

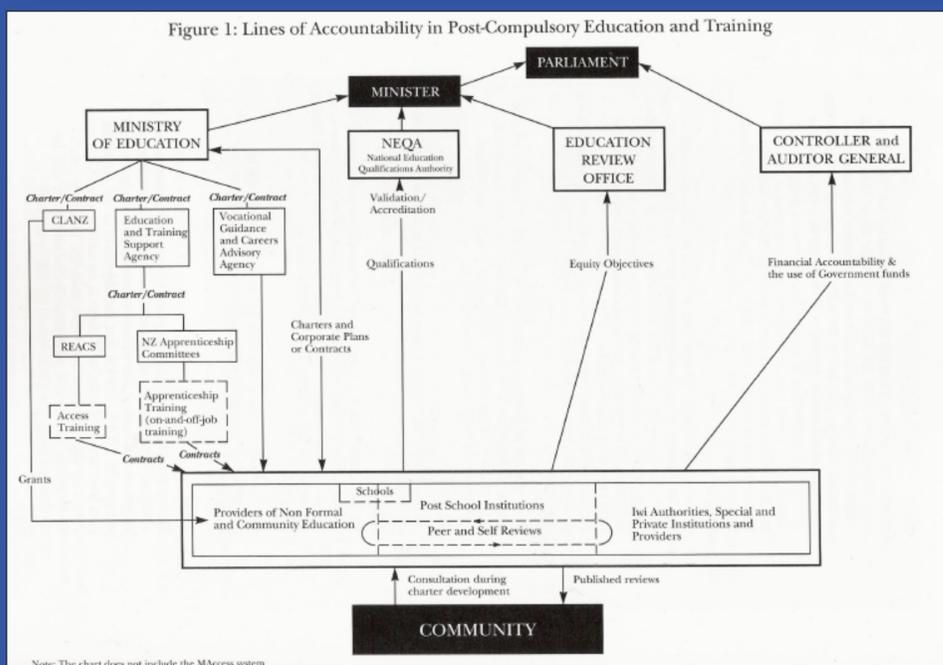
THE ROLE OF THE IDEAS AND THEIR CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY-MAKING PROCESSES FROM THE EIGHTIES TO PRESENT-DAY: THE CASES OF ENGLAND AND NEW ZEALAND IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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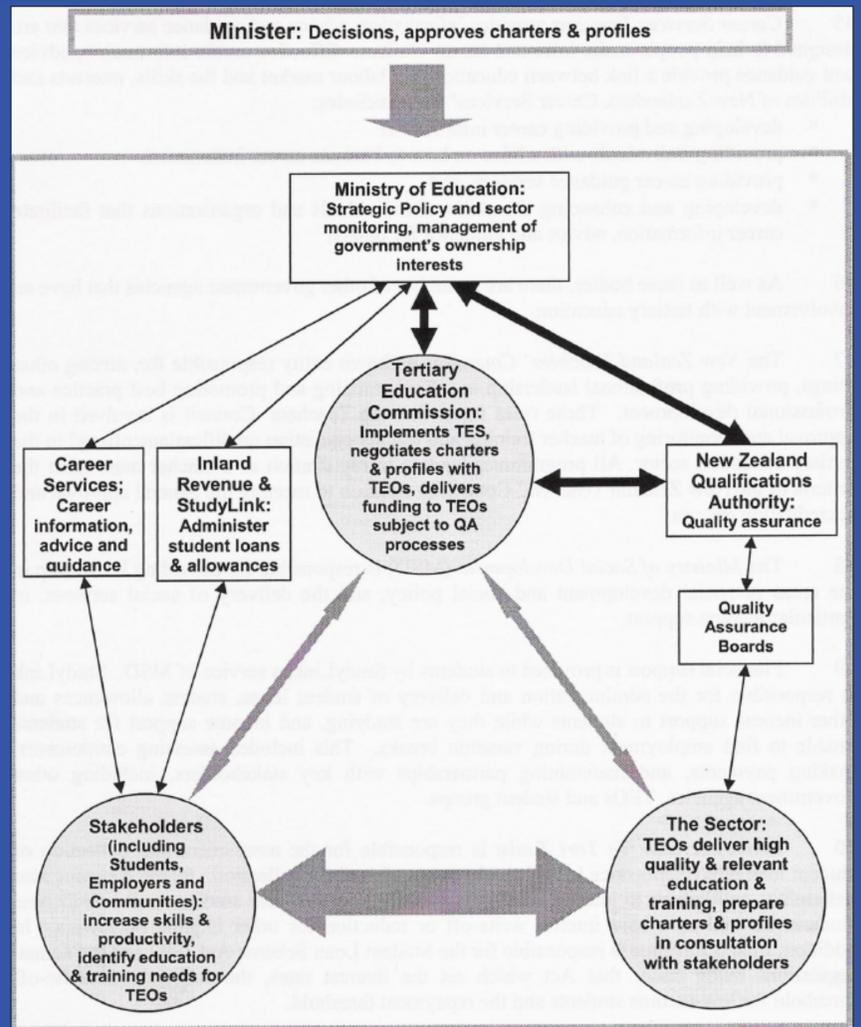
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THEORY

Under a theoretical point of view, the aim of my work is to carry out a research modelled on the **constructivist theory**. It will focus on the analysis of the impact of ideas on the processes of policy making by means of epistemic communities, think tanks and various socioeconomic contexts that may have played a key role in the construction of the different paths. From my point of view **ideas** constitute a priority research field which is worth analysing since their role in policy making processes is rather unexplored. In this context and with the aim of developing a research strand based on the role of ideas, I intend to carry on my study under the **perspective of change**.



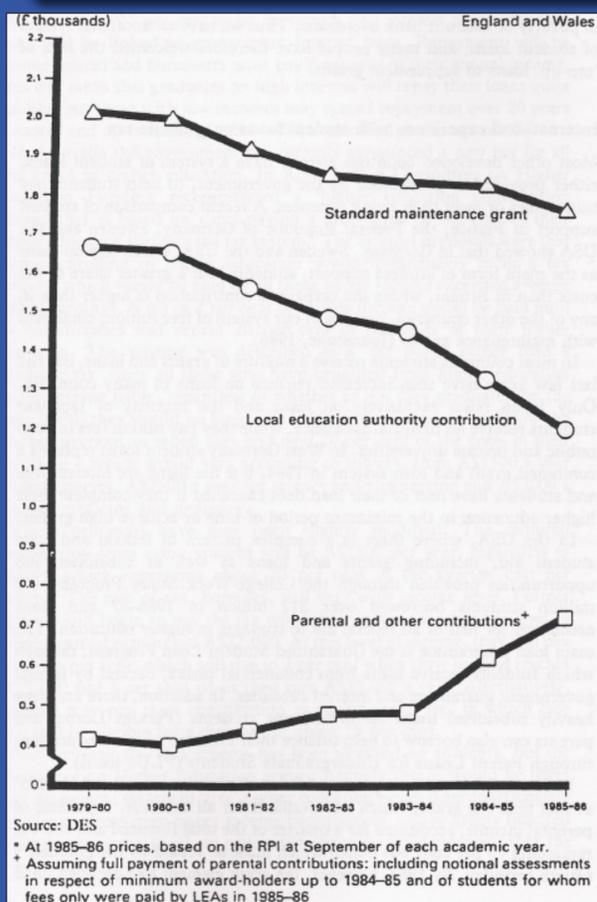
Lines of Accountability in Post-Compulsory Education and Training. [Source: *Learning for Life: Two. Education and Training Beyond the Age of Fifteen*, August 1989, Wellington, Publications Division of the Government Printing Office, p. 24].



Relationship between key actors in tertiary education system in New Zealand. [Source: *OECD Thematic Review of Tertiary Education. New Zealand Country Background Report*, January 2006, Wellington, The New Zealand Ministry of Education, p. 32].

HYPOTHESIS AND METHODOLOGY

Depending on the data and information that I collect I will evaluate the weight of the ideas and possibly of other variables, such as the institutions and the individual interests, which may have influenced the policy making processes. To achieve this goal I plan to adopt the **qualitative methodology** of research, which I believe to be much more effective compared to the more difficult and sometimes reductive application of quantitative data sets. I reckon therefore that the most appropriate tools for information processing include **content analysis**. I intend to apply it to **congressional documents** and **specialised magazines** within the period taken into consideration. Furthermore I am planning **in-depth interviews** to personalities of the political and scientific panorama who had a significant role and influence in the process of higher education reform from the eighties to present-day.



The rate of grant and average contributions (£ thousands) in England and Wales. [Source: *Higher Education Quarterly*, Volume 43 no. 1, Winter 1989, p. 80].

THE CASE STUDIES

The two cases taken into consideration definitely set an example of **radical reform** processes which have occurred in quite different contexts. The peculiarities of each one are determined by the socioeconomic characteristics and the traits of its élite. In **New Zealand** the described process occurred with a steady pace and a good grade of consequentiality, in line with the reforms undertaken in other state divisions and driven by the ideas of the **New Public Management**. On the other hand in **England** the reformative action of **Margaret Thatcher** acquired a very radical connotation as it brought into the ambit of higher education policy concepts like **efficiency**, **excellence** and **rationalization** that contrasted with the generalistic and mass-oriented ideas that were diffused during the seventies. The mission I intend to accomplish throughout my research is to investigate and analyse into depth the differences between two contexts that literature traditionally regards as a single model: the Anglo-Saxon model. From this point of view the **dense analysis** of policy processes will allow to bring out the contrasting aspects of the two realities compared, the role and weight of variables such as **ideas** (main variable), **institutional settings** and **individual interests** (intervening variables) acting in each context.

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