests that vested interests and ideology were not clearly separated through the political dialogue:

‘Many interests were involved in this conversation. However, they didn’t express themselves clearly — often interests and ideological motives were masked through technical consultation on details. In practice, some self-appointed defenders of liberty were protecting business operations.’ (Interview R6)

Similar but distinctive tensions framed most of the discussion. They contributed to shaping how diverse were the streams of influence that fed into the negotiations (Interview R19). First, the ideological divide between those who wanted to reinforce the public good nature of higher education and those who wanted more competition among independent providers. The first rejected and criticised accreditation because of its market orientation while the second wanted to reduce quality assurance to an information system that could expand the data available to the public to tackle the quality issue. The initiative did not conform to either of these positions. Rather, it adopted a moderate position. A member of the chamber explains:

'This legislation sought to offer a judicious solution. It was neither pure market nor pure state control. The government wanted to retain some control over the accreditation system...' (Interview R21)

In addition, different types of intra-sector interests wanted to shape the proposed legislation. For a group of universities, quality was the supreme value of academia and its assurance was their duty. They supported accreditation firmly. For another group, the financial interests of private universities deserved better protection because of their autonomous status and, thus, they rejected greater state control.

Finally, status competition among higher education providers also influenced the discussion of the initiative. Older institutions with well-established reputations sought to use accreditation to reinforce their prestige while newer universities were afraid of the potential consequences it could have for their esteem. In between, other institutions wanted to shape accreditation just to use it against their direct competitors.

Evidently, ideological, political economy and intra-sector competition tensions had a differential impact on Congress. According to a senior academic manager, the political confrontation was primarily ideological:

'There were just two positions: the left and the right. This divide penetrated deeply into the final provisions of the regulation because they compromised upon a solution that left nobody happy... This was not a problem of a group of representatives that hold vested interests in private universities. Obviously those cases existed but I think it was a genuine ideological split.' (Interview R2)

In this context, the political experience available at the Ministry of Education was a key asset. Armanet, the head of the Higher Education Division, gained prominence for her political savvy during the early stages for the discussion. A senior official from the Ministry elaborates:

'Pilar Armanet had total command of the situation... She could identify who were the key players involved in the discussion and why they were adopting different positions in the negotiations.' (Interview R6)

The government, however, was immersed in sensitive negotiations with all political parties — including the ruling coalition. It had to mediate among them and push its own agenda simultaneously with the prospect of a robust agreement. Another senior official from the Ministry explains:

'We cannot put people in the position of being denounced by their constituencies. We could not risk exposing Carolina Toha to be denounced as a traitor by [traditional] universities or having German [Becker] or Evelyn [Matthei] losing their mandate to negotiate. We took care of both sides and by doing so we walked a fine line between them.' (Interview R17)

This strategy allowed the government to isolate some extreme positions that were questioning the idea of regulating quality assurance. It also secured key support from the moderates in opposition. An academic administrator engaged in opposing the legislation explains her impressions:

'We could find few Representatives willing to support our ideological stance. Most of them tried to avoid any association with us because they considered us part of the old establishment of the military rule era... [T]hey acknowledged it was problematic but you cannot stop the world as they used to say.' (Interview R15)

Another factor was the tactical use of a parallel initiative that the government was advancing in the pursuit of its policy agenda. The creation of a new student loan system open to higher education institutions outside of CRUCH was an important step in continuing increasing participation. The new system was pivotal for private universities in continuing their expansion. Aware of this, the government qualified the passing of this legislation in two ways. First, the quality assurance bill had to be

approved by the Chamber before the student loan bill. Second, the latter included a provision requiring accreditation as a condition for universities to be eligible — yet the new accreditation system was voluntary for higher education providers. In practice, this decision secured the final results in the Chamber of Representatives (Geoffroy 2011:97).

Some representatives from the opposition celebrated the joint effort they made with the government in the Education Committee to reach a balanced draft (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional 2006:234). Those who opposed the initiative lamented its consequences for pluralism in higher education — the new agency could bring greater political control to the sector. Thus, they called for greater scrutiny as to the details of the proposed legislation to secure a safer system (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional 2006:239).

The passing of the bill through the Chamber of Representatives gave the government the impression that ideological contestation was over. A senior official from the Ministry of Education remembers:

‘When we obtained the approval from the Chamber I realised that this legislation would be enacted because discussions are much more rational in the Senate. The Chamber was the acid test... Besides, the discussion in the Senate was better organised.’ (Interview R17)

Reality dictated otherwise. The Senate spent two full years — from February 2004 to January 2006 — reviewing the proposed legislation. With the ideological debate over, now was the time for vested interests in the sector to influence the negotiations. A former staff member of the Ministry who had followed negotiations closely, describes the situation:

‘Everybody knew that big corporate interests were behind private universities. Prominent organisations — the Catholic Church and others — were highly influential among traditional universities. These groups could not afford to oppose regulation openly. However, they manoeuvred to produce a light touch regulation with minimal consequences.’ (Interview R6)

Yet instead of coordinating their actions, vested interest from the sector worked in isolation to influence the negotiations using their own networks to reach

the political system. A prominent academic administrator from a private university elaborates:

'I think there were no concerted efforts from private universities to influence [the Congress]. I don't think they had sufficient [political] capital to steer the legislative process in the Senate in such a way. I believe it could have cost them quite a bit...' (Interview R2)

The general discussion took from March to July 2004. The Education Committee repeated the procedure applied by the Chamber. It met 17 times, mainly to receive testimony from rectors, student unions, think tanks, professional associations, and CNAP and CONAP representatives — 67 people delivered their ideas on the proposed legislation by invitation (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional 2006:285-440). The committee and the Senate approved the idea of legislating on quality assurance by an overwhelming majority. However, senators called for a detailed analysis of each provision because of the increasing lack of coherence they detected in the draft. A senior government official describes what followed:

'Once general approval was granted we entered into a very difficult phase. Countless motions were put forward to adjust the content of the draft. One sector wanted more state control and considered the initiative insufficient. The other wanted no control at all because it was an overreaction. Hence, we received 800-plus motions from both camps. We thus engaged in new negotiations with the opposition, approaching leading senators. It took quite a while to deal with each motion. We calmly discussed provision after provision. And the whole process ended in 2006.' (Interview R25)

This time Armanet and Minister Bitar engaged directly in negotiations — at the time he was appointed minister he had already completed his second term as Senator. Together they managed to forge a viable agreement for the government. Although they convinced the committee to repeal most of the motions presented, key changes were introduced in order to make external evaluation as objective as possible. Modifications affected assessment criteria definitions, the appointment of peer review teams, and the right to appeal national agency decisions. In the view of some observers in the sector, these changes altered the evaluation model underlying the initiative. A senior academic administrator explains:

'The bill included all of these absurd safeguards in regard to assessment criteria, the new [advisory] committees and the right to appeal that altered the original model. From now on, accreditation was based on contestation and certification. From now on, the job of the agency was not about supporting universities to enhance their quality.' (Interview R2)

The Senate finally approved the new legislation in January 2006 — one month after the resignation of Minister Bitar. Because of many changes introduced to the draft sanctioned by the Chamber of Representatives, the final version had to be reconciled by a special committee jointly appointed by the chamber and the senate and, then, sanctioned by both branches of the legislature.

Two months later, however, the government changed. After winning the 2005 presidential election with the support of the same coalition in power since 1990, Michelle Bachelet's administration took office in March 2006. Armanet and her team were no longer in charge of the passing of this legislation as new authorities were appointed at the Ministry of Education. Julio Castro — the new head of the Higher Education Division — was now leading the process. Although negotiations over details continued for another four months, the Congress finally passed the Quality Assurance Act in July 2006. It enacted the Act later in November of the same year (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional 2006:1736-1768). By that time, the new student loan system was fully operational, after the Congress passed that legislation in May 2005.

6.6 The failed implementation of the new quality assurance framework

The government undertook the responsibility for implementing the Quality Assurance Act through the Higher Education Division. The first task for Castro was the formation of CNA, the new accreditation agency, and the appointment of all its members. In addition, he had to finalise CNAP and CONAP and secure a smooth transition in the administration of accreditation — by now under the responsibility of the new agency.

Because the government invested heavily in passing the new legislation, the sector expected a similar approach to its implementation. However, other issues captured the attention of the Ministry of Education in the following years.

Furthermore, changes in personnel in the Higher Education Division did not secure the continuation of the same agenda. One academic describes:

'In the view of the government, the passing of the accreditation bill was a great political achievement. It had no idea of the challenges ahead, though. The decisions the government made — or avoided making — for the implementation of CNA revealed the low priority it assigned to this issue.' (Interview R19)

In the view of many observers the problem was not the government's agenda but the people in charge of running the Ministry of Education. Two members of the Education Committee of the Chamber of Representatives endorse this perception, albeit as part of the coalition in power:

'I have a critical perspective on the functioning of the Ministry of Education under President Bachelet. Conditions were difficult and personnel were not qualified, as the frequent changes of ministers illustrate.' (Interview R25)

'I think [accreditation] was never a priority... The government did not have the political drive to push the issue. It neither provided adequate support nor worked to make [accreditation] visible.' (Interview R23)

Nevertheless, the formation of the new agency was a high-stakes issue that quietly informed Congressional discussions. The new private universities' lobby was consistent in endorsing a subtly critical view of CNAP's experts. The experts received universal acclaim for their work in establishing accreditation but some of their accreditation decisions met with scorn among universities. An academic elaborates:

'There were many critiques [of CNAP]. Some fair, some extraordinarily unfair... People pointed out to some favouritism in the way they treated universities but much of that is just mythology.' (Interview R19)

Under Castro's leadership — and probably influenced by the perception of prominent private institutions — the Ministry decided that CNAP staff could not continue serving in CNA. This included the most respected quality assurance experts in the nation who had successfully enacted and legitimised course and institutional

accreditation. The Ministry needed a proper reason to justify this decision. A former senior official from the Higher Education Division explains their approach:

'New regulation implied new players. CNAP was an agency controlled by the government and it was a hot issue. We wanted to protect CNA against this critique. We wanted to avoid complains like "You see? Those who were in the government are now serving here". We had the idea of a whole new team, though this only applied to CNA's president — the [Higher Education] Division was not involved in the appointment of other members.' (Interview R11)

The government's choice for the CNA president was not celebrated. Instead of the clear leadership the sector expected, the Ministry endorsed a former rector of a small regional public university, Emilio Rodríguez. Another senior official at the Ministry of Education elaborates on the sentiment of the sector and the quality assurance community:

'They could have had a national leader [in charge of CNA] to secure the ascendancy of the agency within the sector. But they chose not to do so. I had nothing against the rector. He was a superb rector at Universidad de Tarapacá. I have sympathy for him but he wasn't a national leader.' (Interview R17)

The nomination of the other CNA members followed a similar pathway. The Ministry of Education exerted minimal influence in these processes. The results were not celebrated, either. It was evident that vested interests from the sector were being exerted upon the agency. Another former official from the ministry reveals her impressions

'I think terrible mistakes were made in the nomination of the members of the agency. Different to the formation of CSE — which was a good example of a successful policy implementation — here the independence of the board members from the organisations that nominated them was not achieved. I have the impression that almost everybody [in CNA] is representing vested interests... That is a serious limitation to the autonomy of the agency.' (Interview R6)

In the appreciation of a group of institutional leaders, this was partially an outcome caused by the provisions included in new legislation. An academic administrator suggests:

'The new legislation enacted so many restrictions [for electing CNA's board members] that at the end you couldn't nominate anyone, really. The people you have serving on the board do not have greater knowledge or legitimacy. And you could notice as much from the operation [of the agency] and its lack of authority.' (Interview R2)

Dickhaus (2009:7) has suggested that CINDA experts (serving at CNAP) played a pivotal role in advancing the quality assurance agenda for Chilean higher education. In her observation, they served as the decisive factor in the success of accreditation pilots by shaping discourse, building alliances, and integrating opposite views. Nobody was available to perform those roles in CNA. The same academic administrator describes the implications for the operation of the agency:

'A sharp division between those representing private and public universities arose. It has been damaging because it prompted negotiations and divisions [between groups]. I'm not quite sure whether this happened out of bad luck, unfortunate appointments or the weak leadership of the president.' (Interview R2)

An academic involved in the formation of CNA agrees. In his opinion, this divide had important consequences for the future of the agency:

'One of the main weaknesses of CNA has been its inability to build a common perspective to envision the future of quality assurance and higher education policy.' (Interview R19)

According to a former senior official of the Ministry of Education, in many cases board members had no experience or knowledge in quality assurance. A CNA member recalls his initial times at the agency:

'All of this seemed quite esoteric to me — like the guru of the tribe making decisions in isolation... At the beginning I did not pay much attention to the commission either. I just was doing my job without knowing anyone.' (Interview R18)

Influenced by the people of the Higher Education Division and amid internal leadership problems, CNA avoided approaching CNAP for support. The same CNA member explains:

'If you ask me now — in the past I wouldn't mind — I would say it was a terrible mistake we made... We should build upon their experience to advance our own work. It could help us to avoid many problems we faced.' (Interview R18)

Without a long-term strategy, CNA focused on implementing its own operation from scratch. Staff had to be hired and facilities need to be acquired. Funding was a primary concern. The agency had no budget for 2006. Neither was it included in the fiscal legislation for 2007⁸⁸. The Ministry of Education engaged in several rounds of negotiations with the Treasury to find a solution that would eventually emerge in early 2007.

The executive officer of the agency was appointed in early 2007. Now CNA had enough personnel to start operations. The board, however, quickly realised that it was not prepared to handle the large number of ongoing external assessments. By that time, CNAP was already conducting more than 300 external evaluations at different stages. These were supposed to be continued by the new agency. A solution was improvised. CNAP could continue with them to their conclusion but it could not accept new accreditation applications. In practice, this extended CNAP's mandate until mid 2007.

CNA spent most of 2007 dealing with practicalities. The board soon realised that a vast demand for accreditation was present. A clear sense of urgency then helped the agency to define its agenda. One board member reflects on these developments:

'A sudden heavy workload hit us — which, I think, defines most of our tenure. My main observation is that we had been too concentrated on the urgent matters rather than on what it is important. We had been mainly putting out accreditation decisions ...but we hadn't paused to think about it.' (Interview R18)

⁸⁸ To reiterate, the Quality Assurance Act was enacted in mid November 2006, while the fiscal law for 2007 was enacted one month later. The government failed to make this connection to secure the initial funding needed for CNA.

Even at the practical level, issues were mounting. Advisory committees were not appointed during the initial years. Student representative positions on the CNA board also remained vacant. Repercussions started to emerge. CNA received a mandate to develop its own institutional accreditation criteria and its own supervision system for private agencies. Instead, it adopted what CNAP already had available with minimal variations. In the vision of an academic administrator, this was a serious mistake:

'CNAP procedures were created for a small group of institutions and courses. If you apply them on a larger scale through people with inadequate preparation — both the board and staff — then you get these results, ones which caused a sharp decline in the legitimacy of the agency.' (Interview R2)

University administrators started to voice their concerns. They perceived a marked change in their interaction with the agency. One senior academic remembers

'I think the treatment we received from CNAP was much more fair. María José [Lemaitre] had several conversations with us and other institutions to explain the operation of the system and the countless details involved in the [accreditation] process but also to adjust criteria when unexpected situations occurred.' (Interview R15)

A former CNAP member illustrates the type of problems CNA experienced in conducting institutional accreditation:

'One of the things that impressed me the most is that [CNA] does not use accreditation guidelines. They lost them, literally. Then, universities faced institutional accreditation without guidelines, handbooks or anything, really.' (Interview R10)

By now officially linked to accessing student aid funding, the problem with institutional accreditation was not the replication of CNAP's criteria. Observers in the sector realised that CNA was not capable of developing its own evaluative framework or of providing a sense of direction to its decisions in this domain. The Quality Assurance Act did not provide clear guidance either — the heavy redrafting of this legislation in Congress caused an important conceptual confusion. An academic summarises:

'I believe a pivotal weakness of CNA has been its ongoing inability to rethink assessment criteria and procedures. None of that has yet been done.' (Interview R19)

Because CNA decisions on institutional accreditation were strategic for the sector, the agency experienced enormous pressures — universities were constantly lobbying board members. One group of institutions was expecting to obtain longer accreditation terms and more areas accredited, which could help them to distinguish themselves from competitors. Less prestigious institutions were pushing to have access to student aid even if they were able to receive just one year of accreditation. These pressures became irresistible for a board closely aligned to the institutions that contributed to the election of its members. A senior officer from a funding agency recalls a revealing conversation:

'Once I met a [CNA] member in a social event and asked him about these one-year accreditation decisions. He answered me: "Do you know what is happening? The pressure for securing access to student loans is so strong that it is not sustainable for us not to accredit everyone". I said to him: "But your function is supposed to be to limit that demand! We all know that the demand for loans is gigantic and that all institutions push hard to have access to it but that's why your agency exists!" The conversation did not continue.' (Interview R6)

The supervision of the private accreditation agencies followed a similar pathway. This was the main innovation brought by the Quality Assurance Act to cope with the booming demand for course accreditation. Because CNAP did not develop any model for monitoring their operation, the new agency had numerous options available to create its own approach. Instead, CNA focused on its own limitations for providing stricter supervision and developed a light touch system. With six licensed agencies competing hard to expand their clientele, problems soon emerged. A CNA member explains:

'I have heard many critiques and I think they are fair. I have the impression that the problem is smaller than expected, though. People were saying: this will be a major source of conflict of interests and that ruthless competition will bring all sort of ethical dilemmas — especially from price competition. I think these problems do exist but they are not the main

focus of attention. I think the commission had the tools to do more than we actually did with regard to control and support.’ (Interview R18)

The extended failure of accreditation under CNA was causing a fundamental problem in the sector. Policy infrastructure was not supporting decisionmaking in the way it was supposed to do. Neither funding agencies nor the public could easily discern serious providers from cowboy outfits. In the judgment of a senior academic administrator, further policy development was needed:

‘We have to think of another mechanism to replace today’s accreditation, which in turn replaced licensing — previously called accreditation, too. Because this is a sorting mechanism [among providers]. I think a new category could emerge that could have the support of higher education institutions.’ (Interview R7)

Conversely, other people in the sector were afraid of the growing importance of accreditation as a sorting mechanism. A different academic administrator voices his concerns:

‘First, you have status attached to accreditation. Then, funding has been coupled with it. The more you add things to accreditation, the greater the incentives to achieve it at whatever cost — including bribing external evaluation committees, peers and CNA members. Then, you will reach a point in which the system will crash. I think many people in the sector share this vision.’ (Interview R2)

In addition, CNA was clearly setting itself apart from the existing quality infrastructure. Its disconnection from expert networks was also evident. Its interaction and coordination with the Ministry of Education and with CSE was minimal. A CNA member reflects on the leadership problem they were facing:

‘I think the problem with Emilio [Rodríguez] was he thought that his appointment entitled him by to play a leading role in the system. He seemed to believe that Mr Lavados and Ms Lemaitre had to respect him for this sole reason. But that’s not how things work in real life.’ (Interview R18)

By the time the interviews for this study were conducted (August 2010), the situation of CNA was not looking very promising. Accreditation was losing

credibility rapidly amid allegations of declining standards and the growing influence of universities in CNA's decisionmaking. During the following years, this state of affairs only worsened⁸⁹. In 2012, the OECD appointed a review team to assess quality assurance policy — a request from the Chilean government. The report suggested a radical and urgent overhaul of the existing scheme because it failed to deliver the goods due to 'a poorly conceived legislative basis, inadequate resources, and lack of a shared vision of what it is trying to achieve' (OECD 2012:9).

Before that, however, prospects for accreditation were mostly positive. By 2007, President Bachelet appointed a presidential commission led by Mr Carlos Peña to advance a new policy framework for higher education. Quality assurance was explicitly addressed in its report, which was realised in March 2008. Recommendations were made for enhancing the licensing of new private providers in terms of rising standards and for restricting institutional autonomy for private providers to prevent the explosive enrolment expansion of the past.

Accreditation received some consideration as well (Consejo Asesor Presidencial para la Educación Superior 2008:57-58). Although the commission acknowledged that it was too early to evaluate the functioning of CNA, it recommended a careful monitoring of private accreditation agencies — mainly to avoid conflicts of interest and to secure the sound operation of the system. According to their institutional affiliation — public and private respectively — the 31 members of the commission disagreed over support of a voluntary or mandatory nature for the different types of accreditation.

The commission also suggested the universalisation of accreditation to enhance quality across the sector by reaching most institutions and courses. To make it happen, the presidential commission endorsed additional financial incentives for accredited institutions — institutions that failed accreditation could also receive support to enhance their performance, subject to strict monitoring. The commission called for a greater integration between licensing and accreditation and between

⁸⁹ From 2012, a criminal inquiry was launched to investigate corruption allegations in connexion to CNA. Charges have been presented against a former CNA member and three university presidents for negotiating accreditation outcomes. The top executive officer was sacked — he admitted that bribes were paid. The president resigned amid strong disagreements within the board in regard to the agency's functioning. Simultaneously, a report from the General Audit Agency revealed serious flaws in the operation of CNA, including financial and procedural misconduct (Contraloría General de la República 2012).

institutional and course accreditation. Finally, it demanded action to increase the public's awareness of accreditation and its importance in making enrolment decisions.

The government, furthermore, asked the OECD to conduct an evaluation of higher education policies. Seven international experts in higher education policy were appointed as members of a review team that visited Chile in 2008 and delivered its report in 2009 (OCDE and Banco Mundial 2009:203). The review congratulated the government for adopting a modern approach to quality assurance that was well received among universities. Nonetheless, it recommended encouraging all providers to present for accreditation — through linking access to funding and accreditation. Additionally, the review team endorsed a revision of the assessment criteria in order to increase its clarity, coverage, and ability to discriminate between different types of institution. In its appreciation, this review could also lead to a process of incrementally greater requirements over time that may enhance the quality of the whole sector as a result.

President Bachelet welcomed both reports and endorsed its recommendations. However, none of them were actually implemented during her tenure, which ended in March 2010. To some extent this is the outcome of competing priorities — public secondary education, in particular, being more pressing — that became prominent during the Bachelet years. After more than a decade at the top of the political agenda, higher education policy was no longer an urgent matter (Interview R2). In addition, the Ministry of Education did not have the political clout or the human resources required to deliver a new higher education policy⁹⁰.

After 20 years in power, the centre-left coalition lost the 2009 presidential election. By 2010, a right-centre coalition led by President Sebastian Piñera took government, bringing its own agenda for higher education. Quality assurance was not among his priorities.

...

This chapter has depicted the last stage in the evolution of quality assurance policy and the sudden changes it experienced. Framed by the struggle for controlling institutional accreditation and access to the new student loan scheme, the

⁹⁰ By 2008, a failed attempt of the Higher Education Division to produce a new policy framework demonstrated such an impossibility (División de Educación Superior 2008).

implementation of CNA became a policy fiasco. The stringency of structural properties attached to the evolving competition among higher education providers imposed severe limits to the manipulation of structures by agency.

With quality assurance experts sidelined, the government lost its access to policy knowledge and its ability to forge a new policy agenda. The dissolution of the elite policymaking style has made the government's task increasingly difficult. In contrast, higher education managers acquired sufficient power to dictate the agenda. However, their ability to come together with a sustainable policy agenda for the sector is essentially hampered by their search for individual competitive advantage. As is increasingly happening in other dimensions of public policy in Chile, major policy players perceive that the potential collective benefits of a long-term agenda are of less value than the individual costs in paying for it.

This state of affairs heralds further changes in higher education and quality assurance policy that could depart significantly from the incremental approach adopted since 1990. Yet as the study of previous reforms has shown, policy transformations will not happen soon due to the bureaucratic nature of policymaking in Chile.

THIRD PART

Chapter 7:

Cross-examining the evidence

7.1 Introduction

Part two has provided a comprehensive case description covering all the fundamental elements, processes and outcomes that define the evolution of quality assurance policy in Chile. Organised in a way that is compatible with the theories that inform the study, they are now re-examined in this chapter. This time, however, the analysis shifts from tracing changes in policy development to their dissection, applying the theoretical frameworks described in Chapter 3. The aim is to exploit the potential of these theories for integrating a view of fluctuations in external quality assurance into a plausible policy trajectory.

As is probably self-evident at this point, Chilean quality assurance policy has evolved in an incremental fashion — from a small licensing system built from scratch to a comprehensive scheme including (along with licensing) institutional and course accreditation and an information system for higher education. Licensing's initial success, and its evident statutory limitations, propelled course and institutional accreditation pilots. The outstanding results of the pilots provided the evidence needed to justify a new way to regulate higher education without altering the pillars of higher education policy — diversified provision, a fixed diploma structure, a cost-sharing funding system, and a student aid scheme.

By expanding its scope, quality assurance moved from the periphery to the centre of the policy architecture — primarily to address the negative consequences attached to growing competition among universities. Its potential for quality enhancement also suggested additional regulatory functions to quality assurance agencies. Access to public funding and institutional reputations became essentially linked to accreditation in the matter of a few years.

The growing policy prominence of quality assurance does not imply greater consistency, though. Important variations in policy implementation — as described in Chapters 4 and 6 — reflect the essential plasticity of quality assurance policy in accommodating diverse structural pressures and competing agendas among relevant actors. Although it has brought important transformations to the sector, quality

assurance has primarily reflected and projected the changing dynamics in Chilean higher education into the policy domain.

With a slightly different orientation from previous sections of the thesis, this chapter examines and integrates the interplay of agency and structure at the core of the policy change processes covered in the study. The analysis is organised into two different levels. After this introduction, the next section typifies the agents — i.e. quality assurance experts, government officials, and higher education institutions — and the modes of exercising agency they used that shaped policy outcomes in the three stages of this evolution. The next section unpacks the analysis of the structural elements that conditioned this policy trajectory, namely higher education expansion, competition among providers, policymaking style, and the quality assurance discourse. It also shows the variable weight of these factors in completing each reform.

Later, the analysis moves toward a higher level of abstraction to explore the interaction of agency and structure in explaining policy change. Special attention is paid here to the possibilities and limitations of selected frameworks to explain these successive processes of transformation: Bleiklie and Kogan's, structuration, and morphogenesis theory. The compatibility of the two latter theories is also explicitly addressed with the aim of advancing a robust and flexible framework for investigating policy change in higher education. The closing section summarises the main conclusions emerging from these analyses.

7.2 Typifying agency

The study of higher education policy in Chile ratifies the complexities attached to policy development in higher education, as Cerych and Sabatier (1986) and many others since then have documented. Policy is formed and implemented through several stages — both formal and informal. Policy players engage selectively in these processes aiming to maximise their influence in policy configuration. Their participation, however, defies the prospects of a general categorisation. Grounded in unique historical, cultural, and institutional roots, local realities of policymaking exhibit little commonality. Certainly the cast of policy actors in one nation will ring familiar for other countries, yet their power and agendas show irreducible variation due to contextual differences.

The Chilean case simply confirms the point. Far from being an isolated development controlled by one dominant actor — as it may appear at first glance (see Dickhaus 2009:7) — quality assurance policy and its evolution are the result of successive interactions and compromises. Senior university management, experts in quality assurance and the upper echelons of government prevailed in their attempts at influencing policy content and its implementation. Student and academic unions — prominent players in other dimensions of higher education policy — remained consistently absent from this debate, which seemed to have a modest impact on their activities and on their main concerns (institutional governance and funding).

Although influential through the legislative discussions, members of the Senate and the House of Representatives played an instrumental function in passing the Quality Assurance Act with no further involvement in this policy domain. They merely added ideological overtones to the discussion and this primarily because such language was more suitable to frame their own conversation. However, once the Act pertaining to quality assurance was approved, the tension between more regulation and more market freedom dissipated completely from the policy dialogue.

Table 7.1 typifies the positions adopted by or assigned to major policy players. It condenses the roles they played in each of the stages of the quality assurance evolution and their fluctuations over time. They could be active if their involvement in policy development at least considered their consultation by other actors. In contrast they could be passive if not consulted or excluded if other policy players purposely blocked their participation in policy formation and implementation — a form of negative engagement. They could be leading when no other actor with equivalent resources or influence was disputing their decision-making power upon policy processes. Initiating is a weaker version of leading that implies policy entrepreneurship; the ability to trigger a conversation by effectively accepting an issue onto the policy agenda. High involvement is an intermediate form of participation that lies between leading and active involvement and often assumes some degree of decision-making power. Lastly, it is important to note that these roles can change over time, even within the same phase, as each of them includes at least two stages: policy formation and implementation.

Table 7.1 Quality assurance policy: Agency positioning			
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
QA Experts	Initiating	Leading	Active/Excluded
Government	Active	High involvement	Leading/Passive
HE Managers	Passive	Active	High involvement

The differential involvement of the main players through the policy evolution reflects the rising centrality of quality assurance in higher education in two ways: a larger pool of actors participating in policy formation and implementation and a greater involvement of the actors in the process. Traditional universities became part of the conversation as quality assurance policy expanded from licensing to accreditation. Private universities not only engaged directly in the negotiations but also exercised all of their lobby power and political connections to enhance their chances of influencing the content of the Quality Assurance Act.

The incremental proliferation of quality assessments left few dimensions of higher education unaffected. This trajectory suggests an increasing competition for controlling the new policy infrastructure due to its greater consequentiality. Likewise, the dramatic end of this evolution reveals how the rapid expansion of higher education affected the policy process — the leading private institutions gained in policy influence as their enrolments grew to the point that they prevailed in shaping accreditation outcomes.

Initially, external assessment was primarily an expert issue. Throughout phase one of the quality assurance evolution, CSE experts drew on the international experience to build their own licensing scheme. They obviously acknowledged the limitations imposed by regulation upon them — licensing’s fixed timeframe and the extension and irrevocability of institutional autonomy — and yet they could develop an assessment scheme that followed all the basic methodological principles for institutional evaluation, including clear predefined criteria, self-evaluation, external peer assessment, and a final decision on the level of achievement. They could also test them successfully in a group of small new private universities that benefited from this approach to build stronger managerial systems early on within the Chilean context.

Previously neglected, external quality assessments came to be an important dimension of higher education policy. The people behind this new evaluative technology were rapidly recognised as top quality assurance experts nationwide. Their steps towards building a close connexion with the emergent international expert

community in quality assurance not only secured their alignment with the quality assurance rhetoric but also allowed them to situate their actions within a broader conceptual framework that could help them later in advancing their own policy initiatives.

During the second stage of the quality assurance saga, CSE experts rapidly became key policy actors. Their achievements were impressive. They convinced the government of the importance of expanding external quality assurance — accreditation was one of the top issues of the 1997 policy agenda. They designed the strategy for implementing this priority in an unorthodox fashion and secured the endorsement of the government. They effectively conspired with World Bank officials to finance the accreditation pilots through the MECESUP initiative. Through the formation of CNAP, they built the institutional platform that protected their financial and operational autonomy. Traces of their influence are also evident in the selection of the board members. Lastly, by careful selection of the courses and institutions to be assessed, they maximised the impact of their message on the sector and provided greater legitimacy for accreditation — a previously contested idea by the end of the 1990s.

At the apex of the success, however, their influence started to decline and waned rapidly through phase three of the quality assurance evolution. Other powerful actors managed to exclude them. By 2003, they lost control over the proposed legislation to enact the comprehensive quality assurance scheme they advanced. Later, they could not secure their relocation from CNAP to CNA due to the government's opposition. Their legacy — celebrated on the occasion of the end of CNAP in 2007 — dissolved quickly as the new agency refused to extend their work into the new era of quality assurance. Since then, they mostly disappeared from the public sphere and their prominence in policymaking vanished.

The government, in contrast, performed a less visible role for most of this policy evolution. In many ways, it was as a distant facilitator that occasionally engaged directly in advancing quality assurance — the first steps taken towards implementing CSE revealed the strategy for this policy domain: to use the new agency to carefully monitor the configuration of the new private sector.

Once appointed, the government encouraged and supported CSE experts. Close linkages between the Ministry of Education and the new agency facilitated consensus building towards their model. In practice, they were effectively addressing

one of the urgent problems of the early 1990s: to provide a sense of order to the proliferation of private providers through qualitative assessments. In doing so, they were not questioning the growing diversity in the sector nor the centrality of competition in organising higher education, both pivotal to the prevailing policy landscape of the day.

The government increased its involvement during the second phase of quality assurance policy. It approved a new higher education policy and secured funding for its implementation via the World Bank. For specific orientations, however, it asked for advice. The Ministry of Education relied on CSE experts to organise and implement CNAP. Now in command of a different agency, they were to expand their palette of evaluative technologies. Yet, the government oversaw its operation closely — the Higher Education Division could negotiate CNAP's outcomes in advance.

Only when no other choice was available did the government take the lead role in advancing quality assurance policy. As the evidence suggests (see chapter 6), the government could not entrust to CNAP experts the passing of the comprehensive scheme through the parliament because of the political nature of the negotiations. Such endeavour required an expertise accessible through the ranks of the political parties, which abounded in the corridors of the Higher Education Division at the time. Once the legislative process concluded, however, the government rushed to delegate the implementation of the new bill to CNA and its members — mainly appointed by different groups of institutions.

In sharp contrast with CNAP experts, university managers in private universities were initially passively subjected to external assessments with no power to influence their features. Their traditional counterparts were not affected by the new policy, apart from in the reduction of their independent income from examination. From their distant engagement in external quality assurance, both ended shaping most policy outcomes. However, their growing stature in policy affairs is hard to track with precision — similarly to the government's involvement, vested interests in the sector rarely operate in the open.

Licensing gained rapid legitimacy among private universities. Its approach to external assessment was compatible with the idea of the university as a corporation, which was widely spread among institutions with an entrepreneurial orientation. Unsurprisingly, not all new institutions perceived the utility of this way of conceiving

licensing — institutions that aspired to imitate traditional universities usually found it too unfamiliar.

The interest in course and institutional accreditation grew rapidly among higher education administrators. Traditional universities started to appreciate its potential benefits after some experiments in external course assessment. Yet potential efficiency gains in developing better managerial systems were not the main reason for engaging in course accreditation. In the highly competitive environment of 1999, the search for prestige and distinction was the main reason for autonomous private universities and traditional institutions to join course accreditation pilots according to CNAP's conditions.

The student funding/accreditation nexus was at the basis of the introduction of institutional accreditation. This time, however, universities were able to negotiate the rules of engagement. Thus, basic and complementary dimensions were included in the institutional accreditation pilots.

With most elite universities participating in accreditation pilots, their influence grew throughout the discussions of the Quality Assurance Act. They did not act as a block but they found individual ways to deliver their message to Congress: if accreditation is to exist then the fairness of the process must be secured. Veto powers for peer review committees' membership and the right to appeal CNA decisions were further evidence of universities' influence in policy-making. In retrospect, however, their greater achievement was the exclusion of CNAP experts from taking part in the new agency — without them nobody was able to counteract universities' influence on the agency considering the fact that different groups of higher education institutions gained the power to appoint most board members directly, according to the new legislation.

One factor that radically altered the position of the main policy players over time was a shift in alliances among actors. The strong identification between CSE experts and the government forged a robust partnership that remained throughout the 1990s. This prevented individual universities from influencing quality assurance policy directly and paved the way for advancing accreditation pilots in place of licensing. Combined with a well-executed job at CSE, this partnership is fundamental in explaining why CSE people were commissioned to create CNAP.

Once the assessment technology was developed and tested, the government took the responsibility of advancing the proposed legislation. This new scenario

helped to reconfigure existing partnerships. First, the political nature of the negotiations demanded less interaction between government officials and CNAP experts — their contribution in this domain was fairly modest. Second, universities' powerful lobbying targeted senators and representatives and produced important results. Along with the ongoing ideological debate, senior officials at the Ministry realised that negotiations with leading institutions were necessary to secure the passing of the quality assurance legislation.

A pivotal element in the negotiations was the selection of the people in charge of running CNA. CNAP experts wanted to secure the continuity of their approach to accreditation in the new agency. Universities aspired to increase their influence on CNA — the CNAP experience had showed them that this was unlikely to happen under the same leadership. The Ministry listened to the critics in the sector and decided not to trust the implementation of the new agency to CNAP experts.

This unexpected change would ably reflect the transition from one generation of officials to the next within the Ministry and the subsequent emergence of new policy priorities for higher education by 2006. Yet the evident lack of an agenda within President Bachelet's government suggests otherwise. Poor leadership and the limited connections of the new officials provided a window of opportunity for the sector to influence the government more efficiently. In any case, the outcome is clear: the Ministry relied on university leaders to launch the new quality assurance framework. This decision sealed the fate of CNAP experts and inaugurated a new partnership between government officials and higher education leaders.

The new alliance forged for the implementation of the Quality Assurance Act proved to be ephemeral. Without the support of its quality assurance experts, the government had little to do in implementing the new agency. It appointed a low-profile rector from a distant regional university to preside over the new agency — his main function was to serve as a communication channel between the government and CNA.

Leading institutions in the sector had a decisive influence in shaping the implementation of the agency — often to serve their own purposes. For example, the small group of institutions that concentrated the larger share of enrolment growth played an active role behind the scenes to secure their access to student aid.

The power of accreditation to discriminate serious from dubious providers and to provide the public with accurate information about universities' performance

declined dramatically. The alliance between the government and leading universities did not assure the legitimacy basis for accreditation in the long run: it seemed almost irrelevant for the empowered actors at the end of this policy saga.

Policymaking in quality assurance, as the previous analysis has shown, has reflected a great deal of dynamism among policy players, which is essentially a manifestation of its growing centrality in coordinating higher education policy in two ways: it has affected a larger pool of providers in an incremental fashion and their consequences — in terms of access to funding and reputational gains — have increasingly impacted universities' ability to engage in competition. The prominent position acquired by higher education managers over time reflects the triumph of the sector over external forces in policymaking. In contrast, the diminished position of the government at the end of this evolution indicates a larger reconfiguration of forces that steer higher education as the sector has expanded its influence, visibility and power in Chile. By focusing on policy players, this section has uncovered many of the factors that caused change in quality assurance policy and the ways in which they have influenced the direction of these reforms.

7.3 Tracing structural factors

Conceived as norms and resources that inform recursive behaviour, structures are simultaneously the outcome of human agency and the medium for its constitution (Giddens 1984). Archer (2010[1982]:230) has suggested that structures have the potential to guide all sorts of collective and individual decisions by providing a lever for transforming the empirical domain. As norms they are subject to interpretation, while as resources they are convertible to the process of change.

As expected, this general proposition is fully applicable to the Chilean case. Structural factors have been subject to manipulation by policy players to advance their own influence on policymaking — as the engagement of quality assurance experts in phase 2 suggests. Yet existing structural properties have also exerted a significant influence on them and in practice have much conditioned agents' strategic engagement in policy development. The participation of higher education managers in phases 2 and 3 strongly suggests a stringent need to take part and influence policy formation and implementation to retain and expand their competitive advantages.

What it is perhaps exceptional to this case is the longevity of some structural properties that have contributed in shaping the direction of quality assurance policy over time.

Table 7.2 suggests four structural factors at play in the evolution of quality assurance policy, namely higher education’s expansion, competition among institutions, an elitist policymaking style, and the quality assurance discourse. They have been consistently present in each of the three phases covered in this evolution, which suggests the basic pattern of structural properties that has shaped quality assurance policy.

The influence of these factors on policy development, however, has been far from equal and has also mutated over time. Table 7.2 reflects these variations. The changing nature of structural conditions is categorised using present participles (i.e. ‘-ing’ adjectives) to emphasise the dynamic persistence of these forces in influencing policy change through the three different stages of the quality assurance saga. Often their intensity strengthened in an incremental fashion, originating new sectoral dynamics. ‘Starting’ designates the initial manifestation of a given structure. ‘Mutating’, in contrast, indicates the reformulation of previous existing structures. ‘Growing’ implies an expanding influence of existing structural properties while ‘Peaking’ signals the point at which they have reached their maximal impact upon policy-making. ‘Settling’ denotes the consolidation of stable structural properties that were previously in state of mutation. Lastly, ‘Dissolving’ refers to the dwindling influence of a given structure on policy-making due to its diminished legitimacy among policy players.

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
HE Expansion	Starting	Growing	Peaking
Competition in HE	Starting	Peaking	Mutating
Elitist policymaking	Mutating	Settling	Dissolving
QA discourse	Starting	Growing	Mutating

The first two structural properties — higher education expansion and competition in the sector — have long been core organising principles for the sector unleashed by the 1980 reforms. Combined, they have been pushing higher education towards greater privatisation (Brunner 2009:310-311). In contrast, the third — elitist

polycymaking — refers to the subordination of the sector to the norms, routines, and styles that frame government's action since the restoration of democracy. Additionally, the last one — quality assurance discourse — suggests the importance of a market-friendly rhetoric in expanding regulation of universities' inner operations.

7.3.1 Higher education expansion

Higher education expansion has been a decisive structural condition in implementing the 1980 reforms over time and in shaping related policies including those pertaining to quality assurance. It has been facilitated by private provision's proliferation and by greater competition among universities. Yet a consistent enrolment expansion has contributed to supporting the development of private providers and has provided the conditions for stronger competition among universities, accelerating the reconfiguration of the sector as a result.

The causes for expansion can be found among the steady economic growth Chile experienced since late 1980s and the robust demand for undergraduate education, which has been universally regarded in Chile as the safest avenue for social mobility (Bernasconi and Rojas 2004). As the demand intensified, choice became increasingly important in coordinating the sector and in shaping its expansion — the modest growth of the public subsidy to higher education has also been possible due to larger student cohorts able and willing to pay tuition fees.

Although consistent in its orientation, the pace of growth has fluctuated over time — often periods of booming matriculation figures were followed by less impressive results. Three distinctive points can be traced in this trajectory. First, the early multiplication of educational opportunities caused by the improbable enrolment growth of the early 1990s⁹¹. Then, by the end of the decade enrolment figures peaked again due to the growing number of private universities that embarked on ambitious expansion plans after their autonomy was granted. Finally, universities benefited from the creation of CAE, which made it possible for a larger cohort of prospective students to secure a loan to have access to higher education from 2005.

Higher education's expansion has been mediated by funding. It has been an important means of securing university finances — and sometimes to transfer largesse

⁹¹ The CEES report had anticipated moderate enrolment growth — from 15 to 20% — throughout the 1990s (Comisión de Estudio de la Educación Superior 1991). See section 4.7.1.

to their organisers, as happened with prominent new private institutions — but also for cementing their influence, visibility, and social legitimacy. Quality assurance has often acted at this intersection: it has both moderated and facilitated expansion. In contrast, higher education expansion has been both the cause and the outcome of the policies aiming to regulate its quality.

Examples of this fundamental connection, and its variations, can be found in all phases of the quality assurance evolution. Initially, the prospect of a deregulated system moving towards expansion was problematic. Licensing was the only mechanism available for monitoring the proliferation of new providers — CSE experts kept this objective in mind during its implementation. In practice, it lessened the potential for a much faster enrolment expansion by introducing *ex ante* evaluations for new academic courses and by paying close attention to universities' ongoing operations and strategic planning. Licensing did not fully stop expansion, though. A large group of new providers could manage to sort out licensing requirements and continued their expansion. Once their autonomy was granted, private universities could accelerate their plans for larger student bodies by starting new courses and branch campuses — the strategic planning and administrative tools they acquired during their licensing years assisted them in executing their expansion plans. The same tools assisted them in limiting academic influence on institutional decision-making by centralising control in senior administrative staff.

During the second phase of this policy evolution, the growing deregulation of higher education was again cause for concern and justified the introduction of course accreditation pilots in the perspective of the government and quality assurance experts. Although desirable for the prestige attached to accredited courses, most demand-absorbing institutions⁹² declined to submit their programs to CNAP — released from any control, they were expanding rapidly. Yet the policy agenda of 1997 was not against expansion. Inspired by human capital theory, the government was attempting to increase the qualifications of the workforce rapidly by encouraging greater enrolment sizes.

This ambiguity was finally settled in the course of the third phase of quality assurance evolution. Rapt by the equity discourse towards greater participation, the expansion of higher education was now a top policy priority. The best way to achieve

⁹² The concept of demand-absorbing higher education was coined by Levy (1986:59-61). It refers to universities targeting the growing demand for college education among non-elite students.

this goal was through greater financial support for students. The new loan scheme put forward by the government required institutional accreditation for universities to be eligible. The decision implied a subtle but significant change. With licensing effectively depleted due to the decreasing number of new institutions, external assessment was now focused on making sure that universities were ready to cater for larger student populations. Instead of marginalising dubious providers, the new policy was aimed at rewarding good institutions by giving them access to financial resources essential for their expansion. Unsurprisingly, the policy gave expansion a new boost — probably the most effective incentive ever applied to Chilean higher education⁹³.

The close link between higher education expansion and quality assurance policy evolution cannot be overemphasised. It is a dimension in which the agency and structure intersection has been overtly evident in causing reform. This changing connection has been pivotal in explaining policy players' positioning in regard to quality assurance policy. It has also been essential for understanding variations in policy implementation. As this tension has not stabilised yet, additional changes in policy are expected in the years to come. Universities have put considerable pressure on CNA to be accredited in order to participate in this new expansion wave. It mounted to the point that they overcame the agency's resistance — all universities that submitted for accreditation in 2010 gained the accredited status, signalling the failure of accreditation to distinguish serious from dubious providers. Meanwhile the expansion of the sector continues in a rather accelerated fashion.

7.3.2 Competitive dynamics

The expansion of higher education is closely linked to another key structural property that has shaped quality assurance policy: competition among universities. In the expanding and heavily privatised landscape of Chilean higher education, student choice has deeply affected universities' behaviour. Aggressive recruitment, heavy investment in advertising, flexible student placement, and price competition are usual practices adopted by universities to secure matriculation targets. In doing so they fiercely compete with one another to attract better or more students.

⁹³ According to official data from the Ministry of Education, total enrolments climbed from 619,002 to 987,643 between 2005 and 2010. The new student loan system started in 2006. By 2010 the public subsidy to student aid had increased four-fold.

Competition adopts a dual character in higher education: it is simultaneously market oriented and positionally based. Based on price, the market dimension of competition is self-evident since it is directly linked to prospects of financial gain for universities. This side of competition, however, affects student choice only marginally — the price tag of undergraduate education has not been the main attribute of higher education they focus on. Prospective students seek to secure prestigious credentials to pave their way into the labour market by attending highly esteemed institutions (Marginson 1997a:38-48). For students and universities positional competition is often more symbolic than effective, but not less real, since access to sought-after educational opportunities is greatly structured by social ascription. Yet positional competition seems inevitable for universities, as they have focused on building and communicating robust institutional reputations⁹⁴.

Due to its reputational potential, quality assurance policy has played an important role in shaping positional competition. It has often navigated between the drive for distinction and the imitative behaviour that together guide universities' actions. Yet quality assurance policy has consistently failed to accommodate and stabilise the volatility that these oppositional forces bring to the regulatory domain.

In different ways, the three main changes in quality assurance policy have reflected the exhaustion of existing external quality assessments and the need for further mechanisms to allocate or recognise differential prestige among universities. During the first stage of quality assurance evolution, competition was just starting — it took longer for new private universities to challenge traditional universities. Even the competition between new private universities was initially improbable because they were too small to compete effectively with one another. Progressively, new universities expanded their enrolments and started to engage in positional competition. By 1995 most of them were under licensing and their main aspiration was to secure their autonomy soon. Competition intensified when the first group of autonomous private institutions heavily exploited this attribute in their advertising — they could claim a superior quality to that of their competitors because they had been successfully released from licensing. Once the number of autonomous universities expanded to form a larger group, the competitive advantage of autonomy dissolved.

⁹⁴ According to Bitar (2012:27), expenditure in advertising in higher education was higher than the entire research budget by 2010.

In the beginning of the second phase of this evolution, public and private universities were starting to experience the effects of mounting competition. At this stage, competition had reached the national stage — some universities effectively shifted from single- to multi-campus systems. Even the traditional/new private divide became blurred as regional public universities started to face competition in their own hometowns (Leihy and Salazar 2012:151). Course accreditation pilots offered a new possibility for distinction and higher education providers actively participated in policy implementation to take advantage of this development. The fact that prestigious courses at elite universities submitted for accreditation first reinforced the link between prestige and accreditation — in the view of several observers in the sector, course accreditation provided a sought-after membership for the exclusive group of accredited programs. Again, this attribute was widely exploited through advertising during the enrolment season. From 2001 onwards, the quantity of courses submitting for accreditation grew exponentially.

During the final phase of the quality assurance evolution, competition kept mounting — after all, course accreditation was a limited artefact for reflecting the reputation of universities imparting numerous courses. Institutional accreditation pilots provided new opportunities for prestige differentiation. Unlike other distinction markers, institutional accreditation received an official character that no other source of distinction possessed in the highly privatised environment of Chilean higher education. It was also flexible. In addition to the binary status that emerged from external assessments (accredited/non-accredited), universities could apply for optional accreditation areas to gain public recognition for their robustness in specific domains such as graduate education, research, and service. Yet accreditation was strategic for universities and for that reason they managed to influence the Ministry to exclude quality assurance experts from running CNA and to trust its implementation to sector representatives. Facilitated by poor leadership, and encouraged by the accreditation/student aid link, the agency was not able to resist the constant pressure it received to give more positive assessments at every accreditation cycle.

Without additional discerning tools, accreditation was not functional to existing competitive dynamics in higher education. Universities have started looking for equivalent distinction mechanisms elsewhere. In 2010, Universidad Mayor was

accredited⁹⁵ by a regional accreditation agency from the US: the Middle State Commission on Higher Education. For many universities — especially for promising private institutions — this development showed the way ahead for enhancing their competitive stances.

7.3.3 Policy-making style

Policy-making style is the third structural factor that shaped the fluctuations of quality assurance policy. The connection is self-evident — policy changes are processed and enacted through the political apparatus of the government. The norms and practices of bureaucracy condition the timing and trajectory of reforms. Public officials' preferences and linkages to vested interests also render reform outcomes possible.

In the years that followed the introduction of the 1980 reforms, conditions for policy making experienced tectonic transformations in Chile. The end of General Pinochet's government and the restoration of democracy led by the political parties that – in precarious and technically illegal form – had opposed him inaugurated a whole new era. The president and most of the parliamentary seats were elected⁹⁶. Political parties were legal again. The advent of democracy heralded the end of secrecy and non-accountability that had characterised policymaking under the military rule.

1990 was year zero of the so-called Chilean transition to democracy and the beginning of the quality assurance saga. President Aylwin and his coalition adopted an elitist policymaking approach — the formation of the policy agenda and its implementation was primarily a responsibility of the upper echelons of the main political parties. In part, this decision seemed natural due to the greater ideological convergence among left and centre-left parties towards a program of government (Boeninger 1997:355). In addition, it was a decision dictated by the circumstances. Civic participation was effectively channelled through the political parties. Furthermore, ruling parties wanted to make sure that they could provide sound governance and incremental change without losing discipline after 17 years of proscription (Boeninger 1997:373-384).

⁹⁵ For details see http://www.msche.org/institutions_view.asp?idinstitution=574

⁹⁶ Not all members of the parliament were elected. The National Security Council (4 seats), the President (2 seats), and the Supreme Court (3 seats) appointed 9 (out of 45) seats in the Senate from 1990 to 2006.

This policymaking style was heavily applied to quality assurance policy during the period covered in the study. The group of experts in charge of implementing CSE attempted to replicate this style to fulfil their own mission — a process that was facilitated by their close association with the higher ranks of the government. It was applied at two different levels. First, it engaged in negotiations with promising new universities to convince them to sign up for licensing. Their example could be later used to undermine other institutions' resistance. Additionally, CSE selected distinguished academics from prestigious universities to serve as members of peer review committees. Hence, new providers could not openly question the recommendations included in licensing reports. The sound application of the quality assurance methodology and a heavy reliance on the upper ranks of academic disciplines are at the basis of the agency's success.

During the second phase of this policy saga, the same approach was replicated due to its effectiveness. However, this time the government was directly implicated in the negotiations to introduce course accreditation and to finance pilots through MECESUP. Negotiations occurred behind closed doors and involved senior officials from the Ministry of Education and the World Bank and future CNAP members. Once the template for accreditation pilots was established, the elitist style was also applied in its implementation. Perhaps with the exception of Medicine — which was automatically elite — the selection of the disciplines to be accredited, the conformation of the panels to set accreditation criteria, the selection of the experts in charge of conducting external reviews, and the invitations for piloting were carefully planned to boost accreditation pilots' legitimacy. The unstoppable demand for course accreditation testifies to the effectiveness of this strategy.

In the final stage of this policy evolution, three policy processes were subject to the same elitist style — this time with divergent results. First, CNAP attempted this strategy with institutional accreditation pilots. Yet the elitist approach was radicalised in practice. The selection of the institutions to participate in the first round of pilots exclusively targeted the most prestigious universities across sectoral lines. Public and private, traditional and new, universities accepted CNAP's invitation to be externally assessed. It was understood that all of them would be accredited because they were participating in the pilots to contribute their prestige to cementing the legitimacy of the new scheme.

Secondly, the elitist policymaking style was replicated through the legislative process, this time within the institutional framework of parliament and now with a different leading player: the Ministry of Education. All major actors informally appointed policy brokers to negotiate directly with the Minister and the Head of the Higher Education Division. They engaged in conversations with influential institutions and leading members of the Senate and the House of Representatives. However, it took longer to produce any results due to greater participation in policy formation and the effective lobbying exerted by universities to secure their influence over the new agency.

Lastly, with the policy formation process concluded, the implementation of the new legislation was trusted to a different actor: higher education institutions nominated CNA's board directly. Based on the success of CNAP in applying this approach, CNA attempted a similar elitist strategy. This time, however, results were quite different because the Commission did not have sufficient networks to apply the elitist style. Its technical competency in quality assurance was also weak, which prevented CNA from developing a strategy to construct legitimacy from below. Without sufficient support from the Ministry of Education, it ended under the control of vested interests in the sector.

The ultimate failure of the elitist policymaking style heralds the emergence of participative policymaking in the years to come. Departing from the approach that has dominated the evolution of quality assurance policy, students and academic unions are likely to take an active role in shaping further policy developments in this domain.

7.3.4 Quality assurance discourse

The origins of quality assurance can be traced to the New Public Management agenda for higher education, which emerged from a unique combination of ideas — neoliberal business models and market templates, bureaucratic control systems, and an emphasis on transparency and individualisation (Marginson 2012:2). In particular, the quality assurance discourse advances a mode of regulation usually referred to as 'steering from the distance' (Marginson 1997b:66). Accordingly, universities are granted greater autonomy to conduct their affairs, but their performance is externally assessed ex-post against the criteria provided by the government or by quality assurance agencies.

The quality assurance discourse stresses mission diversity within higher education and the centrality of strategic management in universities. It encourages regulatory intermediation, in which the academic community interfaces between the regulator (the quality assurance agency) and the regulated (universities) through peer review (King, Griffiths, and Williams 2007:162). Likewise, quality assurance discourse presumes to be a value-free methodology. Skolnick (2010:73-77) has suggested, however, that it possesses evident political overtones. The very idea of what constitutes quality is often contested on ideological grounds. Furthermore, quality assurance rhetoric influences the balance of power among stakeholders in higher education and works as an instrument for promoting conformity in academia. At the institutional level, it has consistently helped centralise information and power with professional administrators, and has stressed effectiveness as a core higher education value as universities become increasingly open to public scrutiny (Stensaker 2008:5-6).

The quality assurance discourse aims to provide solutions for two different problems: quality assurance and quality enhancement. The former refers to the possibility of providing greater public accountability for the higher education enterprise while the latter indicates the prospect of achieving gains in quality through the systematic application of quality assurance methodologies. Yet in practice quality enhancement goals are often postponed due to a greater emphasis on assurance and compliance, as Filippakou and Tapper (2008) have demonstrated in the English case.

Although in very different ways, quality assurance discourse has been present in all stages of the policy evolution that is the subject of this study. Initially, it was a fortunate discovery made within the emerging international community of scholars in the field of higher education. Applying this rhetoric to its own function, CSE shifted from a control-oriented system towards a more formative approach that combined minimum standards and the recognition of institutional diversity. Accordingly, the agency defined its own role as a facilitator to support institutions to accomplish their own aims, as long as basic standards were met.

The CSE approach to licensing was attuned with the times and helped to cement the legitimacy of the new evaluative scheme — it facilitated the rapid privatisation higher education was experiencing and created the conditions for eliminating dubious providers from the sector without imposing a single model for the university. The quality assurance discourse penetrated both traditional and new

universities supported by senior administrative officers. They found it useful for shaping their institutions from within according to the emerging paradigms of university management (see Shattock 2003). By introducing strategic management into the sector, they infused a new discourse throughout the university.

During the second part of the quality assurance saga, this discourse was intensively used by the government and quality assurance experts to justify the introduction of course accreditation. The rapid proliferation of agencies worldwide, expert circulation, and the support of international lenders enhanced the legitimacy of the pilots. The socialisation of the strategic management rhetoric and the positive outcomes of licensing also contributed to the acceptance of course accreditation among deans and heads of department. The policy of 1997 conveyed a similar message. Locally, course accreditation was demonstrating its potential for enhancing the standing of senior administrators. Deans expanded their bargaining capacity within universities by supporting the accreditation of the courses in their faculties. Institutional research offices proliferated and with them the use of standardised indicators for management. A performative culture⁹⁷ was gaining ground in universities.

By the time institutional accreditation pilots were introduced — at the beginning of phase three of this policy evolution — quality assurance rhetoric was ubiquitous across Chilean higher education. It was not only a core dimension of the policy architecture but it also signalled a future configuration of the sector due to its compatibility with prevalent competitive dynamics. Part of the common parlance among academics and administrators, it needed no introduction or reinforcement.

As universities became fluent in the jargon, they were able to set their own conditions for participating in the pilots, with the idea of maximising the prestige outcome of the experience. As a vehicle for advancing other interests along with quality concerns, the quality assurance discourse started to lose its pretence to neutrality — from now on, it became another avenue for universities to manipulate the operation of the policy infrastructure. On the other hand, CNAP's experts did not have much comparative knowledge to rely on in this conversation — outside the US, institutional accreditation was just starting in the form of academic audit. The final

⁹⁷ See Veblen (1899) for the idea of performative culture.

configuration of the pilots was thus the product of adaptation and compromise. Yet all parties seemed satisfied with the results.

By the time CNA was implemented, the quality assurance rhetoric was completely mainstream, losing much of its effectivity in the process. With a larger community of experts and interested parties, the problem was distinguishing between those who were just mimicking or manipulating its language and semblance from those who were in full command of the nuances involved. The members of the board of the agency were among the first group. It took some time for the sector to realise that the agency's decisions were not well grounded within the existing framework. Although it was not crucial — universities were already in command of most accreditation decisions from a distance — some formal legitimacy was needed to sustain the policy function of CNA. The lack of ability to provide these essential outcomes undermined its viability.

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This section has presented the structural properties that have played a fundamental role in shaping the evolution of quality assurance policy in Chile. It has demonstrated that they have mutated throughout this evolution as a result of their interaction with leading policy players in a similar incremental fashion but at a different pace. After their emergence, structural properties reach their peak and then start to mutate. Some — as expansion and competition — have exerted pressure to bring reform while others have been used strategically to produce desired policy outcomes. In their constant fluctuation, they have facilitated the three clear transformational stages experienced by quality assurance policy. Yet in the current policy landscape they are not aligned with the existing quality assurance scheme. Further policy adjustments can be forecast at this stage as a result of this state of affairs.

7.4 Policy change dynamics

Previous sections have presented traits of agency and structure in the Chilean higher education context. They have also documented the decisive influence these factors have on the evolution of quality assurance policy. Using the theoretical lenses presented in section 3.5, this section applies them to the study of policy change in

higher education. The aim is to provide a robust account of the process of change itself integrating agency and structure in a coherent narrative. In addition, the result of the analysis could offer a perspective as to the potential of selected theories fully to address the process of policy transformation.

The constant interplay of agency and structural conditions is pivotal when explaining policy change. The process of change, its causes and outcomes, gravitates towards this fundamental dynamic. The trajectory of quality assurance policy in Chile merely reassures this point. It has evolved in an incremental fashion through three fundamental mutations, always expanding its scope. Yet the growing legitimacy this regulatory policy had enjoyed had eroded dramatically at the end of the period covered in the case study — a review of the causes of the failed implementation of CNA has already been provided in section 6.6.

A solid understanding of the policy change process transcends determining the factors involved to focus on the change process itself. It demands a close examination of the temporal dimension in which a reform is unfolded and of the integrative dynamics at play in the process to appreciate the progressive formation of a new policy. Without those accounts, the eyes of the beholder are narrowly directed to the implementation process while broader effects of policy change — the constitution of new social practices or structural elaboration — remain hidden.

Hence, this section applies Bleiklie and Kogan's framework (Bleiklie and Kogan 2006:13-15), structuration theory (Giddens 1984), and morphogenesis theory (Archer 1995) to the case study. The results of their application to the evolution of quality assurance policy in Chile are reported accordingly.

7.4.1 Bleiklie and Kogan's comparative analysis

Section 3.4.4 has already introduced Bleiklie and Kogan's framework for the study of changes in higher education policy. Applied to the Chilean quality assurance policy, Bleiklie and Kogan's approach facilitates analysis by providing guidelines to organise the set of factors and the temporal dimensions involved in policy change processes. It also provides a methodology for identifying when change has effectively occurred.

Accordingly, the continuum of the Chilean quality assurance policy can be broken down into three separate junctures of change: the introduction of licensing, the initiation of course accreditation pilots and the formation, and implementation of a

new quality assurance scheme under CNA (see section 3.6). The encapsulation of the first and the third reform processes is relatively straightforward — in both cases the formation and implementation of new pieces of legislation signalled a self-contained course of action within clear organisational boundaries (CSE and CNA, respectively).

Between them, the delimitation of the accreditation pilots is more problematic. They overlapped with the new evaluative scheme in both its functional and temporal dimensions. Yet they were meant to be provisional, experimental, and participative, as they were preparing the sector for the introduction of new legislation. They were also linked to the MECESUP initiative, which also existed for a fixed term.

Course accreditation pilots were fully formed and implemented by the time the new legislation was to be born — in fact course accreditation pilots continued between 2003 and 2007, although they were deployed into a mature scheme that was fully in operation prior to that time. The evident alteration of social practices they caused, in terms of mainstreaming external quality assurance into higher education, suggests that these pilots constitute a different phase in this evolution that is essential to make sense of what came afterwards.

Institutional accreditation pilots, however, did not meet the same criteria. Originally, they were not part of the pilot accreditation plan and were only developed at the request of the Ministry of Education. They started when the formation of the quality assurance legislation was commencing, in 2003. Their primary goal was to anticipate the expected impact of the new scheme — especially in relation to the eligibility for the new student loan system. As they were primarily used by the government to mitigate possible negative reactions from the sector with regard to the proposed legislation, it is difficult not to situate these evaluative experiences within the initial stages of phase three of the quality assurance saga.

With the distinctive phases of the policy evolution settled, Bleiklie and Kogan's conceptual apparatus turns its attention to the process of change. The orientation of their framework, however, differs from the approach of this case study in two fundamental ways.

First, because of the comparative nature of their approach — focused on a review of key dimensions of change in selected Western European higher education systems — Bleiklie and Kogan concentrate on the consequences of reform in terms of the direction and amount of change between time 1 (T1) and time 2 (T2) in an

aggregate fashion. An important consequence follows: the transformation process through the interaction of structure and agency is basically outside of their scope.

This oversimplification of the study of change is certainly useful to trace the broad effects of reforms but probably less helpful when the focus is posited onto one particular policy trajectory in which intermediate points are as important as origin and destination. This aspect is of particular interest in the Chilean case because of the shifting nature of structural conditions throughout the evolution of policy for quality assurance, as the previous section has revealed.

Secondly, and related to the previous point, Bleiklie and Kogan are primarily interested in the nature of the changes introduced into higher education — whether organic growth or radical transformation — and for that reason they devoted considerable attention to trace continuities and discontinuities in policy that each nation had exhibited. Although presumably central to their model, actors tend to play a relatively minor role in the analysis. Yet the choices they made obviously reflect the objectives, resources, and values they hold. This rich material is rarely used to contextualise policy outcomes. In practice, Bleiklie and Kogan's analysis leaves their model for the study of the change process virtually untested.

These reasons preclude the prospect of a further application of this framework for exploring the dynamics of change in this case study. A pertinent aspect, though, is Bleiklie and Kogan's claim in regard to the differential impact agency and structure have on change.

Tested in all of the phases of the quality assurance saga, this hypothesis had not been confirmed. Both structural conditions and agency have played decisive parts in fostering change that cannot be measured in terms of greater or smaller influence on policy change. Determinism and voluntarism do not operate in an oppositional fashion. In practice, they are simultaneously implicated in such a way in the reform process that it is conceptually impossible to capture their relative causal weight. Even the fortuitous adaptation of quality assurance ideas for implementing licensing — a case that fits well into the narrower scope and shorter time hypothesis — cannot be explained exclusively through CSE's agency.

The ongoing expansion and growing privatisation of higher education were signalling the inevitability of a robust new private cluster — a plan to severely reduce the number of new private providers through stricter governmental control could put under question the reputation of the entire system. Even if that option were available,

the close connections between the political opposition and the nascent providers could trigger an additional political crisis that the first transitional democratic government would not want to confront. Given the elitist policymaking style initiated during President Aylwin's tenure, it is hard not to conjecture that the government authorised — or at least consented to — the approach adopted for the implementation of licensing. Under those conditions it would become somehow evident that a developmental mechanism for the private sector was needed and it did not come out of pure voluntarism from CSE's experts.

7.4.2 Structuration theory

Transcending the agency/structure dualism, Giddens has situated social change as a constitutive process of social systems. In his perspective, both elements are essentially implicated in the unified structuration process from which social systems emerge and evolve. Structures are 'rules and resources implicated in the reproduction of social systems' (Giddens 1976a:121). Agents draw from them 'in order to perform and carry out social interactions' (Elliott 2010:88). These observations allow Giddens to suggest the dual nature of structure as 'the medium and the outcome of the reproduction of practices' (Giddens 1979:5). Because they are internal to the individual, structures enable them to reproduce or transform social practices as a practical consciousness exercise — often with unexpected consequences, since 'human knowledgeability is always bounded' (Giddens 1984:27).

Applied to quality assurance policy in Chile, structuration theory has offered new possibilities for analysis. It does not provide a solution to explain when change occurs — as Archer (2010[1982]:231) has correctly pointed out — but it does advance a robust analytical template to explain the broader process of change in this particular policy evolution. In particular, structuration theory has allowed the tracing of the ways in which agents have manipulated rules and resources to introduce reform, uncovering how they have applied structures of domination, legitimation, and signification to achieve their goals strategically.

The analysis is built upon the typification of agency (Table 7.1) and the classification of structural properties (Table 7.2) advanced in Sections 7.2 and 7.3. It has been directed to connect agency positioning and existing structures in each of the phases covered in this policy evolution. The purpose is to provide a plausible account

of how transformation was enacted in these three basic stages and to situate the prospects for further reforms that emerge from this trajectory. Furthermore, it allows exploring the connections between phases as the factors implicated in the process of change modify their statuses.

At the beginning of Phase 1, the existing policy mechanism for monitoring the quality of new higher education providers was losing its legitimacy rapidly. No policy actor was in charge of its maintenance and new providers could transfer annually from one examiner to another at will. Beyond curricular requirements for professional courses and student examination, they were free to organise themselves and to choose their aims, goals, and institutional strategies. The government only had a marginal intervention in the process though it provided official recognition for new providers. As they multiplied rapidly by the end of the 1980s, the status of official recognition was in peril.

The government acted to secure the fundamental principles of the 1980 reforms in a new democratic era. Existing private universities were given no opportunity to oppose: the new framework was approved without consultation. They did not have any reason to do so, either. The new legislation did not make the new supervision regime mandatory for them yet it gave them the chance to transfer to the new system.

In its original form, licensing pointed to greater control upon new providers. It assumed universities had to be closely monitored according to their core operational dimensions. Lack of progress in achieving their own goals had to be reported and was subject to escalating sanctions. However, critical parts of the system could only be decided during its implementation, which was in charge of the new democratic government.

The implementation of licensing was trusted to a group of individuals closely connected to the parties in power that had a clear goal in mind. This group attempted to retain the core principles of the 1980 reforms — they welcome a vigorous new private sector and the greater competition it would bring to higher education — but were worried about the consequences attached to new providers' rapid proliferation.

The development of a quality assurance methodology to guide licensing provided evidence of the new approach they adopted. Located in a position of power, CSE experts applied available resources to gain the knowledge needed to set up a strategy. The new framework clearly departed from the traditional approach to

licensing — based on external examination of students⁹⁸ — allowing the bringing of something completely new. The new assessment technology, based on self-review and external peer review, was imported and adapted with the on-the-ground support of a leading American expert.

Along with this new technology, a structural property of signification was activated: the new quality assurance discourse. It facilitated a viable interpretation of the existing framework that emphasised the neutrality of the evaluative tool and its potential for accommodating institutional diversity. Organised around an adjustable notion of quality — fitness *for* and *of* purpose — the quality assurance discourse mainly focused on developing sound administrative systems for universities in a way that vaguely but effectively reflected the private sector's corporate management.

Additionally, CSE experts activated the structural property of elitism. They engaged in negotiation with prominent private providers and persuaded them to submit to licensing. The message was clear: successful institutions could effectively achieve their autonomy through the new system. With the most respected new providers undertaking licensing, the scheme itself and the agency behind it gained in reputation rapidly.

In CSE's appreciation, its reputation was essential for enhancing its credibility in dealing with problematic licensing cases. Likewise, a respected agency working collaboratively with serious providers was effectively a decisive part of the message for attracting other recently formed institutions to licensing in large numbers. The reduction of regulatory costs associated with the supervision of new private providers was another structure of domination conveniently exploited for the implementation of licensing. As Archer (2010[1982]:232) has aptly suggested, structural properties of signification and legitimation entail resources for their operation.

CSE experts also benefited from recently formed domination structures — the emerging expansion of higher education and the initial steps towards greater competition in the sector — that contributed to enhance licensing's regulatory prominence. It provided distinction and corporate-like management strategies that were well attuned to the growing influence of markets in coordinating higher education.

⁹⁸ From private secondary schools to traditional private universities, external student examination was the preferred method for controlling the quality of education in Chile throughout the twentieth century.

The evident signs of successful implementation helped CSE experts to secure continuous government support throughout the 1990s. After all, the government was heavily involved in the decisions made by the CSE board. Probably the lack of enthusiasm among student and academic unions — natural allies of the ruling centre-left coalition — raised a few doubts in the central government. However, senior university administrators helped to expand the perception of its positive contribution to regulating the sector.

Further development of policy could refer to the successful licensing implementation to justify the need for expanding the reach of quality assurance in Chilean higher education as the introduction of accreditation suggests. CSE experts gained in influence in higher education policy as well. The end of their tenure at CSE in 1998 put them in the position to advance new policy initiatives, kicking off the second phase of the quality assurance evolution as a result.

Holding political, policy and financial resources for mainstreaming external quality assessments in higher education, the next task for the quality assurance experts was to articulate their project. They decided to reach the whole sector with course accreditation though they did not have even the prospect of a legal mandate that could predispose universities to accept it beforehand.

With some refinements, the strategy used was very similar to the implementation of licensing: an intense use of the quality assurance discourse to provide a compelling interpretation for addressing quality concerns; a tactical alignment of course accreditation with the competitive dynamics of the sector; and an intensive application of resources to maximise the impact of their involvement in the elitist policymaking style. The challenge of bringing policy change was, however, of a different magnitude compared to implementing a limited monitoring device for a distinctive group of universities with modest enrolments.

Aware of its communicative potential, CNAP explicitly regarded the accredited status as something distinctive. In the same vein as the marketing attempts to introduce greater differentiation among corporations, CNAP represented accreditation as a ‘quality seal’⁹⁹ to differentiate reliable from less responsible providers. The goal was self-evident — a reinforcement of accreditation’s appeal —

⁹⁹ Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado (2007:41).

but the strategy would also help to legitimise the intensive use of advertising during the enrolment season.

The frequent use of ad-hoc events to socialise uptake of the new evaluative technology and to attract new allies and acolytes from the sector was an important factor in expanding the resource pool CNAP had for advancing its agenda. It was also a concrete demonstration of the participatory approach adopted by CNAP. At the same time, the agency was careful to choose the right people to participate in its graduate attributes panels and in its external review teams. Similarly, the first courses to be submitted for accreditation were strategically picked to maximise its reputational potential in three domains: the agency, the evaluative scheme, and the accredited course.

Additionally, the influence of structural properties they relied on for implementing licensing was augmented significantly between 1990 and 1998. Quality assurance discourse gained in legitimacy as the leading interpretation for framing quality issues as accreditation schemes proliferated worldwide. In part, their popularity arose from regional integration agendas and from the attempts of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to liberalise international trade on services (Lemaitre 2007:111). Cross-border mobility of students and professionals required the recognition of foreign credentials. Course accreditation emerged as a serious candidate to fulfil that function by providing clear information about the quality and structure of foreign courses. Mutual recognition agreements among accreditation agencies could facilitate the process as well.

The growing number of autonomous universities was expanding competitive patterns across the sector. Universities were actively seeking to recruit more or better students. For the first time since the 1980 reforms, traditional universities — especially regional public universities — were experiencing greater competition from new providers: the superior standing of traditional universities was no longer taken for granted. New universities with elite aspirations were trying to distinguish themselves from their demand-absorbing peers. As a result, university presidents were increasingly searching for a new distinction marker and course accreditation seemed a good instrument to reinforce or challenge well-established reputations.

The elitist approach to participation was also reinforced by the prevalent policymaking ethos. Channels for policy circulation were heavily restricted through a few political leaders — negotiating with them was the most effective way to advance

a new policy in the perception of the sector. Fully adjusted to the political landscape, universities had secured high-profile support from across the political spectrum. In the increasingly volatile environment of the late 1990s, elitist participation was also an important factor in policymaking — probably the only way to secure a swift and positive reaction from the sector was through the involvement of elite schools and faculties. They could play a key function in legitimising the new evaluative scheme, which could additionally help them in reassuring their own status.

Quality assurance experts relied heavily on their knowledge of these structural properties to introduce CNAP and course accreditation. After all, they had been refining the same strategy since 1990. Early on, CNAP claimed that its model had emerged from the international experience in quality assurance. Therefore, it could assert that the ability of accreditation to provide public assurance for accredited programs while assisting them in enhancing their quality was evidence-based. Interestingly, the idea of quality behind these pilots remained open, helping the agency to accommodate and conciliate in practice divergent aims if necessary.

In retrospect, it is not difficult to attribute the sound implementation of course accreditation to CNAP's ability to notice and apply structural properties of domination, legitimation, and signification to advance change. To this day, accreditation pilots stand as an unusual but successful policymaking experiment in Chilean higher education. The spontaneous collaboration it received from university administrators made the task easier. Elite universities benefited greatly from this strategy as their courses and institutions gained in academic distinction and market salience as a result.

In sharp contrast with previous phases, the last phase of the Chilean evolution reveals a much more complex process of change. Policy formation (the Quality Assurance Act) and policy implementation (institutional accreditation pilots) occurred simultaneously. Although they were part of the bill, course accreditation and licensing were already well-established practices when the congressional discussion started.

The government — the leading actor behind these initiatives — divided the discussions into parallel tracks, trusting in its ability to use one (accreditation pilots) to influence the other (parliamentary discussions). Senior officials at the Ministry of Education expected to approve the legislation without losing any important provisions. Probably because it was assumed that the bill would resemble the ongoing evaluative experiences, its implementation was not within the scope of consideration.

Guided by the short-term priorities imposed by competition, university managers attempted to configure an evaluative scheme that could give them a greater voice in the accreditation process. Because of their assessment of the pilots, they wanted to counteract the unpredictable nature of external evaluations — CNAP’s discretionary use of the evaluative framework was a cause of concern for management systems based on performance indicators — and to maximise their reputational outcome. The prospects of a new student loan scheme open to all accredited institutions simply increased the intensity of their pledge.

CNAP experts aspired to project their longstanding leadership into the new regulatory landscape, consolidating their influence system-wide. Two circumstances conspired to defeat their expectations. Their design for institutional accreditation pilots was incomplete and, thus, they had to engage in negotiations with the sector to forge a viable scheme. Additionally, their political capital was insufficient to allow them to lead the negotiations in Congress, which effectively relegated them to a secondary role.

Fully aware of the ongoing expansion wave, the government sought to make additional funding conditional upon accreditation. Universities could not sustain their current or potential growth rate without that support. Additionally, universities could barely avoid accreditation once course and institutional pilots were fully operational — accreditation rapidly transformed competitive dynamics in a way that higher education providers could not resist if they wanted to retain or improve their place in the pecking order. Backed by CNAP experts, the government increasingly mastered the quality assurance discourse to justify those interpretations that supported its accreditation plans.

Universities knew they could not escape accreditation. Their aspiration was to make it as harmless as they could. They were ready to apply the pool of resources they had accumulated because of the dominant policymaking style — private providers, in particular, had expedient access to Congress and other corridors of power for advancing their own policy agenda. Universities could exploit the ideological debate caused by the quality assurance bill to justify their positioning. By endorsing institutional diversity and reclaiming the importance of applying due process principles to accreditation, they could oppose some aspects of the proposed legislation.

After years of intense bargaining, the government eventually secured the piece of legislation it wanted. Universities left their fingerprints on the quality assurance bill, as well. The final version of the legislation simultaneously reflected these sometimes conflicting strands — vague and confusing regulations were the cost the government and the sector paid for this compromise. This outcome deferred the burden of settling upon a functional scheme to its time of implementation.

However, the government lost its chance to control the implementation process by accepting that CNAP experts could not be appointed in the new agency. It simply had no alternative plan of action. It could only trust the implementation to the sector. Taking advantage of the situation, universities controlled the nomination of CNA board members. They applied the prevalent elitism to mobilise the resources to secure their control of the agency — previously exploited for policymaking and for implementation of the accreditation pilots. Against government plans, universities acquired a decisive influence in the new agency's operation that has been deeply problematic. Future reforms in quality assurance continue to be heavily conditioned by these results.

7.4.3 Morphogenesis theory

Morphogenesis assumes that structure predates action. Conditioned by pre-existing structures (T1), action commences (T2) and concludes (T3) structural elaboration. Resulting structures postdate action (T4). Action, however, partially overlaps with structures — it starts conditioned by pre-existing structures and ends when resulting structures are formed and survive in their own right. Archer (2010[1982]:238) has suggested that morphogenesis occurs in a cyclical fashion: she expects that the result of structural elaboration could sooner or later lead to further transformations in the same fashion.

The application of Archer's model to the analysis of phase 1 of the quality assurance evolution reveals some peculiarities. Although abrupt, the transition from the initial structural conditioning (external examination) to structural elaboration (licensing) essentially followed the morphogenetic pathway. It happened quietly — appearing overnight, almost — without warning amid the transition to democracy.

Its implementation, however, was more complicated: once LOCE was enacted, the people behind this reform left their position of power, leaving an

important vacuum at a crucial time. Given the broad wording of the new regulation, the implementation process was essential in defining its purpose and organisation.

Archer (2010[1982]:240) has suggested that ‘...agency exerts two independent influences, one temporal, the other directional.’ Drastic changes in agency influenced both the timeframe for implementing licensing and the direction it followed in the way predicted by Archer.

Originally, licensing required immediate implementation. It was assumed that CSE could be formed for the short term assisted by the Ministry of Education. Because the new regulation was a surprise for the new government, it took longer to appoint all of the board members — CSE was formally installed on 19th of July 1990 (Consejo Superior de Educación 1998:11). For another year or so, the council had no clear agenda. It took three full years — from 1991 to 1993 — to complete licensing’s implementation. Albeit targeting a cluster of small institutions of little complexity, the challenge of configuring a quality assurance scheme aiming to provide broad supervision proved to be complex.

Intricate legal interpretations, unclear technological adaptations, and new providers’ scepticism also conspired against a swift transition. Yet in the end the new scheme gained in legitimacy due to the skilful manipulation of existing structural properties and the influence of economic incentives for transferring from one regime to the other. Since then, licensing has remained as a core element of higher education regulation.

Additionally, the directionality of licensing experienced an important variation. The real policy change — the existing licensing model — overlapped with a failed attempt to replace external examination with a stricter supervisory scheme. The resulting system adopted a developmental approach in which the assessment framework aimed to guide new providers but also to protect them against arbitrary decisions.

The second phase of this policy evolution is relatively straightforward — mainly because agency remained under the same hands. As predicted by the morphogenetic model, the resulting structure from the original reform (licensing) was the starting point for the next one. It allowed an incremental change towards course accreditation. Using licensing as a conceptual starting point, CSE experts convinced the government that an expansion of quality assurance was the appropriate measure to

confront the challenges of growing deregulation and greater competition due the increasing number of autonomous private providers.

From 1997 onwards, accreditation became a high priority in higher education policy. The MECESUP initiative bolstered this goal by providing funding and the organisational infrastructure for running accreditation pilots. Although the purpose was to achieve system-wide quality enhancement, universities engaged with it for different reasons — market differentiation and internal resource allocation disputes pushed universities towards accreditation pilots.

This alignment cemented course accreditation success. The broader legitimacy of the evaluative scheme, however, emanated from different sources. The emerging managerial systems in universities allowed external demands to assert their growing influence. Additionally, the public appeal of accreditation as a quality marker demanded universities to renew their commitment to accreditation over time to retain their position in undergraduate enrolment competition.

Different to licensing, the introduction of course accreditation was completed in a relatively short period of time. By 2001 the process of change was concluded as its structural elaboration had been robustly established. During the next years — and until the end of CNAP in 2007 — disciplinary and professional groups kept expanding the number of sets of graduate attributes for course accreditation purposes. This multiplied the number of courses in position to be accredited in the upcoming years. The enactment of the Quality Assurance Act in 2006 delegated this responsibility from CNA to private agencies. CNA retained the power to supervise course accreditation agencies. The course accreditation model did not experience other substantive variations, at least formally.

The process of policy change occurring during phase 3 of this evolution started similarly to the previous phase. The result of the previous structural elaboration — course accreditation — provided the initial structural conditioning from which reform would be launched. However, different to previous phases, here the directions of change were multiple. It aimed at incremental change by expanding accreditation at the institutional level but also to formalise the quality assurance infrastructure brought about by the MECESUP initiative in provisional form.

The government was behind this reform agenda — directly in the introduction of new prospective legislation for a comprehensive and permanent quality assurance scheme and indirectly in the development of institutional accreditation pilots. It was

understood that the fate of the proposed legislation depended on the pilots' success and both were closely coupled with other policy initiatives.

CNAP experts were not completely sidelined, but their main task pointed towards the provision of favourable conditions for the government to pass the new legislation. Institutional accreditation pilots produced the expected results due to the effective manipulation of stringent structural conditions towards that purpose — it is hard to imagine a different result due to the vast experience that CNAP experts had accumulated in this particular domain. Yet their influence in the quality assurance agenda progressively decreased as the congressional process became overtly political.

The lack of experience in aligning structural properties conspired against the Ministry of Education. The production of expected outcomes took longer and became uncertain. The result of the structural elaboration differed substantially from that planned.

With CNAP experts vetoed by the sector and the government exclusively focused on politics, the implementation of the new legislation was trusted to the sector. Resembling the implementation of licensing, changes in appointing agency members played a significant role in guiding the implementation of the new legislation.

Under the collective control of universities, the implementation of CNA was crucial for the functioning of the new system. Numerous aspects of regulation were not clear and the leadership of the agency was pivotal for a functional system. By shifting the direction of change, the sector avoided a proper implementation of the new legislation. CNA mimicked what CNAP used to do without investing in developing a new assessment technology or adjusting the old one to the new scenario.

The main reason behind this unusual development was the lack of interest among universities with regard to the functioning of accreditation. For them, the quality assurance discourse lost all its utility. The decreasing legitimacy of this assessment methodology signalled its ultimate failure. Universities' single point of interest was how to achieve the desired results through the agency's decisions on accreditation. Lobbying and peer pressure became the preferred tools for securing expected outcomes.

Over time, institutional accreditation became a formality for gaining access to the new student aid system backed by the government. This caused a major disruption in higher education policy — prospective students, their families, and funding

agencies are still expecting to receive useful information from accreditation agencies — yet it responded to sectoral needs effectively. The lack of greater differentiation was a problem universities were facing. Yet they were able to consider available options for tackling the issue without greater involvement from the government.

7.5 Conclusions

Based on the case description presented in Chapters 4 to 6, this chapter has organised and analysed the main factors affecting quality assurance policy through the three phases of its evolution. Accordingly, three groups of policy players — quality assurance experts, the government, and higher education managers — have led policy development at the different stages of this evolution. Likewise, the expansion of higher education, the competitive dynamics inside the sector, an elite policymaking style, and the quality assurance discourse have been identified as the essential structural properties that have played a decisive influence in shaping reforms in this domain. Combined, they have provided the necessary building blocks to explain why quality assurance policy has experienced important transformations.

The theories selected for the study have been tested with the aim of exploring their potential for explaining change. Bleiklie and Kogan's framework was of limited help mainly because of its comparative orientation and its policy outcomes focus. In contrast, structuration theory has provided a plausible but incomplete account of policy change. However, the full narrative has only surfaced when it has been combined with morphogenesis theory as Stones (2001) has suggested. The emerging picture has revealed new possibilities for analysis that situate the study of quality assurance beyond the axis of greater and lesser state control upon universities.

Chapter 8:

Unfolding quality assurance: agency, structure and the policy process

8.1 Introduction

This study was conducted to examine and systematically account for developments from a policy analysis perspective informed by social theory. The expectation was to provide a better understanding of the functions quality assurance serves in a national system of higher education. Two different sets of findings can be now reported — one pertains to the process of change in this specific policy domain while the other refers to the policy outcomes that resulted from this evolution. The policy change typology developed by Howlett and Cashore (2009) supports this examination. Their categories of ‘policy means’ inform the first part of the findings while their categories of ‘policy ends’ guide the analysis. It is important to note, however, that the latter does not attempt to provide an impact analysis but, rather, a broader reflection on the issues at play in the functioning of this specific policy within the Chilean context.

The chapter is organised into five sections. This introduction is followed by the presentation of the findings of the study organised in two sets of categories. Later, the main conclusions are put forward. Here policy trajectories previously reported are revisited and compared to Streeck and Thelen’s typology for incremental policy change — the final twist of the quality assurance saga suggests the need of expanding the palette of observed policy changes. Additionally, Capano and Howlett’s (2009) criteria for describing policy transformations have also been applied. The next section introduces the implications for higher education policy that have surfaced through the study. Chiefly, it suggests that the failure of accreditation has opened up a new opportunity to rethink higher education policy or at least to reconsider the operation of the quality assurance apparatus. Finally, the significance and limitations of the study are presented to situate and contextualise the findings and conclusions of the thesis properly.

8.2 Findings

Documenting the evolution of quality assurance policy in Chile has provided more than a rich historical tapestry of data covering twenty years of policy development in

a particular and in many ways irreplicable setting. As Chapter 7 has demonstrated, the case study has shed new light on the dynamics of reform in higher education in two key dimensions: the factors at play in each instance of policy shift and the ways in which these have interacted through the political system to bring change in this policy area. Building upon that examination, this section presents the main findings of the study organised in two different but related groupings.

8.2.1 In relation to the policy process

As expected, agency and structure have performed a central role in shaping the processes that brought change into quality assurance policy. The cast of empowered actors and the structural properties that conditioned their involvement in policymaking remained fairly stable through the three stages of change that affected quality assurance policy. This continuity helped to cement an incremental policy trajectory in which external quality assessments transited from the periphery to the heart of higher education policy.

However, the permanence of the factors affecting policy development conceals variations in policy players' positioning and in the stringency of structural factors. Quality assurance experts led the implementation of licensing, the formation and the implementation of accreditation pilots. Higher education managers, in contrast, were passive under licensing then active during the pilots and the legislative discussion of the Quality Assurance Act and finally in excluding the experts during CNA's implementation. In the background, the government remained active in the implementation of licensing, increased its engagement during the pilots and the discussion of the proposed legislation and became passive at the end of this evolution. These shifts in engagement and policy leadership have important consequences for the direction of change in quality assurance.

Changes in agency greatly affected policy implementation during phases 1 and 3 of this evolution (see Chapters 4 and 6) while structural factors remained relatively stable in their direction: expansion and competition continued putting pressure on universities to distinguish themselves from their competitors and to secure new sources of funding; quality assurance discourse was expanding and gaining in primacy; and elite policymaking continued to be heavily used yet under circumstances of greater participation within the sector. In both cases implemented policy little

resembles the original intentions because the agents in charge of their implementation — CSE experts in the first case, representatives of the sector within CNA in the second — consciously decided to introduce variations into policy objectives while maintaining procedures and practices. They did not ignore the limits of regulation imposed on them (such as the timeframe for licensing or the duration of accreditation terms) but they were able to take advantage of poor or obscure wording to redirect licensing or accreditation towards achieving different goals.

This finding suggests that Archer's noting of agency's limitations in bringing about change — the stringency of constraints argument — has proven to be wrong in the Chilean case. On the contrary, unexpected outcomes can be largely attributed to the centrality of agency in shaping policy's operation. This is the result of an evidently legalistic approach to quality assurance agencies' management and the greater autonomy conferred to them to conduct their operations: agencies cannot break the law but they can do whatever they want as long it can be interpreted as legal. Yet that flexibility for reconsidering aims and goals of policy has only been possible because no actor has held enough power or interest to contest the new policy direction, as these examples illustrate.

Additionally, divergences between policy formation and implementation indicate a weak role for the government in securing desired outcomes. This is particularly clear in phase 3 of this policy evolution. Invested with enough power to dictate the agenda, lead negotiations, and direct implementation — which was a responsibility of the Ministry of Education — the government eventually failed to achieve the functional long-term quality assurance scheme it had envisioned. The greater policy powers conferred upon the Ministry proved to be of little utility when its capacity to monitor the operation of quality assurance agencies and to direct policy implementation was limited.

Both reform examples — the implementation of licensing and the formation and implementation of the new quality assurance scheme — suggest an important fracture between policy formation and implementation. This has been a well-documented phenomenon since Cerych and Sabatier's landmark study of higher education reform (1986:16). Yet to their list of factors affecting implementation (i.e. clarity of objectives, degree of change envisioned, adequacy of causal theory, adequacy of financial resources, degree of commitment to policy objectives, changes in the socioeconomic conditions) this study has added a new one: changes in agency.

This finding is tightly coupled with an important feature of quality assurance: its flexibility to serve even inconsistent objectives depending on who is commanding its operation.

The same policy trajectory offers a counter-example that confirms this finding. Continuity in agency between policy formation and implementation assured a greater consistency in policy goals. The tight control CNAP experts exerted on policy content during the implementation of accreditation pilots — they designed the pilot plan, secured the resources for its implementation and controlled its functioning — played a decisive role in achieving sound implementation of these experiences even under conditions of wider participation from the sector and little regulatory stability.

Discourse has been the other defining dimension of the policy processes linked to quality assurance — it has provided guidance in framing negotiations and has assisted the government in gaining support for reform. Quality assurance rhetoric was formulated during the implementation of licensing (phase 1; in many cases through the translation of English-language terminology which was not uniformly understood in the first place) and socialised through the accreditation pilots (phase 2). However, it only became central when the government attempted to pass the Quality Assurance Act through Congress.

The persuasiveness of the quality assurance discourse cannot be overstated. Its penetration into Chilean universities has been profound due to its ability to convey a sense of modernity and professionalism to university management that, with few exceptions, had previously been absent from the sector. Within the policy domain, the government and the political system could emphasise its evident accountability properties, its light touch intervention in university management, and its value-for-money in terms of securing a basic level of quality in the sector at low cost.

The growing centrality of quality assurance within the policy architecture was also reinforced by the positive view offered by international scholarship in this domain, which contributed to enhancing its legitimacy in the sector rapidly. Kells, for example, openly suggests that quality assurance is able to perform different roles simultaneously: assessing the functioning of programs and services; assessing the achievement of results in light of stated intentions; assuring that internal regulatory mechanisms are in place and functioning; and reporting to the public and the government (1992:18). The goals of quality assurance have been even more ambitious, as can be appreciated in the well-known definition of Vlăsceanu,

Grunberg, and Pârlea: ‘quality assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement, providing information and judgment (not ranking) through an agreed and consistent process and well-established criteria’ (2007:74).

These bold words suggest a clear message: quality assurance was the fundamental regulatory response able to address many quality-related issues in higher education. Often repeated, but not necessarily understood, by university leaders and government officials, it became a fundamental policy principle. Yet, as often occurs with one-size-fits-all solutions, high expectations for accreditation’s performance under the new quality assurance scheme contributed to a poor implementation of CNA. The operation of the agency revealed that a number of long-term conditions — the independence of the agency, a sound evaluative strategy and sector endorsement, among others — were critical for securing expected results. Once it was clear that accreditation could not match expectations, a sense of despair spread throughout the sector. By 2013 policymakers are still discussing how CNA’s accreditation approach can be repaired.

8.2.2 In relation to policy outcomes

After 20 years of quality assurance, Chilean higher education is still struggling fully to make sense of its possibilities and limitations. In practice, it has primarily sustained an institutionalised arena for settling important issues. For private providers, accreditation means access to the student aid system and big chances to secure matriculation and income targets. For traditional universities, it assures their eligibility for additional public funding. Beyond these functions, quality assurance primarily updates the state of positional competition in the sector for institutions, the government, and the general public. Additionally, it regulates access to government funding for universities and shepherds expectations for quality improvement.

Rarely stressed, the polysemy of quality assurance has obviously affected the achievement of its goals and the fulfilment of the expectations attached to licensing and accreditation. As mentioned in Chapter 1, John Brennan (1997) has identified three key controversies — in language, power, and change — attached to the introduction of quality assessments in higher education across the developed world. Although none of these issues has manifested in an especially controversial way through this policy saga, they can help to illustrate how external evaluation has

contributed to transforming Chilean higher education and may well continue to influence higher education policy more generally.

With virtually all higher education providers subject to one or another form of external quality assessment, senior administrations have assumed the task of dealing with external accountability demands. Yet their job has been less complicated than initially thought: most external requirements are subject to a similar treatment. This has been possible because existing schemes rely on the same notion of quality — fitness *for* and *of* purpose — though their orientation, target population, and eligibility criteria are divergent. This is especially evident for institution-wide assessments. External assessment methodologies are also structured in a similar fashion: both CSE and CNA employ self-assessment reports, peer review visits, and given criteria in order to decide upon higher education quality.

In addition, accreditation and licensing have situated the conversation about quality assurance at a higher level of abstraction — most external assessments have focused on the level of achievement of institutional missions using aggregate data produced by institutional research offices. This orientation has helped universities to concentrate on their own priorities and to monitor their realisation. Yet it has left the specific ways in which they confront quality challenges excluded from external appraisals. As institutional practices and processes are left virtually untouched, improvement has rarely been subject to closer scrutiny through external assessments. This discursive accent on accountability fits well with the prevalent managerial approach to higher education in Chile. With administrative structures and procedures out of sight for quality assurance agencies, licensing and accreditation have secured a higher level of autonomy for senior management to steer academic departments and to monitor their operation. In practice, this orientation implies that quality assurance has contributed to redistributing power in universities.

In practice, this way of conceiving of external quality assurance has accelerated the dissemination and legitimisation of managerial practices and values — already prominent in the growing competition among universities for funding and students. Examples can be found at different levels. Universities have developed systems for processing, producing, and analysing data through specialised units usually located or coordinated at the central level. These units are in charge of monitoring external assessments and often address external requirements of information. The intensive use of performance indicators has radically altered the

ways in which academic departments define their goals and evaluate their performance. Reward systems for academics have also experienced significant variations, as Bernasconi and Rojas (2004) have reported.

By emphasising strategic planning and data-driven management, external quality assessments have facilitated the expansion of administrative powers across the sector at the expense of traditional academic practices. In the traditional sub-sector, faculty councils have lost traction in university governance. In the new private sector, academic participation has mainly been reduced to providing feedback for self-assessment reports. However, the emergence of this new corporate environment can only be loosely linked to quality assurance. The modernisation agenda attached to MECESUP initiatives had far greater influence among traditional universities (Rodriguez et al. 2010). The entrepreneurial orientation of demand-absorbing providers and the executive style adopted by PUC imitators pushed new private institutions to adopt administrative systems akin to the for-profit sector in the US (Bernasconi 2006:329-330).

For all its innovative character, quality assurance has reflected rather than caused change in higher education — essentially, it has been a function of the competitive ethos that has dominated Chilean higher education since 1990. In practice, quality assurance reforms have mostly operated in the following instrumental direction: every time leading universities face greater competition from less prestigious providers due to an increasingly undifferentiated environment, quality assurance policy has been adjusted to make differences evident again. In spite of the evident limitations that quality assurance has imposed on their autonomy, universities have rarely complained of the expansive coverage of quality assurance. The government has swiftly responded to these demands in expectation of expanding accountability in a highly deregulated sector. This convergence has displaced the quality assurance controversy in Chile: from an open debate on the merits of its introduction (or its expansion) to less visible disputes over controlling quality assurance agencies, as the study has demonstrated.

Yet the regulatory power of accreditation and licensing has proven to be limited. In the long run, quality assurance agencies have not been able to resist pressures from vested interests in the sector and have succumbed to relaxing their application of assessment standards. In part this is a consequence of the assessment methodology applied: it implies that any new evaluation round primarily focuses on

the list of issues arising from the previous round. Universities concentrate their efforts in providing evidence of their achievement in overcoming previous weaknesses. As the list of deficiencies reduces over time, most providers eventually acquire sought-after quality certification. Then, they exploit it heavily in their advertising, causing less differentiation in competition.

The self-defeating nature of quality assurance schemes in Chilean higher education heralds the emergence of a new external assessment scheme in the years to come — this is demanded by a higher education system based on competition and differentiation. So far, governments have applied the same strategy to cope with this problem: the creation of additional policy mechanisms in addition to existing ones, which remain in operation but with lower status. This time, however, the current lack of available policy alternatives to accreditation suggests further adjustments to the current framework rather than the creation of new policy instruments. This conclusion is reinforced by the centrality of accreditation in sorting reputations and distributing resources: it cannot be easily modified without major changes to the policy architecture. Additionally, the structural properties that contributed to shaping the current situation are still exerting a significant influence towards maintaining the status quo in policy dynamics.

A number of ongoing developments have the potential for changing this state of affairs. Competition is exhibiting growing concentratedness — a smaller group of private providers is increasingly attracting a larger proportion of enrolments. Enrolment expansion is showing some signs of weakening (Consejo Nacional de Educación 2012). Supported by groups of senior administrators, the quality assurance discourse remains strong in the sector, though the elitist policymaking style that prevailed during the Concertación governments has been heavily questioned by student and academic unions. Under these conditions, new change may be predicted in quality assurance policy, although its direction remains uncertain.

Whatever the new arrangements might be, it is important to keep in mind the need for enhancing trust in emerging accountability arrangements in higher education as Stensaker and Harvey (2011:252-253) have recently stressed. The legitimacy of CNA, and indeed accreditation, has been seriously damaged. Public support for quality assurance can hardly be regained if the whole sector does not support the agency's operation. A starting point is perhaps the criterion advanced by Martin Trow

in order to create ‘...a system of accountability that does not punish truth-telling and reward the appearance of achievement’ (1996:314).

8.3 Conclusions: Rethinking policy trajectories

The Chilean quality assurance saga suggests a linear trajectory. The three reforms analysed in the study have consistently indicated that the process of change has leant toward incrementalism — each phase added a new institutional arrangement (CSE/CNAP/CNA) for appraising the quality of higher education. Likewise, each reform has reassured the policy direction adopted by government. The growing centrality of this policy domain denotes a clear pathway towards continuity, aiming to generate transformative results.

Licensing, accreditation pilots, and the new quality assurance framework have expanded the use of external assessment methodologies and their significance within the current policy architecture. Key higher education processes are currently mediated through quality assurance, which suggests the way the sector’s coordination is largely carried out in essential dimensions such as competition, funding, and accountability.

Despite the evident failure of CNA and accreditation, quality assurance still stands out as a prominent example of policy development in Chile. From the elitist formation of licensing to the participatory introduction of accreditation pilots, the results were consistently outstanding, due to a skilful manipulation of structural conditions by agency. The group of experts behind these initiatives provided continuous agency that was pivotal in securing expected outcomes — positive perceptions about their technical competence and credibility remain strong across policy circles up to this day.

Yet this is a partial account of the policy evolution subject to this case study. For all its achievement, the government experienced a number of backlashes that suggest a less favourable picture for the future of external quality assurance in higher education. Applying Streeck and Thelen’s categories for the gradual transformation of policy regimes (2005:31), it is possible to observe that licensing has experienced a deliberate neglect. From 1997 onwards, CSE has insistently called for reforming licensing to secure attainment of goals through policy maintenance — so far with no

success¹⁰⁰. This policy drift has multiple causes. The lack of political consensus needed for introducing any changes into LOCE has consistently blocked the prospect of a licensing scheme attuned to the realities of the sector. Licensing reform has become increasingly redundant due to a declining number of new providers since the turn of the new millennium. Additionally, those providers wanting to avoid the stringencies of licensing can always buy an autonomous institution.

Accreditation pilots ended in 2007 according to the plan prepared by the Ministry of Education. Their extinction was a product of layering. The comprehensive framework created to include them within a permanent scheme caused changes in their status and structure. CNA's accreditation and the system of private agencies gradually replaced CNAP — all new applications were shown towards the new policy infrastructure from 2006 on. As the stature of the new agency grew in the sector, the influence of CNAP progressively dissolved. As Streeck and Thelen (2005) have correctly predicted, this was caused by differential growth: the new institution created at the fringe of the old one grew faster, destabilising the preexisting structure. The sharp discontinuity between the older and the new agency made this transition unambiguous.

However, Streeck and Thelen's ideas do not provide a viable pathway to make sense of the implementation of CNA. It was supposed to be the pinnacle of the quality assurance evolution, a comprehensive scheme for coordinating higher education policy. Yet the government failed to secure the independence of the agency: CNA was effectively captured by vested interests in the sector.

In the short term, universities benefited from accessing additional funding and from securing their reputations. Yet, in the long run, the increasing inability of CNA to separate reputable from dubious providers compromised the legitimacy of accreditation and of CNA, forcing the government to intervene to reinforce policy. Universities are now considering other policy alternatives to put forward — the possibility of authorising international accreditation agencies to operate in the context of the current quality assurance framework seems to be a popular choice among private providers¹⁰¹.

¹⁰⁰ The only fundamental change licensing has experienced in 23 years is the unification of all licensing processes under a single agency, CNED.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, the rector of Universidad Mayor advancing this policy recommendation in the press: <http://blogs.elmercurio.com/columnasycartas/2012/12/31/proyecto-de-ley-de-acreditacio.asp>.

The transition from CNAP to CNA was supposed to be incremental — at least formally. The twist in the control of the agency was an additional element that reveals the complexities of policymaking in the Chilean context. The government dominated the formal legislative process, yet for all its statutory powers it could not defeat the influence of vested interests in shaping policy outcomes as to two key points: the wording of the new legislation and the implementation of the new agency.

The diminished position of the government in determining higher education policy is perhaps another manifestation of the current configuration of sector dynamics. Autonomy and competition have helped to secure a robust power base for a small group of institutions. Over time they have forged strong political connections and secured sufficient economic influence to affect policy directions. A larger but weaker group of other higher education providers rely on their ability to anticipate change and to adapt to new circumstances for their survival. Because of their distinctness, traditional universities can push for additional government support for their survival — mainly through performance contracts — but at the cost of losing their functional autonomy, affecting their standing in sector competition.

Yet, for all their advantage in configuring higher education policy, universities are exposed to critical risks. The assumptions that cemented the expansion of higher education — the willingness within the middle and lower middle classes to pay for their children's education and the wider social recognition of universities' diplomas — are showing some signs of exhaustion due to the rapid and unplanned growth of the sector, which is exerting significant pressure on the operation of the labour market (Urzúa 2012).

Likewise, the ability of quality assurance to secure an acceptable threshold for quality and efficiency in higher education are also under question. Retention rates remain just above 50% at the end of undergraduate courses (Consejo Nacional de Educación 2012). Large groups of students will never graduate (González 2005). The contribution of licensing and accreditation have made in addressing these serious problems in the sector remains to be proven.

Combined, these two factors — the consequences of massification and the modest contribution made by quality assurance agencies to address quality problems — may push for a drastic transformation of the policy landscape in the following years, causing a non-incremental shift in quality assurance.

8.4 Implications

The quality assurance saga has illustrated the complex transformation of Chilean higher education. A highly autonomous and homogeneous sector was subject to strong intervention from the government, which eventually fully reconfigured its foundations.

Although it is hard to assess whether government goals have been fully accomplished in the process, the resulting scenario is profoundly different: as has been suggested in many parts of the study, competition and autonomy are the dominant organising principles of the sector. In contrast, the power of the government to steer higher education has diminished substantially.

The evolution of quality assurance policy reflects this transition from strong to marginal government interference. Yet the three stages of this policy trajectory do not suggest a linear development in this particular dimension. Quite the contrary; by the end of phase 2, the government was highly satisfied with accreditation pilots and the prospect of regulating higher education from a distance through quality assurance seemed realistic. However, at the decisive moment — the introduction of the new student loan scheme linked to accreditation — universities suddenly lost their enthusiasm for cooperating with the government in enabling the new quality assurance agency to do its job. After a difficult Congressional discussion, they took decisive command of its implementation.

Thus, only at the last stages of the evolution did its direction exhibit a radical unwanted change. It was the moment when the ‘quality game’ (Ewell 2007) was finally revealed. Universities were seeking to have access to additional funding and in exchange they were willing to accept additional accountability in the form of a new evaluative scheme — it could also assist them in reinforcing positional competition in the sector. Yet they could only agree on this new policy setting if they could influence the implementation of the new agency from within.

This unexpected development caused a major disruption in the operation of the policy infrastructure. Without a mechanism for discriminating (or conditioning) access to the new student loan scheme, universities have primarily relied on this source of funding to expand their enrolments rapidly — especially among demand-absorbing institutions. Since its introduction in 2006, the new loan scheme has grown

exponentially: by 2010 it concentrated 47.72% of all student aid provided by the government¹⁰².

The expansion of the student aid system has been the main driver for the swift multiplication of the public subsidy to higher education, which almost doubled between 2006 and 2010 (Ministerio de Educación 2012). As a result, the projected public contribution to higher education climbed from 0,66% to 1,04% of Chile's GDP between 2009 and 2013.

In this scenario, the government has very little control over how universities use the additional funding. In fact, universities are probably enjoying greater freedom than ever before, however much the reliance on accountability rhetoric in higher education policy. With few *ex-post* restrictions to conducting their own business in place, their main concern seems to be how to adjust to the competitive ethos in which they are located — in a highly privatised sector it is difficult for universities not to advance their self-interest first.

This freedom is even larger for new private universities. They could comply with the minimal legal obligations imposed on them to retain official recognition¹⁰³ without any further commitments. Given their prominence within the higher education landscape — only 1 out of 4 students is currently enrolled in traditional institutions — broader regulatory arrangements may be necessary to reassure the commitment of higher education to the public good.

What function may quality assurance policy perform in this scenario? So far, it has served to enhance executive powers and to legitimise and reinforce a corporate culture within universities — it is difficult to visualise a different outcome given its corporate origin and the ideological impulse behind its importation into higher education.

At the system level, licensing and accreditation have helped to secure a basic level of acceptable performance among higher educator institutions by marginalising wild providers. This basic level of performance has not been stable over the years, though. Each new scheme has been brought about to confront urgent concerns as to provision's quality and initially they have performed according to expectation. Over

¹⁰² Excluding research grants, public subsidy to higher education was distributed that year as follows: 68.67% for student aid, 23.13% for AFD, 3.25% for AFI, and 4.93% for MECESUP and other special initiatives (Ministerio de Educación 2012).

¹⁰³ This obligation is basically reduced to offering academic courses, to providing diplomas for their graduates, and to backing up new student loans.

time, however, universities have learnt how to submit themselves to external assessment so as to minimise their risk of failing — either by using external evaluation procedures strategically and/or by lobbying the quality assurance agency. A flexible interpretation of assessment criteria has diminished the ability of licensing and accreditation to discriminate between good and bad providers and quality standards have declined consequently.

By focusing on the achievement of university missions, quality assurance has also preserved institutional autonomy, helping to accommodate and legitimise diversity and innovation in higher education. Over the years, this has been an area of major concern for new private providers — they have feared a backlash from quality assurance agencies because of the unorthodox ways in which they have structured curricula and organised their administrative and academic units. Although this concern has proven to be unjustified, it has helped to reinforce the positive appreciation of diversity in quality assurance.

These developments have an obvious positive connotation in a comparative perspective and perhaps they have produced beneficial effects for Chilean higher education. However, in a market-oriented higher education system, they have also contributed to legitimising greater competition among universities, facilitated the protection of vested interests in the sector, and tempered the basic collegial model of the university.

In the traditional sector, the executive position of university rectors has been enhanced at the expense of academic councils and departments. Yet their impact is even greater among new private providers. With few prominent counterexamples, they have barely started to develop an academic culture, as their corporate governance systems have effectively prevented students and academics from having any serious influence in setting institutional priorities.

Yet quality assurance assessments have the potential to alter this state of affairs. Their ability to orchestrate a conversation about university processes and outcomes in a comprehensive fashion, involving both internal and external actors, should not be underestimated. They also possess a significant communicative value that assists them in settling expectations based on previous performance at different levels — institutions, departments, and courses. This potential can be exploited by reorienting external assessments towards addressing persistent challenges in the sector: accreditation and licensing can play an important role in reassuring important

higher education values that have received lesser consideration since the introduction of the 1980s reforms.

The enhancement of the academic profession, a broader participation in setting the goals and priorities of universities, and a greater focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning — among other traditional values of the university — might be explicitly included in external quality assurance criteria, pushing higher education providers to consider those issues in their routine practices.

Two conditions would facilitate this process. Incentives, especially those of a financial nature, need to be disassociated from accreditation. As Chapter 6 has shown, strong incentives have made it difficult for universities to tell the truth in external quality assurance assessments: they simply cannot afford to lose access to the student aid that is essential for their survival. Although the funding linkage has aimed to secure the prominence of institutional accreditation, in practice it has heavily distorted operations to the point of making this form of external assessment irrelevant — the very possibility of a meaningful conversation about institutional quality is now essentially excluded from accreditation.

In addition, greater involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance procedures attached to licensing and accreditation could expand the conversation about improvement beyond institutional research offices. Students, local communities and employers could have a stronger voice in quality assurance procedures by participating in external assessment panels. As Galán (2012) has documented within the European higher education sphere, the benefits of genuine student participation in quality assurance are greater than the concerns about any lack of technical competence. Universities and quality assurance agencies would develop creative ways to enhance student participation in external assessments without putting the integrity of the process at risk.

It is difficult to anticipate how higher education providers would respond to reforms of this kind — so far they have been highly efficient in achieving their own goals through quality assurance policy. What is clear, however, is that the government has to rethink its goals for licensing and course and institutional accreditation (in the context of reviewing its whole higher education policy) and the best ways to accomplish them at the system and institutional levels.

The challenge implies going beyond the current policy conceptions. Given the copious amounts of expert knowledge already imported during the last 20 years, it would also require greater consideration of the local context and its dynamics instead of the straightforward implementation of policy recipes. In the past, Chilean policymakers have provided consistent evidence of their ability to innovate when necessary. The state of higher education in Chile is reaching a point at which this ability needs to be exercised again.

8.5 Limitations and significance

Although focused on policy change dynamics, the study has not aimed to describe and explain the variety of factors involved in the evolution of Chilean higher education. Rather, it has been devoted to scrutinising one specific policy and its variations over time. The timing and the factors that caused reform in the quality assurance domain only partially overlap with other policy changes in the sector.

A broader generalisation of the findings of the study is also constrained by the specificity of the events covered. Because it has focused on a single case (Chilean higher education) and on a single unit of analysis (quality assurance policy) its potential for direct comparability is limited even within the Latin American context.

Additionally, the elite approach chosen has been highly useful to document the voices and perspectives of the policy players directly involved in the reforms examined. However, this has limited the scope of the study, excluding the views of other actors such as students and academic union representatives. Their lack of engagement in policymaking and policy implementation through the phases of this evolution minimised the risk of losing vital data in documenting the case. It is important to keep in mind that this characteristic is closely correlated with the transition to democracy in Chile and is likely to change in the years to come.

Finally, establishing my position as a researcher has not been simple. Because of my professional experience in the field of quality assurance in Chile, I have had to challenge my prior knowledge of its operation and evolution. To the best of my ability, I have tried to put aside my prejudices and solely rely on the collected evidence and the theories that informed the framework of the study.

Even considering all these limitations, the study has provided a critical understanding of the stages and the factors behind the quality assurance saga in Chile

and the functions this specific policy has performed. Given the centrality of accreditation in the current policy architecture, it has contributed in shedding new light on policymaking dynamics in higher education and on the interdependency of policy instruments in achieving governmental goals.

Furthermore, the case study has revealed the functions that accreditation and licensing have performed in practice, contributing a wider understanding of what quality assurance is and what roles it performs in national contexts, under the influence of various actors. Likewise, the study has expanded scholarship on how quality assurance schemes have been implemented in developing nations (in particular, one that in some opinions has been elevated into the developed category over the course of the timeframe) and has identified some conditions affecting their viability.

The study is also timely. Chilean higher education is facing difficult choices and the purpose and function of policy is heavily contested. The governance of the sector is under question. New paradigms are yet to emerge but the design and implementation of new regulatory mechanisms would benefit greatly from consulting this case study.

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Appendix:

Trends in contemporary higher education in Latin America

In the view of IESALC — the regional UNESCO agency for higher education — the changes experienced by Latin American higher education since the late 1990s have been marked. This wave is comparable to previous waves of change brought by the Cordoba reforms of 1918 and the revolutionary adjustments of the 1960s and the 1970s.

Important variations in the local and the global context of higher education in Latin America are at the basis of these changes (IESALC 2003). At the local level, reform initiatives were triggered by financial restrictions in public universities, institutional diversification and the dominance of the private sub-sector, growing female participation, graduate unemployment, brain drain, and new skills and knowledge demanded by job markets. On the global stage, the increasing internationalisation of education, a digital convergence of the cultural and educational industries (newly so conceived), the rise of global networks and the global economy, and the fast expansion of scientific knowledge and networks contributed in shaping reform agendas.

By the turn of the new millennium, national systems of higher education started to reflect the effects associated with the new regional policy landscape. Three large-scale comparative studies carried out over the last decade illustrate new and old patterns across national systems of higher education, especially in relation to provision, enrolments, funding and research (IESALC 2006; CINDA 2007; UIS 2012).

With the sole exception of Cuba, all countries had authorised public and private provision of higher education by 2002. Although universities prevail across the regional landscape, they do coexist with — and are outnumbered by — other organisations that provide technical and vocational education at the post secondary level (see Table Appendix 1).

Table Appendix 1: Higher education institutions in Latin America (2002)

Country	Universities			Non-university institutions		
	Private	Public	Total	Private	Public	Total
Argentina	44	55	99	1196	1795	2991
Bolivia	36	15	51	0	0	0
Brazil	190	86	276			1737

Chile	38	25	63	158	0	158
Colombia	137	73	210	83	34	117
Costa Rica	50	4	54	7	60	67
Cuba	0	54	54	0	10	10
Dom. Rep.	31	2	33	7	3	10
Ecuador	37	28	65	199	138	337
El Salvador	25	1	26	10	6	16
Guatemala	9	1	10	0	0	0
Honduras	8	4	12	2	1	3
Mexico	1159	615	1774			127
Nicaragua	40	4	44	29	45	74
Panama	28	4	32	31	8	39
Peru	45	28	73			
Uruguay	4	1	5	7	3	10
Venezuela	27	22	49	69	51	120
Total	1908	1022	2930	1798	2154	5816

Source: Didriksson (2008:43)

Most Latin American nations have experienced robust enrolment expansions since the 1980s. The participation rate of the relevant age group almost doubled between 1985 and 2005, from 17.2% to 31.7% (Riveros 2008). By 2003, in three countries — Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico — were concentrated close to 60% of enrolments, reflecting demographic trends in the region (Table Appendix 2).

Argentina has achieved universal (i.e. over 50% of the age-cohort, according to Martin Trow's definition) participation in higher education during the past decade. Compared to smaller nations, Brazil and Mexico have only attained modest levels of participation. This, however, belies a steady expansion experienced by Brazilian higher education over the past decade, with an average annual expansion of 12% during the period 2000-2005.

Venezuela (7.5%), Chile (6.5%), and Colombia (6%) are other Latin American nations that have experienced robust annual average gains in participation (CINDA 2007). In contrast, small Central America countries — El Salvador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica stand out among them — have exhibited modest increases in higher education enrolments over the same period (Riveros 2008).

Table Appendix 2: Higher education enrolments in Latin America (2003)

Country	Total Enrolment	Population (Thousands)	18-24 Cohort (Thousands)	Students (Per 10,000 inhabitants)	Gross Enrolment Rate	Female participation
Argentina	2,010,830	37,870	3,351.4	531	60%	59.3%
Bolivia	312,769	9,025	809.3	347	38.6%	45%
Brazil	3,887,022	182,470	17,120.5	213	22.7%	56.4%
Chile	567,114	15,929	1,227.9	356	46.2%	48%
Colombia	1,035,006	44,562	4,039.9	232	25.6%	51.3% (2002)
Costa Rica	170,423	4,167	393.9	409	43.3%	53.1% (2002)

Cuba	273,588	11,306	720.6	242	38%	61.8% (2002)
Dom. Rep.	293,169	8,819	797.7	332	36.8%	65% (2002)
Ecuador	286,954	12,843	1,295.9	223	22.1%	
El Salvador	116,521	6,638	659	176	17.7%	54.8%
Guatemala	218,466	12,084	1,186.7	181	18.4%	
Honduras	120,012	7,001	677.1	171	17.7%	55.9%
Mexico	2,322,781	103,301	9,723.6	225	23.9%	48.7%
Nicaragua	104,403	5,268	550.9	198	19%	54.3%
Panama	132,167	3,116	261.9	424	50.5%	60.6%
Peru	871,145	27,148	2,629.4	321	33.1%	44.6% (2002)
Uruguay	105,268	3,408	260	309	40.5%	61% (1999)
Venezuela	997,662	25,672	2,372.6	389	42%	60.3% (1999)
Total (Av)	13,825,300	520,627	48,078.3	(259)	(28.5%)	(54.4%)

Source: IESALC (2006:244)

Table Appendix 2 illustrates the effects of substantial demographic changes undergone by national systems of higher education in recent years according to key indicators, including female participation. As can be observed in Table Appendix 3, the number of students pursuing higher education jumped from 7.5 to 13.9 million over the 1994-2003 period in the group of South American nations¹⁰⁴. Compared to previous years, the sector has been growing at pace since 2000, supporting the prediction of a rapid transition from elite to mass systems of higher education in most nations (IESALC 2006).

**Table Appendix 3: Evolution of enrolments in South America
(Millions of students)**

1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
7.521	8.147	8.544	9.083	9.665	10.306	11.270	12.116	13.019	13.934

Source: IESALC (2006)

Salient national differences emerge in enrolment patterns when they are disaggregated by area of knowledge, as can be observed in Table Appendix 4 for selected countries. At the regional level, however, the Social Sciences-Law-Business cluster has a clear prominence compared to other fields, concentrating up to 42% of undergraduate enrolments, followed by Engineering, Industry, and Construction (14%) and Education (10%).

Table Appendix 4: Distribution of enrolments by field of knowledge (by 2002)

	E	H&A	SS,L&B	S	E,I&C	A	HC&W	S	US
Argentina	3,2%	7,2%	35%	7,4%	7,2%	2,9%	10,1%	1%	26%

¹⁰⁴ That is, excluding Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama.

Brazil (2003)	12,6%	8,9%	43,1%	11,1%	7,8%	1,8%	10,2%	3%	1,4%
Chile	12,9%	6,3%	34,9%	1,6%	31,4%	5%	7,9%	0%	0%
Colombia	11,6%	3,4%	41,6%	3%	29,2%	1,9%	9,2%	0%	0%
Costa Rica	21,7%	7,7%	30,3%	13,1%	15,7%	3,4%	6,2%	1,6%	0,3%
El Salvador	9,7%	1,4%	51,8%	10,2%	12,4%	0%	14,4%	0,1%	0%
Guatemala	13%	0,7%	43,8%	1,7%	17,1%	1,9%	6,3%	0%	15,6%
Mexico	11,3%	3,6%	41,7%	12,5%	18,6%	2,1%	8%	1,9%	0,3%
Panama	15,6%	7,3%	42,4%	3,8%	18,1%	1,2%	7,1%	2,8%	1,8%
Region	10,5%	6,5%	40,6%	9,2%	13,7%	2,3%	9,4%	1,8%	6%

E=Education; H&A=Humanities & Arts; SS,L&B=Social Sciences, Law & Business; S=Sciences; E,I&C=Engineering, Industry & Construction; A=Agriculture; HC&W=Health Care & Welfare; S=Services; US=Unspecific Sector

Source: Didriksson (2008:47)

Analysing data for the Year 2000, Arocena and Sutz (2005) have drawn a new picture of the shape of the sector in Latin America (Table Appendix 5). The majority of national systems have accommodated much participatory expansion within public universities. Conversely, a smaller but growing number of nations have mainly relied on private provision to increase participation.

Table Appendix 5: Classification of national systems of higher education (By 2000)

	Mainly Public			Mainly Private		
	Universal	Mass	Elite	Universal	Mass	Elite
Large (> 2,000,000)	Argentina		Mexico			Brazil
Medium/Big (500,000-800,000)		Peru Venezuela			Chile ¹⁰⁵ Colombia	
Medium (100,000-200,000)		Bolivia Cuba Ecuador			Dom. Rep. El Salvador	
Small (<100,000)	Costa Rica Panama Uruguay		Guatemala Honduras Nicaragua			

Source: Arocena and Sutz (2005)

The public-led expansion thesis in the region requires a qualification, though. In spite of the sustained growth of the public sector it is important to note that one of the most consistent trends in Latin American higher education in recent decades has been the growing saliency of private universities and other private post-secondary education providers.

¹⁰⁵ By 2010, Chilean higher education reached 876,000 students, which is roughly half of enrolments in Colombia (1,674,000), and one third of the student population in Argentina (2,387,000) and Venezuela (2,123,000) — Brazil (6,553,000) and Mexico (2,847,000) being the largest sectors in the region (UIS 2012).

Private institutions have captured most of the enrolment expansion. According to IESALC data, they accounted for nigh on half of regional enrolment by 2002 (Table Appendix 6). In fact, by 2003, the situation depicted by Aracena and Sutz exhibits some variation, as Nicaragua and Costa Rica have joined the group of nations with a majority of enrolments located in private universities (Table Appendix 7).

Table Appendix 6: Public and private enrolment in Latin American higher education

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Public	61.5%	60.5%	59.6%	59%	57.5%	56%	55%	56%	54%
Private	38.5%	39.5%	40.4%	41%	42.5%	44%	45%	44%	46%

Source: IESALC (2006:46)

Table Appendix 7: Percentage of public/private enrolment in higher education in Latin America (By 2003)

Brazil Chile Colombia Costa Rica Dom. Rep. El Salvador Nicaragua	Between 50% and 75% of enrolments in the private sector
Ecuador Guatemala Mexico Peru Venezuela	Between 50% and 75% of enrolments in the public sector
Argentina Bolivia Cuba Honduras Panama Uruguay	Between 75% and 100% of enrolments in the public sector

Source: IESALC (2006:46)

A substantial part of higher education expansion across Latin America has been financed from a mix of private and public sources. Although in recent years most national governments showed narrow variations in their sectoral expenditure, in a longer perspective of public expenditure in education differences worth noting emerge, as can be observed in Tables Appendix 8 and Appendix 9.

Table Appendix 8: Total public spending on education and per student for higher education

	Public spending on education (As percentage of GDP)		Public spending per student, higher education (As percentage of GDP per capita)	
	1985	2005	1999	2004
Argentina	1.4	3.8	17.7	11.8
Bolivia	1.8	6.4	44.1	36
Brazil	5	4.4	57	32.6
Chile	3.8	3.5	37.1	25.8

Colombia	2.8	4.8	49.4	24.6
Costa Rica	4.1	4.9	55	35.9
Cuba	8.9	9.8	86.4	59
Dom. Rep.	1.5	1.8	11.8	9.3
Ecuador	9	17.9		34.4
El Salvador	1.5	1.8	9.4	12.1
Honduras	4	3.6	59.4	
Mexico	3.7	5.4	47.8	41.3
Nicaragua	3.4	3.1		
Panama	4.4	3.8	33.6	26.5
Peru	2.7	2.4	21.2	12.1
Uruguay	2.6	3.6	19.1	20.1
Venezuela	5	5	53.5	
Latin America	3.9	4.8	41.2	28.7

Source: Riveros (2008:379)

Table Appendix 9: Total public spending on higher education as a percentage of GDP

	1990	2000	2001	2002	2003
Argentina	0.44	0.65	0.52	0.53	0.48
Bolivia	0.95	1.21	1.5		
Brazil	1	1.06			1.16
Chile	0.43	0.45	0.45	0.42	0.44
Colombia		0.73	0.71	0.74	
Costa Rica	1	0.9	0.9	0.86	0.86
Cuba	1.23	1.87	2.78	3.27	2.8
Dom. Rep.	0.15	0.35	0.27	0.29	0.27
El Salvador					0.14
Guatemala	0.26	0.27	0.28	0.27	0.14
Honduras		1.2	1.2		0.28
Mexico	0.5	0.73	0.87	0.84	0.81
Nicaragua		1	1.2	1.2	1.01
Panama	1.28	1.25	1.27	1.16	1.2
Uruguay	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.39

Source: Riveros (2008:381)

Most governments moderately expanded their expenditure in education between 1985 and 2005 (Riveros 2008). Bolivia and Ecuador — and to lesser extents Colombia and Mexico — have led the expansion of public subsidy to higher education. On average, the region's governments spent 0.77% of GDP on higher education by 2004. This greater contribution has not tracked with the robust enrolment growth and hence the level of funding per student — as proportion of per capita GDP — has consistently declined over the last two decades.

The very process of expansion — in many cases linked to the rise of private provision with little intervention from governments — and the greater priority given to primary and secondary education across the region explain this situation (IESALC 2006).

In most nations, public universities have responded to modest public funding by increasing their internal efficiency. They have also secured new funding sources including the introduction of tuition fees. Yet, with the conspicuous exception of Chile — where private funding outpaces public subsidy by a ratio of 6 to 1 — private contributions to higher education have remained fairly low in Latin America (CINDA 2007).

Research and development (R&D) in Latin American universities has remained marginal in the global context. A very limited group of institutions in each country have adequate infrastructure and personnel to engage in competitive research. According to estimations by Albornoz, Macedo and Alfaraz (2010), the entire region contributed 1.9% of global spending in R&D in 2006.

Despite robust investments made by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico in the sector between 1997 and 2007, this ratio has remained fairly stable since 2002. These four nations account for 95% of all regional expenditure in R&D — Brazil alone then accounted for 60% of regional scientific production.

Regardless of the limited financial support available, R&D output has expanded in recent years across the region. The annual number of scientific publications in the same four nations has expanded from 16,707 to 41,648 over the period 1996-2007 (Albornoz, Macedo and Alfaraz 2010). The number of patent applications has commenced on a similar trajectory during those years (from 38,096 to 62,684).

Although Brazil contributes more than the half of the growth in publications and patent applications in Latin America, other governments have shown a renewed policy interest in this area. The significant influence of knowledge economy rhetoric among ruling elites in the region heralds new developments in this policy domain in the years to come.



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