



## DOCTOR OF BUSINESS (DBA)

### Unintended consequences of international education partnerships in UK research-intensive universities

Baylon, Caroline

*Award date:*  
2021

*Awarding institution:*  
University of Bath

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Unintended consequences of international  
education partnerships in UK research-  
intensive universities

Caroline Pascale Baylon

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor  
of Business Administration (Higher  
Education Management)

University of Bath

School of Management

June 2021

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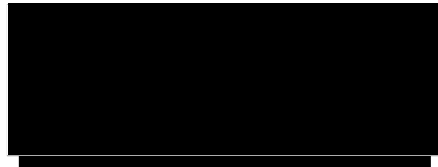
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## List of abbreviations

*Abbreviations have been avoided as much as possible, however a small number of terms, used frequently and throughout the thesis, were abbreviated to help improve the flow of the paper.*

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IPP	International pathway providers
RG	Russell Group
RIU	Research-intensive university

## Abstract

This study explores organisationally driven international education partnerships between international pathway providers (IPPs) and Russell Group (RG) universities and, using a thematic analysis, identifies (1) what types of unintended consequences exist, (2) what causes them, (3) who they affect (4) and whether middle managers contribute to the shaping and/or reshaping of the original strategy and goals. Eleven Russell Group universities are included in this study.

Our research created a comprehensive taxonomy of the unintended consequences of developing and implementing partnerships with IPPs; as a result, we found that most areas of the university are affected by the development of the IPPs and that a holistic university approach may therefore be necessary when developing and implementing such partnerships. This study also found two broad factors responsible for generating unintended consequences in partnerships between research-intensive universities (RIUs) and IPPs, both of which are linked to decision-making and communication processes. We investigated our research questions by focusing on middle managers tasked with developing and implementing the partnerships studied and, in so doing, increased the understanding of the impact of their actions. One of the primary findings of the study was the possible misinterpretation of the intended strategy, including by middle managers in charge of sense-giving, leading to unmet 'expectations' despite the realisation of the original strategy. Lastly, the findings contribute to enabling higher education institutions and, in particular, research-intensive universities to be better prepared and mindful of the possible consequences of developing and implementing IPPs.

### Interest Area/Key words:

partnerships in higher education, middle manager, strategy as practice, international student recruitment, internationalisation, unintended consequences, Russell Group, international pathway providers

## 1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*'People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does'. Foucault, Madness and Civilisation, 1965*

Over the past three decades, UK higher education (HE) has had to adapt to a more globalised and marketised system (Brooks et al., 2021; Lucas, 2019). This study focuses on research-intensive universities (RIUs). Although they are often considered as residing in a different category, one that is more resilient to change (Morphew et al., 2018), RIUs have also had to adapt to this environment in their recent past and are now behaving more aggressively, moving away from what could be seen as their traditional characteristics. Under increasing market pressure, most RIUs are now pursuing strategies aimed at global brand positioning, profile raising and revenue generation (Hazelkorn, 2015a). The latter is usually achieved by attracting large numbers of international students who pay premium fees.

This more competitive behaviour may be seen as a deviation from the model of RIUs as commonly understood and described by the Russell Group, the organisation that represents the 24 self-selected research-intensive universities of the UK. The Russell Group (RG) describes its members as universities that 'maintain the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with local and national business and the public sector'<sup>1</sup>. However, the existence of the RG itself is evidence that brand positioning is of very high importance to those higher education institutions (HEIs) and that, in a very competitive environment, they wish to differentiate themselves from the rest of UK HEIs (Furley et al., 2014; Kethuda, 2021). For this reason, the study is centred around RG universities, although we acknowledge that several RIUs are not members of the group.

International cooperation in HE is not new. It responds to strategic demands to collaborate in research, internationalise the curriculum and provide students with relevant global opportunities to enrich their experience, and it is typically a central component of universities' strategies (Bista, 2018; Caniglia et al., 2018). However, in an increasingly competitive environment and coinciding with the deregulation of student numbers, we have started to see, over the last ten to fifteen years in particular, RIUs beginning to adopt strategies that would have only been found in less selective universities in the past. One of those, which is the subject of this study, is developing partnerships with IPPs, which are aimed at rapidly

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<sup>1</sup> <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/about/our-universities/> - Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> May 2021

growing HEIs' overseas student population. IPPs offer a robust addition to universities' own recruitment infrastructure, bringing in talented students from places that universities might not ordinarily be able to reach (Agosti and Bernat, 2018).

An international pathway program is a pre-university course, usually of one-year in length, that prepares students for their entry into a full degree programme at a university. They help international students develop their English fluency while completing selected credit-bearing academic classes. International students who enrol in such programmes usually do so because the overseas educational system they have come from would not allow them to progress directly into undergraduate programmes in countries such as the UK, USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand (McCartney and Metcalfe, 2018a and 2018b; Zaba, 2020). They last about a year and generally offer 'conditional acceptance' to the university they are affiliated with, subject to the student meeting previously agreed upon entry requirements (Agosti and Bernat, 2018).

Since the early 2000s, the global HE sector has seen the proliferation of study programmes that offer non-traditional student pathways to access university education (Agosti and Bernat, 2018; McCartney and Metcalfe, 2018a and 2018b). These programmes increase participation within a local context or attract more international fee-paying students. This study focuses on the latter. It is linked to the topic of marketisation of HE and the push to attract larger numbers of international students on university campuses. Partnerships with IPPs are now often seen as a must-have in UK universities and are considered a way to rapidly expand the international student population. For those reasons, they are sometimes described by those philosophically opposed to the idea of such mechanisms as 'pathways to profit' (Times Higher Education, 2014).

Thousands of international students are enrolled in study centres operated by IPPs, with the majority established on university campuses to ensure a smooth transition (Agosti and Bernat, 2018). At the time of data collection, 11 out of the 24 RG universities were involved in such partnerships in the UK, with many having been set up in the last ten years. Since then, an additional three RG universities have joined their ranks. However, this rapid shift has not been without unintended consequences (Cunnington, 2019). Using this very specific context, we explore the role of 'middle managers' in developing and implementing partnerships with IPPs within the RG.

Building on the work of Floyd and Wooldridge (2017), which recommended that future research on middle management strategy process should focus on more homogeneous samples



(both in terms of the type of middle manager and the type of industry studied) within more specific contexts, we focused on three types of middle managers within HEIs that identify as having commonalities (the RG) within a specific context (the development and implementation of partnerships with IPPs) in a specific country (the UK). This approach will help develop a more nuanced view of the nature of middle management work and, crucially, a more accurate understanding of how middle managers contribute to strategy-making.

Therefore, this study contributes to the research on middle management strategy processes. By focusing on specific types of middle managers, we aim to ascertain how likely they are to influence strategic outcomes, going beyond a broad acknowledgement that has been found in previous studies and towards a more defined theory connecting specific managerial functions to particular forms of influence within a specific context. In addition, from an empirical perspective, we also identified a clear gap in the literature. This relates to the unintended consequences of partnerships between IPPs and RG universities within the UK as identified by the middle managers involved in their development and implementation. The typology of unintended consequences produced within this study will be of interest to practitioners taking part in those specific activities within universities (particularly the RG) in the UK.

It is important to note that this thesis has been conducted by a practitioner-researcher. Although the research was not carried out from within the researcher's own organisation, it can still be considered as 'insider research' since it has been conducted within a specific sector (the Russell Group) to which the researcher has close professional ties. By nature, this provides a strong basis to the study, given that the researcher has prior experience and understanding of the ecosystem, established networks, a closeness to issues and trusted contact in place that are needed for openness in responses. The researcher was acutely aware throughout the study of the fact that her position could lead to the production of a biased report of limited use (van Heugten 2004) if mitigating actions were not put in place.

While possible concerns need to be acknowledged and will be addressed in chapter 5, we agree with Dodd and Epstein (2012) that the advantages of practitioner research make it worth pursuing. In the case of this study, the findings that were gathered would not have been possible to obtain by an independent researcher that does not have existing connections within the universities studied. We believe that such an approach may present the only opportunity to study important initiatives such as IPPs, so that lessons from them, whether good or bad, are captured.

## 1.1 General aims and research agenda

This study will focus on RIUs only, as defined by the RG. It will aim to improve the understanding of the impact of the actions carried out by the middle managers tasked with developing and implementing the partnerships studied. It will additionally focus on building an overview of current developments in IPP partnerships at RG universities.

The substantive aims of the study are listed below:

- To identify the types of unintended (i.e., unanticipated, whether direct or indirect, desirable or undesirable) consequences and to assess their impact on stakeholders at the individual and organisational level.
- To understand the causes of these unintended consequences, informed by a strategy-as-practice approach, and to focus on actions taken by the middle managers charged with the delivery of IPP partnerships.
- To understand the level of diversion (if any) between intended and realised organisational strategies related to the development of IPP partnerships.
- To bring these three aims together to appreciate the impact of the middle manager on the strategic developments and outcomes of international education partnerships at RG universities.

Documenting unanticipated consequences, both negative and positive ones, will allow us to create a taxonomy to improve understanding of the development and implementation of IPP partnerships in UK RIUs. We acknowledge the fundamental difficulty in unambiguously classifying unintended consequences but believe that attempting to do so will contribute to assisting implementers and stakeholders of IPP partnerships. In particular, we anticipate that this may lead to the development of a set of pointers allowing managers to identify and mitigate unwanted consequences as they arise and better understand how to systematically benefit from those unintended positive consequences.

Our research aims to improve the understanding of the role played by middle managers in influencing strategic outcomes. It will also allow us to identify, anticipate, benefit from, mitigate and possibly avoid unintended consequences within a specific context (IPP partnerships in RIUs) from an empirical perspective to benefit HE practitioners. In the HE sector, the implementation of such partnerships is often considered art rather than a science. Research supporting the ongoing identification of unintended consequences of IPP partnerships in RIUs

and the contexts in which they are most likely to materialise is required. This will lead us to greater understanding of the innate risks and benefits to developing such partnerships in an RIU setting. It will also enable us to consider ways to anticipate those risks more accurately and the mitigating actions that managers may put in place to increase the likelihood of success.

Ascertaining the intended aims of each of the partnerships studied will be of the utmost importance. This will be done, as further described in chapter 5 using information collected during interviews and documentary analysis. Top-level managers' intended strategies, as described by middle managers, will be clearly mapped to assure that unintended consequences can be subsequently compared to the original objectives of the partnerships. The study will identify a list of common factors leading to unintended consequences, along with the type of unintended consequences that exist and how they affect stakeholders at various levels. This approach will help determine whether unintended consequences are contributing factors to whether or not IPP partnerships at RIUs have a successful outcome and how middle managers can influence and prevent them. Additionally, it is possible that a more insightful model could be developed. Determining and disseminating best practices in optimal operational strategy design and implementation will also be an important component of this study. This will enable RIUs to be better prepared and mindful of the possible consequences of developing and implementing IPP partnerships.

## **1.2 Research questions**

Although the literature associated with unintended consequences of purposive social action and the literature related to IPPs is fairly extensive, the link between the two has not yet been explored. This allows us to investigate the relationship between the two concepts and explore new ideas. Research questions were generated as part of the critical evaluation of the theories used to build the theoretical framework and the literature related to the core concepts supporting this study. These are closely linked with the aims of the study outlined above.

**The central research question** is 'How do the roles and decisions of middle managers leading the development and implementation of IPP partnerships in UK RIUs impact the strategy development process?'

### **Research Question 1**

What are the types of unintended consequences of developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs, as described by middle managers?

## **Research Question 2**

What factors, as perceived by middle managers, produce unintended consequences when developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs and whom do they impact?

## **Research Question 3**

Do the unintended consequences of developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs, as perceived by the middle managers, lead to organisational changes or adaptations?

## **Research Question 4**

Can any level of deviation existing between the intended and realised strategies supporting the development and implementation of IPP partnerships in UK RIUs be attributed to the actions of middle managers?

The research questions are related to the current literature; they emanate from the central research question and were used to develop the interview guide (see appendix 1) and collect the data. The research questions were also central to the development of the theoretical framework supporting this study, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

### **1.3 Contribution and originality**

This study's originality lies in a number of key areas. First, it addresses a gap in the literature in being the first study to investigate IPPs from a management (as opposed to academic) perspective, most particularly using middle managers' view to identify unintended consequences of IPPs within the Russell Group environment. The comprehensive taxonomy of unintended consequences will contribute to enabling practitioners to better tailor their future approach to IPP development and implementation.

Second, the study creates a new theoretical framework that interweaves Merton's theory of unintended consequences (1936) with elements of Strategy as Practice, in particular the concepts of intended and realised strategies and the roles of middle managers in the strategy process (Figure 3). Underpinning the framework are several key concepts taken from the literature in the areas of organisational culture, internationalisation strategy and international partnerships in HEIs. This is a complex but flexible framework that could be used to study different topics within studies focusing on international higher education. With minimal adaptations, the framework lends itself to be used for topics that are not specifically related to

internationalisation or to the Russell Group, but aims to identify unintended consequences of a specific strategic initiative within a group of universities.

Third, the study also contributes to deepening the field of middle managers related research by adapting the model developed by Floyd and Woodbridge (2017). Using Floyd and Woolridge's (2017) type of middle management strategic role and incorporating Bulgerman's (1983) middle manager's model of strategic behaviours, we developed a way to portray each category of middle managers in a more precise way.

#### **1.4 Thesis overview**

Following this introductory chapter, we will now outline the thesis' structure. It comprises eight chapters starting with the current chapter, which introduces the aims and research agenda of the study and overviews its structure. Chapter 2 explores the context of the investigation. Afterward, Chapter 3 overviews the following key concepts in the relevant literature for this study: the organisational culture of HEIs; globalisation and institutionalisation of internationalisation in HEIs; and international education partnerships in HEIs. Next, Chapter 4 presents the theoretical framework used in the study and the theories that informed its development. Chapter 5 then discusses the overall methodology. The findings of the investigation are presented in Chapter 6, followed by an interpretation of the results and a discussion of their implications in Chapter 7. Finally, Chapter 8 evaluates whether the study achieved its aims through the theoretical framework. The application of the findings to a broader context is examined, and possible directions for future research, alongside recommendations are proposed.

## **2 CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT – RECENT TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UK**

UK RIUs have been subject to significant changes over the past few years and have had to adapt to challenges and opportunities associated with the globalisation and marketisation of the HE sector (Torres, 2015). Adapting to this new environment has changed the character of the primary aims of a modern RIU. Such changes have encouraged the development of activities that are less research-oriented, aimed at generating revenue from non-research sources and generally could be considered as bringing the tools of teaching-oriented universities (less prestigious and sometimes described in the sector as ‘recruiting’ HEIs as opposed to ‘selective’ ones) into world class (a term that has been contested [Shattock, 2017; Hazelkorn, 2011 and 2015a]) research-focused universities (Healey, 2015).

Pursuing strategies that are more centred around market positioning and revenue generation, UK RIUs are now actively engaged in multiple and extensive trans-national education projects and partnerships. Although an increasing number of academic staff are now on a teaching-only contract, many are still highly research-oriented and focused on delivering excellence in research and innovation.

Three related recent trends in HE provide important background context for this study: the marketisation of the HE sector; the importance of international brand recognition in global rankings for the purpose of reputation building and revenue generation; and the RG as a mission group representing UK RIUs. These factors, explored below, were chosen because they have contributed to creating an environment to which RIUs have to adapt by changing behaviours and strategies that may not have always been associated with world-class HEIs in the past. One of these new strategies is the development of international education partnerships, particularly those aimed at recruiting large numbers of international, fee-paying students.

### **2.1 Marketisation of UK higher education**

In recent years, the UK Government has published a number of key policy papers leading to drastic changes in HE. These include the Green Paper ‘Fulfilling our potential: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice’ (BIS, 2015), the White Paper ‘Success as a knowledge economy: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice’ (BIS, 2016a) and the Higher Education and Research Bill (BIS, 2016b). All appear to propose a new student ideal that presupposes a transactional model of student engagement, forming part of a long-term shift towards neoliberal political economy that institutionalises market-oriented policies in HE (Brown et al., 2013; Pickford, 2016). Previous policies that have enabled these recent ones

include the Jarratt Report (1985), the Dearing Report (1997), the Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy (BIS, 2009), the Browne Review (2010) and Students at the Heart of the System (BIS, 2011).

Roger Brown et al. (2013, p. 2–3) stated that the following basic features define a marketized HE sector: (a) universities are autonomous entities from a legal perspective, they are free to set their own mission and priorities and staff are directly employed by the HEIs themselves; (b) new providers can freely enter the market as entry barriers are minimal; (c) students have a genuine choice about what, where and how to study, leading to competition between the HEIs; (d) Tuition fees, funded by students, forms the majority of HEIs' revenues; (e) competition between HEIs exists on a number of levels including quality and price; and (f) consumer information and support are primary indicators in quality assurance and less importance is given to quality enhancement. Similar features are also set out in Jongbloed's (2003) eight conditions for a free market.

As Brown and Carasso noted (p. 23), few HE systems operate as pure markets. However, the above features appear to match the current HE environment in the UK, where HEIs are increasingly competing for students, staff and resources and where students are often viewed as customers. The only element that is not yet present is competitive prices for UK students, as the majority of universities have chosen to set their fees at the highest possible level, but the climate is changing rapidly, and one can only assume that this will become a reality fairly soon. Price competition, however, already exists in the deregulated overseas fee environment, where universities charge high tuition fees in order to generate additional revenues (Van Damme, 2017). Notably, in the overseas student market, it is not unusual for the most expensive universities to attract more students than those offering cheaper courses (Norton and Cherastidtham, 2015).

Many scholars have argued that marketisation and HE cannot happily co-exist for many reasons, primarily because education is about quality and cannot be assigned a market value (Arum and Roska, 2011; Barnett, 2011; Bendixen and Jacobsen, 2017; Molesworth et al., 2009;). Within the context of marketisation of higher education, the quality of education that students receive from a university has emerged as a priority for HEIs (Altbach 2010; Harvey and Knight 1996). This has resulted in universities striving to demonstrate that their academic programs are of high quality and working to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Ewell 2010). However, defining "quality" can be somewhat difficult. Harvey and Green (1993) identified five main definitions or conceptions of quality: (1) exceptional, (2) consistency, (3) value for money, (4) fitness for purpose, and (5) transformation.

Biggs (2001), on the other hand discussed two main approaches to quality assurance: retrospective - looking “back to what has already been done” (p. 222) - and prospective - “concerned with assuring that teaching and learning does now, and in future will continue, to fit the purpose of the institution. It also encourages continuing upgrading and improvement of teaching through quality enhancement” (p. 222). In this study, we acknowledge these various concepts of quality and will consider them as an essential element to take into account when assessing IPPs. We also generally agree with those who see the marketisation of HE process as a permanent phenomenon that reflects the need for HEIs to achieve a competitive advantage in a given market (Hall, 2015; Jongbloed, 2003). This view is taken because the resource dependencies of UK universities have changed dramatically over the past few decades, and, with a significant decrease in public funding, universities are now dependent on tuition fee income, especially those of high fee-paying international students, for their financial sustainability. The current pandemic has thrown this issue into sharp relief (London Economics, 2020).

## **2.2 Brand recognition, global rankings, reputation and revenue**

Higher education strategies and priorities, at institutional, national and international policy levels, are increasingly influenced by prestige culture (Ordorika and Lloyd, 2015) where international league tables and market competition dominate. The notion of ‘excellence’ frames both sector-wide and organisational practices (Stevenson et al., 2017). Rankings have played a transformative role in the HE landscape (Hazelkorn, 2015b), profoundly reshaping the sector, driven by economic imperatives to develop ‘global, entrepreneurial, corporate, commercialised universities’ (Stevenson et al., 2014), which are otherwise described as ‘ideal’ universities (Elken et al., 2016). While this phenomenon has been noticed globally, it has been felt severely in the UK.

In the last 15 years, global rankings, a controversial indicator of quality and academic prestige, have introduced a new dimension to the internationalisation of HE. Prestige and its pursuit have value, leading to greater capture of resources for HEIs (Kehm, 2019). It can be argued that status, in HE, has become a ‘positional good’ (Bourdieu, 1975). Hazelkorn (2008) revealed that 63% of university vice-chancellors and presidents who were surveyed have taken strategic, organisational, managerial or academic actions as a result of rankings. Locke (2014) and Bekhradnia (2016), too, have identified that rankings are now commonly used for decision-making purposes. Under neo-liberal influences, a new managerial culture is increasingly reinforced in UK HEIs (Badat, 2010).



Universities are increasingly relying on internationalisation to grow their global reputation and generate substantial revenues. For this reason, what used to be seen as an add-on or a hobby of a small proportion of academic staff, now requires a strategic approach (Neale et al., 2018). Partnerships with IPPs have become central to student number growth and income generation (Agosti and Bernat, 2018). However, in the case of RIUs, such overtly commercial partnerships must be delicately balanced with the need to maintain a positive corporate reputation in key global markets.

A number of publications have attempted to establish a definition of corporate reputation (Barnett et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2006; Pires and Trez, 2018). Barnett et al. (2006) pointed out that general opinion and assessment was central to corporate reputation. Common judgements, which are usually evaluative (i.e., good vs bad) are decisive factors in determining reputation. What stakeholders think of an organisation is therefore central to corporate reputation. Corporate reputation is source of competitive advantage, as it is time-consuming for new market entrants to match a well-established reputation (Ravasi et al., 2018). This definition can also be applied within an HE context, especially if, following neo-liberal ideology, HEI can be managed as businesses. Reputation and global rankings are therefore a key element of the 'scramble for students' (Matsumoto and Ono, 2008) experienced by most HEIs actively involved in what is increasingly seen as the mediatisation of rankings and HE in general (Stack 2016), a phenomenon that all universities including RIUs must adapt to.

### **2.3 The Russell Group as an organisational field**

McCormack et al. (2014, p. 5) described the UK HE system as comprising 158 degree-granting universities. Most of these universities are not-for-profit, some of which are research-oriented, and others focus primarily on teaching. Traditionally, UK universities were divided into research-focused universities and 'polytechnics', which are less research-oriented and offer more vocationally oriented programmes. In 1992, this system was formally unified (Raffe and Coxford, 2016). The polytechnics became universities, and specialist institutions remained as colleges of HE. New funding councils for England, Scotland and Wales were created, forming a new 'administrative system' of HE (Rees and Istance, 1997) and unified systems in three of the UK's countries - England, Scotland and Wales - replacing the former binary system.

However, the system that was set up in 1992 is not truly unified (Scott, 1995), and an informal status hierarchy remains. This hierarchy was subsequently created when the RG – a membership organisation of large RIUs – representing the higher stratum, was formed (Fell et

al., 2015). The RG is comprised of self-selected RIUs (representing around 15% of the sector, but accounting for the majority of all research income [Russell Group, 2017]) and distinguishes itself from other groups (Aghion et al., 2010; McCormack et al., 2014), sometimes controversially.

The RG was formed in 1994 and, at the time, comprised 13 English and two Scottish universities. Since then, other universities have been invited to join the group, and there are now 24 member universities across the United Kingdom (Russell Group 2017), which is fairly large compared to similar groups in other countries (e.g., Australia's Group of 8 or Germany's U15). While the RG has no official status, it is able to exercise influence at governmental level and contribute to policy debates. Being an RG member is seen as an indicator of the organisation's status. Within the RG itself, there is a subgroup known as the 'Golden Triangle' including Oxford and Cambridge, and the large London universities (Raffe and Coxford, 2016) are further ahead of the others (due to their larger financial endowments, their ability to attract significant research funding and large numbers of international staff and students), demonstrating a disparity in research intensity within the group.

The RG can be described as a 'mission' group (Filippakou and Tapper, 2015). The self-proclaimed group of 'leading' HEIs is often challenged (Fazackerley, 2013). Sir David Watson, professor of higher education at the University of Oxford, argued that the RG 'represents neither the sector as a whole [nor], in many cases, the best of the sector' (Morgan, 2014). It has however been successful at promoting its members as one of the '24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector' (Russell Group, 2017).

The key characteristics of the universities in the RG are described as follows in the group's profile:

*'Lead in pioneering, excellent research and innovation; Are responsible for ground-breaking inventions and discoveries; Produce excellent research on a grand scale, across a broad range of disciplines, generating huge impact through critical mass and quality; Compete on an international stage to attract the brightest minds from around the world to study, research and teach; Provide an outstanding student experience for both undergraduates and postgraduates, where teaching is enhanced by world-class research and facilities; Produce the most distinguished contributors to society; Work with major multinationals as well as SMEs and start-up companies to drive cutting-edge innovation; Play a key role in their local communities; Provide the vast majority of medical research and education' (Russell Group, 2017, p. 3).*

Sauntson and Morrish (2010) demonstrated in their study of the RG mission statement that, compared to other universities, RG statements presuppose confidence in their quality and impact on all aspects of university activities. This confidence is supported by comparative facts and figures widely disseminated by the RG and its member organisations such as the wide difference in average annual income (£688 million for RG universities compared to £132 million

for other universities), economic output (with RG universities responsible for 44% of the sector output when the RG comprises 15% of universities in the UK) and research output (with RG universities responsible for three quarters of international citations and the most cited papers produced in the UK (Russell Group, 2017).

Therefore, it appears that the RG has successfully conveyed a message that its members want to disseminate, with the concepts of excellence in research and innovation at its core. A shift from a 'pyramid of prestige' (Halsey, 1961) to a more formally defined hierarchy (Filippakou and Tapper, 2015), with top performing RIUs at its top, appears to now be solidified and here to stay.

As described by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), an organisational field is a set of organisational sharing systems of common meanings. Actors within these systems interact and consort more regularly with each other than with actors from outside their field. By doing so, they create a recognised area of institutional life. This definition applies to the RG, as described above.

Therefore, this study focuses on a specific (although self-defined) organisational field as a complete set of connected actors, that is, 'a community of organisations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside of the field' (Scott, 1994, p. 207–208). As highlighted by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), organisational fields have common or similar institutional structures within which social actors respond to their environment and also interact frequently with each other. This attitude can lead to structural isomorphism. RG universities are therefore treated within this study as a specific organisational field facing common changes in their external environment. Within this field, we examine how middle managers, as social actors, operate to influence (or not) the strategy development and implementation.

The next chapter presents the literature review and outlines the gap identified within the literature.

### **3 CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Large and complex education-focused partnerships enable many of the international strategies of modern HEIs; they provide visibility and brand association and may lead to revenue generation. Focusing on the implementation of partnerships between IPPs and RG universities, this study's interest lies in understanding the outcomes related to delivery of these partnerships, most specifically the various unintended effects (negative or positive). While there has been much research on international partnerships in HE and internationalisation of HE in general, few researchers have focused on partnerships with IPPs, taking organisational culture and the specific role played by middle managers into consideration. This clear gap in the literature will be explored in this chapter and in chapter 4 where the theoretical framework of the study is outlined. Consequently, this study requires an exposition of three key, inter-related, areas of literature: organisational culture in HEIs, institutionalisation of internationalisation in HEIs and international partnerships in HEIs (specifically, with IPPs).

#### **3.1 Organisational culture in higher education institutions**

##### **3.1.1 Higher education institutions as organisations...or not!**

*'About eighty-five institutions in the western world established by 1520 still exist in recognisable forms, with similar functions and unbroken histories, including the Catholic church, the parliaments of the Isle of Man, of Iceland and of Great Britain, several Swiss cantons, and seventy universities. Kings that rule, feudal lords with vassals, guilds with monopolies are gone. These seventy universities, however, are still in the same locations with some of the same buildings, with professors and students doing much the same things, and with governance carried on in much the same ways'.* Clark Kerr (1983, p. 152)

Considering the history of universities, many have argued that universities are specific organisations, impossible to compare with anything else. Experts in this area of research have attempted to define universities as organisations from the perspective of the decision-making process. Four main concepts were developed, primarily in the 60s and 70s, to explain the specificities of universities as organisations. Goodman (1962) and Millett (1962) were pioneers in developing what is now considered one of the first theoretical models for explaining the uniqueness of the university decision-making process: the 'collegial model'. In this model, decisions are made through consensus by peers who have shared values and responsibilities. This model was later criticised for the way decision-making process itself was described and the fact that shared academic values would make it difficult to reach a compromise between all stakeholders involved (Clark, 2001).

Therefore, other alternatives were developed to address the limits of the collegial model, which included the idea that universities are bureaucratic and rational (Blau, 1973), with defined structures, processes and lines of authority, as discussed in the Weberian theory of bureaucracy (Weber, 1968). This was later adapted by Mintzberg (1979) to define universities as 'professional bureaucracies'. The third model, the political model developed by Baldrige (1971), argues that each actor exercises individual choice in decision-making process with the aim to control various resources. Therefore, conflicts are a central characteristic of the university life and bargaining and negotiation between several stakeholders (Baldrige, 1971; Manning, 2017) becomes the de facto decision making process. This position is different from both collegial and bureaucratic models, where such tensions are unimportant.

Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) developed two interlinked concepts: the 'organised anarchy' in which universities are seen as large, stable organisation with very independent components; and the 'garbage can' decision-making model, which is established on the chance encounter between problems, solutions, and more or less involved actors – the latter being more or less available depending on their resources and temporal availabilities. Finally, Brunsson and K. Sahlin-Andersson (2000) have argued that recent pushes to reform universities are attempts to 'construct' organisations via the building of hierarchies and the implementation of centralised organisational policies and strategies. However, such pressures from the external environment have a limited impact on effectively transforming universities (Bauer et al., 1999; Baker-Shelley et al., 2017; de Boer 2001, 2002; Mignot-Gérard and Musselin, 1999, 2000, and 2002;).

All of the above models have been extensively criticised, leading us to agree with the critics of those theories that they are all out of touch with reality and show a utopian or simplistic view of how universities work as organisations. Regardless of the model used, it is possible to identify several key characteristics of universities as organisations, which are important to take into account as they play an important role in the way strategic change can be implemented and managed. Universities are characterised by the fact that they serve a number of purposes; therefore, goal ambiguity is a common trait of these organisations. Unlike other organisations, they lack a single, clearly definable production function, and more and more, have to be managed as hybrid organisations, comprising both public and private elements (Kleimann, 2019).

As demonstrated by Miller et al. (2014), universities are accountable to numerous stakeholders to varying degrees. Individual stakeholders have their own objectives, interests and concerns, which are often conflicting (Foster and Jonker, 2005), thereby leading to a

divergence in strategic decisions. These stakeholders do not just exercise external pressure but are also intrinsically linked with the work of the universities. The benefits of co-creation with multiple stakeholders as a means of sustainable competitive advantage has been documented in the literature (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). In the majority of cases, the commitment of academic staff to their discipline and profession is higher than their commitment to the university (Altbach, 2008). Academic staff's allegiance to their discipline resembles an ideal model of professionalism (Friedson, 1994) with specialised worker in control of their own work, as opposed to being controlled by customer demands in the free-market model or by a manager in a bureaucracy. This specificity is important to take into account when considering organisational culture in HE.

### **3.1.2 Organisational culture**

The concept of culture has been used to help define and understand the internationalisation of HEIs in response to globalisation (Beerkens, 2003; Young et al., 2017). The culture of an organisation impacts how it operates and includes the underlying assumptions, values and philosophies that influence the way activities processes and policies are defined and generally can explain why certain things the way are they are within an organisation (Johnson, 2015; Jones et al., 1991). It is therefore important to understand this concept in order to identify how international strategies are developed, implemented and evaluated as we can safely assume that the culture of an organisation impacts the way strategies are developed and delivered.

Johnson (2008 and 2015) developed the 'cultural web', an analytical tool that is often used to understand the relationships between strategy and organisational culture. The 'cultural web' helps identify how existing strategies are embedded and taken for granted within assumptions and beliefs about the organisation, held in a central paradigm and connected with a variety of tangible and intangible aspects of the organisation that include the following: 'myths', 'symbols', 'power structures', 'organisational structures', 'control systems' and 'routines and rituals' (Johnson, 2008 and 2015). In the case of our study, the central paradigm of RG universities is that they are world class and research-oriented and that we could therefore find traces of this paradigm within all aspects mentioned above.

Davies (2001) argued that until recently, HEIs tended have been characterised as having a low corporate identity and tended be non-interventionist in most areas. Collegiate or bureaucratic cultures were the most dominant ones. However, especially in the UK, a number of factors, mostly linked to the reduction in public funding as well as other external pressures

(Duderstadt, 2000; Scott, 1998), have destabilised these dominant cultures and led to the emergence of a more entrepreneurial and corporate approach in which university-level strategic thinking is more common. Each culture will have different styles, characteristics and methods of working.

When identifying how universities develop, implement and monitor international strategies, this study takes the view that different cultures can co-exist as described by McNay (1995). McNay developed a useful model that identifies the four different types of university cultures according to the type of operational controls and the organisation's preferences in terms of policy and strategy. The cultural types, which may co-exist in all organisations, are described as follows: (1) Enterprise – this first cultural types had tight policy and loose operational control. Here, the the marketplace is of high importance, external opportunities are pursued systematically and relationships with clients are prioritised (2) Corporate – This cultural type has tight policy and tight operational control. Here senior management is dominant. (3) Collegiate – This cultural type has loose policy and loose operational control. Here individual freedom is of the highest importance and decision making is decentralised. (4) Bureaucratic – This cultural type has tight operational control and loose policy. Here law, order, regulations and precedent are of the highest importance.

As observed by Kolsaker (2008), academic freedom is still, at least in European universities (Karran et al., 2017), of the utmost importance, and academic staff are difficult to manage as they 'come and go as they please, have a relatively free hand in course design, and disappear to do "real work" (research) for days on end' (Kolsaker, 2008, p. 516). The high levels of professionalism that can be encountered in universities is, more often than not, multifaceted and 'the cultures of academic men, like other subcultures, are often subtle and complex. Faculty cultures have many segments and only a few aspects can be caught in one net, no matter how fine the webbing of the net nor how large its size' (Clark, 1963, p. 40).

Bergquist (1992) outlined four clashing cultures in universities: 'collegial', 'managerial', 'developmental' and 'negotiating' culture. In scrutinising the matter culture and change, Bergquist remarked that the four cultures can be present in conflict with each other in universities and are particularly noticed in three domains: structure, process and attitude. We agree with Bergquist, for organisational change to successfully persist, it must affect each of the three domains and be coupled with structural change.

Finally, universities, fragmented in nature due to the factors listed above, are often described as forming loosely coupled social systems (Weick, 1976), in which universities

demonstrate low levels of internal integration. As loosely coupled systems, HEIs can undergo small adjustments easily and react rapidly to their environments; however, change on a larger scale is difficult. Maximising current and future opportunities required agility and adaptability that HEIs, used to stability, find a difficult trade—off to accept. Clark (1983) also described HE as a loosely coupled system with ambiguous goals that are only ‘softly focused’. We consider the fact that the ‘fundamental adaptive mechanism of universities is the capacity to add and subtract some fields of knowledge and related units without disturbing all of the others’ (p. 104) to be both a positive and a negative point when it comes to implementation of change across an organisation, especially in the case of the development and implementation of IPPs.

Clark (2001) described the entrepreneurial university as one that has a “diversified funding base” (p.12) and a “strengthened steering core” (p.14). It also has a capacity for change in what is seen as a “reinvention of university collegiality” (p.16) with entrepreneurship being embedded in all parts of the university life and collegiality being a means to achieving greater success rather than an end to itself. However, what may be in the long term a natural and inevitable evolution of the more traditional university where collegiality and bureaucracy dominate (Etzkowitz, 2004), usually starts in senior management and is accompanied by a significant process of organisational changes in the different parts of the university, often hindered by serious obstacles (Rinne & Koivula, 2005).

A clash of values is often described, causing resistance in academic and professional services staff (Mkrtychyan, 2014). Higgs and Rowland (2005) have demonstrated that 70% of change initiatives fail and that the key cause of this failure is leadership behaviour combined with recipients' resistance to change. Resistance to change can occur due to personal characteristics (Oreg, 2006), lack of motivation, uncertainties, and increased anxiety about the change itself (Vos and Rupert, 2018).

Moreover, Higgs and Rowland (2005) have identified that leadership behaviour of those acting as change agents can have a significant impact on the effective realisation of the change. They found change agents utilise three different types of behaviours to influence their recipients (sometimes simultaneously) (Higgs & Rowland, 2011): (1) a shaping behaviour which involves personal involvement in controlling what gets done and holding others accountable for the delivery of tasks; (2) a framing behaviour which requires embedding the change through various steps of a journey and challenging others to deliver the change; (3) a creating behaviour that focuses on creating individual and organisational capabilities to induce the change.

Change agents' influencing skills appears to be an important part of managing change successfully. It is all the more importance when, as it is the case in this study, considering the



role of middle managers, who often need to influence change recipients but also top level managers in strategy development and implementation. Kipnis and Schimdt (1982) have developed profiles of the strategies that people use to influence their managers at work, called the Profile of Organisational Influence Strategies. Their classification of 6 dimensions of upward influence include: a) friendliness – creating a favourable impression, sometimes using flattery, b) reason – using facts and data, c) bargain - exchanging benefits or favours, d) coalitions – mobilising others and applying social pressure, e) assertiveness – demanding or forceful requests, and f) higher authority – bypassing their direct manager.

Universities are increasingly transitioning from a collegiate culture and beginning to accept alternative cultures, in particular enterprise or corporate ones (Marginson and Considine, 2000). Nevertheless, for many, mostly academic and professional service staff, the new culture is diametrically opposite to traditional academic values (Donahue, 2018; Giroux, 2002). Culture plays a significant role in how universities respond to their external environment, especially internationally, and bureaucratic or collegial culture, where dominant, appear to be the ones experiencing the greatest difficulties to adapt (Carlson, 2017; Davies, 2001).

## **3.2 Globalisation and institutionalisation of internationalisation in HEIs**

Globalisation is a process with far-reaching impact on all types of activities, including HE. Globalisation is a complex concept, however in its simplest form, it refers to the ‘reforms and structures that transcend national borders’ (Astiz et al., 2002). Within HE, the process of globalisation has the potential to impact national education policies and local instructional strategies in a wide manner.

### **3.2.1 Internationalisation of higher education**

In HE circles, colleagues and other stakeholders refer to what Neave (1997) calls the ‘inaccurate myth’ of the international nature of university. Altbach (1998), for example, often refers to the university as the one organisation that has always been global, ‘with its roots in Medieval Europe, the modern university is at the centre of an international knowledge system that encompasses technology, communication and cultures’ (p. 347).

Kerr et al. (1994) stated, possibly more accurately, ‘Universities are, by nature of their commitment to advancing universal knowledge, essentially international institutions, but they have been living, increasingly, in a world of nation states that have designs on them’ (p. 6). It is useful to reflect on the original roots of the university when studying the internationalisation of

HE in today's world; however, we also need to recognise that the definition of the term internationalisation itself has changed over the centuries. The initial 'academic pilgrimage' (Ruegg and de Ridder-Symoens, 1992, p. 280) of students and professors that was a fairly common occurrence in the Middle Ages came to a stop when universities started to develop and grow in numbers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (de Ridder-Symoens, 2016). Universities started to play a more national role, mostly attracting students and academic staff from their immediate region.

With the emergence of the nation state, universities slowly became national symbols, and internationalisation was translated into the exportation of HE systems, mostly by European colonising powers (Bonaccorsi and Daraio, 2007; Neave, 2009; Roberts et al., 1996) but also by the development of universities built on the European model around the world (Altbach, 1989 and 2015). During that period, international student mobility never truly came to a halt but was related to the 'cultural and intellectual advantage of educational travel' (Ruegg and de Ridder-Symoens, 1996). Clark and Neave (1992) described international academic mobility in the 20<sup>th</sup> century up until the 1970s as 'overwhelmingly volunteerist, unorganised and individual' (p. 15). Recently, however, a major shift in the internationalisation of HE has taken place, especially in the UK.

In the 1980s, HE in the UK witnessed a move 'from aid to trade' (Coleman, 2003, p. 355) and the introduction of tuition fees for foreign students in 1983 with the Education Fees and Awards Act (Great Britain, 1983). Since then, HE in the UK has undergone a dramatic transformation, which has been strengthened to some extent by the introduction of global rankings in the mid-2000s and the increased competitiveness of the HE global markets (Hazelkorn, 2015a). More recently, the UK's new international education strategy (Department for Education, 2019) and its recent update (Department for Education, 2021) continue to encourage this transformation by aiming to increase revenue generated through HE exports to £35 billions per annum by 2030, targeting high strategic regions such as China, South East Asia and the Middle East, which (un)coincidentally are also key markets for IPPs.

### **3.2.2 Organisational factors**

The way organisations respond to international opportunities is linked to their dominating cultures, and staff are therefore vital to the success of the internationalisation of HE (Santhi, 2010). As universities start to institutionalise their international strategies, new positions and portfolios are created to cater for internationalisation efforts, such as Deputy or Pro-Vice Chancellors, Deputy Rectors or Directors for Internationalisation (Soliman et al., 2019; Taylor,

2010), who are responsible for the internationalisation efforts of the university (including development of a strategy and its implementation). Santhi (2010) suggested that there are ten success factors for the internationalisation of HEIs: organisational policy and structure, governmental policy, leadership and governance, administrative support, financial support, knowledge, human resource and recognition, technology integration, internationalisation ethos and innovativeness.

Santhi and others (Bedenlier, 2017; Childress, 2010; Dewey and Duff, 2009; Knight, 1995;) have also suggested that internationalisation efforts within HEIs are most productive when faculty members drive activities. However, there are many dimensions of the internationalisation of HEIs, and other parts of the universities also play a key role (De Wit, 2002; Elkin et al., 2005; Knight, 2008 and 2015; McRaven and Sommers, 2017; Middlehurst, 1997; Taylor, 2010;). Consequently, all participants from top management and academic staff to professional services need to cooperate in the pursuit of internationalisation within specific universities (Taylor, 2010).

Jane Knight (1995) identified the commitment and support of top-level management (such as the Vice Chancellor himself but also the Pro-Vice Chancellors and other key senior managers such as Registrars or COOs) and academic staff as essential factors required to facilitate the internationalisation process. The existence of an international office as well as adequate funding and support are also important factors. For Knight, policy statements and communication are second in importance to the people involved in both the leadership and implementation of internationalisation activities.

Childress (2010) also explored the roles and attitudes of faculty towards internationalisation. She outlined different types of faculty engagement ('champions', 'advocates', 'latent champions and advocates', 'uninterested', 'sceptics' and 'opponents'). She also discussed the types of strategic incentives that can help facilitate change. Childress integrated these in a model called the 'Five I's of Faculty Engagement in Internationalisation' (p. 153) comprising five key elements: 'intentionality', 'investments', 'infrastructure', 'institutional networks' and 'individual support'. Without these critical components, it is effectively impossible for an HE university to effectively facilitate the development and implementation of internationalisation strategies.

A number of models aimed at identifying organisational responses to the internationalisation of HEIs were developed in the 1990s. Hans de Wit edited what has now become a key reference for many studies in which he compared HEIs internationalisation

strategies in Australia, Canada, Europe and the US (de Wit, 1995). Five models were chosen that demonstrate a range of possible strategies: (1) Clark and Neave's two paradigmatic models for managing international cooperation (Clark and Neave, 1992, pp. 166–169), one 'leadership driven' and one 'base unit driven'. In so doing, they implicitly created a distinction between a centralised and decentralised approach. (2) Davies' model (Davies, 1992) which included a matrix according to which an HEIs develop four types of strategies: central-systematic strategy (comprehensive in nature, with an explicit international mission and specific policies and procedures); an ad hoc-central strategy (where activities have an ad hoc character); systematic-marginal strategy (where activities are limited but well-organised); an hoc-marginal strategy (where activities are limited and decision-making unclear). (3) Van Dijk and Meijer's model (Van Dijk and Meijer, 1994), in which three dimensions are outlined: policy (marginal or priority), support (one-sided or interactive) and implementation (ad hoc or systematic). (4) Rudzki's model. (Rudzki, 1995) identifies four key dimensions of internationalisation: student mobility, staff development, curriculum innovation and organisational change. Rudzki also outlines that internationalisation can be either reactive and proactive. (5) Knight's model (Knight, 1994) paints a picture of internationalisation as a continuous cycle rather than a linear or static process, in which HEIs moves through six steps at their own pace, and rarely follows the steps in a pre-determined sequence to the steps, with a two-way flow that occurring between different steps.

These five different models of internationalisation are useful guides that can help, from a conceptual perspective, understand how internationalisation strategies are developed, implemented and evaluated. These models are still widely used today.

Numerous HE practitioners and researchers (Adserias et al., 2017; Bensimon, 1993; Birnbaum, 1988; Duderstadt, 2000; Eckel, Green, Hill, & Mallon, 1999;) have examined the connections between leadership in HE and successful organisational change. Change leadership and management must be adapted to the distinctive context of HE systems to ensure its success. Denis, Lamothe and Langley (2001) remarked that loose coupling can be conducive to efficient local incremental adaptation, however it does not facilitate larger scale change. They indicated that three types of 'coupling' are required to happen concurrently for change is to be successful. These 'couplings' need to take place within the top-level management team, additionally they are also required between the top-level management team and internal organisational stakeholders, finally they are needed between the top-level management team and the external stakeholders of the organisation.

Similarly, Eckel et al. (1999) argued that change in HE is needs to account for the autonomy and independence between units and the devolved decision-making. They recommend that suggesting large-scale change be supported by change teams charged with strategic purpose, a strong engagement with the campus community; by assuring that time and resources are dedicated and aligned with the change effort. Finally, Weick (1982) suggested that organisational change should be 'centralised when sub-units' adjustments can have discontinuous, long-term effects at considerable expense and decentralised when adjustments have continuous, abbreviated, inexpensive effects' (p. 390).

This study focuses on the importance of professional and academic staff involvement in the delivery of international strategic activities (i.e., partnerships with IPPs). We assume that internationalisation is already Institutionalised at a variety of levels, possibly following one of the models described above, and will therefore focus on the role of middle managers. Their key characteristics, as based on the notion of strategy as practice, may have a direct impact on change processes related to the development of partnerships between IPPs and RIUs, ensuring the delivery of the intended outcomes and producing unintended effects.

The loose coupling and high professionalism found in universities would appear to limit the effectiveness of formal structures as a means to reinforce coordination and cooperation. The goal ambiguity, multiple stakeholders and cultures also means leadership practice and the management of change within universities cannot be carried out in a straightforward manner. In these respects, the theory of strategy as practice is therefore well-suited to the organisational context and culture often found in HEI.

### **3.3 International partnerships in higher education institutions**

International linkages and collaborations have become a key focus of HE policy in most countries over the last few decades and have often been considered as an instrument for enhancing national economic competitiveness (Nowotny, 2001; Yoon et al., 2020). Indeed, there has been a surge in collaborations across fields in HEIs (Altbach et al., 2009; Bozeman et al., 2013; Deem et al., 2008; Yarmoshuk et al., 2020; Wuchty et al., 2007), and some have argued that universities that do not form international collaborations risk losing their competitive advantage (Adams, 2013; Keisler, 2020). It is therefore understandable that many universities in the UK and elsewhere are actively engaged in developing international partnerships.

However, it is important that they are seen with the right type of partner, one that can enhance their reputation or confirm their standing.

Partnerships are varied in type and complex in nature. This study focuses on partnerships between RIUs and IPPs, predominantly aimed at attracting international fee-paying students. However, it is important to understand the broader literature on partnerships in HE to enable us to identify gaps in the literature.

### **3.3.1 Partnerships as inter-organisational relations**

The study of inter-organisational relations is a subset of organisation studies. Partnerships between organisations are referred to as inter-organisational relations. Examples of Inter-organisational relations include networks, strategic alliances, partnerships, franchises, and joint ventures (Ojanen, 2018; Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos, 2011; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). Many have studied the reasons and motivations for organisations and firms to enter inter-organisational cooperations, generally agreeing that they do so in order to adapt to or influence their environment (Ojanen, 2018; Podolny and Page, 1998;). Reasons for seeking partnerships are various and include, for example, the wish to minimise costs or risks (Dooley and O'Sullivan, 2016) as well resource dependency (Gazley, 2017), accessing new knowledge (Kapucu and Demiroz, 2017), expanding customers and suppliers' bases (Barringer and Harrison, 2000) and maximising profits, value creation and larger achievements (Kishna et al., 2017; van Fenema and Loebbecke, 2014).

Brass et al. (2004) established that inter-organisational collaborations are more likely if partners have a comparable status. Linkages with organisations of unequal status can easily damage the reputation of the higher status party even if they benefit the lower status organisation and act as a power source. A lack of prestige is therefore a constraint on alliance entry (Stuart, 1998). Associating with well-known organisations can bring significant advantages in terms of brand or product recognition (Podolny and Stuart, 1995; Stuart et al., 1999) as well as legitimacy (Baum and Oliver, 1991, 1992; Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Kim and Celis, 2016), acting as an 'endorsement' of status from high-status organisations to its partner (Stuart et al., 1999).

The above description of partnerships as inter-organisational relations aligns well with what can be observed currently in the international HE context. When presuming - as we do in this study - that engaging in global partnerships is a strategic behaviour of HEIs to gain financial benefits – understanding this is not true in all cases and that some international partnerships do not seek financial benefits – and raise their profile globally, the reasons for partnering and the

types of partnership that we will describe below are not dissimilar to those formed by global companies or firms in the process of internationalising and seeking entry to new markets.

### **3.3.2 International partnerships in higher education institutions**

Literature on international partnerships between HEIs has flourished over the past two decades. In the wake of the 1995 General Agreement on Trade-in Services (GATS) and as private and 'for-profit' provisions became more widespread in order to meet the expansion in demand for higher education globally, a number of authors have defined or classified international partnerships between HEIs to capture the difference between the new market-oriented imperative for HEI internationalisation as opposed to internationalisation at home (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Beerkens, 2002; Healey, 2008; Knight, 2004; Henderson et al., 2017). Operating in a highly competitive environment, HEIs evolve concurrently in the global, national and local (or 'glonacal') realms (Marginson, 2004).

Some scholars have attempted to 'stock take' (Naidoo, 2009) the new forms of cross-border education (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005; McBurnie and Ziguras, 2006), while others have focused on specific providers or countries (Healey, 2008 and 2015; Miller-Idriss and Hannauer, 2011; Sidhu, Ho, & Yeoh, 2011). However, the proliferation of studies related to international collaboration has not led a commonly agreed upon definition of international partnerships in HEIs. Thus, the concept of 'international partnership' in HE is difficult to define (Butterfield et al., 2016; Wilkins et al., 2017), and many use 'confuse and imprecise' terminology (Lang, 2002) when discussing it.

Some define partnerships as 'cooperative agreements' through which HEIs seek the help or support of another organisation for a variety of purposes, such as sharing resources or knowledge or coordinating activities, when both share a common goal (Kinser and Green, 2009). Others, such as Maher et al. (2003), view partnerships through the lens of culture and stress the importance of strategically identifying the right type of partner taking into account 'the history, organisational cultures and structures' (p. 115).

Generally speaking, partnerships include the following activities: collaborative research, exchange of students and staff, collaborative teaching and curriculum development, joint conferences and workshops and community development. It is possible, however, to first differentiate between a formal and informal partnership. At the individual level, international partnerships or collaborations among academics are extremely common, especially in research. International research collaborations have been linked with positively influencing research

quality and impact, as first demonstrated by Reagans and Zuckerman (2001), with others (such as Bozeman et al., 2013; Grauwin et al., 2012; Djukanović et al., 2017) also supporting this view.

Partnerships differ in terms of the breadth and scale of the cooperation. Samoff and Carrol (2004) identified university-level partnerships, department-faculty partnerships, multiple-inter-university partnerships and partnerships among individual academic staff. The first three categories are based on institutional agreements, whereas the last category involves informal collaborations between individual scholars. Informal partnerships involving individual scholars may evolve into institutional partnerships (Baskerville et al., 2011; Samoff and Carrol, 2004). Large formal international partnerships supported by governments can sometimes be seen by HEIs as 'obligatory' (Madhani, 2017). This is often the case in North-South partnerships, where partners are invited to participate once the objectives of projects or programmes have already been agreed upon by the respective governmental agencies.

These types of partnerships, often described as capacity building, have been studied extensively (Amare et al., 2017; Barrett et al., 2011; Maher et al., 2003; Obamba and Mwema, 2009;). Maher et al. (2003) pointed out that these partnerships are a 'negotiated space' that require 'continual negotiation of the meaning and practice of collaboration among partners' (p. 108). Partners need to develop 'ethical frameworks' for collaboration in order for partners to benefit from the relationship (Helms, 2017, p. 33). Within this context, Sutton (2016) described these partnerships as providing mutual but asymmetrical benefits and proposed a three-dimensional model of benefits (individual, for example, funding; institutional, for example, creation of new knowledge via collaborative research; and systemic).

Many partnerships models have been proposed, some focusing on the cycles and stages of partnership development (Eddy, 2010). Others from the point of view of organisational change (Amey et al., 2007) depict partnerships as a developmental process with strong interaction between context, motivations and outcomes (Eddy, 2010). Twinning, as a 'flexible platform' through which long-standing relationships can be built (Jensen et al., 2007, p. 382), describes a model in which HEIs have the ability to strategically pool or access their resources (Beerkens, 2010), allowing them to adapt and grow together (Jensen et al., 2007).

Knight (2004) also pointed to a growing global tendency towards the pursuit and development of strategic alliances and consortia that are more market-oriented mechanisms, which partner universities use to obtain more resources for 'objectives such as international benchmarks, joint research and scholarly activities, increased number of mobility programmes



for students and faculty, collaborative bids on large-scale development projects, and development of web-based courses and curriculum materials' (Knight, 1999, p. 216).

Some studies have further differentiated partnerships according to the intensity of the level of collaboration and effort involved in their delivery (Amey et al., 2007; de Wit 2002 and 2011; Shams, 2017), that is, low or high intensity. Another possible way to categorise international partnership is to define them as instructional and non-instructional (Sakamoto and Chapman, 2011). The former includes student exchanges, joint degree programmes, trans-national education and distance learning; the latter includes activities such as joint research, capacity building programmes for faculties and university management, joint infrastructure initiatives, and accreditation. Using the last two definitions, this study will focus on high intensity instructional partnerships, requiring significant transformation and adaptation of practices in both partners to ensure their success (Lane, 2011).

### **3.3.3 University international pathway programmes and international pathway providers**

Over the past two decades, the global HE sector has seen the proliferation of study programmes that offer non-traditional students' pathways to access university education (Agosti and Bernat, 2018). These programmes are often intended to broaden participation within a local context or for the purpose of attracting more international fee-paying students. This study focuses on the latter and is linked to the marketisation of HE and the imperative to attract larger numbers of international students on university campuses (explored above in the previous chapter). International pathways are often seen as a must-have by top-level managers at UK universities and are considered a method for rapidly expanding the international student population<sup>2</sup>. Some have expressed concerns and even outright opposition to privately provided international pathway programmes (University and College Union, 2012). Although usually unsubstantiated, these negative views are often embedded in the academic departments of universities where staff question the academic quality and professionalism of IPPs (Manning, in Agosti and Bernat, 2018).

Thousands of international students are enrolled in study centres operated by IPPs, with the majority established on university campuses to ensure a smooth transition (Agosti and Bernat, 2018). Very little, however, has been written on the subject so far, especially with

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2 <https://thepienews.com/analysis/pipeline-to-progress-how-the-pathway-market-is-a-defining-trend-in-international-education/>

regards to international pathways operated by private providers. Agosti and Bernat (2018) recently published a book dedicated to tracing the 'factors that caused the emergence of university pathway programmes at a national and global scale' (p. 3). However, the majority of the book examines national level pathways, focusing on widening participation in HE with only two chapters on international pathways. Of the two, one, authored by Manning (Manning, in Agosti and Bernat, 2018) provides a broad description of the existing 'provision of international pathway programmes as a means for international students to gain access to higher education' (p. 245) in the UK. The other focuses on a case study of the first Canadian partnership between a university and an IPP (Rahilly and Hudson, in Agosti and Bernat, 2018), the partnership between Simon Fraser University and Navitas.

An academic journal – *InForm* – is dedicated to international foundation pathways and was created in 2008. It is produced by the International Foundation Programme at the University of Reading with contributors from all types of international foundation providers. However, the majority of the articles published in *InForm* focus on teaching and learning practices and research; as a result, while they were useful for informing the context of this study, they were not applicable to our research questions.

Only a handful of other publications can be found on the subject of university international pathways and partnerships with IPPs. Manning (2013 and 2014) is one of the few authors who has written on the subject; however, his focus has been mostly on assessment and academic programme structures of international foundation programmes and does not specifically focus on IPPs.

Manning (in Agosti and Bernat, 2018) highlighted that 'linkages and connections of pathway programmes with the host HEIs' (p. 248) are essential to the success of any partnerships whether internal (if the pathway programme is delivered in-house) or with external private providers. These essential linkages are required because of the nature of universities as loosely coupled organisations (Weick, 1976), as described above in section 3.1. Manning identified the essential linkages necessary for the successful implementation of such partnerships, which include the following: recruitment and admissions (for initial entry and progression into university programmes), curriculum development, pathway staff recruitment and training, facilities access, student support/welfare and general experience. He also stressed that International Pathway Programmes need tailoring in the areas of subject specialism and language skills and that a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate (Manning, 2013).

Rahilly and Hudson (in Agosti and Bernat, 2018) argued that the success of the Simon Fraser University-Navitas partnership has resulted in significant changes in the university and that careful change management is essential in realising the intended strategy of the university. They, too, stress that in order to achieve the organisational recruitment goals, 'curricular and instructional integration' (p. 271) was necessary as well as 'transition and practical support' (p. 274), 'social and academic integration' (p. 275) and alignment for 'policies and practices' (p. 278) between the Navitas Centre and the university. Above all, they emphasised the importance of stakeholder engagement (academics and professional services staff) in the implementation process as 'failing that support, the implementation of the agreement would be very difficult' (p. 279). Finally, the importance of senior leadership is identified as the key to success; in the case of this specific partnership, 'active, engaged and thoughtful leadership' was provided by the provost.

Based on the literature review, our study contributes to the field by progressing middle management strategy process research. By focusing on specific types of middle managers, we aim to ascertain how likely they are to influence strategic outcomes, going beyond the broad acknowledgement that has been found in previous studies and towards a more defined theory that connects specific managerial functions to specific forms of influence, within a specific context. In addition, from an empirical perspective, we have also identified a clear gap in the literature. This gap relates to the unintended consequences of partnerships between IPPs and RIUs within the UK from the perspective of the middle managers involved in their development and implementation. The typology of unintended consequences produced within this study will be of interest to practitioners involved in these specific activities within universities (particularly the RG) in the UK.

Within a specific HE organisational culture, our theoretical framework combines the notion of strategy as practice, placing middle managers at the centre of strategy delivery, and the concept of the organisational effects of purposive social actions to help us develop a typology of those unintended effects and understand whether these influence the realisation of the organisational strategy (negatively or positively) and lead to other (again positive or negatives) consequences for the universities involved.

The next chapter will present the theoretical framework used in this study and will explore the two key theories that informed its development.

## **4 CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study examines the unintended consequences of IPPs in RIUs as perceived from the middle manager's point of view. The theoretical framework of this study was informed by two theories: Merton's well-established theory of unintended consequences of purposive social actions (Merton, 1936) and the more recent theory of strategy as practice (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson, 2007; Whittington, 2006, 2017(b)). Using these theories, a theoretical framework was developed to analyse and create a typology of unintended consequences linked to the introduction and development of IPPs in RIUs. The framework also helped to ascertain the ability of middle managers to influence strategic developments and outcomes within the context of planned organisational change.

### **4.1 Unintended and unanticipated consequences of purposive social action**

#### **4.1.1 Merton's definitions – unintended consequences and purposive social action (1936)**

The thought that actions can produce results other than those initially planned is not new, and American sociologist Robert K. Merton (1936) is widely recognised as having popularised the concept of unanticipated consequences, applying a systematic analysis to this topic. In his seminal 1936 paper, 'Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Action', Merton listed the possible causes of unanticipated consequences, which in turn have been studied and developed by other scholars over the years.

First, when defining *purposive social action*, Merton emphasised that the term was 'concerned with "conduct" as distinct from "behaviour"'. That is, with action that involves motives and consequently a choice between various alternatives' (Merton, 1936, p. 896). Merton also stated that 'no blanket statement categorically affirming or denying the practical feasibility of all social planning is warranted' (Merton, 1936, p. 904). In his view, social action is driven by 'opinion and estimate' (Merton, 1936, p. 900). Ignorance or lack of foreknowledge can therefore influence actions and lead to unanticipated consequences (Burlyuk, 2017). However, in a context where information is now more readily available than it might have been in 1936, one may argue that ignorance should be less of a key factor in the generation of unintended consequences. What has not changed, however, is the possibility that individuals opt for ignorance as a deliberate choice.

In his interpretation of Merton's theory, Giddens (1984, p. 5) also suggested that social actors apply 'reflexive monitoring of action' by observing what others do within the social structure they operate to help them in making decisions and act. For Moore and Tumin (1949, p. 788), however, ignorance can be a deliberate choice as it 'performs specifiable functions in social structure and action'. Thus, Moore and Tumin (1949) linked two of the types of unanticipated consequences identified by Merton: ignorance and values (see point 4 below). When social agents decide to ignore information when making decisions, they reinforce traditional social values while maintaining social order.

Second, error can be a factor affecting purposive social action, which can be caused by false assumptions, situations incorrectly interpreted, or mistakes being made when executing an action (Solinas-Saunders, 2015). Merton (1936) indicated that error can also occur when decisions are influenced by habit (assuming that actions that have produced desired outcomes in the past will do so again). Elster (1990) is one of the many authors who have built on this theory and has identified an additional mechanism contributing to unintended consequences: the tendency for people to act on wrong assumptions about what other people will do. This concept was developed further by Vaughan (1999) in the idea of the sociology of mistake.

Third, acquiring sufficient knowledge can be time and energy consuming, which social actors may not have. The imperative for immediate results or the 'imperious immediacy of interest' (Merton, 1936, p. 901) causes decision-makers to develop and implement policies whilst having obtained only partial knowledge of an issue. This phenomenon is still relevant today. Overriding of long-term interest by immediate interest has also been called 'myopia' (McAulay, 2007), or 'blind spots' (Lodge, 2019), referring to social actors longing for beneficial outcomes of an action so much that they are blind to any unwanted consequences.

Fourth, basic values can legitimate or prohibit action. To illustrate this, Merton used the example of the Protestant ethic of hard work and austerity, which 'paradoxically leads to its own decline through the accumulation of wealth and possessions' (Merton, 1936, p. 903); Merton pointed out that social agents' rationality is influenced by the way they decode reality in the context of a social system (Merton, 1936). Supporting this idea, Moore and Tumin (1949) also showed that society, and social agents within it, ascribe high importance to 'ultimate values' shaping social action. Rationality can therefore be unexpected and is not synonymous with objectivity. As Giddens (1984) demonstrated, rationality is a subjective concept moulded by individuals' actions within the framework that is their existing social structure.

Finally, Merton introduced the idea of 'self-defeating prediction', referring to instances when the prediction of future developments or consequences manifests itself as being inaccurate or false because the prediction influences social actors' actions and changes the course of history. Merton later developed the concept further, which he coined the 'the self-fulfilling prophecy' (Merton, 1948).

Written 65 years ago, Merton's (1936) article, 'The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action', continues to be highly relevant today. The five factors limiting an actor's possibility to anticipate both direct and indirect consequences and leading to the actual effects of behaviour deviating from intended ones are still widely used and sometimes 'taken for granted' (Sveiby, 2009). The next section explores the concept of unintended consequences as developed before and after Merton.

#### **4.1.2 Unintended consequences: A concept taken for granted (Sveiby, 2009) in the social sciences?**

The concept of unintended consequences has been used in research in a wide variety of subjects, including the unintended effects of social policy (Andersen and Serritzlew, 2007; Legge Jr., 1983), economic policy (Holzer and Millo, 2005; Glinavos, 2008), gender bias policies (Caleo and Heilman, 2019), performance management (Franco-Santos and Otley, 2018) and new legislation (Bulyuk, 2017; Chouvy, 2013; Dexter, 1981; Glinavos, 2008; Iyengar, 2008; Rose et al., 2001). It has also been used in the area of marketing and advertising (Calfee, 1987; Fry and Polonsky, 2004). The introduction of new IT systems has also been studied under the theory of unintended consequences (Binbasioglu and Winston, 2004; Bloomrosen, 2011; Bockerman et al., 2019; Harrison et al., 2007). Moreover, scholars have recognised that planned organisational change often produces unintended consequences (Cameron, 2005; Carey et al., 2018; Fairhurst et al., 2002; Gilmore et al., 1997; Jian, 2007; McNamara et al., 2002; Vaughan, 1999; White and Ramsey, 1978). Research has been conducted on particular types of unintended consequences, such as resistance (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002), and on their impacts, such as environmental disturbances (McKinley & Scherer, 2000).

At the organisational level, the literature comprises numerous examples showing that rational choices can lead to unintended consequences. This is found within the Carnegie School (March and Simon, 1958; March and Olsen, 1979), studies of informal organisation (Bosk, 1979), studies focusing on work as an error-ridden activity (Paget, 1988) and the literature on risk, accidents and disaster (Turner and Pidgeon, 1997). The theory of unintended consequences has

also been applied in HE contexts with regards to organisational changes related to learning and teaching innovation (Nworie and Haughton, 2008; Zucker and Hicks, 2019).

The fact that actions often result in unintended consequences is not a novel idea. Merton himself admitted that 'virtually every substantial contributor to the long history of social thought' has dealt with the matter' (Merton, 1936, p. 894). Philosophers (Sartre, 1960) as well as sociologists (Weber, 1905) have often referred to the concept of unintended consequences. Nevertheless, while the notion of unintended consequences may appear self-evident to some, one should not fail to take note of its varied and unexpected implications.

Before Merton (1936), a number of studies emphasised the existence and importance of unintended consequences of social action. One of the most influential studies in the field is Max Weber's (1905) study of how Calvinism encouraged the growth of capitalism. Similarly, an emphasis on the unanticipated consequences of purposive social actions can also be found in the theory of diffusion (Park et al., 1925), which focuses on the propagation of cultural attributes and patterns from one society to another (Dexter, 1981). Finally, the concept of unintended consequences of social change has developed from the study of innovation and inventions. Ogburn (1922) has shown how inventions lead to results that may be different from those that were intended or designed. Rogers (1995) developed this idea further through the theory of diffusion of innovation, in which he emphasised the need to understand the unanticipated consequences of the diffusion of innovations. He provides a number of examples of the unintended negative consequences of technological diffusion. For example, in agricultural innovation in the American Midwest, when adopting automatic tomato pickers has led to harder tomatoes (disliked by consumers) becoming more common and the loss jobs causing the disappearance of thousands of small farms.

Finally, in his interpretation of Merton's theory, Giddens defined 'unintended consequences' as the outcomes that would otherwise not have happened should a social actor had acted in a different way and are not what the actor expected to occur (Giddens, 1979, 1984). He assumes that social actors are knowledgeable human agents and that they routinely monitor their actions and environment. This assumption can therefore indicate that social agents have their own practical consciousness (Giddens, 1984).

We have demonstrated that the concept of unintended consequences has been used extensively. Therefore, in order to create our research framework, it is necessary to further define how we have understood this theory and used it in our study.

### 4.1.3 Definitions and typology

We propose the use of the theory of unintended consequences as part of the theoretical framework for this study. The development of a typology of unintended consequences is a natural pre-requisite for our study and analysis. Clarification of terminology is required as the concept of unintended consequences has been used in a variety of contexts and in ways that sometimes differ from one author to another (Bloomrosen, 2010). It is not straightforward to cluster unintended consequences in a single taxonomy because they are derived from something unknown or hidden. We will follow the attributes outlined by Rogers (1982, 1995) in his diffusion of innovations theory and differentiate between the unintended consequences of social actions based on the following characteristics: anticipated vs unanticipated, desirable vs undesirable and direct vs indirect.

The terminology used can also at times be confusing, and we have found the following four expressions used in different circumstances: unintended consequences, unanticipated consequences, unintended but anticipated consequences, and unintended and unanticipated consequences. We will attempt to differentiate and clarify the meaning of these terms.

First, the terms ‘unintended consequences’ and ‘unanticipated consequences’, although often used interchangeably, are not synonymous (Ash et al., 2004). ‘Unintended’ insinuates a lack of purposeful action, on the other hand, ‘unanticipated’ signals the inability to predict outcomes and consequences (Bloomrosen, 2010; Helm, 1971). Many authors, however, have used the term interchangeably. Merton, in his later work (Merton, 1968), used the term anticipated as the opposite of unintended. Like Baert (1991), we prefer to differentiate between the two phrases since an unintended consequence can be anticipated. More recently, De Zwart (2015) pointed out the distinction between ‘unintended’ and ‘unanticipated’. He explained how the two expressions became conflated and why it is necessary to treat them separately, stressing that ‘unintended but anticipated’ consequences should be treated as a separate category to enable policy makers and change managers to document the consequences of their actions. Unintended and unanticipated consequences have been well documented in the literature with widely recognised theories such as the Adam Smith’s (1759) ‘invisible hand’ or Edward Lorenz’s (2000) ‘butterfly effect’.

De Zwart (2015) showed that the term ‘unintended’ consequences is used far more often nowadays than the term ‘unanticipated’ consequences and argues that the terms should be differentiated, especially as ‘unintended but anticipated’ consequences constitute a distinct set of consequences that are known to policy makers/change managers and therefore can be



considered as intentional actions (i.e. a risk that someone decides to take or collateral damage). We agree that truly unanticipated consequences can only be unintended, but unintended consequences can either be anticipated or not. In this study, we will focus on consequences that are both unintended and unanticipated.

Second, unintended consequences can either be perceived as desirable or undesirable (Rogers, 1982). Unintended outcomes of an action can be viewed as positive, negative, mixed, neutral or possibly even perverse, that is, contradicting the initial goal of the action (Helm, 1971). Many unintended consequences do not fall neatly into a specific category (Daase and Friesendorf, 2010). Unanticipated beneficial consequences are often considered a 'happy surprise' (Bloomrosen, 2010). However, past research has focused primarily on adverse consequences, which is often what is referred to and understood by 'unintended consequences' (Bryant, 2017; Chouvy, 2012; MacKay, 2013; Sveiby, 2009; Shrubsole et al., 2014; Solinas-Saunders, 2015; Tan, 2017). In any case, positive and negative consequences can have an impact of varied scale, in the short term or in the long term, and by various types of stakeholders. Typologies, as they are refined when analysing the unintended consequences of actions, can therefore become complex as new layers are added (Chouvy, 2012; Nescolarde-Selva et al., 2019).

Finally, unintended consequences can either be direct or indirect (Rogers, 1982). Merton defined the 'consequences of purposive action' as both; consequences specifically and directly result from the action, and consequences of 'the interplay between the action and the objective situation' are indirect but causally related. Oftentimes, truly unintended consequences (i.e., unanticipated) are the result of a chain of events (Bloomrosen, 2010; Helm, 1971; Vyse, 2017).

This study focuses on the unintended and unanticipated consequences, including both direct and indirect, desirable and undesirable consequences. We will also follow a framework, detailed below (see Figure 3), that includes stakeholder groups affected by the outcome of the actions. One key element that we wish to clarify from the outset is that 'unintended consequences need to be distinguished from a failure to achieve the intended consequences' (Aoi et al., 2007, p. 6). Thus, for each case study, we ensured that the initial goals and intentions were documented and understood before focusing on the unintended consequences of actions taken.

Using the theory of strategy as practice to complement the theory of unintended/unanticipated consequences will allow us to build a more complete theoretical

framework for analysis of unintended consequences of partnerships between Russell Group Universities and International Pathways Providers. In particular, the concepts of intended and realised strategies enable us to avoid the pitfall outlined above – differentiating between unintended consequences and the failure to achieve the intended consequences - and to understand the initial goals of the partnerships. as well as the role of middle managers in translating and implementing those goals. Additionally, the role played by middle managers in the theory of Strategy as Practice will also strengthen the framework and add a practice-based dimension to the analysis.

## **4.2 Strategy as practice**

The theory of strategy as practice has emerged over the past 15 years; moving away from the traditional view of strategy as a property of organisations, it argues instead that strategy is something that people *do* (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson, 2007; Whittington, 2006 and 2017(b)) and should therefore be studied with an emphasis on the role of middle managers and concepts such as sense-making and sense-giving. Strategy as practice shows, through the lens of theories of social practice, that strategy development and change can be considered an emergent and intended process, often producing unintended outcomes, but in all cases, it is an ongoing process (Johnson et al., 2003).

We recognised that strategy as practice, as a framework for investigation, has been subject to criticisms related to its 'micro-myopia' (Vaara & Whittington, 2012), that is, its tendency to be concerned solely with the observed actions of managers. This study addresses this limitation by using the complementary theoretical concept of 'unanticipated consequences' as first developed by Merton (1936) as well as by focusing on one specific type of activity (IPPs) within a specific organisational culture (HE and, in particular, UK RIUs).

### **4.2.1 Praxis, practice and practitioners: strategy as something that people 'do'**

Whittington (2006) outlined 'strategy as practice' as the reciprocal relationship between the three crucial elements of praxis, practices and practitioners (Figure 1). Whittington (2006) described the three elements as follows:

- strategy 'practitioners': the actors doing the strategy work, recognising that each interpret and engage with their work in a unique way depending on their knowledge and experience (Balogun and Johnson, 2004).

- strategic 'practices': 'routinised types of behaviour' (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249), such as procedures and techniques (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009; Mueller, 2017), but also more informal mechanisms such as the types of discourse and rhetoric used in strategy work (Sillince et al., 2012).
- strategy 'praxis': the present concrete and specific activities as informed and guided by practices.

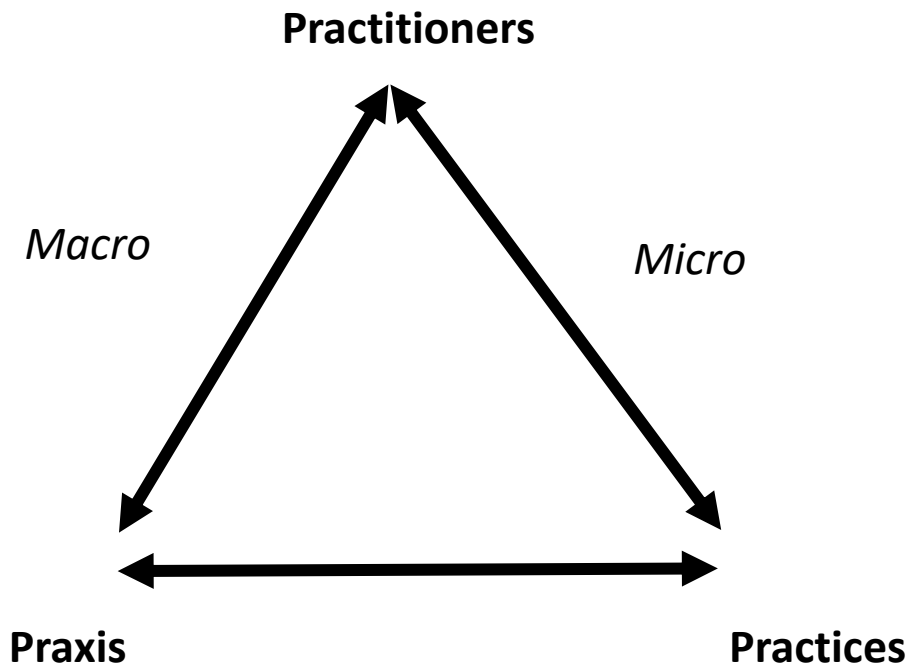


Figure 1: Reciprocal relationships in strategy as practice

Source: Whittington, 2006

Strategy as practice encourages researchers to adopt an activity-based view, emphasising strategy through a study of observable micro-activities (Johnson et al., 2003, p. 1). Thus, within strategy as practice, it is possible to define all strategic activity as based on 'regular, socially defined modes of acting that arise from the plural social institutions to which [actors] belong' (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p. 6). Such an approach makes it possible to cut across multiple levels of analysis (Johnson, 2007; Whittington, 2006) and connect individual activities (micro-level) to the organisation (meso-level) and organisational field (macro-level).

Strategy as practice is a theoretically pluralistic or 'promiscuous' field (Carter et al., 2008), drawing upon a wide range of perspectives, such as structuration theory (Whittington, 2010), activity theory (Jarzabkowski, 2003), Bourdieusism (Gomez, 2010; Whittington, 2017a),

Foucauldian practice theory (McCabe, 2010), social constructivism such as sense-making (Rouleau, 2005), discourse (Mantere and Vaara, 2008) and ritual theory (Johnson et al., 2010). We will explore some of these perspectives below to examine the influence of middle managers on strategic outcomes.

## **4.2.2 The role of the boundary-spanning middle manager**

### **4.2.2.1 Definition**

During the past two to three decades, studies focusing on the role of middle managers in strategy development and implementation have consistently defined middle managers in large organisation as a set of individuals spanning those hierarchically located below the top managers to those acting as the first-level supervision (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Huy, 2001; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Wooldridge et al., 2008). Boundary-spanning activities have been defined in a variety of ways. Some refer to the actual activities, which may include filtering, transacting, buffering, representing and protecting (Adams, 1976). Others have categorised these actions and segmented them into specific areas such as external representation, internal influence and service delivery (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003). Boundary-spanning activities have also been defined as focusing on representation and coordination as well as gathering information (Marrone, 2010). Discussing the issue from the perspective of information communication, Tushman and Scanlan (1981) identified two specific functions of the boundary-spanning activities. The first is passing on information in order to represent the organisation to external stakeholders. The second involves gathering intelligence from the external environment and disseminating it within the organisation.

This study takes a more focused approach, as recommended by Floyd and Wooldridge (2017). Numerous studies have demonstrated that middle managers are not simply passive 'messengers'. They can do more than act on behalf of senior managers to disseminate the corporate mission and strategy within the organisation; instead, they take an active role in making organisational change possible (for example, Balogun, 2003; Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Bower, 1972; Fryer et al., 2017; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau and Balogun, 2008; Westley, 1990). Their role is often critical to championing new initiatives as well as influencing top-level managers' strategic thinking and guaranteeing effective implementation of strategies. However, Floyd and Wooldridge (2017), have argued that these previous studies have over-estimated the importance of middle managers to the strategy-making process; moreover, these studies did not demonstrate any differences between various managerial positions and contexts and, as a result, may have overstated the occurrence of this phenomenon. This is because generalisations

are made from a subset of middle managers – those located just below upper management – and other middle managers’ strategic influence is less frequent (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990).

For this reason, Floyd and Wooldridge have recently categorised middle management positions by taking into account managers’ external boundary-spanning responsibility and their position within the hierarchy as key factors in their ability to influence strategy. Their classification adds nuance and detail to the definition of middle management, and it also draws clearer connections to strategic influence. They differentiate between the different types of middle management according to their position in the organisational hierarchy and also determine whether their roles require them to externally and/or internally span boundaries. Table 1 below is the result of their analysis which identifies five classes of middle managers.

Table 1: Five classes of middle management positions

Source: (Floyd and Woolridge, 2017)

	External boundary-spanning responsibilities	Internal boundary-spanning responsibilities	Bounded job responsibilities
Middle managers reporting directly to upper management	<i>Senior relationship managers</i>	<i>Senior team leaders</i>	
Middle managers reporting at least one level below upper management	<i>Assessment and improvement managers</i>	<i>Internal services and assurance managers</i>	<i>Unit managers</i>

As further explained in the methodology chapter, the majority of participants in this study are either senior relationship managers, assessment and improvement managers or a manager working directly for either one of the aforementioned roles with specific responsibility for the management of the partnership between the university and the IPP; we have called this latter category of individuals ‘functional specialists’.

#### 4.2.2.2 Ability to influence strategic developments and outcomes

During a time of change, middle managers play an important role in motivating staff affected by the change while making sure that day-to-day operations are delivered efficiently (Cheng and Petrovic-Lazarevic, 2005; Gjerde and Alvesson, 2019). In their leadership role, middle managers are expected to explain the causes of the strategic change and promote its benefits (Balogun and Rouleau, 2017; Johns and Teare, 1995). Balogun (2003) developed a framework outlining the four interrelated roles of middle managers as change intermediaries: (1) continuous and gradual sense-making – understanding the impact of the change on their role and that of others- leading to personal change; (2) Sense-giving (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) to others – guiding them to make sense of things; (3) Maintain a business as usual activities in the middle of all the changes, which means constant juggling of priorities; and (4) Implementing the changes needed.

Balogun (2003) observed that the latter two roles fit well with the traditional management and coordination role that is usually attributed to middle managers. However, the first two roles are rarely noticed, even though they involve 'interpretation of the change intent into tangible actions for both themselves and their teams' (p. 78), an important aspect of the middle manager's role. Balogun also argued that 'interpretation that occurs as part of undertaking personal change is, in fact, the key task for middle managers, since it informs all the other roles' (p. 79). Those managers can be considered boundary-spanning (Rouleau, Balogun and Floyd, 2015; Prysor and Henley, 2017; Williams, 2019) and, as such, play an important role in ensuring continuity and success in strategy delivery.

Mantere (2008) identified particular enablers of middle management agency, but also finds that, for it to take place efficiently, actions by upper management are required via, for example, discourses to promote participation in strategy work by middle managers (Mantere and Vaara, 2008, Anas et al., 2019). In their daily activities, middle managers have to meet conflicting demands and respond to contradictory logics (Bryant and Stensaker, 2011; Lüscher and Lewis, 2008). In response to these managerial paradoxes, they develop specific narratives, strategies and tactics to guide and fuel their activities (Balogun et al., 2005). In the context of our study, our expectation is that the actions of the middle managers, and the paradoxes they face, may lead to consequences that were not anticipated and deviate from the primary objectives of the partnerships.

While middle management's strategic influence has also been described in a variety of ways, this study will employ the definition of Burgelman (1983). He portrayed middle managers'

strategic behaviours as either induced (i.e., aligned with upper management and supporting the firm's deliberate strategy) or autonomous. This latest behaviour is similar to what Mintzberg (1979) refers to as an emergent strategy. Similarly, Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) have outlined four middle management strategic roles, classified by their type of influence (upward or downward) and the impact they have on strategy (integrative, in support of the company's deliberate strategy; or divergent, encouraging the company in new strategic directions).

#### **4.2.3 Middle managers and the importance of sense-making and sense-giving**

In times of change, middle managers are expected to guide their teams through the change by helping them make sense of what is happening and adapt as rapidly as possible to avoid any disruption to the organisation (Bencherki et al., 2019). In order to do this, they need to make sense of what is happening for them initially (Morikuni et al., 2019). Many authors have recognised the importance that sense-making plays in middle managers implementing change (Loukopoulos and Garreau, 2018; Neumann et al., 2019;). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) define strategic sense-making as the way managers understand, clarify, create and disseminate sense of the information they have obtained about the strategic change. Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) discuss middle managers 'synthesizing information'. Nonaka (1988 and 1994) stressed that middle manager's ability to 'combine macro and micro information and unify individual visions'.

Once middle managers have made sense of the new situation, their role is to help others make sense of the changes that are happening and to answer questions such as 'what should we do next?' or 'what does this mean in practice?' (Steinberg, 2018). Sense-making turns confusion and disorder into understandable words that helps others to move on and look forward to the new state of play (Holt, 2009). Within the context of this study, partnerships with IPPs are highly disruptive to a specific group of staff or department. Middle managers have therefore an important role to play in sense-giving (Engle et al., 2017). Pfeffer (1981) argued that providing explanations is one of their key stakes, in doing so, they help rationalise and legitimise the activities undertaken by the organisation. This view is supported by findings from several studies outlining that organisational change carried out using effective explanation is linked positively to perception of fairness (Brandis et al., 2016; Brockner et al., 1990; Greenhalgh, 1983; Shaw and Barrett-Power, 1997).

As Cameron and Green (2004) showed, the role of middle managers is to convey the reasons of change to others in an understandable manner and turn the objectives of the change into reality. Middle managers are key to sense-giving when it comes to raising awareness of the change amongst their staff, as well as shape their perceptions, behaviours and beliefs as well as

reinforce their commitment to their organisation's objectives. In doing so, they help avoiding resistance to change (Awamleh and Gardner, 1999; Bass, 1985; Heyden et al., 2017). They also are critical to effective communication and reduction of uncertainty within their wider network as part of their daily activities.

Middle managers, through their daily practice and the exercise of knowledgeable performance, play a central role in developing and implementing strategies as well as enacting change (Rouleau, 2005). Rouleau (2005) showed that middle managers play a crucial role in translating an organisation's new strategy into something meaningful to those they work with on a day-to-day basis, and through efficient dissemination, they support the embedding of new concepts and directions. Similarly, Floyd and Wooldridge (1997) and Balogun (2003) demonstrated how middle managers use their knowledge of who to talk to and how in order to synthesise information accordingly.

The importance of the role of middle managers in sense-making and sense-giving is undeniable. Two key elements are needed, however, to ensure that they can perform their role fully and effectively. First, they require accurate and up-to-date information. Second, they need to be seen as credible messengers with the necessary legitimacy within their networks. Lack of information and/or credibility makes sense-making and sense-giving uneasy for middle managers and dismisses their ability to act as change intermediaries (Shreeve-Fawkes, 2016). Sense-making and sense-giving are all the more important when they operate in a university, considering the specificities of these types of organisations described in the literature review (Degn, 2015).

Considering the importance of sense-making and sense-giving played by middle managers, it is easily conceivable that strategies may produce unintended outcomes as well as realise the originally intended ones. Because of their pivotal roles in strategy development and implementation, their 'purposive social action' (Merton, 1936) can have a significant impact.

#### **4.2.4 Intended strategies and unintended outcomes**

It is generally agreed that strategic change is an emergent process (Balogun, 2006; Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Mintzberg, 2000; Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014), and that the business of developing strategy (Mantere, 2008; Benneworth et al., 2017) resides beyond the senior management team. Centralised strategy guides the action of middle management and, in return, the actions of middle management alter the strategic process leading to the construction of a consensus with integrated goals (Friesl and Kwon, 2017; Jarzabkowski and



Balogun, 2007). Activities related to strategy delivery are distributed across the organisation and take place at different levels (Floyd and Lane, 2000; Lechner and Floyd, 2012; Mantere, 2005).

The delivery agents often act fairly autonomously and, depending on how they make sense of the strategy, can contest or counteract existing strategies, thereby leading to the emergences of new strategic developments (Howard-Grenville, 2007; Koppmann et al., 2017; Lechner and Floyd, 2012;). This leads to a realised strategy with both intended and unintended outcomes (Balogun and Johnson, 2005). Figure 2 below illustrates this process.

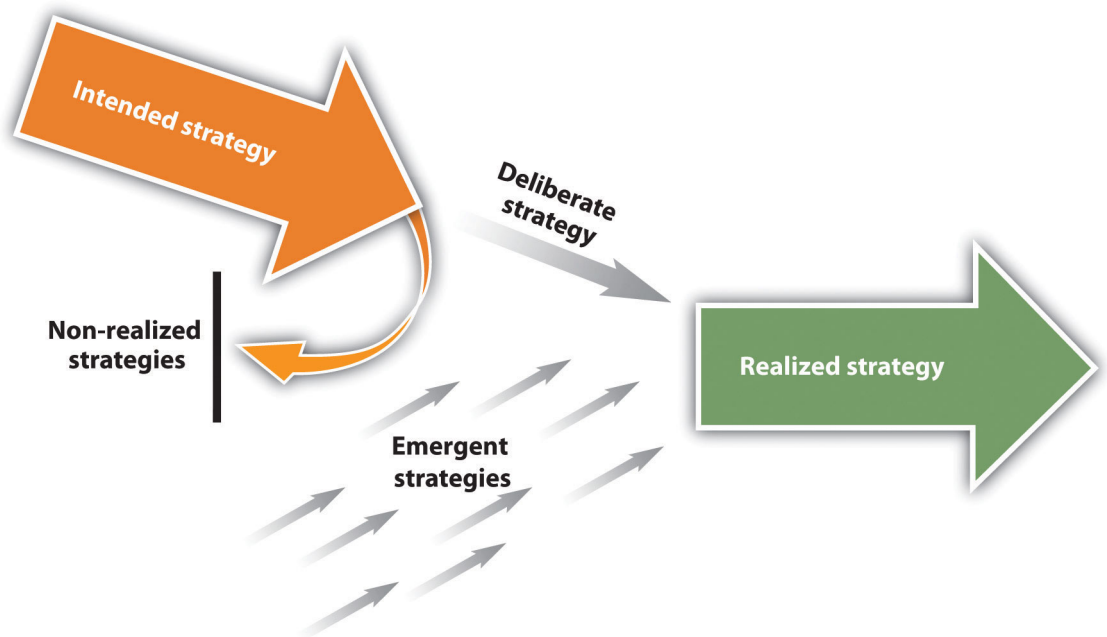


Figure 2: A model of intended, emergent and realised strategies

Source: (Balogun and Johnson, 2005)

Balogun and Johnson (2006) have demonstrated the key importance of the actors in charge of translating strategic plans into activities and challenged the idea that strategic change can be managed top-down. They argued that any strategic change is dependent on the way the recipient/agent of change makes sense of the strategy and can lead to the need for senior management to edit plans. Therefore, strategic change is 'not only dynamic, emergent and non-linear but also frustrating and daunting' (Balogun, 2006, p. 30).

Sense-making is key to understanding the unintended outcomes of top-down strategies and the interpretative processes affecting individual change agents and recipients (or participants, in general). Since change recipients and agents are situated within a wider organisational culture, with its own shared assumptions, belief and rituals, any major changes require a shift in shared beliefs within the organisation and, at the individual level, requires

memory models that individuals have about the organisation to shift too. These assumptions are related to how the organisation behaves internally or externally (Ala-Laurinaho et al., 2017).

In the context of this study, it may be that within RG universities, the primacy of the belief that research is the most important activity for academics contradicts the organisational strategic objectives related to the development of partnerships with IPPs. This situation was documented, for example, by Watson et al. (2016) with the case of academic 'buy-in' for third stream activities, showing a marked difference in participation between RG and non-RG academics.

### **4.3 Summary of theoretical framework**

Our theoretical framework (summarised below in Figure 3) was informed both by the theory of strategy as practice and Merton's theory of unanticipated consequences of purposive social action (1936). By combining both theories, we aimed to create a taxonomy that would improve the understanding of unintended consequences in the development and implementation of partnerships between IPPs and UK RIUs. The two theories complement and intersect with each other in a seamless manner with the framework overall shaping our analysis and interpretation of the data.

Following the strategy as practice approach, we examined the roles and actions of middle managers (Floyd and Woolridge, 2017) in charge of leading the partnerships' development. This allowed us to identify unintended consequences of various types, as found in Merton's theory (1936). We focused on the perceptions of middle managers of the causes or limiting factors that influence their actions and lead to unintended consequences as they exercise sense-giving and sense-making, a central concept in strategy as practice (Rouleau, 2005). Additionally, we identified and classified the types of unintended consequences the stakeholders they affect, again utilising the theory of unintended consequences (Merton, 1936). Finally, this theoretical framework allowed us to determine how unintended consequences influence the realisation of the intended strategies and their original goals and contribute to the delivery of a 'realised strategy' (Balogun and Johnson, 2005).

The theoretical framework is comprised of five stages, with stages 1, 2 and 5 based on the strategy as practice theory and stages 3 and 4 on Merton's theory of unintended consequences of purposive social actions (1936). Each of the stages are described below.

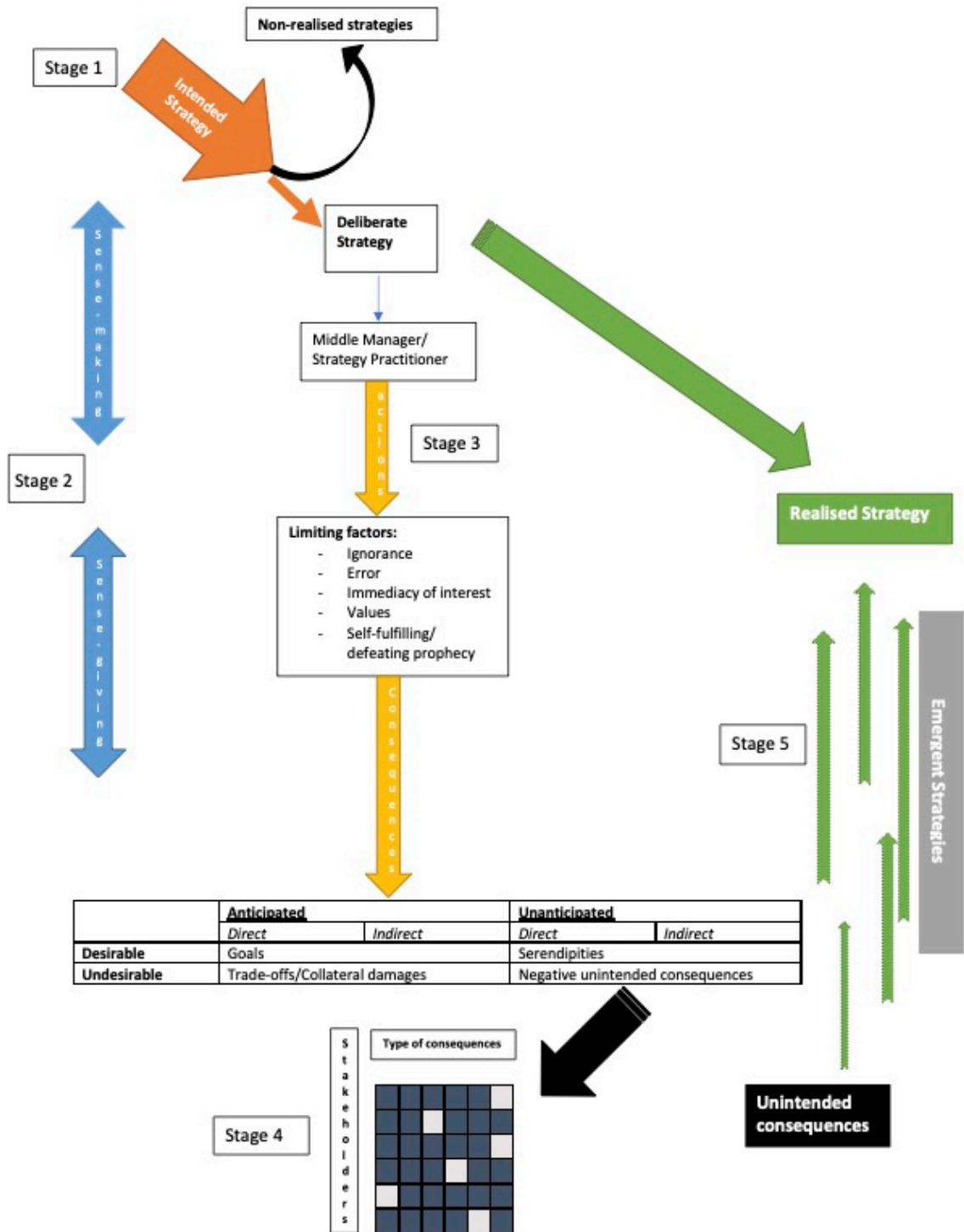


Figure 3: Theoretical Framework: Intended and unintended consequences of strategy implementation.

Stage 1 ensures, for contextual purposes, that the intended strategy and rationale behind the partnerships are clearly understood and appreciated, thereby helping to identify the true unintended consequences and not just the failures to achieve the intended strategy. Information collected in this initial stage to compare and identify any strategic deviations and the organisational impact of middle managers' actions (Balogun and Johnson, 2005) is used later on in Stage 5.

Stage 2 focuses on the influence of the middle managers on strategic outcomes. The important elements of strategy as practice utilised are (1) the definition of the middle managers and (2) the importance of sense-making and sense-giving for middle managers as described above in 4.2.3.

Stage 3 identifies the factors leading to unintended consequences involved in the development and implementation of partnerships with IPPs from the perspective of the managers. Understanding what generates unintended consequences is important, especially as the study is cross-sectional and allows us to pay particular attention to the specificities found in a certain type of HEIs.

Stage 4 synthesises and categorises these unintended consequences. As described in 4.1.3, we highlight the consequences that are both unintended and unanticipated, which are both desirable or undesirable, as well as direct or indirect. Adopting this approach also allows us to identify which stakeholders are affected by the unintended consequences.

Finally, Stage 5 allows us to identify whether the intended strategy has been realised, if any deviation or emergent strategies have surfaced as a result of the actions of the middle managers' actions, as well as reacting to unintended consequences (whether these are generated by the middle managers them or others).

The next section describes the methodology as well as the study and research methods.

## **5 CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes and justifies the research design, methodology as well as the method choices which I<sup>3</sup> used to answer the main research questions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). In the following sections, I describe how I followed a qualitative narrative methodology (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000) and thematic analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to study an organisational field from a cross-sectional perspective. This approach allowed me to study the causes and impacts of unintended consequences of partnerships between RG universities and IPPs through the lens of the middle managers involved in the development and implementation of the partnerships. Twenty-five managers from the 11 RG universities that currently partner with IPPs and four managers of the IPPs included in this study were interviewed.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews to allow for the most comprehensive analysis of the formal structures and roles involved in the partnership as well as their unintended consequences (Kallio et al., 2016). After obtaining permission of the participants, I systematically recorded each interview, I then transcribed them, analysed them line-by-line and coded them using a thematic analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This chapter is organised as follows: I will first outline the research approach and explain the reasons for taking such an approach. This section will also address the philosophical underpinnings of the study and its methodology. Second, I will discuss the research design used in this study and detail its inherent challenges and issues. Third, I will describe the research methods and techniques used including the data collection, ethical considerations and data analysis. Finally, I will provide an outline of the research process.

### **5.2 Research approach**

#### **5.2.1 Context: a practitioner-researcher**

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<sup>3</sup> The first person is used in this chapter to indicate the active participation of the author as researcher in the study that is being described.

As well as being a research student, I am also the International Director at the University of Bristol (UK). I have worked in HE in the UK, holding a number of positions within international offices for the past 15 years, and have established a strong network of contacts, especially within the RG. My professional experience has enabled me to research a 'real-world' situation within a context that I know well, but which, although similar on the surface, differs greatly from one university to another (Sinnott, 1989). The HE sector has often been characterised as inherently fluid, ill-defined, lacking clarity, rapidly changing and lacking transparency (Weick, 1976; Musselin 2007; Stensaker, 2015; Weick, 1976). Thus, this study involves me, as a practitioner-researcher, investigating a real-world issue with the view to produce research outcomes that can progress research in the area of HE management as well as lead to improved practice.

Taking into account this context, I used a problem-based methodology to conduct the research that propose solutions from the perspective of a practitioner (Robinson, 1993). I considered how reality will be defined within the context of the investigation and the research design as well as strategies that would most likely ensure that useful and relevant information would be gathered. I adopted an interpretivist (Myers, 2008) and social constructivist position, underpinned by a 'weak' subjectivist ontology (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) as described in 5.2.2.1 below. This approach enabled me to acknowledge that individuals play a key role in actively creating reality through social interaction. Using a narrative inquiry, I reconstructed the participants' experience in relationship to both others and their social milieu (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). I will further explain the essential role of social interactions within this study later in this chapter.

A qualitative thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) approach was chosen as it provided me with the greatest possibility to explore the contextual aspects of the environment and its participants in their greatest depth and to identify emerging themes in the most comprehensive way. Using a thematic analysis for the data collected enabled me to move from specific observations and measures and to detect patterns and regularities, to formulate thematic maps, and, finally, to develop some general conclusions or recommendations. I accept that this framework may not allow for clear patterns to emerge as it would if I had chosen to frame this study within the principles of positivism. However, this approach allows for critical inquiry, flexibility in data collection and the possibility of developing culturally and historically situated interpretations. Discussion regarding each of these decisions is provided in the sections below.

### **5.2.2 Philosophical position and methodology**

I acknowledge that a clear philosophical position is an essential part of research design. Kaplan (1964, p. 18) defined the term 'methodology' as 'the study – the description, the explanation, and the justification – of methods and not the methods themselves'. Different research methodologies are commonly used in qualitative research in the social sciences and include, among others, the following: case studies, phenomenological or grounded theory approaches, as well as narrative, testimonials or biographical methodologies (Carter and Little, 2007). Research questions and the epistemological positions play a central role in choosing the most appropriate research methodology. Therefore, I considered the various approaches available to me once I had identified my research questions with the aim to develop a clear framework in which to conduct my study. Below, I will explain why I have chosen to follow social constructivism as an epistemological position combined with a fully qualitative interpretist thematic analysis.

#### **5.2.2.1 Social constructivism and the interpretist approach**

This study followed an interpretist approach and took a social constructionist epistemological position. In so doing, I have followed principles such as those developed by Berger and Luckman (1966) and Shotter (1993) and focused on the ways that individuals develop an understanding of the world through sharing their experiences with others using communication and language (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Social constructivism is frequently contrasted with positivism in the way they describe how the world exists; the former views reality as socially constructed, and the latter exists externally and, as a result, is measurable using objective methods. In social constructivism, reality can only be given meaning by people (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008); it is a construction of shared meanings and interpretations (Berger and Luckman, 1966).

My interest lies in the way social constructionism views roles, identity and power and how it centres human agency (Andrews, 2012). This perspective aligns well with the focus of my study on the influence of middle managers on decision-making and how individuals actively interpret organisational structures and social situations. In turn, an individual's role, identity and power dynamics are moulded by their interactions with others and influence the way they behave according to the context within which they evolve. Shared meanings can be described through systematic research and analysis, and it is therefore possible to elucidate why people behave in a certain way or choose one action over another (Burr, 2015).

Thus, I encouraged participants in this study to clearly articulate how they understood and saw their relations to their colleagues and stakeholder on a daily basis and how this affected

their role, identity and power dynamics. I made a point of identifying the meaning that those experiences held for them and how these influenced their actions. I then analysed their interpretation of these experiences. Following Fineman (1993), I embraced the fact that 'interpretation is a cornerstone to social constructionist thought' (p. 11). This approach allowed me to compare – in particular, when more than one participant was from the same universities, but also when participants from different HEIs worked with the same partner – and consider alternative explanations of how unintended consequences are brought about.

For the above reasons, I have chosen not to follow a realist approach. Realism acknowledges the fact that both 'real' and 'thought' objects exist. Real objects can be described as facts (Sayer, 1992, p. 47) that exist regardless of whether they are known by anyone. These real objects are then given meaning by thought objects. Thought objects are characterised as an individual's understanding of the world surrounding them and how they communicate this to others. Consequently, in this study, both the existence of a partnership and the role played by middle managers in their development and delivery are objects set within a context that varies from an HEI to another, despite them being similar on the surface and being part of a single network, the RG.

Thus, using social constructivism and an interpretivist approach, we are able to understand whether the context either enables or limits the ability of middle managers to influence decision-making and the development of unintended consequences. Interpretivism is often used to describe a socially created world (Blaikie, 2007) and enables the researcher to become an active creator of the research. Due to the chosen approach and the fact that I am a practitioner-researcher, I am of the opinion that the participants and I co-created knowledge when discussing and reflecting on their experiences. I am intertwined with the process, and it would be difficult to extricate myself from it. I had to make a conscious effort to minimise any impact of this situation, especially any possible biases, as my experiences, views, and values inevitably bring some subjectivity to the research process (Cunliffe, 2002; Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999). It was essential to remain reflexive and transparent about my own subjectivity throughout my research.

Considering my epistemological position described above, the following sections explain why I used a qualitative thematic analysis method to answer my research questions.

#### **5.2.2.2 Qualitative approach**

I developed a framework for conducting the study after identifying the research questions. A qualitative approach was the most natural way forward, considering my



professional knowledge and the assumptions made regarding how and what I would learn during this project (Creswell et al., 2003). Because social constructivism believes that knowledge, and reality, is constructed by an individual's practices, interactions between them and how this is experienced within a specific social context (Crotty, 1998), my research primarily aimed to gather views from participants (Creswell et al., 2003). This perspective called for a qualitative research methodology. Central to qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, is the emphasis on 'the interpretation of observation in accordance with the subjects' own understandings' (Bryman et al., 2012, p. 135).

Qualitative research focuses on context and, when used in a project which centres on organisations, helps present an accurate picture of what the organisation is like. A qualitative approach can also allow for a better understanding of how events unfold over time and the process that has led to these events (Bryman et al., 2012). I believe understanding such a process within my study and focusing on both a bottom-up inductive and a theoretically framed deductive analysis (Creswell et al., 2007; Jupp, 2006) is key to answering my research questions. For these reasons, I chose qualitative methodologies and methods.

Creswell et al. (2007) has suggested that five qualitative approaches are available to choose from: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. In this particular research project, my primary interest was to discover and understand the causes and impact of unintended consequences through the lens of the managers responsible for developing and delivering partnerships between RG universities and IPPs. Analysing the nature and scope of the partnership was paramount to gaining an understanding of the aims and motivations of those managers and how these could affect development partnerships development and implementation.

First, I excluded the possibility of carrying out a phenomenological study since this would focus on describing the meaning and experience of a specific phenomenon or concept of a number of individuals (Van Manen, 2016). A phenomenological approach homes in on a single concept and centres around lived experience. Data is collected from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and from this, a synthesis outlining the core elements of the experience for all of the individuals involved is created. As my study focused on the role that middle managers play in the development and implementation of a specific type of partnership, the 'lived experienced' aspect of phenomenology could be an interesting approach, especially the opportunity to focus on 'what' they experienced and 'how' they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Although this would allow me to initially distil individual experiences, I found

that the approach would not provide the level of details required to answer my research questions.

Second, ethnography is a 'research process based on fieldwork using a variety of (mainly qualitative) research techniques but including engagement in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time' (Davies, 2000, p. 4–5). It is generally recognised that the design of an ethnographic study would involve focusing on an 'entire culture-sharing group' (Harris, 1968) and would require extensive fieldwork to be carried out (Wolcott, 2008). For these reasons, I decided that an ethnographic approach would not be appropriate for my study. Although I could gain access to participants, I would not have been able to spend extensive time with them. Additionally, although they share many similarities, RG universities cannot be described as a 'culture-sharing group'.

Third, the case study is a useful mechanism to support the empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1994). It is a comprehensive method for planning, gathering and analysing data. According to Yin (2017), case study methods are best for answering 'why' and 'how' types of questions, as this leads to gaining an in-depth understanding of particular phenomena and the contexts in which these occur. While this approach could have been taken in this study, it would have meant that only a small number of universities could have been included in the study. However, I favoured ensuring the participation of all universities involved in a specific type of partnerships (those currently working with IPPs) within a specific network of universities (the RG), which meant that the case study approach would not have been a realistic one for a DBA thesis.

Finally, a grounded theory methodology allows researchers to investigate the contextual characteristics of the environment and its participants in the greatest possible depth and comprehensively identify emerging themes. Grounded theory permits to study basic social processes and to gain an understanding of the complexity and varied interactions that produces variation in that process (Heath and Cowley, 2004). Using a grounded theory approach, theory evolves during actual research through looking at the same event or process in different settings or situations (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). While this approach was an appealing one, in terms of identifying patterns and themes, the main aim of grounded theory is to test hypotheses and develop new theories; it also pre-supposes no pre-existing theories and is mainly an inductive process. Since my study is placed within a theoretical framework, and is therefore both deductive and inductive, grounded theory was found to be unsuitable.

Therefore, I opted for a narrative approach set within a context of a study of an organisational field (the RG of universities). I chose this approach because I have extensive contextual knowledge and believe that a narrative approach would expose distinctive paradigms of understanding or experience in the organisational field that may not be easily grasped, for example, in a case study design. Moreover, a study of a specific organisational field would allow for greater reliability of the findings and provide me with an opportunity for generalisation.

### **5.2.2.3 Narrative methodology and sense-making**

This study focused on the role that middle managers play in sense-making and sense-giving within their organisations' stable frames enabling the management of uncertainty (Weick, 1995). For this reason, I found that my research questions would be most effectively answered using narrative research, as it is an interpretive approach that involves a storytelling methodology, focusing on how individuals or groups make sense of events and actions in their lives (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In its simplest form, narrative research refers to a discursive representation of a chronology of events that an individual goes through (Johnston, 2002; Toolan, 2012). Our experiences are edited and made meaningful by our narratives, what Ricoeur (1984) calls 'emplotment'.

Bruner (1987, 1991) and Lyotard (1984) have argued that there are two kinds of sense-making modes, which stand in opposition to one another: the first is a logico-scientific mode, and the second is a narrative mode of ordering experience and making sense. Narrative research centres around the unique features of what occurred and the participation of individuals in generating these specific events. A narrative methodology approach views the individual within their social environments as deliberately giving meaning to objects, others and themselves. If narrative is elevated into 'the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful' (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1), then one could argue that the stories we tell are such because they reflect how we have experienced them, which makes us who we are (McAdams, 2008; Randall, 2018).

Narrative inquiry was first used by Connelly and Clandinin (2000) as a methodology to describe the personal stories of teachers. This methodology enables researchers to look for ways to understand and then present real-life experiences through the stories of the research participants (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000; Creswell, 2002). It also enables the inquirer to obtain a rich description of these experiences, explore their meanings and present a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' points of view. A narrative approach to the research is justified in this study as the research questions centre around how a specific

phenomenon is described or perceived by a cluster of individuals involved in comparable activities, in this case, the middle managers tasked with leading and implementing IPPs.

A chain of experiences is therefore of interest as these are weaved into a narrative and, in particular, the manner in which people make sense of their experience by encoding it in narrative. I acknowledge that choosing to follow a narrative approach is not without its limitations. Indeed, people may recount their experiences in different ways, at different occasions, to different people. I see my position as a 'peer' or 'insider' to the community studied – rather than stranger – as an advantage, one that enables me to extract a more accurate version of reality than would have been provided to someone who was external to the participants' environment. I agree with Clandinin (2006) when they state that the 'narrative researcher is in a dual role – in an intimate relationship with the participant and in a professionally responsible role in the scholarly community' and acknowledge that this is sometimes a difficult balance to strike.

Narrative inquiry is a complex and dynamic methodology (Clandinin, 2006). The researcher and the participant need to come to an agreement on the meaning of the stories by providing validation checks throughout the collection and analysis (Creswell and Miller, 2000). I expand further on the specificities of narrative inquiry later in this chapter. I recognise and embrace the subjective reality inherent in this process, which I found to be a refined and remarkably useful way to expose nuances and details about the participants' experiences.

### **5.3 Research design**

I carefully selected my research design to ensure its fit for the focus of my research, the problem it is aiming to solve and the questions to be answered. My intent was to make sure that I could gather findings and conclusions that can be considered credible (Creswell et al., 2007; Opie et al., 2004). My main focus was therefore to ensure that my research design could help me generate pertinent data to answer my research questions. The central aim of my research is to develop a more in-depth understanding of how unintended consequences develop as perceived middle managers actions and how they lead to changes to the original strategic intent in RG universities partnering with IPPs. To fulfil this aim, I designed a qualitative study of an organisational field, informed by literature review, based on a narrative methodology supported by thematic analysis.

#### **5.3.1 General outline of the research design**

In this study, I followed a thematic analysis approach, using a continuous iterative process between data collection and analysis. I determined participant numbers in each university, prioritising quality over quantity. Details related to universities and participant selection can be found below in section 5.4.2 'Participant selection and sampling'.

The study was conducted in two stages. In the first phase, I identified key points of contact in each of the universities to be involved in the research project and had an initial informal conversation with them. This phase allowed me to obtain an initial understanding of the context within each university and map essential connections as well identify participants to be interviewed. In the second phase, I spent several days at each university, interviewing participants using semi-structured interviews and gathering further information informally from key contacts. This approach allowed me to observe and explore the similarities and differences between each university and to identify common themes and patterns. This process enabled me, in turn, to discern generalisable implications. In designing the study, I also leveraged the literature I had reviewed. I also took into account my knowledge and experience of the UK HE system, in particular the RG. Thus, I was able to identify the key characteristics of the desired sample. As described in the literature review, middle managers at various levels play a crucial role in influencing strategy development and implementation; for that reason, I decided that including individual working in different hierarchical levels would be appropriate.

My experience of UK HE also enabled me to navigate the complexities of each university in a fairly straightforward manner and consider the different variables that can be found in each of them. As a result, I was able to identify how unintended consequences are formed in each university and what their impact is.

During the data analysis stage, in keeping with a thematic analysis approach, I followed Braun and Clarke (2006)'s 6-step framework, which includes the following steps: Step 1: data familiarisation; Step 2: initial codes generation; Step 3: themes search; Step 4: themes review; Step 5: themes definition; and Step 6: Write up. These steps will be further described in the next sections.

However, I used the framework flexibly, and my research process was iterative, which involved observing, coding, analysing, reflecting, recoding and rethinking. In effect, proceeding in this way has meant repeating steps 2 to 5 several times. My research questions were guided by a number of key concepts included in the theoretical framework as well as the literature review. These concepts included the theory of strategy as practice (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008) and Merton's concept of unintended consequences of social actions

(Merton, 1936). Taking this approach provided me with a fluid framework to view the situation, develop the research design and formulate themes and questions to be used for the data collection. However, this process did not prevent me from exploring emerging themes and ideas. In summary, I aimed to philosophically align my research approach, methodology and design and develop a structure that would allow for suitable answers to my research questions to emerge.

In addition, I carried out the literature review in two stages. It was conducted at the beginning of the project to help define research questions and frame the problem (Creswell et al., 2003), as is typical in any qualitative study. Later on, I returned to the literature review as part of the data analysis process to help me compare and contrast the findings in my study. This approach is consistent with the use of an inductive logic process as the literature can become an aid once patterns or categories have been identified (Creswell et al., 2003).

The following section describes the research methods I used to collect and analyse the data for this study.

## **5.4 Research methods**

The main data collection mechanism for this study was semi-structured interviews conducted (Flick, 2009) with middle managers involved in the development and management of partnerships with IPPs in RG universities. I used an interview guide (Kallio et al., 2016) to ensure consistency of the topics discussed with participants and that the data collected would answer my research questions, as well as legitimise my research. Participants included individuals at different hierarchical levels. Afterward, I used a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2014) to analyse the data.

The following section describes the research methods that I have chosen, the decisions I made and how I implemented them. First, I will address the data collection methods, then I will detail how participants were selected and how I secured access to participants. Next, I'll discuss data collection processes, and finally, I will describe the data analysis procedures.

### **5.4.1 Data collection**

#### **5.4.1.1 Desk research and initial information gathering**

This first step of data collection was desk-based and aimed at identifying six to eight universities that would become the focus of the study. Criteria for selection included the following:

- o Membership in the RG.
- o Clear strategic imperative to actively develop international education partnerships with IPPs.
- o Existence of education partnerships at various stages of development (from those at the early stages of implementation to the well-established ones).

During that initial stage, I also reviewed international strategies and related documents that can be found in the public domain (such as committees' terms of references, agendas and minutes, management reports, mission statements, senior managers statements, quotes or speeches at public events, policies and procedures) to identify a number of universities to take part in the study. I identified 11 universities fitting the above criteria and went on to map key contacts in each of the universities with whom to have an informal discussion. Those contacts were usually my counterparts – international directors. The initial discussions took place either over the phone or in person between June 2018 and August 2018. By following this process, I was able to create a list of key stakeholders and possible participants to interview at each of the 11 universities. The majority of those that I approached agreed to be interviewed as long as anonymity was ensured. However, all participants gave permission for the name of their universities to be mentioned in this study.

The 11 universities included in this study are the following: Durham University; Queen's University, Belfast; University of Exeter; University of Glasgow; University of Leeds; University of Liverpool; University of Manchester; University of Newcastle; University of Nottingham; University of Sheffield; University of York

These universities partner with the following four different IPPs: INTO (Queen's University Belfast, University of Exeter, University of Manchester and University of Newcastle); Kaplan (University of Glasgow, University of Liverpool, University of Nottingham, University of Sheffield and University of York); NCUK (University of Leeds, University of Manchester and University of Sheffield); and Study Group (Durham University, University of Leeds and University of Sheffield).

#### **5.4.1.2 Interviews**

Once the participants were selected (as described in section 5.4.2 below), interviews were conducted. All participants were sent a consent form along with an explanatory information sheet introducing my study and detailing what was required of them ahead of the

interview. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix 2, and a copy of the participant information sheet can be found in Appendix 3. The 25 interviews with participants from the 11 RG universities took place between September and December 2018. I conducted all but three of the interviews in person, spending a couple of days at each university to also gather informal information to enable me to get a better grasp of the context.

For the purpose of cross referencing, I identified a small number of possible participants from each of the IPPs, eventually agreeing to interview one key contact at each of the four providers. I conducted four interviews with participants from the IPPs that partner with the 11 universities (one participant from each provider) as described above. Three agreed for their interview to be recorded and transcribed, one preferred not to be recorded; therefore, I relied on extensive notes taken during the interview for data analysis. These interviews took place in February and March 2019. In total, 29 interviews were conducted.

I agree with Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) that face-to-face interviews are best when looking to 'capture the meaning and interpretation of phenomena in relation to the interviewee's worldview' (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, p. 144). Conducting interviews in person and in situ gave me an opportunity to observe non-verbal cues such as a change in facial expressions and other subtle signs that could be missed on video or telephone calls. Thanks to my work experience and background, I was able to rapidly build a common understanding with each of the participants and put them at ease. I found that those who were a little tense to start with relaxed quickly once starting to interact in person. Due to the fact that they were talking to a peer rather than a more traditional researcher, I was able to extract information that participants would not have readily divulged to a stranger.

Each interview lasted on average between 45 and 90 minutes. The objective of the interviews was to obtain in-depth insight into the perspective of the key actors involved in the leadership and delivery of partnerships with IPPs. I sought permission to record the interview prior to commencing (permission was also clearly requested in the consent form, but I double-checked at the beginning of the interview in case this was not completely understood by the participants). Permission was granted in most cases (two participants out of the 29 asked not to be recorded – when that was the case, I took extensive notes). I used semi-structured interviews conducted within an open framework, which allowed for a focused but conversational communication (Morse and Richards, 2002). The process I followed was one of intensive interviews as described by Charmaz (2014): 'a gently-guided one-sided conversation that explores research participants' perspective on their personal experience with the research topic'



(p. 56).

For that purpose, I designed an interview guide (see Appendix 1) which I used to conduct the semi-structured interviews. This guide included open-ended questions set out in a logical order to assure all information required was covered. I also included several structured questions (demographic, career history and organisational) at the beginning of the interviews before moving on to the semi-structured questions. This approach enabled me to gather greater context and probe participants more effectively. The interview guide also allowed me to ensure that the same topics were considered with all participants while taking an agile approach and allowing participants with opportunities to develop new lines of inquiry that may lead to new emergent themes. The wording of these questions was checked for clarity and agreed with my supervisor prior to the interviews.

This method was appropriate as my professional knowledge and experience allowed me to frame the discussion in advance. Additionally, this permitted me, for each of the interviews, to effectively integrate the contextual information and data collected in the desk-research stage of data collection. I followed Robson's (2011) definition of the semi-structured interview; I defined a set of questions in advance but felt free to amend the order in which I asked them, depending on my perception of what appeared most appropriate in the context of the interview. This approach allowed me to have follow up questions when gaps were unveiled and seek further explanation when required. It also meant that I omitted to ask certain questions in some interviews. In so doing, I was guided by the organisational context or individual responses. Depending on how the conversations unfolded, I also varied the order of questions.

My aim was to interview more than one participant at each of the 11 universities. I managed to do this for all but two universities. By interviewing several individuals from the same university, some of the variability that could potentially have arisen by having a single representative for each university was reduced. However, I am aware that conscious or unconscious respondent deviation can be significantly increased and become a weakness when greater flexibility of response is permitted. However, I believe that my awareness of this possible issue has enabled me, as the interviewer, to prevent respondents from straying off topic. Additionally, I recognised that greatest potential weaknesses of interviewing are linked to the interviewer themselves (Fontana and Frey, 2005).

I therefore made a conscious effort to ask open and non-guided questions and, while remaining friendly, not show any non-verbal expression that may lead the respondent to believe

that I agreed, disagreed or had a specific professional view on any of the matters discussed. I see my experience and background as a benefit that enabled me to investigate my research questions with great depth; however, this same experience can lead to possible biases. During the interviews, I took great care in avoiding to over-rely on my own knowledge; I regularly reviewed my field notes and transcripts to assure that integrity was maintained during the data collection and questioned whether my interpretation of the data was based on the participants' answers or my own views. Challenging myself in such a way ensure that my personal values would not influence the choice of themes to be pursued.

I experienced technical difficulties with one recording. This resulted in the loss of the recorded data. I realised that this incident had happened the day following the interview; I therefore was able to reconstruct the essence of the participant's answers from memory and my field notes. When concluding the interviews, I asked all participants how they had felt about the interview process and whether they had anything to add. This was mainly to help with validity and appropriateness. None of the participants expressed any major criticism of the process; the majority told me that they found the process useful and made them reflect on their day-to-day work and practices.

#### **5.4.2 Participant selection and sampling**

This particular study did not call for sampling methods to be used for participant selection, as I was looking to interact with individuals that fit a simple but specific set of criteria within a defined number of universities. Relevant participants from each university were therefore identified as described above during the desk research. The following criteria were used to select the participants: (1) Boundary-spanning 'middle managers' (as described in Chapter 4); (2) Currently or having recently been involved in the development and/or implementation of the partnerships studied; (3) Willing to discuss their experience without revealing any commercially sensitive information (usually when guaranteed anonymity).

I conducted 25 one-on-one interviews at 11 RG universities, which included all of those who currently partner with IPPs, and four with IPPs representatives. All interviewees can be described as 'middle managers' although, following Floyd and Wooldridge's classification (2017), three general categories were identified: (1) senior relationship managers (directors), (2) assessment and improvement managers (typically 'heads' usually in charge of international recruitment) and (3) functional specialists (in charge of a specific area of activity). This last category deviates from Floyd and Wooldridge's classification and includes managers working

directly for either one of the aforementioned roles with specific responsibility for the management of the partnership between the university and the IPP.

Institutional size or geographical spread were not parameters of importance, as the main focus was to ensure comprehensive participation of all RG universities involved in partnerships with IPPs, regardless of these characteristics. This was an important component of the research design; it was essential to obtain a cross-sectional and comprehensive view to ensure that my research questions could be answered in the best possible way. I specified a number of criteria for the selection of participants but did not predetermine the number of interviews I wished to conduct. In some universities, where partnership development and implementation are heavily centralised, it may mean, for example, interviewing a single participant, who has been central to the development and implementation of the partnerships at all stages and has a comprehensive knowledge of the partnerships. The key objective was to achieve 'saturation' rather than simply collect the largest quantity of data (Saunders et al., 2018).

Reaching 'saturation' has meant that I decided to stop adding new participants when repetition or confirmation of previously collected data occurred. This design was chosen because I wanted to develop a rich description of experiences from the participants' perspectives. This method allowed me to validate emerging themes by adjusting questions and topics of discussions with various subgroups in the following stages: (1) participants from the same universities; (2) participants from different universities working with the same partner; (3) all participants focusing on specific emerging themes, issues and theories. This approach allowed me some flexibility, and I was then able to add other participants at later stages if it seemed that their experience would contribute to a specific emerging theme.

Conversely, I also decided to stop integrating further cases and not interview some participants that had originally been identified when it became evident that their contribution would not bring any new data and only lead to saturation. The decision to add or remove participants from my original target list was made by having a short informal phone call with the person. Thus, for three universities, I decided to only interview one participant.

As described above, all participants were boundary spanning 'middle managers'. I identified all of the study participants directly or via referrals. Those identified directly were usually my counterparts at other RG universities. I know the majority of them quite well as we meet frequently thanks to the RG International Forum, a formal group aimed at exchanging best

practices and influencing national and international HE policies. Referrals were usually made by those key contact points and were an effective way to gain the participant's consent, as, in effect, this gave me a seal of approval from senior colleagues at each of those universities.

Details of the interviews along with the demographic characteristics of each of the participants are shown in Table 2 (university participants) and Table 3 (partner participants). These tables also include details of the interviews (duration, date and transcription word count). Overall, there were 16 males and 13 females, 16 senior relationship managers (SRM), 6 assessment and improvement managers (AIM) and 7 functional specialists (FS).

### **5.4.3 Data analysis**

#### **5.4.3.1 Nvivo qualitative analysis software for data management**

The process of data collection, analysis and interpretation was fully framed within the theoretical framework. The full data collection and analysis process was carried out in several cycles until I could draw satisfactory conclusions, going through the five stages of the theoretical framework multiple times to refine the analysis and interpretation of the findings

. In this study, all interviews were audio recorded, transcribed professionally and coded in order to elevate the material from a descriptive to an interpretive level. I conducted the data analysis using the qualitative analysis software NVivo. The use of NVivo was essential for processing and analysing a great quantity of complex qualitative data in a documented and systematic manner. It allowed me to organise and manage a large dataset with a clear coding structure, which then helped me with the creation of themes and the searching of data (King, 2004).

The data analysis was an ongoing and iterative process. The data from previous interviews informed how the later transcripts would be analysed and prompting particular scrutiny of all aspects of the interviews. I used NVivo to examine the raw data. Using the software as data management tool I identified as many interpretations as possible and found correlations between the interviews and the results with reference to the original research questions. This is one of the main advantages that I found in the use of Nvivo as a data management tool. It allowed me to search my large data sets of 29 lengthy interviews and then organise the results in a variety of ways (Spencer et al., 2003). This was invaluable for content analysis as well as the organisation of the data into themes enabling me to address the research questions, utilising the theoretical framework to its full extent. While manual sorting would have been possible, it would have been difficult and time-consuming.

Table 2: Interview details and demographic characteristics of participants (universities)

University	Partner	Length of Partnership (Years)	Participant	Interview Details			Demographic Characteristics			
				Date (2018)	Duration (mins.)	Transcribed word count	Gender (M/F)	Age	Position	Years involved in partnership
A	1	4	A-1	27-Sep	57	7,531	M	25–35	FSM	2
			A-2	27-Sep	41	6,186	M	45–55	SRM	2
			A-2	27-Sep	75	9,295	M	45–55	AIM	2
			A-4	28-Sept	60	N/A	F	35–45	SRM	2
B	2	10	B-1	04-Oct	47	7,235	F	35–45	FS	6

			B-2	04-Oct	51	7,996	F	45– 55	FS	10
			B-3	04-Oct	72	10,443	F	35– 45	SRM	10
C	1	11	C-1	08-Oct	68	11,920	F	25– 35	FS	7
			C-2	12-Nov	40	6,904	M	55– 65	AIM	11
			C.3	12-Nov	52	9,318	F	25– 35	FS	1
D	2 and 3	11 and 30	D-1	23-Oct	53	6,667	M	25– 35	FS	11
			D-2	30-Nov	25	N/A	M	45– 55	SRM	10
E	2	13	E-1	23-Oct	38	4,404	M	25– 35	AIM	1

			E-2	05-Nov	53	8,135	M	45– 55	SRM	10
F	3 and 4	5 and 30	F-1	25-Oct	66	7,146	M	35– 45	FS	3
			F-2	25-Oct	66	10,381	F	35– 45	SRM	2
			F-3	25-Oct	75	9,205	F	55– 65	SRM	20
G	4	2	G-1	31-Oct	61	9,492	F	55– 65	SRM	2
H	1	12	H-1	11-Nov	45	6,643	M	35– 45	SRM	10
			H-2	11-Nov	45	6,643	F	35– 45	SRM	20
I	1	3	I-1	03-Dec	46	5,913	M	45– 55	SRM	3

J	1, 3 and 4	10, 4 and 30	J-1	14-Dec	67	9,761	M	55– 65	SRM	10
			J-2	14-Dec	64	11,084	M	55– 65	SRM	2
			J-3	14-Dec	79	12,541	M	45– 55	AIM	10
K	2	12	K-1	17-Dec	32	4,764	M	35– 45	SRM	2



Table 3: Interview details and demographic characteristics of participants (partners)

Partner	Interview Details			Demographic Characteristics			
	Date	Duration (mins.)	Transcribed words count	Gender (M/F)	Age category (yrs.)	Position	Years involved in partnership
1	05-Feb	90	11,319	M	55–65	SRM	10
2	05-Feb	60	N/A	F	45–55	SRM	15
3	13-Feb	74	11,550	F	35–45	AIM	2
4	08-Mar	51	8,085	F	35–45	AIM	4

#### 5.4.3.2 Thematic analysis

When planning my study, I gave careful consideration to how reality should be defined and, as a consequence, which design strategy would most likely gather the information required to answer my research questions. I adopted a social constructionist position and a qualitative approach. Being aware of the fact that a thematic analysis may have implications in terms of the credibility of the research process (Nowell et al., 2017) due to its potential for lack of focus, I decided to follow the method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). I chose a thematic analysis as it is a flexible process that leads to identifying patterns or themes in qualitative data. The aims of a thematic analysis are to identify patterns in the data that are of significance or thought-provoking. Those patterns are then used to answer the research questions by interpreting and making sense of the themes that have emerged.

A thematic analysis can be conducted in various ways (Alholjailan, 2012; Javadi and Zarea, 2016). In this study, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step framework (further described below in the section on the research design and methods) because it offers a well-defined and practical structure for conducting a thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) differentiated between two types of themes: semantic and latent. Semantic themes are 'within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written' (p. 84). The latent themes aim to go beyond the descriptive level and 'start to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data' (p. 84). Braun and Clarke's approach also fitted well with the theoretical framework I have created to address the research questions in this study, as it can be applied to each stage of the framework independently but also enable the identification of cross-cutting themes that can be found within several parts of the theoretical framework.

The analysis in this study identified mostly semantic themes; however, the analysis was not only a descriptive one and focused on interpreting and explaining them, supported by the concept that can be found in the study's theoretical framework. While carrying out my research, I did not pre-suppose any pre-existing reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008) regarding how the unintended consequences of partnerships between RG universities and IPPs come about or how they affect the HEIs involved. I did, however, use my professional experience and the literature review and the theoretical framework to inform the design and methods used in this study, which allowed me to generate a general explanation as described and perceived by the participants.

Finally, Braun and Clarke (2006) differentiated between a thematic analysis, which is more top-down and emanates from particular research question(s) and/or the researcher's interest, and an inductive one, which is developed bottom up and originates from the data itself. Our analysis was framed within a clear theoretical framework and research questions and is therefore more thematic than inductive.

The following sections on research design and methods provides additional details regarding how a thematic analysis approach was utilised in this study.

#### **5.4.4 The Braun and Clarke (2006) framework: detailed analysis sample**

In keeping with a thematic analysis approach, I followed Braun and Clarke (2006)'s 6-step framework during the data analysis stage. In this section, I discuss how the framework was utilised and the six steps followed using my second research question as an example.

The analysis was concerned with addressing my specific research questions and analysing the data with this aim in mind – as a result, this was a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) rather than an inductive one. I therefore familiarised myself with the data (*Step 1*) reading the transcripts as well as my field notes several times. This was a circular process which I conducted continuously during data collection and analysis and which enabled me to become familiar with all the data that had been collected. I started making notes and jotting down early thoughts. Below are some of initial notes made during data collection:

*The [Participant 1 from University F] does seem to think that their feedback was not taken into account when the partnership was initially developed and that it would have been useful if it had. There is a sense that the whole idea of a partnership with a private provider can be seen as threatening and is not always understood within the academic community.*

Following this first stage, I proceeded to generate preliminary codes (*Step 2*). During this stage, I started to organise my data in a structured and meaningful manner using NVivo, as described above. My aim was to systematically arrange my data according to its thematic significance for my research questions. I therefore coded each data segment that was pertinent to my research questions. I used open coding (Khandkar, 2009) without any pre-set codes but elaborated and altered the codes as I worked through the coding process, starting by using terms that were used by participants within the transcripts. It was essential to consider each individual interview separately. This process helped identify the contextual variables affecting each university. I coded each of the transcripts considering each key sentence and paragraph segments of the transcribed interviews.

I also used the audio recording during my initial round of coding to ensure that I could remember the nuances of the conversation. I revised the coding structure after each transcript was coded. I endeavoured to code the data in a way that would allow me to generate meaning in a systematic way (Punch, 2013). After coding each transcript, I compared the codes and modified them before moving on to the next transcript. Working in such a way, I generated new codes and also modified existing ones. I started coding while collecting the data. This gave me a certain freedom in altering the direction of the interviews to help confirm or discard themes as they were being developed.

This approach helped me synthesise a complex and vast body of raw text data into a condensed format. It also allowed me to form linkages between my research questions and the findings acquired from the data. This, in return, enabled me to develop models from the themes and information gathered during the qualitative data analysis, including several main categories, then moving towards more abstract generalisations and ideas. I found that a thematic analysis approach to be a convenient and efficient way of analysing qualitative data for my research purposes (Thomas, 2006). Table 4 shows all the preliminary codes that were identified for our second research question, along with the corresponding descriptions.

Table 4: Preliminary codes (Research Question 2: Factors leading to unintended consequences)

<b>Preliminary Codes</b>	<b>Description</b>
Decision-making (in general terms)	Describes how decision-making is carried out, influenced and enabled with regards to the partnerships at the strategic level.
Operational level decisions	Describes how decision-making at the operational level is carried out between the parties involved in the partnership.
Independent and trusted individuals/managers	Some report that they are able to be fairly independent and that decision-making at the operational level is well-defined and placed with a small number of staff who are able to escalate issues if necessary.
No major issues with decision-making	Some of the participants reported that at the operational level, and when working with peers, no major issues exist.
Decision-making supported by official structures and	Some partnerships have formalised operations delivery and decision-making by forming official groups tasked with leading

groups	activities in specific areas. This appears to be a successful way to embed the partnership across the university and more rapidly gain acceptance of the partners than when only a few individuals are involved.
Inertia due to formal decision-making structures	In one case, in particular, it appears that the formal structure was set up to enable operational decisions, which had the opposite effect than expected and led to inertia.
Formal academic links	The academic links, at least on paper, are often formalised with individuals on both sides of the partnership.
Academics not communicated to – do not understand impact of partnership	The structures in place in all partnerships lead to extensive work being carried out by academics. Some do not always understand why they are required to do this work and its importance. In addition, they are not effectively communicated to when decisions are made at the board level.
Lack of experience in dealing with private provider	The practices used by a private provider, although changing rapidly, are often seen as being better suited to 'recruiting universities' rather than the RG.
Problematic senior engagement	In some more established partnerships, the strategic engagement has been less intense, and middle managers feel that they have been left to run the aspects of the partnerships they should not be responsible for (i.e. partnerships 'taken for granted').
In long-term partnerships, less intensive senior engagement	In long-term partnerships, the partner is sometimes taken for granted or established enough to not require extensive strategic engagement.
Lack of senior engagement addressed	In one partnership, this issue was identified, and changes were made to address the situation.
Lack of senior engagement in new partnership	We have seen that in some new partnerships, there has been a lack of senior engagement once the agreement was signed

	(i.e. at the implementation stage), possibly due to a misunderstanding as to what a successful partnership would entail.
Well-structured decision-making	All partnerships have fairly well-defined decision-making structures at the strategic level, comprising a number of boards, including representatives from both parties. Aside from an overall partnership board, we often find a sub-board focusing on academic, operations and marketing and recruitment matters.
Partnership championed by senior management	The partnerships that work well appear to have strong support from senior managers who take responsibility for top-level relationship management with the partner.
Informed senior leaders	Oftentimes the majority of decisions are made by a high-level strategy board or steering group. In some cases, university board members appear to be well-prepared and receive briefing from those closer to the issues before attending the board and making decisions.
Problematic strategic decision-making	Decision-making strategic levels appear to be problematic due to a variety of issues, ranging from lack of effective communication to lack of trust.
Lack of effective communication from RG universities to partners	Universities do not always alert partners to changes that may impact their ability to deliver their targets.
Lack of knowledge	From the university's side, middle managers refer to the fact that many decisions taken at the strategic level require a certain level of detailed knowledge. However, those with the decision-making power at this level do not always have this knowledge nor do they consult with the relevant manager prior to making a decision, which leads to issues in the delivery of objectives.

Partner overtly pushing for change	Strategic decision-making often appears problematic because of the tensions resulting from requests from the partners to change ways of working/desire for flexibility. RG universities, however, are risk averse and reluctant to implement the recommended change.
Partner pushing for change by comparison to competitors	Pathway providers use the common tactic of requesting a change in policy due to the fact that 'others' (i.e. competitors) haven't implemented a similar change.
Lack of strategic alignment	Partnerships with private providers do not always fall under the oversight of a PVC International; rather, they often are within an education remit, which leads to a lack of alignment with the international objectives of a university,
Lack of leadership	A disengaged senior team was found in one particular university, whose partnership had failed and sought a new partner, bringing drastic changes to the management of the relationship.
Commercial outlook Profit vs quality	Some parts of the universities are reluctant to work with companies that they see as commercially rather than educationally led. This reluctance often reduces with time, once the faculty sees the benefits of increased international student numbers.
Complacency from university	In universities with long-established partnerships, we found that there are factions, especially in senior management, that either take the partnership for granted or question whether it is actually needed.
Complacency from partner	Those in a long-term partnership think that the partner has become complacent with time, having locked them in a contractual relationship they cannot extricate themselves from.

Partners delivering poor quality students	Some parts of the universities, mostly academic department, perceive students coming from the pathway providers as being of lower standards and therefore are reluctant to accept them.
Lack of experience of large international student groups	The perception of lack of quality within the new groups of students is not always founded and seems to stem from a lack of experience from teaching staff who are not used to working with a multicultural group.
Partner does not always deliver on proposals	There is a perception that partners often 'jump the gun' when announcing new projects or proposals, which are taken seriously within the universities but then fall through, leading to disappointment.
Partner perceived negatively	In some universities, private providers are generally viewed negatively, which is not always based on hard evidence but rather on hear-say or reputation within the sector.
Getting more positive over the years	The perception of the partner appears to improve over the years, once an academic department sees the financial benefits that additional overseas student revenue brings.
Partner more knowledgeable than the international office	Some participants (those who felt disgruntled about not being consulted in decision-making regarding the partnership) felt that it undermined their credibility internally.
Partner seen has threat	In some universities, the partners are seen as a threat by the international office as they often have the ear of the senior team and appear to always somehow 'get their way'. In addition, there is a fear that the partner could take over recruitment activities for the whole of the university rather than just pathways.
Partner staff quality	Staff quality at the partner's has been questioned in a number of universities.



Partner able to understand RG universities	One partner has managed to change the perception of poor staff quality and commercial outlook, at least with one university, who considers to them to be 'like them'
Poor quality and high turnover	Academic staff do not accept staff from private pathway providers as being of equal level to them. This is due to a perception that staff lack commitment to their role, which results in many vacancies, short-term contracts and high turnover.
Contract vs expectations	One striking source of unintended consequences (on the HEI side) comes from the fact that the majority of universities involved in partnerships with pathway providers have different expectations from what is actually stated in their contracts. This was found in all but two of the partnerships studied, and this can be attributed mostly to a difference in culture between the private sector and HE, especially highly selective universities such as the RG.
Contract amended with time	A few have managed to amend their contracts over the years to include more specific targets and other clauses. One university, in particular, learned lessons from the past and implemented tougher clauses with a new partner, only for this to backfire as the objectives of the partnerships were unrealistic.
Negotiated by the senior team, did not consider operational aspects	One of the main issues is the fact that the contract appears to be vague, lacking targets and details. This is especially the case for universities where the middle managers were not consulted during the contract negotiation.
No financial penalties in contracts	We found that a great deal of frustration exists around that fact that most contracts do not include financial penalties for lack of performance. This has led one university to attempt, in vain, to refuse to pay the commission and to general

	bitterness within the partnership.
Targets	The problematic partnerships appear to not have set targets other than a fairly general figure or financial target to be achieved.
International Foundation vs pre-master's targets	The lack of detailed target means that the 'expected' balance between IFP (most desired by universities) and pre-master's is rarely achieved.
Lack of nationality diversity	Due to the vagueness of the contract, many universities 'expected' a wide variety of nationalities to progress to their programme when, in reality, the majority were Chinese.
Lack of programme diversity	Similarly, universities 'expected' students to join the majority or their programme when, in reality, they were often clustered around a small number of (sometimes already successful) programmes.
Target for pathway college but not for progression	A general frustration relates to the fact that many partnerships have agreed upon targets for student enrolling in the foundation pathway but none for those progressing to the university. The 'expectation' was that the majority of students would progress to the university, but the reality is often very different.
Unaware that institutional changes may be required to be successful	Some universities are frustrated with requests from the partners to change the ways things are done internally in order to ensure success. There is a view that the partner is slowly responsible for the delivery of objectives, which goes against the concept of partnership.
Types of students	The types of students recruited from pathway providers are different from the ones that staff at RG universities are used to, especially those universities that do not have large numbers of international students.

Lack of academic buy-in	Partnerships with pathway providers are often agreed upon at the top level within universities. However, they require sustained involvement from academic departments to be successful. Lack of academic buy-in can therefore lead to unintended consequences.
Academics lacking information	Academic buy-in is often lacking because the aims and details of the partnership were not explained clearly to key academic groups.
Academics pre-existing prejudice against partner	Academic department often show reluctance to engage with the partners due to perceived issues, some supported by evidence, others not.
Academics feeling threatened	Usually found in English centres, who believe that as a next step, their university will outsource them too.
Academics' disappointment	Some academic stakeholders appear to have disengaged from the partnership due to disappointment/anger related to the partner's inability to deliver in a variety of areas (numbers, quality, diversity).
Academics' general lack of interest	Often found in departments that are not interested in growing student numbers despite strategic push.
Lack of experience	Partnerships with pathway providers are generally still a new concept in RG universities, which has meant that staff involved in the partnerships (senior, academic, professional services) rarely have experience of working within this context; this has led to unnecessary complications and unintended consequences.
Lack of internal communications	Lack of communications or misleading communications related to the partnerships are a key factor in what staff would qualify as unintended consequences.
Unclear communication and	The lack of clear communications also leads to

misunderstandings	misunderstanding or expectations that are quite different from the reality.
Faculties not engaged	Faculty engagement is often an issue, and we found that in some universities, academic departments were not given a clear picture of what the partnership would entail.
Objectives and targets not realistic	Often it was found that one of the roots of frustration and unintended consequences comes from the fact that objectives and targets (real or expected) are unrealistic; the reasons for this comes from the fact that either the partner promised unrealistic results in order to win the contract, or the university (or parts of) have unrealistic expectations about what the partnerships should/could deliver.
Relationship management	Lack of effective relationship management is a key factor in the generation of unintended consequences and was mentioned by participants from eight of the universities studied. In its widest form, this category covered anything from staff turnover, reluctance to engage or share information to disengagement over the years when the partnerships seem well-established.
Attempts to improve relationship	The early stages of the partnership often see numerous issues related to poor relationship management. However, some universities have attempted to change and address the situation.
Complete separation: us and them	Where serious issues have arisen, we have found that this was due to a detached attitude from the part of the university that did not think they had a role to play in the success of the partnership.
Problematic relationship	The majority of the universities in this study described their relationship with their partner as problematic and line of communication ineffective for a variety of reasons.

Different standards and abilities	Universities are often not as well-resourced as private providers and thus are not always able to respond to partners' demands and queries in a timely manner, leading to frustration because they feel that they are being 'pushed' or 'forced' into certain decisions.
Disengagement from long-term partnership	Those universities that have been in a partnership for a long time often describe feeling that they are less of a priority to their partner, especially with regards to new partners that have been signed more recently.
Reluctance to share information	This is found on the university side, where staff are suspicious of the partner and therefore make decisions without consulting with them, leading to issues within the partnership down the line.
Incomplete information sharing from the university	Staff from the universities sometimes show a certain lack of trust in their partners, leading to poor information sharing; however, lack of effective information sharing is not always due to distrust but more often due to that fact that the impact on the partnership of decision made is often forgotten.
Lack of clarity from partners	We found that in some cases, the partners were not always straightforward in their reports to universities.
Staff changes and turnover	Changes in senior as well as operational staff involved in the partnership causes issues due to the lack of corporate memory and/or a lack of understanding of the importance of the partnership.

Searching for categories and themes then took place (Step 3). Once all interviews had been coded, I scrutinised the codes and grouped those that fit together into a smaller number of themes (Merriam, 1998) – I called these 'categories'. For example, there were several codes that referred to contractual matters as key factors leading to unintended consequences; these were grouped under the category 'contract terms vs expectations'. Table 5 shows all first-order categories once the preliminary codes were clustered together for our first research question.

Table 5: Categories and primary code clusters: Research Question 1 – Factors Influencing Unintended Consequences

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Preliminary Codes</b>
Institutional changes required to implement the partnership	Lack of strategic alignment
	Partner overtly pushing for change
	Partner pushing for change by comparison to competitors
	Unaware that university changes may be required to be successful
Contract terms vs expectations	Contract amended with time
	Negotiated by senior team, did not consider operational aspect
Objectives and targets	Targets
	IFP vs pre-master's' targets
	Lack of national diversity
	Lack of programme diversity
	Objectives and targets are not realistic
Financial arrangements	No financial penalties in contracts
	Target for pathway college but not for progression
Consideration of operational implementation	Operational level decisions
	Decision-making supported by official structures and groups
Senior leadership	Problematic senior engagement
	In long-term partnerships, less intensive senior engagement

	Lack of senior engagement addressed
	Lack of senior engagement in new partnership
	Partnership championed by senior management
	Informed senior leaders
Strategic governance	Well-structured decision-making
	Problematic strategic decision-making
Operational flexibility	No major issues with decision-making
	Inertia due to formal decision-making structures
Commercial outlook	Commercial outlook: profit vs quality
Increased number of international students on campus	Lack of experience with large international student groups
Ability of middle managers to influence change	Independent and trusted individuals/managers
	Out-of-the-loop manager
	Only implementing
Knowledge of pathway partnerships	Lack of experience in dealing with private provider
	Lack of knowledge
Operational structure	Problematic relationship
	Relationship management
	Attempts to improve relationship
Academic buy-in	Formal academic links
	Academics lacking information

	Lack of academic buy-in
	Academics feeling threatened
	Academics' disappointment
	Academics' general lack of interest
	Faculty not engaged
Other internal stakeholders' interest	Lack of experience
	Lack of internal communications
Perception of partner	Partners delivering poor quality students
	Partner does not always deliver on proposals
	Partner perceived negatively
	Becoming more positive over the years
	Partner able to understand the RG universities
	Academics' pre-existing prejudice against the partner
'Us and them'	Partner perceived has threat
	Partner more knowledgeable than the international office
	Complete separation between us and them
Different standards	Types of students
	Different standards and abilities
Disengagement	Complacency from university
	Complacency from partner



	Lack of leadership
	Disengagement from long-term partnership
Reluctance to share information	Lack of effective communication from RG universities to partners
	Reluctance to share information
	Incomplete information sharing from university
Lack of clarity/misunderstandings	Academics not communicated to – they do not understand the impact of the partnership
	Lack of clarity from partners
	Unclear communication and misunderstandings
Staff changes and turnover	Partner staff quality
	Poor quality and high turnover
	Staff changes and turnover

Afterwards, I grouped the categories into themes, placing the categories under emerging dominant concepts and themes. This organisational method allowed for pattern coding and the development of a small number of key themes. At various stages, I followed up with a small number of participants to fine-tune my understanding of the data and ensure that findings match the reality. This also helped establish the credibility and dependability of the findings.

Once this step was completed, I managed to organise the codes into much broader themes that were relevant to the specific research questions. These codes were primarily descriptive and outlined patterns in the data that were pertinent to the research questions. I proceeded with reviewing the categories and themes (*Step 4*). I reviewed the data clustered under each theme and evaluated whether the data supported the various themes and categories. I also reviewed all themes to ensure that they were coherent and sufficiently distinct from each other and made a number of changes at this stage (for example, eliminating themes to avoid overlap or duplication, creating new themes or categories or downgrading themes to categories).

Continuing with the previous example, for my second research question, I identified four themes: (1) experience (senior level); (2) experience (operational level); (3) internal communications; and (4) partner relationship management.

Finally, I refined the themes (*Step 5*) with the aim to 'identify the "essence" of what each theme is about' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). This stage of reflection ensured that I was satisfied that all categories and themes interacted with each other. Using an iterative process, I inferred aggregate dimensions from the second order themes (see Figure 4). In the case of my first research question, this led to two aggregate dimensions: (1) decision-making and (2) communication.

For example, the dimension of *decision-making* was derived from the concept of 'experience' (themes), which was related in varying degrees of strength to other concepts found in first-order categories such as 'leadership', 'governance', 'structure', 'implementation', 'objectives', 'targets', 'influence' and 'expectations'. This dimension also had the maximum co-occurrences within the preliminary codes. Once the dimensions were identified, I searched the transcripts again for additional references to these concepts that may have been missed from all participants. At this stage, I returned to the literature to further refine the key dimensions identified.

Figure 4 is a final thematic map that shows the links between categories, themes and dimensions for my first research question. Taking this approach allowed for a smooth transition to the writing up of my findings (*Step 6*). During this last step, I reported all relevant concisely and objectively in a logical order. I also used tables and graphs to illustrate specific findings.

#### **5.4.5 Reliability and validity**

Ensuring reliability and validity is essential, which was a key concern of mine as I am aware that controversy exists regarding the need for validity in qualitative research (Wolcott, 1994). In this study, I used mechanisms that are commonly followed in qualitative research to ensure the validity and reliability of my data. As a result, my findings were justified through participant verification and triangulation (Robinson & Lai, 2006). Participant verification is viewed as a primary method of establishing credibility in qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). As previously stated, in this study, all interviews were recorded and transcribed professionally. All interviewees had an opportunity to review and comments on the transcripts. I usually sent the transcripts to the interviewees within a week or two of the interviews to ensure that our conversation would still be fresh to in the participant's mind.

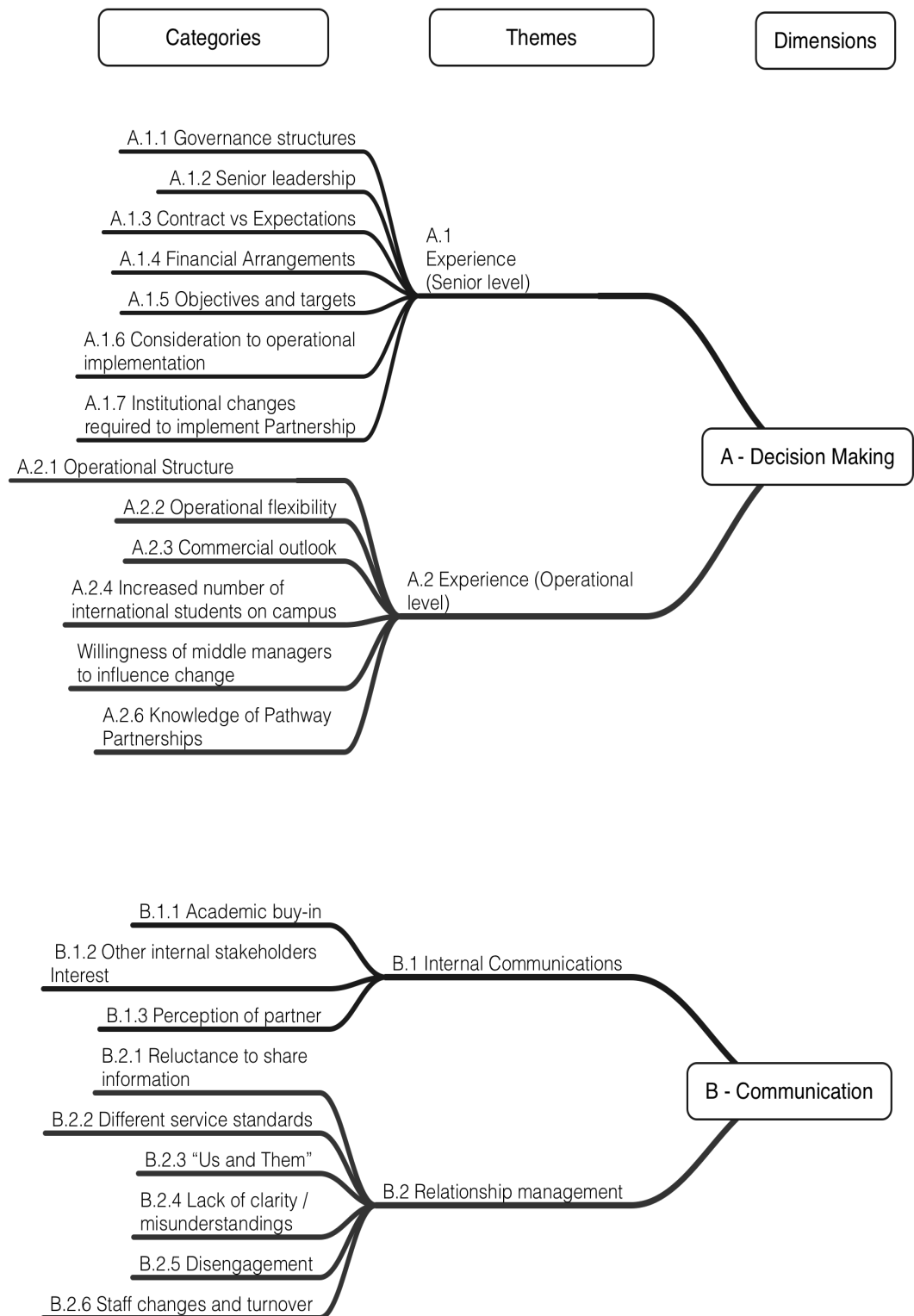


Figure 4: Thematic map: Research question 2 – Factors leading to unintended consequences

I informed them at the time of sending the transcript that, if I did not hear for them within two weeks, I would assume that they were in agreement with the content. A small number of participants requested revisions; however, these were not substantive.

Enabling 'member checking' (Creswell and Miller, 2000) as described above, played a key role in data validation (Saunders et al., 2012). Although I used one primary data collection method (i.e., interviews), I aimed to ensure a greater degree of validity and reliability by not only obtaining a variety of information on the same issue (Sarantakos, 2012) but by also including interviews with representatives from the partner organisations. This approach helped validate my results and verify the assumptions that I had drawn from the interviews with RG universities.

To support data validation, once data analysis had been carried out, I used documentary analysis (Bowen, 2009) to better inform the data interpretation process. This allowed me, in particular, to triangulate the views of the middle managers with what can be considered to be the "official" view of the participating institutions and seek convergence and corroboration, giving voice and meaning to the intent of the top-level managers who were not formally included in this study. I analysed publicly available documents that referred to the IPPs (such as strategic plans, mission statements, annual reports, policies, and minutes of meetings) and coded content into themes similar to those found in the interview transcripts. Conducting documentary analysis to supplement and triangulate my findings provided a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility (Bowen, 2009) and reduced the impact of potential bias by examining information collected through different methods.

## **5.5 Ethical considerations**

Throughout the project, I carefully considered any potential ethical problems that could be associated with my study. I also carefully thought about sensitive issues that may arise from it. I was conscious of the possible impact of my research and of the need to ensure that no harm comes to the subjects of the research or to society in general. Throughout my project, I followed the British Educational Research Association's *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (British Educational Research Association, 2018) as well as the University of Bath's Code of Good Practice in Research Integrity (University of Bath, 2017). Considering these guidelines carefully, I concluded that there are no major ethical issues with my study's topic or my chosen approach, and that, overall, the ethical dimension to this study can be considered relatively small. I

therefore submitted my 'Ethical Implications of Research Activity' form to my lead supervisor at the University of Bath, who subsequently approved it.

However, the research questions themselves and the data collected are sensitive in nature. In addition, my own professional involvement within the RG also needed to be navigated delicately. Some of the information collected could be considered commercially sensitive. Voluntary informed consent is 'the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway' (British Educational Research Association, 2018, p. 9). As the universities in this study are all competitors in a small network, the RG, it would not have been possible to gather any information if anonymity had not been guaranteed. Therefore, I made sure to voluntarily acquire informed consent from the participants and ensure complete confidentiality.

All participants were therefore sent a consent form along with an explanatory information sheet introducing my study and detailing what was required of them. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix 2, and a copy of the participant information sheet can be found in Appendix 3. This document was sent via e-mail. Participants' voluntary informed consent was then confirmed when they returned the form electronically or handed the completed form to me on the day of the interview. In addition, I reviewed the content of the consent forms at the start of each interview and offered to answer any questions or concerns that the participants might have. At that time, I asked again for permission to record the discussion and reiterated that confidentiality would be ensured, and anonymity maintained. The participants were therefore all fully informed of the objectives of the study and, as colleagues, understood that it would lead to mutual learning and benefits.

I made it clear every step of the way that the participants that they were engaging with the study on a voluntary basis, and that they could withdraw at any time. I also demonstrated to the participants that I would make every conceivable effort so their participation would not impact their university, the operation of any of their departments or themselves personally. Finally, once data was gathered, I provided each of the participants with opportunities to review the data and sought their help in interpreting it when required, providing me with a direct system of feedback and verification. I do not consider any of the interviewees to be vulnerable in any way, and as described above, they were therefore able to provide informed consent or withdraw consent should they wish to. Given the experience and self-assured nature of the individuals involved, I am confident that, should they have had any doubt or questions, they would have addressed them immediately.

The second possible ethical issue of the research was my own role as a employee of one of the RG universities. I therefore had to be aware of my relationships and prior knowledge and put measures in place to prevent biases and pre-conceived notions. I did this by constantly reminding myself of any possible conflict of interest, using clear validation and reliability methods in my project and generally committing to impartiality. I deliberately chose a type of partnership that did not exist in my own university at the time the research was conducted to enable me to follow the above measures and reassure participants that I would not use any commercially sensitive information collected as part of this project for my own professional benefit or to further my university's competitive advantage. Finally, throughout data collection and analysis as well as when writing my conclusions, I followed the general principles for education practitioner research (Robinson & Lai, 2006) which encourage researchers 'to explain, evaluate, and improve...practices in ways that are rigorous as well as relevant to the particular context' (p. 15).

This chapter has detailed the approach, design and methods I have taken in this study and how they were implemented. Based on the literature review, I established clear research questions that would allow me to explore and understand the unintended consequences of partnerships between RG universities and IPPs and the role played by middle managers within this context. Aligned with my social constructionist epistemology, I designed a study based on a thematic analysis methodology, qualitative and cross-sectional in nature. My research questions, which I anchored in the literature review, guided the way my data collection methods were developed. Through the 29 interviews I conducted, across 11 RG universities and four IPPs, I managed to gather a large amount of rich data. I carried out data analysis following a thematic analysis approach, deconstructing and reassembling the data in attempting to answer my research questions. Through this process, I generated helpful findings, which I will be discussing in the next chapter.

## **6 CHAPTER 6: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings of the study, set against the four research questions that directed the investigation:

#### **Research Question 1**

What are the types of unintended consequences of developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs, as described by middle managers?

#### **Research Question 2**

What factors, as perceived by middle managers, produce unintended consequences when developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs and whom do they impact?

#### **Research Question 3**

Do the unintended consequences of developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs, as perceived by the middle managers, lead to organisational changes or adaptations?

#### **Research Question 4**

Can any level of deviation existing between the intended and realised strategies supporting the development and implementation of IPP partnerships in UK RIUs be attributed to the actions of middle managers?

Addressing the key findings for each of our research questions, this chapter outlines the themes and dimensions identified as part of the data analysis. For each research questions, supporting data will be presented in tables showing categories, themes and dimensions as discerned during the data analysis. Thematic maps were also used to help visualise the categories, themes and dimensions and how they relate to each other. Tables 6–13 in the sections below also present representative data for each of the categories and themes.

### **6.2 Research Question 1: What are the types of unintended consequences of developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs, as described by middle managers?**

We found that answering our first research question was best done by creating a typology of unintended consequences as perceived by the middle managers involved in the partnerships studied. Seven ‘types’ or overarching dimensions were identified: (1) student performance, (2)

commercial awareness, (3) education and curriculum, (4) internal culture, (5) external perception, (6) infrastructure and (7) student experience. Most are inter-related. Some result directly or indirectly from the actions of the middle managers, and others result directly or indirectly from the factors, leading to the unintended consequences described in section 6.3. Overall, the typology provides a comprehensive overview of the perceived types on unintended consequences found in partnerships between RG universities and IPPs. The types of unintended consequences are not weighted in any way in this section but are all presented in an equal manner. Both positive and negative consequences were categorised. Their impact will be described in section 6.4, addressing our third research question.

The findings, including the initial categories that led to the identification of themes and dimensions, are summarised in Figure 5 below. The results are described in the same order as in the figure in the text below. Additionally, Table 6 presents representative data for each of the categories and themes.

### **6.2.1 Student performance**

The first type of unintended consequence identified relates to the performance of students enrolled in the programmes developed under the partnerships (figure 6). The majority of the participants interviewed mentioned that this was an area that was often overlooked at the time of the initiation of the partnerships. The motivations behind the setting up of the partnership, as explored in section 6.5, are mostly financial, and those involved in decision-making are therefore less involved in teaching delivery.

The majority of the unintended consequences identified in this area are negative and cluster around two inter-related themes: student quality (i.e., their academic ability when joining the pathway programme) and student outcomes (i.e., their academic ability having completed the pathway programme or once enrolled in a university course).

#### **6.2.1.1 Student quality**

The worry over what was described by the study's participants as 'student quality' is widespread and was mentioned by the majority of the middle managers interviewed. UK RIUs have especially high entry requirements and are used to operating in a selective way. The concept of a pathway programme is quite opposite to what academic departments, in particular, are used to, and we therefore found some deep suspicion on the part of the academic managers who participated in the study.



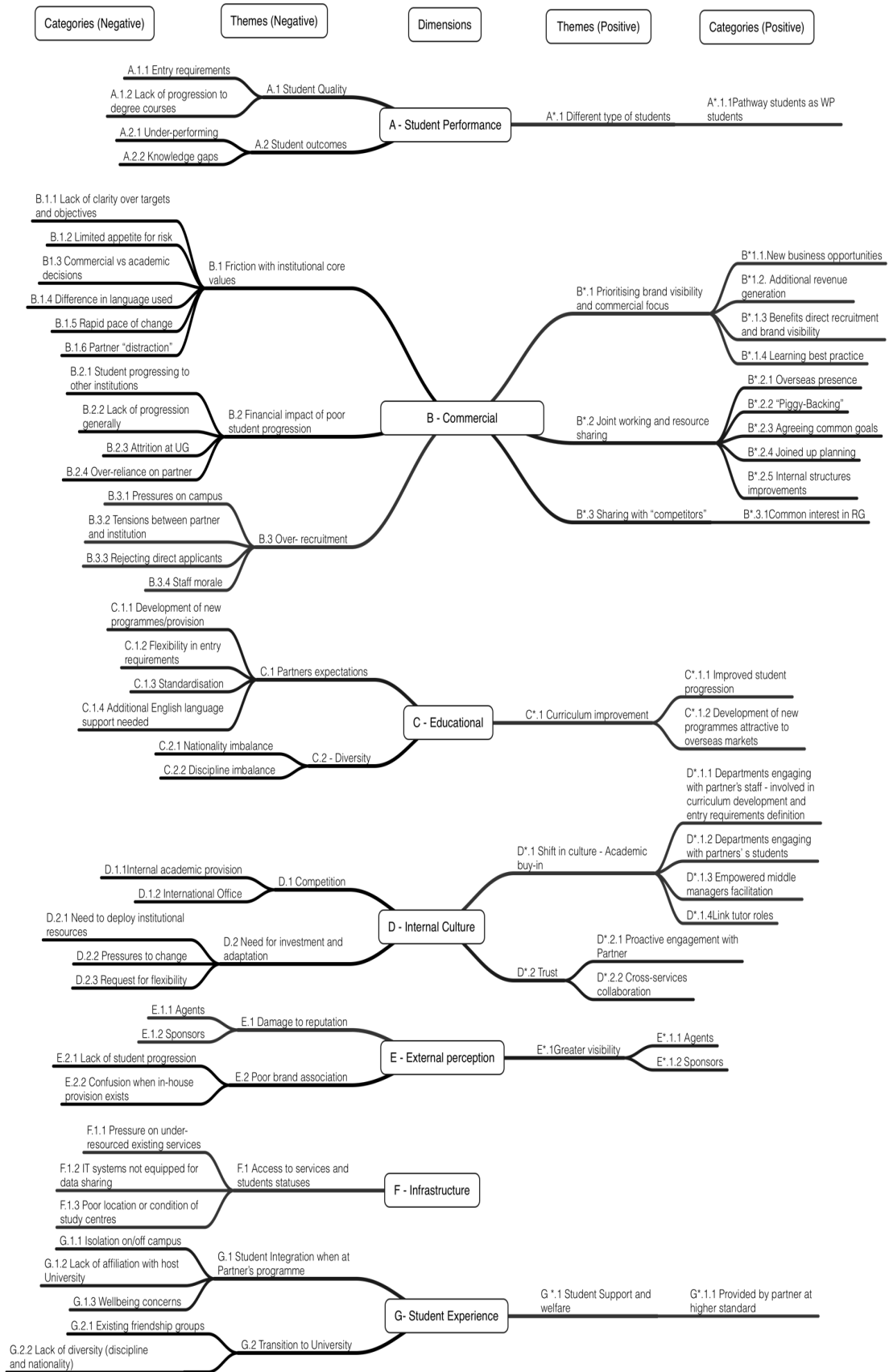


Figure 5: Thematic map – Types of unintended consequences

Table 6: Types of Unintended consequences - Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data

Dimensions, themes and categories	Representative data
<p><u>Overarching Dimension A:</u> <u>Student Performance</u></p> <p><i>Negative consequences</i></p> <p>A.1: Quality</p> <p>A.1.1: Entry requirements</p> <p>A.1.2.: Lack of progression</p> <p>A.2.: Students Outcomes</p> <p>A.2.1: Under-performing</p>	<p>A.1: “Because we’re obliged to take any student who passes the progression requirements from the pathway college. They may be lower quality than the students that we could have recruited and accepted during the main cycle. I mean, absolutely, that’s a concern.” (Functional Specialist, University A)</p> <p>A.1.1: “They took advantage I think a little bit in terms of entry requirements which again we’re trying to claw back and push the entry requirements into [the Partners’ study centre] up because still slightly nervous about what’s gonna happen at the end of the year in terms of dropout rates and fails.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University G)</p> <p>A.1.2: “We were disappointed with recruitment, particularly with progression, and also that things were just on a downward trend.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University E)</p> <p>A.2: “We were very keen to try and have the discussion to modify the foundation year content so that it matched the learning outcomes for our students. [...]. The reason we wanted that was because we recognised that the students were learning in a foreign country and our experience of transnational education is that when we bring students across from say China, they’re very good students but they find it difficult” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>A.2.1: “The challenge really became issues of quality and diversity. Quality, we started to notice, anecdotally, from the feedback from lecturers, that the students, who were coming in through that pathway, were poorer, in terms of their aptitude, and that’s why we couldn’t really – we needed to try and find</p>

<p>A.2.2: Knowledge gaps</p> <p><i>Positive consequences</i></p> <p>A*.1: Different type of students</p> <p>A*.1.1: Pathway students as WP students</p>	<p>out if that was the case and we were looking, then, at, as they progressed through, how they were doing. There did seem to be an element of underperformance.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)</p> <p>A.2.2: “They were not teaching a direct replica of the first-year course so there were inevitable gaps.” (Functional Specialist, University C)</p> <p>A*.1: “You’re not comparing like for like because the [Partner 2] students that are coming in, we have made a deliberate strategy but they’re coming in on a lower standard, so it’s not fair to compare them to three A-level standards. Three A’s for A-level because that’s not what they came in on so they may have done well then and based on their entry criteria, so your comparison is more about entry criteria versus exit, rather than [Partner2] and so we haven’t massively found any differential.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>A*.1.1: “By nature a student who requires the additional study to go through on foundation or a pre-Master, by nature they aren't going to be the ones with the top language skills, or always the very top grades.” (Senior Relationship Manager, university K)</p>
<p><u>Overarching Dimension B:</u></p> <p><u>Commercial</u></p> <p><i>Negative consequences</i></p> <p>B.1: Friction with core values</p> <p>B.1.1: Lack of clarity over targets and objectives</p> <p>B.1.2: Limited appetite for risk</p>	<p>B1: “Equally important is the making sure that the students that come through the from [Partner2] can then survive in a Russell Group university and I have to say that the university’s been very clear on that, which I think is the right thing to do. Not necessarily commercially the right thing to do but I think in terms of student wellbeing and student progression, it’s the right thing to do to make sure that the students that come through have the right standing and can then survive once they’re into the university.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>B.1.1: “It’s clear that they’re responsible for the overall targets in the plan but the split and the different categories of students in those targets, although they’re in the plan, there’s no penalties if they meet that overall target in a different way.” (Functional Specialist, University A)</p> <p>B.1.2: “all of a sudden they went to China and were dealing with commercial private organisations who ate them up in terms of negotiating and their ability to nail them down on financial arrangements and that was a hard lesson to learn and was quite challenging and [...] we were being asked tough decisions about commercial operations overseas and that was the first time that we were be asked to think about that sort of thing and I think most of us were a bit</p>

<p>B.1.3: Commercial vs academic decisions</p> <p>B.1.4: Difference in language used</p> <p>B.1.5: Rapid pace of change</p> <p>B.1.6: Partner “distraction”</p> <p>B.2: Financial Impact of poor student progression</p> <p>B.2.1: Students progressing to other institutions</p>	<p>out of our depth and so we either were very conservative and just said don’t do anything, no don’t do anything, don’t try this, don’t go forward” (Senior Relationship Manager, University F)</p> <p>B.1.3: “So yes, that is the difference isn’t it? It’s about a commercial decision over an academic decision” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University H)</p> <p>B.1.4: “These are deals that would horrify other people because it’s not that there’s anything wrong with the actual relationships it’s just the way that the deals are done are in different language with a different reality from a lot of our academic colleagues so needing to weave your way through provided you are absolutely true to the core values of the organisation.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University F)</p> <p>B.1.5: “They change more often than we do, which is normal, because they’re a commercial company.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, university B)</p> <p>B.1.6: My perception was 100% that it was just lower down on the list of priorities for [Partner 2], [...] they definitely went through a period of feeling like they’d exhausted the growth potential in the UK, and it was just all about the US. I’d gone on activities where eight of the presentations had been from their new American partners and there’d been a tiny bit about [a UK University] or something and just no mention of the other partners at all.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University E)</p> <p>B.2: “We would want to know how many students did we think, realistically, we could get onto each of our programmes. Because, obviously, we’ve got our own planning process, we know how many, well, how much capacity there is, how many seats in the room and how many it can hold. We needed to know what we could, more or less, sort of guarantee to fill and we wanted to get those plans and dovetail onto the [Partner 2] thing. (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)</p> <p>B.2.1: “I thought we were selling, my interpretation is that we were selling [Partner 2/University E] diplomas for students who wanted to come to the [University E] and that if they, somehow, failed there would be a safety net and they could go elsewhere. But what started to concern me was that, actually, we were losing students to good universities, including Bristol, but they were going to others as well. I remember once walking into the INTO centre, there was a poster up, it was promoting Durham and I said, “Durham?” Actually, I ripped it off the wall and I said, “What the hell’s this?” Because all these students should be thinking about going to [University E].” (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)</p>
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<p>B.2.2: Lack of progression generally</p>	<p>B.2.2: “My concern was that really what we were, I suppose mis-selling’s too strong a word, but I could easily see a student being told that they can go into a top ten Russell Group university by an agent and yet the agent knew, in their heart of hearts, they weren’t going to do it. Nothing worse than students not fulfilling their dreams, right? If progression rate is at 56 per cent, nearly one in two students are coming into this programme, has anyone asked the students how they feel?” (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)</p>
<p>B.2.3: Attrition at UG</p>	<p>B.2.3: “When 15% or 20% of them bomb out then the... you see the way the university’s financial model works is they say ‘well, looking at the last ten years, 90% of your first years progress to second year, then about 95 progress to third’, so they run this statistical model saying this is what you’ll have in three years’ time on your existing students. Now, if you have these students who are weaker coming in you’ve got to redo that analysis otherwise a year down the line, they will suddenly say the numbers are not adding up and you’re in deficit.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University J)</p>
<p>B.2.4: Over-reliance on Partner</p>	<p>B.2.4: “If you’re successful in developing that pathway, sometimes the university can get complacent about having to put in the investment to develop its own channels and then you end up in a situation where large proportions of your international undergraduates are coming through the partner and you haven’t developed the other channels.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University K)</p>
<p>B.3: Over-recruitment</p>	<p>B.3: “Well they over-shot targets which had serious impact.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University G)</p>
<p>B.3.1: Pressures on campus</p>	<p>B.3.1: “I also recommended capping numbers onto certain [Partner 1] programmes to safeguard the direct recruitment as well and avoid going over capacity which is something that happened as well because when I took over, the role, lack of planning in previous years had meant that there were no spaces for some of the [Partner 1] students and teaching space was having to be hired from the Hilton hotel – not ideal, so again recommendations about that to control the pipeline.” (Functional Specialist, university C)</p>
<p>B.3.2: Tensions between partners and university</p>	<p>B.3.2: “They filled their boots. [...] So that has now been reigned back and they’ve been told they have to hit our targets and not fill their boots”. (Senior Relationship Manager, University G).</p>
<p>B.3.3: Rejecting direct applicants</p>	<p>B.3.3: “I had to announce how many pre-15th January direct entry business school students of AAA plus quality we’d had to reject, and it was a huge number that we’d rejected, and it was something like two thirds we rejected direct entry in order to keep space for what we thought was gonna progress and actually it was a higher progression rate than we anticipated.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University G)</p>

<p>B.3.4: Staff morale</p> <p><i>Positive consequences</i></p> <p>B*.1: Brand visibility and commercial focus</p> <p>B*1.1: New business opportunities</p> <p>B*1.2: Additional revenue generation</p> <p>B*.1.3: Benefits direct recruitment and brand visibility</p> <p>B*1.4: Learning best practice</p> <p>B*2: Joint working and resource sharing</p>	<p>B.3.4: “I think it impacts on staff morale as well from the university side so the recruitment team was constantly distraught when the business school would close programmes in January because we’d come up with these ideas to increase diversity onto it and then we’d hear [Partner 1] had over recruited so we’d have to shut it down and you’re right a lot of effort had to go into those things that actually if [Partner 1] had delivered, we could have focussed on core and really looked at larger scale development”. (Functional Specialist, University C)</p> <p>B*.1: “[University A] had been quite a traditional, dare I say it slightly boring university, it has had to become a little more commercially focussed and a bit more in touch with what goes on in the wider world, this kind of thing, so I think they’ve probably learned some lessons about that and it’s been good to see some of the activities that [Partner 4] are doing and getting input from some of their staff” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University A)</p> <p>B*1.1: “Going to where [Partner 3] had students helped provide a focus for where to go and market, promote. So, we began to learn how to promote to kind of closed groups of students by going and promoting with [Partner 3]” (Senior Relationship Manager, University F)</p> <p>B*1.2: “I think there was that overriding cultural shift. [...] Actually, recognition from [University J] and from down in the faculties and the departments, this is actually much bigger than you realise. This is a lot of students coming in, overseas students, overseas fee-paying undergraduates, paying fees for three or four years. This is a big sum of money. [...] we bizarrely were like, ‘Do you realise how big this is for us?’” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>B*.1.3: “The [Partner 3] partners would attend certain events, ‘cause it was sometimes easier to get into certain institutions or have a platform for recruiting students as a group of 10 or 12 universities. So, for me, as an international recruitment expert, I think this provides that additional platform for promoting yourselves in country. That’s not to say there isn’t some complication around a university as part of the brand, a university on its own, but I think, on the whole, the benefits there outweigh any disadvantages.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University F)</p> <p>B*1.4: “It’s just a total U-turn of how we started out. [Partner 2] has really played a key role in not only the agent partnerships, but also understanding of the English language requirements and pathway providers and opened up a lot more doors for us. I would say the reliance on them though has definitely moved on. That the university has – the brand profile has been raised a lot, so we’re maybe not as reliant on [Partner 2] as we previously were.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>B*2: “We’ve done a lot of joint recruitment work as well and sometimes [Partner 1] have supported [University C] staff to go out with them to these markets.” (Functional Specialist, University C)</p>
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B*2.1: Overseas presence	B*2.1: “And then another benefit we have is obviously a lot of their in-country offices is where we base our in-country staff as well and for us that’s – I don’t think we’ve got any staff now who are in agents offices and I personally feel that’s a much better model.” (Functional Specialist, University C)
B*2.2: “Piggy-backing”	B*2.2: “I think the doors that Study Group opened into the East Asia market have really helped that. Because it’s something, although we can and could do, and have been doing ourselves, it’s just so much easier with that big sales force behind it.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University F)
B*2.3: Agreeing common goals	B*2.3: “The reason why it’s really important to me is ultimately I’m judged on the recruitment targets every year and the recruitment through our pathways partner significantly contributes towards those targets. So, I’m very keen to see that we’re working in close partnership with Kaplan making sure that the things that we agree with them make sense from a recruitment point of view” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University H)
B*2.4: Joined up planning	B*2.4: “We need to keep the partner on board as well. We can’t just complain about them. There has to be something in it for them and something in it for us and to be able to try and tie those success factors together so that our success is their success and vice versa.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, university B)
B*2.5: Internal structures improvements	B*2.5: “Yes and I suppose in a way it’s informed how we’ve shaped our team as well. You know as we were saying a few years ago, we didn’t have a relations part of what we did. It was just another hat that a recruitment team would have. Now as a recruiting team we know how important the pathway’s recruitment is to our overall intake and we know it needs to be managed in a different way to our direct recruitment activities. So, we’ve changed our structure to accommodate it.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, university H)
B*3: Sharing with “competitors”	B*3: “One nice thing actually that I didn’t say that came about as been a [Partner 1] partner was a really close relationship with some of their other partners as well so it’s nice to be able to like pick up the phone to [Middle Manager] at [University H] or whoever and like then discuss the problems together so you feel like you’re not in it alone and it also means you’ve got a sounding board when Kaplan come up with a new crazy idea to be like, are you gonna do this?” (Functional Specialist, University C)
B*3.1: Common interest in RG	B*3.1: “Yeah, I remember [a manager] called it the counterbalance club and what he meant by that was that there were these discreet channels where we would try to form a common position with some universities that had the same kind of problems. (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)

<p><u>Overarching Dimension C:</u></p> <p><u>Educational</u></p> <p><i>Negative consequences</i></p> <p>C.1: Partners expectations</p> <p>C.1.1: Development of new programmes</p> <p>C.1.2: Flexibility in entry requirements</p> <p>C.1.3: Standardisation</p> <p>C.1.4: Additional English Language Support needed</p> <p>C.2: Diversity</p>	<p>C.1: “One of the running themes has often been that the intelligence that’s been used to underpin a potential new development is always based on x university of x commercial partner is doing this, the market is doing that. That sort of language doesn’t always hold gravitas with our academic community ‘cause they wanna know well what’s gonna be the academic implications of this new type of student” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University H)</p> <p>C.1.1: “Introducing new programmes – INTO do things really quickly. They want to introduce a new programme they want to start in September, they tell you now, whereas it could take a full year to go through the university cycle in order to get some of those things through.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>C.1.2: “They would say, ‘We think your entry requirements are too high. We’re finding it very difficult to recruit students to the Centre.’ I would say, ‘Can you provide some evidence for this?’ They would then come back with normally [Another Russell Group University]’s entry requirements, ‘cause [Another Russell group University] tended to be pretty flexible.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University E)</p> <p>C.1.3: “I suppose the rationale from [Partner1]’s perspective that has been that it means that they can have a standardised programme which means they can benchmark better high performances across centres, measure centre performance, measure our academic staff performance so it gives them more control and therefore they’ve got better quality control. That’s their rationale. However, it’s a challenging one to sell.” (Functional Specialist, University C)</p> <p>C.1.4: “Yeah, from what I understand there was quite a lot of that, a lot of additional English language training had to go on, i.e., students coming back into the centre to do even more. They’ve already graduated, they have to go back in and do more English language training. That was costing us, and we had to pay for that, ‘cause there’s relationship where we would pay for the students using that, so there was that.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)</p> <p>C.2: “We wanted a much more diversified income stream, we wanted to make sure that they weren’t recruiting solely from China, they recruited more widely, and they weren’t solely recruiting for business, so that’s the kind of issue. As the years went on those kinds of discussions became more and more vexed about how we were going to try and solve that. (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)</p>
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<p>C.2.1: Nationality imbalance</p> <p>C.2.2: Discipline imbalance</p> <p><i>Positive consequences:</i></p> <p>C*1.1: Curriculum improvement</p> <p>C*1.2: Improved student progression</p> <p>C*1.3: Development of new programmes attractive to overseas markets</p>	<p>C.2.1: “Diversity was a problem, so with the Centre it was predominantly Chinese with a smattering of others” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University J)</p> <p>C.2.2: “There’s certainly some schools that will get a lot of international students via the [Partner 2] route, so there’ll be some schools that get none, just probably because of the subject mix, but there are like I think Management is one of them, there’s some in the engineering faculty where they would get a big cohort of ex [Partner 2] international students, so they would ... I guess they see that as a positive, but sometimes a negative” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>C*1.1: “One of the consequences, and I know it’s an unintended consequence, one of the unintended consequences is we discovered with our offer, the degrees and the titles that we had were not persuasive”. (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>C*1.2: “One of the consequences, and I know it’s an unintended consequence, one of the unintended consequences is we discovered with our offer, the degrees and the titles that we had were not persuasive. [...] So, we’ve got more MScs now and we’ve got a pre-masters course and therefore we’re getting a lot more students in [laugh]. So, it’s obvious, isn’t it?” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>C*1.3: “A proposal would have come through – a business plan by [Partner 1] showing where they think how many numbers we’ll get, which types of markets they’d be targeting, what kind of scholarships they’d want to put around it. Then that would all be fed into the academic sub-group, who would then decide if it was possible, and then what kind of modules and what we would need from the students.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p>
<p><u>Overarching Dimension D:</u></p> <p><u>Internal Culture</u></p> <p><i>Negative consequences</i></p> <p>D.1: Competition</p>	<p>D.1: “it’s been baby steps each year slightly closer each year a little bit more like a standard private provider university relationship but we do still have some big hurdles and it is not an embedded centre and we have not given them 220 students that are on our own foundation year which in income terms is a big price to handover to a private provider coming onto campus so from our perspective [Partner4] I can’t conceive of what they have to promise now to be given the running of our own foundation year in addition to the stream of students that they bring.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University F)</p>

D.1.1: Internal Academic provision	<p>D.1.1: [Partner 2] and [University D] were competing in the field of English Language, so if they were year-round students, they would be competing. The other area where there was genuine competition, although certainly from [Partner 2]'s perspective I think they would have sought to play that down, was because there was still a mixed home/international foundation programme that was delivered one of our Faculties and which is still there, and is like a more traditional foundation programme, where it's a year zero. All students progress in the normal way – if they get 40%, then they're able to progress on to their main course. There were times when [Partner 2] won business that had previously been going to [University D], and certainly the ethos of the internal foundation programme was just completely different to [Partner 2]. The internal foundation programme had no ambition to grow, were very much about academic standards and completely un-commercially-minded, whereas [Partner 2] were desperate to grow as quickly as possible at Manchester and elsewhere; very commercially-minded." (Functional Specialist, University D)</p>
D.1.2: International Office	<p>D.1.2: "You may have a multiple dynamic where you have an international office where... or you have the senior... someone on the senior management who wants the win for the project, who then is frustrated with having dealt with various parts of the professional services that they couldn't get together and frustrated with the international office. Then you have the international office which if it's in that position isn't feeling... is feeling a bit defensive about the work that it's doing and is seeing in a sense a competition and then you can have a dynamic where you've got this running entirely in parallel to the rest of all the recruitment channels." (Senior Relationship Manager, University K)</p>
D.2.: Partner Expectations	<p>D.2.: "So many people are still now coping with just the everyday pain of working with a commercial organisation who have different perimeters, different expectations, different goals "(Senior Relationship Manager, University F)</p>
D.2.1: Need to deploy institutional resources	<p>D.2.1:" We have to have conversations with [Partner 1] which kind of go along the lines of, "Well, the university needs to spend more money doing this, that and the other," even though it's their responsibility to recruit to these programmes. They're kind of saying now, "Well, the university needs to up its game, do more marketing. It's not present enough in certain markets. You need to resource the international recruitment team better and raise the profile." All these things, they're sort of saying it's the university needs to do more of this, when it should have been agreed that that's [Partner 1]'s responsibility, full stop." (Functional Specialist, University A)</p>
D.2.2: Pressures to change	<p>D.2.2: "So [Partner 3] say to us: 'oh you know if you don't put anything in you know the other universities will do!' (Senior Relationship Manager, University F)</p>

<p>D.2.3: Request for flexibility</p> <p><i>Positive consequences</i></p> <p>D*.1: Shift in culture -Academic buy-in</p> <p>D*.1.1: Departments engaging with Partner’s staff</p> <p>D*1.2: Departments engaging with Partner’s students</p> <p>D*1.3: Empowered middle managers facilitation</p> <p>D*.1.4: Link tutor roles</p> <p>D*2: Trust:</p> <p>D*2.1: Proactive engagement with partner</p>	<p>D.2.3: “Students who had made the grade came to us, students who were well below the grade didn’t, but there was a borderline region and [Partner 1] would be very persuasive to try and convince us to take the students.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>D*.1: “[Partner 2] did do a lot of sessions on introducing academics to new countries, new opportunities. Here’s some success stories of where some of our partners have been successful. All of that helped, because people started to see where they could get the benefit.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>D*.1.1: “The advantage we had was that very quickly we developed a very good relationship with a few of the teaching staff and I think that was very, very important.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>D*1.2: “Departments do offer to come over, we had our some of our students going on to Sociology - this time, went over for sort of tea and cake with the Head of Sociology over the summer period, just you know little things like that really makes the students feel part of the University, it’s good for their engagement and you know it’s just a nice positive vibe about the place to have that level of interaction with the departments, you know.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University A)</p> <p>D*1.3: “Those decisions aren’t taken at the higher level, those decisions that are taken by schools following discussions or advice from our office. [...] I would probably be involved in those [conversations] in terms of if schools were interested in finding out more about what it involved or if we thought, at any stage, it was worth us saying to a particular school this may be a route we want to consider” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University F)</p> <p>D*.1.4: “Link Tutors was one of them, which is, as the name suggests, it’s a link between the departments and [Partner 1] and they are really critical to the successful partnership.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>D*2: “Because the academic mindset is collegiate and, well, on the one hand collegiate and on the other hand a bit narrow minded. So, what was out at play, at this point, was they’re gonna come to us, so we just wanna embrace them, which was lovely.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University F)</p> <p>D*2.1: “There’s some key champions for the [Partner 4] relationship within the colleges as well and hopefully it will help them to be able to champion it even more as well and it’s just again – and not just for Kaplan but across the board” (Functional Specialist, University C)</p>
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<p>D*2.2: Cross-services collaboration</p>	<p>D*2.2: “the link tutors’ group has allowed us to form relationships in departments where we didn’t previously [...] having a formalised structure where you’ve been able to influence who they are and what role they take has helped us to understand the pressures on the academic community to shape things accordingly.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University H)</p>
<p><u>Overarching Dimension E:</u> <u>External Perception</u></p> <p><i>Negative consequences</i></p> <p>E.1: Damage to reputation with other key partners</p> <p>E.1.1: Agents</p> <p>E.1.2: Sponsors</p> <p>E.2: Poor brand association with students</p> <p>E.2.1: Lack of progression</p>	<p>E.1: “So in the first year, we had a lot of what the hell are you doing? Why is [University G] needing to do this?” (Senior Relationship Manager, University G)</p> <p>E.1.1: “That then completely upsets your relationships with our [...], so really complicated stuff and I think it was new for [Partner 1] as well. I think they also found it complicated and confusing”. (Functional Specialist, University A)</p> <p>E.1.2: “if you fast forward about five or six years from then, there was a period where a lot of the middle Eastern sponsors in particular were very negative about commercial foundation providers and do you remember there was that point where every Vice Chancellor I think received a letter from the Kuwaitis, you know the Emirates – it was all counter signed by about five or six GCC countries basically saying we do not want to work with a university that has a commercial pathway provision if you like so it was almost that external negativity that was sewed into the equation. [...] Saudi Aramco for example, was a classic example that wouldn’t sponsor students at that time into a commercial foundation, so we did have a discussion” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University H)</p> <p>E.2: “Yeah, no, that’s right, ‘cause, to my view, the brand was all Exeter’s brand, INTO didn’t have a brand, right? They were new market entrants, and they were trading on the brands of established universities. We have to be very careful, as universities, to protect the brand. So, if their agents are going out and telling people they’re coming to the University of Exeter and then the vast majority of them are not.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)</p> <p>E.2.1: “That’s the main current concern, is the fact that, obviously, [Partner 4] need our brand to promote the centre, but then when progression’s poor or people hear about people not progressing, that is negative when it comes under our brand umbrella. So yeah, I would say that is a big concern at the moment, yeah, that would probably be the main concern.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University F)</p>

<p>E.2.2: Confusion when in-house provision exists</p> <p><i>Positive consequences</i></p> <p>E*.1: Greater visibility</p> <p>E*.1.1: Agents</p> <p>E*.1.2: Sponsors</p>	<p>E.2.2: “So what we came up with was that they need to be clear in their brochure that there are two routes, [...]. So, they’ve come up with a diagram that they’ve put in their brochure now, which says, gives a student choices, which lead them either to ours or theirs and, basically, we’re quite hot on any new publicity, we’re very hot on what does that look like from the perspective of the student? (Senior Relationship Manager, University F)</p> <p>E*.1: “We went on to now have our own in-country market presence to the point that we actually have more staff in-country than we do here in the office, which is totally the reverse of what we were like when we started.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, university B)</p> <p>E*.1.1: The [Partner 2] partnership has really opened the doors for us in terms of getting into that agent network and we then signed a number of their key agents to begin with, and we’ve seen the numbers really increase”. (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>E*.1.2: “Over time, I’m sure we’ll come to this later, [Partner 1] in particular really excelled in their relationship with sponsors to the point where the tables were probably turned, and it was the university that were seen to be giving the bad service [laugh] so I think they’ve almost become pioneers in excellent service to sponsors now so they really have it turned fully around and credit to them for doing that.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University H).</p>
<p><u>Overarching Dimension F:</u></p> <p><u>Infrastructure</u></p> <p>F.1: Access to services and student statuses</p> <p>F.1.1: Pressure on under-resourced services</p> <p>F.1.2: IT systems to equipped for data sharing</p>	<p>F.1: “Access to our facilities [...] I mean you know, the scale of the requirement to access our laboratories, has maybe slightly surprised us because the numbers have been big.” (Senior Relationship Manager, university I)</p> <p>F.1.1: “We are bringing increased numbers onto the campus - that puts greater demand on central services, be it from a student support side of things, be it from admissions, be it sort of behind-the-scenes registry type activities. International students often require more support than home students do, they need visas, and you know slightly more challenging welfare issues, not necessarily though.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University A)</p> <p>F.1.2: “Now, one of the consequences of this which we hadn’t thought of, was simply that our student record system didn’t allow us easily to gather data on the performance of that group of students, and it probably sounds silly, and indeed it is, but our system didn’t allow us to easily collate the data from the</p>

<p>F.1.3: Poor location or condition of study centres</p>	<p>sub groups that were coming in through the international college and because of that, it meant that we had to collate the data manually, essentially and that was expensive in terms of time and effort.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>F.1.3: “The campus here is a little bit spread out, so it is actually on the way up to accommodation. It’s very convenient for the students. They’re five minutes from accommodation, whereas the campus here might be 10 minutes, but it’s not right on site, so sometimes they do get forgotten about up there. The other thing that I would say is some of our academics will fly to China to recruit students, but they won’t walk up the road where we’ve got hundreds of Chinese students who are sitting ready to be – it’s that kind of challenge as well that we’re dealing with.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p>
<p><u>Overarching Dimension G:</u> <u>Student Experience</u> <i>Negative consequences</i></p> <p>G.1: Student integration when at partner’s programme</p> <p>G.1.1: Isolation on/off campus</p> <p>G.1.2: Not university students</p>	<p>G.1: “What we needed was some way of getting the students in the college, which is just down the road, to feel part of our university and they felt part of the college and they identified with the college, but they didn’t automatically think of themselves as Sheffield students, which is why they came here because that was the natural thing to do, but they would also look elsewhere.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>G.1.1: “When the students are at the foundation college, although it’s on campus, they do not necessarily have access to all university facilities.” (Functional Specialist, University C)</p> <p>G.1.2: “The progression officer would have done lots of initiatives to try and get the students from the centre integrate more with you know the schools and have open days and pizza evenings and all that sort of stuff, but I think that still has to be managed. It doesn’t happen automatically. I guess they are probably seen, maybe this is right, I don’t know, as [Partner 2] students, but obviously we find the closer they can integrate and have a sense of where they might end up, actually the better our progression is, so there’s a sort of virtual circle, but it actually takes effort and management to make that sort of stuff happen” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p>

G.1.3: Wellbeing concerns	G.1.3: "I just have an overall concern that they push the students too quickly to meet the English language standards and therefore do flounder a bit, once they come to the university and that as a professional kind of wellbeing, that's my professional background, that's not nice, , kids, it's hard enough going to a different country, but to then be pushed through." (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)
G.2: Transition to University	G.2: "The Centre students because they've had a year to get used to the area and probably got private accommodation, have opted out of college and that actually isn't good because that means they're not integrated in the area that they should be." (Senior Relationship Manager, University G)
G.2.1: Existing friendship groups	G.2.1: The second issue is that you've got large cohorts of students, in some cases and in other cases one or two students entering into second year where friendship groups have already been made, where students understand the implications and the expectations and then these students are coming in later, they're not settling as well, they're not integrating (Functional Specialist, University C)
G.2.2: Lack of diversity	G.2.2: "I think there were other issues, there were so many Chinese students coming through to particular programmes that they were dominating those programmes, in terms of the sheer numbers. It wasn't a diverse, international population, it was a heavily Chinese and heavily UK population and the two never really kind of mixed it created all sorts of problems there." (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)
<i>Positive consequences</i>	
G*.1: Student support and welfare	G*.1: "So when I came here, there was no international student support office. Now there is and we've got 12 to 15 staff, just to support the students once they're here, so I understood straight away how important it was." (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)
G*.1.1: Provided by partner at higher standard	G*.1.1: "From my perspective our relationship with [Partner 1] is much more than just a recruitment one, it's about providing, you know, absolutely top-quality student support for them as well." (Senior Relationship Manager, University A)

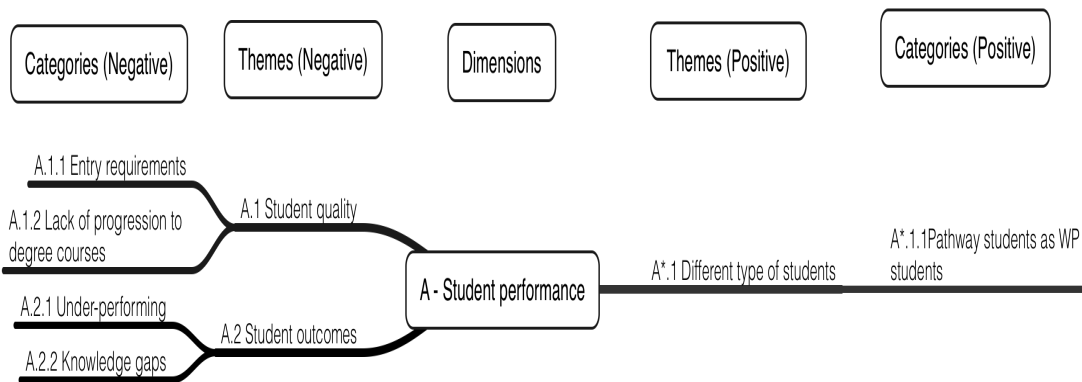


Figure 6: Thematic map – Types of unintended consequences – Student performance dimension

A number of middle managers acknowledged that pathway students come from a different background and may not be completely equal to direct entry students. Whether actual or perceived doubt over the academic ability of international pathway students often casts a shadow over the partnership as a whole. Several middle managers have sought comparative data and attempted to compare student outcomes, but in some cases, it appears that no amount of data can convince academic staff. There are two main reasons for this: the programme’s entry requirements and the students’ poor progression into university programmes.

**Entry requirements** (into the International Pathway programme) were often mentioned and appear to be a bone of contention for all participating universities with their partners. The majority indicated that they have received pressure from their partners to drop entry requirements, especially in the area of the English language. Some have acquiesced to the request to lower the standards due to the commercial imperative to generate revenue, but others have refused to drop their entry requirements and have, as a consequence, missed their targets.

Recruiting an adequate number of students into the International Pathway programme itself is not actually of interest to the universities, and the unintended consequence of having low entry requirements to the pathway programme has actually been that many have seen low numbers of students joining the university’s programmes. This **lack of progression** has been identified by several universities, especially in the initial stages of the partnerships when it had not always been understood that entry requirements to the pathway programme were misaligned with the high entry requirements of the university programmes.



*'I think they would say it's our admissions criteria being too strict. We would say it's probably the quality of students that are initially recruited and maybe, potentially, some of the in-session English, probably; as with these things, it's somewhere between the two' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University F)*

#### **6.2.1.2 Student outcomes**

Pathway student outcomes were often cited as a source of disappointment by participants. They are often found to be underperforming in general or having knowledge gaps. Many of the middle managers interviewed expressed that their academic colleagues perceive international pathway students as **underperforming**; however, very few are actually able to prove this. As mentioned above, middle managers usually advocate for the students and attempt to 'give sense' to the situation to others by explaining that these students come from different backgrounds and are quite unlike direct entry students. **Knowledge gaps**, making the students' transition to university difficult, are also commonly found. These lead to discontent in academic departments and the unintended consequence of adding to the workload of teaching staff without giving them the assurance that the students will eventually succeed in entering their degree programme.

*'What happens if actually [Partner 4] sends us 20 students; 15 of them are brilliant, but five are a complete waste of time. They distort our average, so you've got to break it down to see what the distribution is and then the university says "oh, but this is a lot of work"' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University J)*

However, a minority of participants expressed that one of the unintended consequences of the pathway programmes is that they actually bring diversity to what could otherwise be a fairly homogeneous classroom, and that having different types of students to teach is indeed a positive consequence of the partnership.

#### **6.2.1.3 Different type of students**

Several universities indicated that they have achieved greater diversity by partnering with an IPP. However, this outcome is an exception rather than a rule. One university found that working with a partner has brought them great diversity in terms of the disciplines students wish to study. Another found that working with a partner has brought them great diversity of nationalities. In those two cases, objectively, and based on sector data, the two universities were previously underperforming in their direct recruitment activities; therefore, they entered into

their partnerships with the aim of generally growing their student numbers but with limited expectations, leading to this unintended positive consequence.

At two universities, the middle managers led initiatives to improve perceptions of pathway students and convince various parts of their university that adjustments are needed, in a similar way to those made for UK students from under-represented groups by HEIs in their **Widening Participation** efforts. This has benefited all non-UK students.

*‘We came up with a new marking strategy, which was an inclusive marking strategy, and it does include international, like they think about international when they created it...it’s basically saying unless the marking criteria require you to scrutinise language, you shouldn’t be scrutinising language. So, you shouldn’t mark an essay down for language, if that’s not one of the criteria...So, the issue is have they communicated the message in a way I understand at the level I expect? But not did they use an article, or did they conjugate the verb appropriately, or whatever? ‘Cause some people get so distracted by the grammar that they’re not thinking “have they answered the question?”’ (Senior Relationship Manager, University F).*

## **6.2.2 Commercial**

The second type of unintended consequences can be categorised under a broad ‘commercial’ dimension (figure 7). The partnerships are commercial in nature, which results in both negative and positive consequences for the universities. The negative ones, in particular, are felt to be too uncomfortable to discuss, not only because of the commercial sensitivities surrounding them, but also because of the lack of experience in dealing with business-related activities as described above.

### **6.2.2.1 Friction with institutional core values**

The commercial approach of IPPs often creates friction within universities that view a more practical and business-oriented approach as contrary to their core values. Used to being driven by academic decision-making and putting quality and student experience at the centre of everything they do, it can be difficult to think about ‘bottom line’, resulting in unintended consequences.

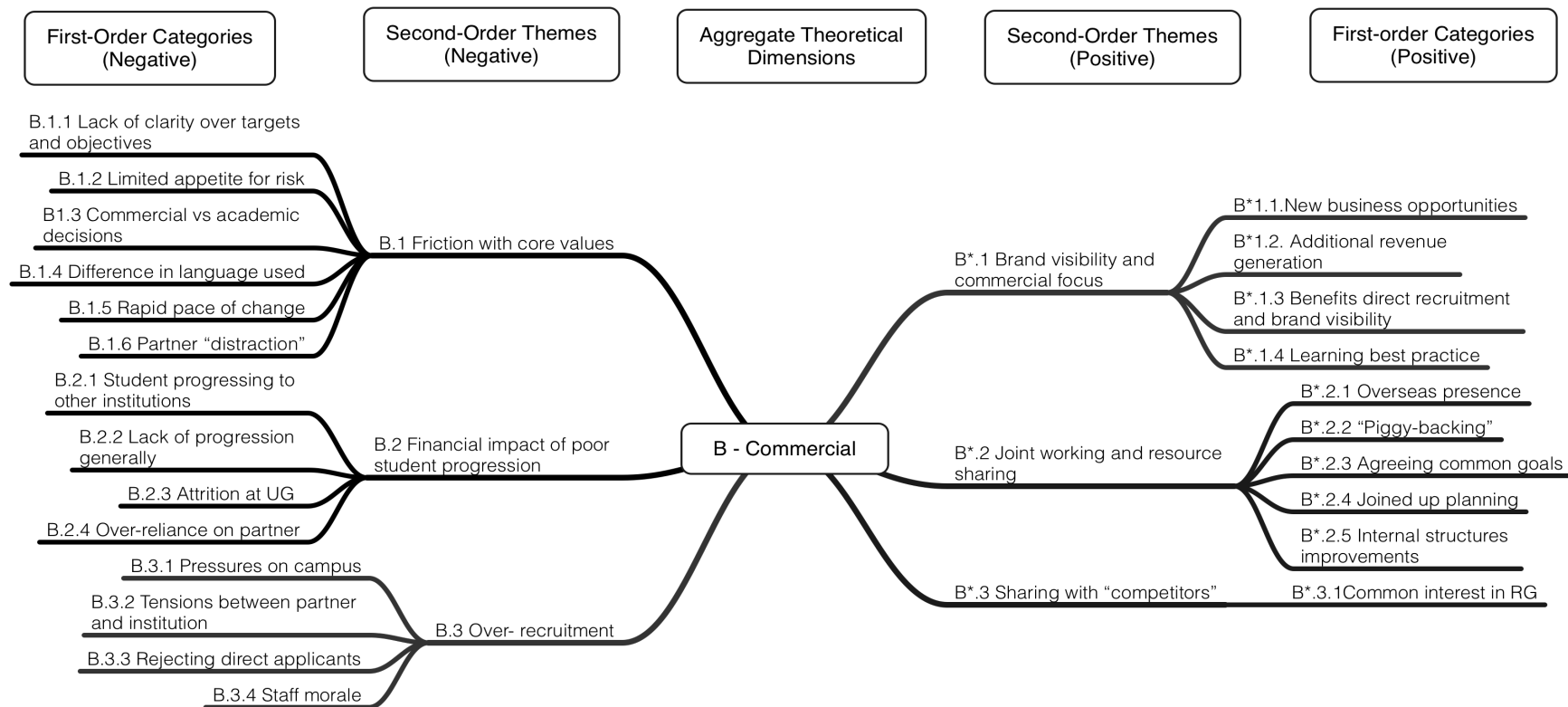


Figure 7: Thematic map – Types of unintended consequences – Commercial dimension

We pointed out earlier that, in general, many of the universities indicated that one of the key factors leading to unintended consequences was the fact that contracts supporting the partnerships lacked details, clear **targets** as well as penalties for poor performance. Additionally, some also indicated that elements of the contract went beyond what had been requested within the procurement process, but this was not understood by top-level management at the time the contract was signed.

One of the key unintended consequence resulting from this lack of commercial awareness is the fact that ‘quality’, although important to all universities, is not the primary outcome of the partnerships – student numbers and revenue are. Because of the lack of detailed targets within the contracts, the majority of partnerships have produced a continuous imbalance between pre-master’s and International Foundation Pathway (IFP) students, leading to issues with long-term financial planning, which will be explored in 6.2.2.2. Because most contracts do not specify how many IFP and pre-master’s students are to be recruited (rather, they have a general revenue-driven target), many find themselves overwhelmed with pre-master’s students of a lower quality than direct entry students that they could recruit more easily.

Only one university had financial penalties included in their contract in case of poor performance. However, when faced with the penalties, the partner was unable to pay them, and the university then decided to amend the contract rather than terminate it completely. This case demonstrates one of the major differences in approach between the partners. RIUs are generally **risk averse** and slow in decision-making. However, one of the consequences of entering into a partnership with a commercial company is that it pushes RIUs into an uncomfortable place where **decisions are driven by business imperatives rather than academic endeavours**, and students become a commodity. Many managers mentioned the clash in the **language used** by each side as well as the **rapid pace of change** taking place within the pathway providers as a shock and something that they had not expected. Many also expressed that they felt that their partner was not giving them the **attention** they deserved and treated them like any other university, which offended them.

*‘What is important is making sure that the students that come through from [Partner 2] can then survive in a Russell Group university, and I have to say that the university’s been very clear on that, which I think is the right thing to do. Not necessarily commercially the right thing to do, but I think in terms of student wellbeing and student progression, it’s the right thing to do to make sure that the students that come through have the right standing and can then survive once they’re into the university’ (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B).*

### 6.2.2.2 Financial impact of poor student progression

The financial impact of poor performance has important consequences from a planning perspective. Poor performance may also have different meanings depending on whether this is viewed from the partners' – who see the bottom line and recruitment to the pathway programmes – and universities' perspective – who take a more nuanced approach and are concerned with student progression into degree courses and their successful completion. Four categories of unintended consequences can be found under this theme.

First, there appear to be significant issues in some partnerships, where, in effect, there are two ways of defining success: successful recruitment to the pathway programmes and successful **student progression** to university programmes. Although data was not always officially shared due to commercial sensitivities, the latter was very disappointing for many, with some seeing less than half of the students progressing on to university programmes.

In addition, some pathway providers operate their own placement system in which students are not always encouraged to progress to their 'home' university (i.e., the university hosting the pathway programme). Rather, they are **placed elsewhere**, either because they do not have the grades to enrol in their 'home' universities or can actually progress to a higher-ranked university should they have over-performed.

*'So, I think that was a key issue. So, we didn't want them to be going around saying, "oh, it doesn't matter if you fail [University E], if you fail this programme, we'll find you a place somewhere else". We thought that should only happen in exceptional circumstances, not coming here as a student' (Senior Relation Manager, University E).*

Third, in addition to poor progression, a number of participants indicated that they found **attrition** was greater than average for those who progressed to university degrees. This is a major issue from a financial planning perspective, which we will explore below, as planning forecasts are usually based on historical rates of attrition and any changes to these will have an impact on the financial sustainability of the university and its individual components.

Finally, one university, which has been in a partnership with a pathway provider for over ten years, found that the success of their pathway programme has meant that the university has not invested in other types of promotional and recruitment channels, leading to an **over-reliance on the partner** as a feeder for undergraduate students, which they consider a major risk.

### 6.2.2.3 Over-recruitment

If poor recruitment or progression is a major issue that leads to a number of negative unintended consequences, the opposite is also problematic and leads to different sorts of unintended consequences. Indeed, if students progress at a rate that makes it difficult for the university to integrate them, or if this means that the majority will not actually complete their degree programme at the risk of deteriorating the brand perception of the university. Because most contracts do not prescribe how many foundation and pre-master's students are to be recruited, many find themselves overwhelmed with the number of pre-master's students. The majority of universities expressed that they were not expecting such an imbalance and that this is certainly not what they wanted. Four categories of unintended consequences can be found under this theme.

First, too many students, either on the pathway programme or progressing to university programmes, can put a lot of **pressure on various parts of campus** from timetabling to staffing; other issues that emerge include class sizes and ill-equipped professional services that are unable to provide the support needed to all students due to the sudden influx in numbers. This leads to poor student experience and therefore also adversely affects the reputation of the university.

Second, overshooting the target (especially exceeding numbers for the pathway programmes) has led several universities to become highly suspicious of the intentions of their partners and question their motivations (i.e., using their brand for revenue generation rather than pursuit of the original aims of the partnership), leading to the development of **tensions** and toxic relations.

Next, in one specific case, a university had to **reject a large number of high-quality direct entry students** due to lack of capacity on campus in order to accommodate the over-recruitment into one of the already popular programmes.

Finally, many expressed that over-recruitment could have a detrimental effect on **staff morale** within international offices. Witnessing the students, they have attracted being rejected in favour of those progressing from the International Pathway programmes can be demotivating and can impact the wider student recruitment process as a whole.

*'There was at the start of one year where the number of students coming into the business programme was higher than ever expected. We got wind of this, and we asked them to close recruitment, which they did, but they waited a month and put a call out for deposits which then made the numbers shoot up even more and they went I think 180 over target so we had to stop direct recruitment immediately and yes, really, really had to work to try and move those students*

*onto different programmes...the recruitment teams were really distraught' (Functional Specialist, University C)*

The clash of cultures may be a difficult one, but it has also brought some unexpected positive consequences for many. Three different themes emerged in this area: brand visibility, collaborative work with the partners and collaboration amongst RG universities.

#### **6.2.2.4 Brand visibility and commercial focus**

The commercial focus brought by the partnership leads to a 'positive' unintended consequence in the form of a wake-up call for some universities that has helped them shift the culture rapidly. We use the word 'positive' carefully here as a move to a more corporate and business-oriented culture may not be seen as a positive change to everyone; however, from the middle managers' perspective, this was a welcome and unexpected change. Four specific areas stood out from the interviews: The possibility of accessing new business opportunities, revenue generation, increased brand visibility benefiting direct recruitment, and gaining best practice.

At universities where the partnerships have been in place for some time, the relationship has sometimes evolved and matured, leading to new, often lucrative, collaborative joint **business opportunities**. These included, for example, expanding the partnership in a mutually beneficial manner, in the area of online programme delivery or satellite campus management in the UK or overseas.

The sudden influx of overseas fee-paying students has also helped faculties and academic schools/departments realise that internationalisation and its associated **revenue** can help them support further developments in their own areas, such as putting cases forward for capital investment or expansion into new research areas.

The marketing and promotional work carried out by IPPs in order to recruit students into pathway programmes has also had a halo affect for some universities, who have seen their direct recruitment at all levels and **brand visibility** increase as a result of the partnerships.

Some members of international offices have also indicated that they were able to share and learn **best practices** in student recruitment and marketing from the IPP, in particular, in the area of agent management as well as other external organisations, such as governmental sponsors.

Generally, universities have had to become savvier about the way they deal with IPPs. The numerous issues and negative unintended consequences mentioned by middle

managers have actually led them to become more aware of the fact that working with a commercial company is quite different and requires a more professional approach.

*'So that might just bring a little bit of a step change in the way we do these things, which is, that's a healthy development, I think. Sometimes you have to have a little bit of a watershed moment to take something to the next level, I think that's – it's not necessarily a bad thing' (Senior Relation Manager, University F).*

#### **6.2.2.5 Joint working and resource sharing**

For many, the concept of IPPs is still new. Some universities have only recently started to accept it, usually due to the facilitation of middle managers in charge to the management of the partnerships, some of whom, as mentioned above, have found that there are quite a few positive aspects of working with their partners. In addition to bringing a shift in a more business-like culture, they have found that working collaboratively can be beneficial. Five types of positive unintended consequences were mentioned when talking about joint working between universities and pathway providers.

The possibility of joint working and resource sharing, leading to greater trust at the operational level, was mentioned several times. We found that joint working leads to a particular division of labour sometimes, with some markets covered entirely by the partner and others managed jointly. For some, applicant referrals are common and ensure continuity of customer experience.

Additionally, universities found what was described as an additional 'perk' or 'freebie' in the fact that their partners have usually an extensive **physical presence overseas** and are happy to let universities use their offices as an outpost in key markets. This helps universities optimise their engagement in countries of strategic importance.

Another key expression that was used several times by participants when describing the positive unintended consequences of the partnerships is '**piggy-backing**', by which is meant using the work or activities carried out by the IPP to their own advantage. Several middle managers mentioned that their university has been able to take advantage of the activities of the partners and benefit from brand association, especially in regions where they are less known.

Although some universities see the partners as competitors, or in an 'us and them' light, the majority are actively trying to embrace the partnerships and identify **common goals** that



leads to joint success. This collaboration is, again, usually facilitated by middle managers who play a pivotal role in helping to shape and reach consensus on the common goals.

Similarly, once common goals are agreed up, ***joined up planning*** often takes place. Planning jointly and sharing information has been a positive unintended consequence for some universities. Because of the nature of the partnerships and the fact that some activities are interweaved between partner and university, it becomes necessary to agree on joint processes and join the dots from both sides of the partnership. One area where joint processes are required is around admissions and visas. At the operational level, a seamless process is necessary to ensure a positive applicant experience that leads to students deciding to join a specific pathway programme and university. At the academic level, as we will explore later, many have learned to work with partners in developing and monitoring common learning and teaching processes. At the strategic level, ensuring alignment and complementarity in recruitment strategies are also seen as essential.

Finally, several participants stated that working with pathway providers has led to the ***improvement of their internal structures***; this is particularly the case within international offices but has also started to take place in other areas, such as student support. Instead of considering the partnership as an entirely separate activity, coming from the whim of top-level managers, some middle managers have completely embraced them and embedded them into their structure and work practices.

*'I think having our eyes open to a different way of working is useful as well in terms of shaping our own strategy and how we go about understanding what you're competing against. So, it has been positive from that perspective' (Functional Specialist, University C).*

#### **6.2.2.6 Sharing with 'competitors'**

Finally, the novelty of working with IPPs has ***brought the RG universities who work with them together*** as small clusters that use each other as sounding boards. This positive consequence comes from a negative unintended consequence of the partnership (the pressure that partners put on universities to change to be more competitive with each other).

*'Yeah, I remember [a middle manager] called it the counterbalance club and what he meant by that was that there were these discreet channels where we would try to form a common position with some universities that had the same kind of problems' (Senior Relationship Manager, University E).*

### 6.2.3 Educational

The third type of unintended consequences can be categorised under an ‘educational’ dimension (figure 8). The uniqueness of pathway programme partnerships is that unlike any other type of products that universities may usually purchase (furniture, transport and food), they are educational endeavours by nature and require, at a minimum, an interface with academic departments and, in some cases, full integration. This unusual combination results in both negative and positive consequences. Three themes emerged from the interviews – two negative unintended consequences and a positive one. These themes will be explored below and presented in figure 8.

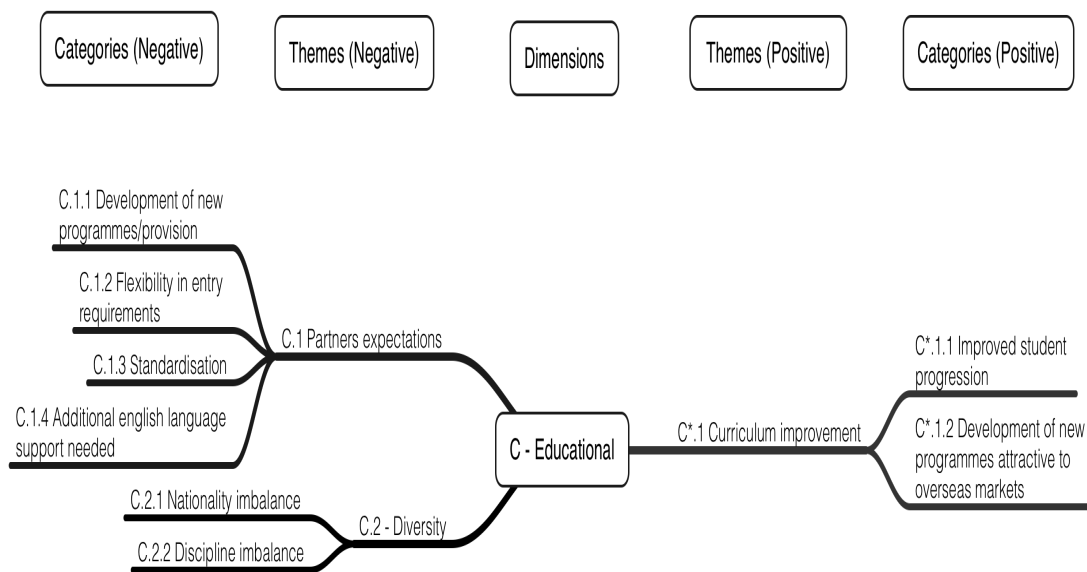


Figure 8: Thematic map – Types of unintended consequences – Educational dimension

#### 6.2.3.1 Partners’ expectations

The need for collaboration with the partners is often unexpected; in the initial stages of the partnerships, universities and academic departments were taken aback by what has been described as ‘demands’ from their partners. These demands can be divided into four main categories.

IPPs have been actively suggesting to universities that they should **develop new programmes** that would be attractive to overseas students. This suggestion has been received negatively by academic staff, in particular, who see this type of attitude as encroaching on their area of work (and the all-important academic freedom). Although these negative attitudes are changing, RIUs’ academic programmes are often aligned with a specific department’s set of

research interests rather than with market demands. Therefore, such suggestions by IPPs are typically met with a significant amount of pushback from academic departments.

Furthermore, IPPs have been seen to 'interfere' and encourage universities to adopt lower **entry requirements** in order to be able to place more students in certain courses. This push relates to the lack of student progression into degree programmes, which can be seen from two different angles: entry requirements for the pathway programme are too low to enable students to progress successfully at the partner university, or entry requirements to university programmes are too high.

Several participants also mentioned that, unexpectedly, once the partnership started to mature, their pathway provider attempted to **standardise** their offering to align it with their wider portfolio. This move often comes as a surprise, as most universities have shown that during their procurement process, they were extremely keen to identify a partner that could offer a bespoke solution and adapt their pathway programme that would suit the university's programmes. This change of attitude, in combination with the IPPs' push for new programme development and changes in entry requirements, have led universities to become dissatisfied with their partner and believe that they are not receiving the level of service they are entitled to.

Finally, most universities identified that once a student joins the university programme, they still require additional **English language support**. This is because they are admitted to the pathway centres with a low level of English to start. The need to provide English language support seems to be completely unexpected and has become a source of discontent for several universities.

*'They pushed quite hard, which was another one of the problems... "Domestic foundation year, can we do that?" "Well, actually, we already do bits of that at [University J]". Also "International Year 1, can we do that please?" Again, they presented cases around engineering. I said, "Don't present engineering; they won't do it". That's one of our premium products. They keep throwing in new stuff' (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)*

### **6.2.3.2 Diversity**

The second theme identified as a negative unintended consequence of the partnerships in the area of education and teaching relates to what is often described as 'imbalances'. Academic departments expressed their dissatisfaction over this issue to middle managers, in particular, with regards to nationality and discipline imbalances.

**Nationality imbalance** was mentioned by the majority of the participants as a source of deep resentment. IPPs appear to have suggested, even promised, that the students would be recruited from a vast number of countries. In reality, the majority of students who are recruited to the programmes are from China. Indeed, some participants mentioned that up to 90% of their pathway students were from China, and that this overrepresentation was problematic in the classroom once they progressed to the university.

Similarly, imbalances are also found at the **discipline** level, with the more popular courses becoming overwhelmed with students and those struggling to recruit seeing limited benefits from the partnership.

*'We wanted a much more diversified income stream, we wanted to make sure that they weren't recruiting solely from China, they recruited more widely, and they weren't solely recruiting for business; so that's the kind of issue. As the years went on, those kinds of discussions became more and more vexed about how we were going to try and solve that' (Senior Relationship Manager, University E).*

### 6.2.3.3 Curriculum improvement

One positive unintended consequence of these partnerships in the education and teaching area with the partnership is the improvements to the curriculum in order to make programmes more attractive to international students. When there is effective collaboration between the universities' academic departments and the pathway providers' teaching staff, improvements were noticed on both sides.

Collaboration has led to changes in the pathway programme to ensure that what is taught to students would ensure progression to the university programme, addressing, for example, the knowledge gaps identified above as an issue and helping students become **better equipped to progress** into university programmes.

Similarly, those who have managed to have open and trusting relations with their IPPs have learned lessons from them and followed their advice. This collaboration has led to **amendments of existing degree programmes and the development of new ones** to ensure that specific departments have are attractive to overseas students. Developing new programmes is essential to attracting larger numbers of overseas students, and pathway partners have helped reinforce a message that some middle managers have had tried to disseminate for some time.

*'One of the consequences, and I know it's an unintended consequence, one of the unintended consequences is we discovered with our offer, the degrees and the titles that we had were not*

*persuasive. Now, this actually was recognised by the international office here, but I have to say we, and I guess I, didn't do enough about it with them. Starting with the new provider gave us a fresh impetus, and...with [Partner 4] what we have done is that we have set up now quite a successful pre-master's course, which we didn't have before, for science and a consequence of that is that we're actually setting up more MScs. So, we've got more MScs now, and we've got a pre-master's course and therefore, we're getting a lot more students in [laugh]. So, it's obvious, isn't it?' (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)*

### 6.2.4 Internal culture

The fourth type of unintended consequence can be categorised under an 'internal culture' dimension (figure 9). Bringing an external party to organisations such as universities can be a challenge. IPPs, which need to interact closely with a number of areas with their partner university, can bring both positive and negative unintended consequences. Four themes emerged from the interviews, including two negative unintended consequences and two positive ones. We will explore them below.

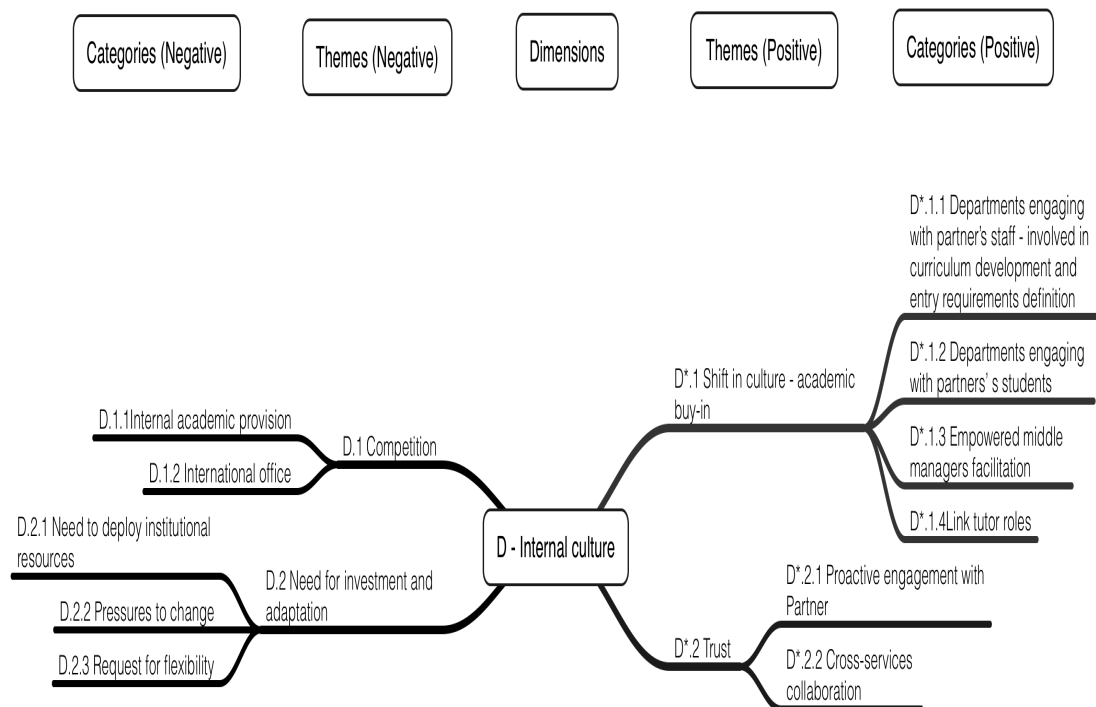


Figure 9: Thematic map – Types of unintended consequences – Internal culture dimension

#### 6.2.4.1 Competition

The introduction of a new international pathway partnership has, in some universities, placed certain areas of the university in direct competition with the pathway provider. This is

especially noticeable when universities have retained internal provisions that are similar to what the IPP offers (such as a foundation or pre-master's programme) or within international offices.

Three universities have retained an ***internally delivered international pathway provision*** while also developing a partnership with an IPP. Two have found themselves in direct competition with the IPPs and acknowledge that this is problematic. The third one has managed to avoid this situation by ensuring that the IPP would focus on a different discipline than what is already being delivered by the university. The two universities with pathways in direct competition with their partners find it difficult to articulate the difference between the two offerings, and those in charge of delivering and promoting the internally delivered programme feel as if they have been placed in an unfair position, which appears to be an unintended consequence or oversight from those who initially developed the partnership rather than a deliberate decision to ostracise those involved in the internal provision.

The university that has ensured a differentiation between internal and partner provisions also agreed that the partner would carry out recruitment and promotional duties on their behalf, which removes some of the issues of duplication. This approach, however, created tensions with the university's international office. A number of participants from ***international offices*** indicated that they consider themselves in direct competition with the IPPs, especially in their fight for institutional resources. This will be explored later when discussing the impact of the unintended consequences on stakeholders.

*'Obviously, we were marketing the [Partner 2] provision and recruiting to it indirectly; so you promote it and then refer them off to the relevant contacts at INTO, but we would say... "Can I actually get them on our internal foundation programme?"' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University D).*

#### **6.2.4.2 Need for investment and adaptation**

The ***need to deploy institutional resources***, once the partnership is being implemented or is already established, seems to have come as a surprise to some universities. Middle managers shared that many of their colleagues did not understand that they, too, needed to participate in the partnership and that they have not just bought a ready-made solution. Managing the partnerships requires extensive involvement in order to ensure success as the partner requires guidance but also will suggest changes to be implemented, as mentioned above. This two-way relationship was not always understood and was mentioned as a negative unintended consequence of the partnership.

In addition to the need to adapt and develop new ‘products’, many were also surprised that the partnerships came with hidden costs, and that additional financial investment would be required as the partnership developed. Managing the relationship with the partner also takes an extensive amount of time, an unintended consequence that top-level management and academic communities had not foreseen.

One of the indirect, unintended consequence of the partnerships stems from the IPPs’ expectation that universities will be reactive and adapt in order to succeed. As mentioned earlier, ***pressure to change and be flexible*** is often perceived negatively by universities. This pressure is not only applied in the education and teaching domain, but in many other areas; it is usually explained as a way for universities to catch up or act similarly to their competitors in an attempt to gain market share or remain competitive in a tough environment. ‘Competitors are already doing it’ is an expression that was mentioned by several middle managers as a tactic used by pathway providers to suggest changes in a variety of areas. One frequently mentioned type of pressure was a push to pay higher commissions to agents, for example.

Similarly, data collected during the interviews showed that the many requests for flexibility in various areas from the IPPs has led to changes in ways of working. For example, IPPs are less risk averse than RIUs and have been known to interpret immigration law in a more flexible way. Therefore, they have put pressure on their university partners to change their views in some areas, which has led to both friction but also effective improvements.

*‘It is a lot of work for the return; I think [University F] does pretty well. I think we’re the second, third largest recruiter in terms of volume. It’s very labour intensive, but it does provide a decent return... I suspect people outside the marketing communities don’t understand quite how much work goes into maintaining those relationships because, of course, it’s not just about the marketing, but also about the input into the – having an influence in the academic side of things...More broadly in the university, people don’t understand the amount of work that goes into this!’ (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University F).*

#### **6.2.4.3 Shift in culture – Academic buy-in**

We found that partnering with a pathway provider has, in some cases, helped shift internal culture, especially within academic departments. The majority of universities (seven) studied reported that the partnership has enabled middle managers to work more closely with the academic community. This is due to the fact that academic buy-in is required in order to make the partnership a success. This unanticipated phenomenon is noticeable in four different ways.

In several cases, some **academics are proactively engaged with the IPPs** and promote the partners' programme as one that belongs to the university. These 'pioneers', so to speak, are essential to developing broader academic buy-in as the partnership develops and become more prominent on campus. Staff employed by the pathway providers have also attempted to engage with academics directly, which has proven successful in ensuring buy-in for several partnerships.

Beyond these individual 'pioneers', the next stage of involvement is when whole departments at some universities have shown commitment to the partnership and, in particular, to developing **links with students** in the pathway programmes in order to ensure progression into their discipline rather than to another department or another university.

The role of the link tutor is important to ensuring buy-in from academic departments. **Link tutors** are academic staff appointed by the universities and typically involved in curriculum development to ensure the success of the pathway programme; they are often good advocates for the partnership and perceive the IPP in a positive light. These new boundary-spanning academic functions, uniquely found in IPP partnerships, act as a bridge between the university and the partner in a similar way to how middle managers coordinate the partnership. In fact, link tutors usually frequently interact with the middle managers and therefore can help empower them. Giving academic departments ownership of progression requirements has led, in some cases, to greater buy-in, an understanding of the imperatives of the partnerships and, as a consequence, greater flexibility in entry requirements.

Finally, it does appear that for some, the partnership has **empowered middle managers ability to facilitate and influence development**. The role of the middle managers is crucial to securing academic buy-in by suggesting to department that they should engage with the partner to enable the success of the partnership. Most meet regularly with senior academics to discuss issues and progress. Many also have direct contact with the link tutors, providing them with comprehensive oversight of the partnership and influence over its developments.

*'The link tutors' group has allowed us to form relationships in departments where we didn't previously...They trust you; you've got an in, you've got a friendly relationship and...having a formalised structure where you've been able to influence who they are and what role they take has helped us to understand the pressures on the academic community to shape things accordingly' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University H).*

#### **6.2.4.4 Trust**



It is important for the IPPs to build trust with academic staff, and some have done this well, although it has taken several years to achieve. In some cases, departments have embraced the partnership and ***proactively approached the partners*** (with middle managers often acting a conduit) to seek collaboration. These are usually departments that underperform in overseas student recruitment and see the potential financial benefits of this partnership.

Beyond the engagement of academic departments, it appears that another positive unintended consequence is the breaking down of silos on campus to foster ***cross-services collaboration***. Having an IPP on campus sends a clear message to faculties that internationalisation and international students are priorities. Because of the multifaceted nature of large-scale partnerships with IPPs, various parts of universities that would not usually work together end up having to collaborate. For example, due to the need for new programmes to be attractive to international students, academic units collaborate with international marketing functions of the university in order to ensure success. Frequently, middle managers based in international offices are able to cross boundaries and facilitate activities that would normally be considered outside their purview.

*'So, sometimes my role is sort of what I should be doing, which is around recruitment and management working out how we work with them in market. Sometimes my role is actually about warning senior colleagues about what may come because I've been through a partnership with another provider in a different university; so sometimes, I'm sort of the voice of doom and gloom and just saying maybe we should ask them to do this, maybe we should ask them to do that. Sometimes I'm actually a fixer for [Partner 4] because sometimes they're coming up against blockages in areas of the university who simply aren't internationally minded, who have never dealt with a partnership like this, so I'm having to fix things ... So, my role spans this whole range' (Senior Relationship Manager, University G).*

#### **6.2.4.5 External perception**

The fifth type of unintended consequence falls under the category of 'external perception' (figure 10). Reputation and brand image are of the utmost importance to RIUs. Pathway programmes were not always seen as something that high-profile universities should be associated with. Although this perception is changing, a certain amount of stigma remains, and two negative unintended consequences were identified under this category. Many participants also acknowledged that one of the positive unintended consequence of the

partnerships is that it had made their university more visible to agents and governmental sponsors, in particular.

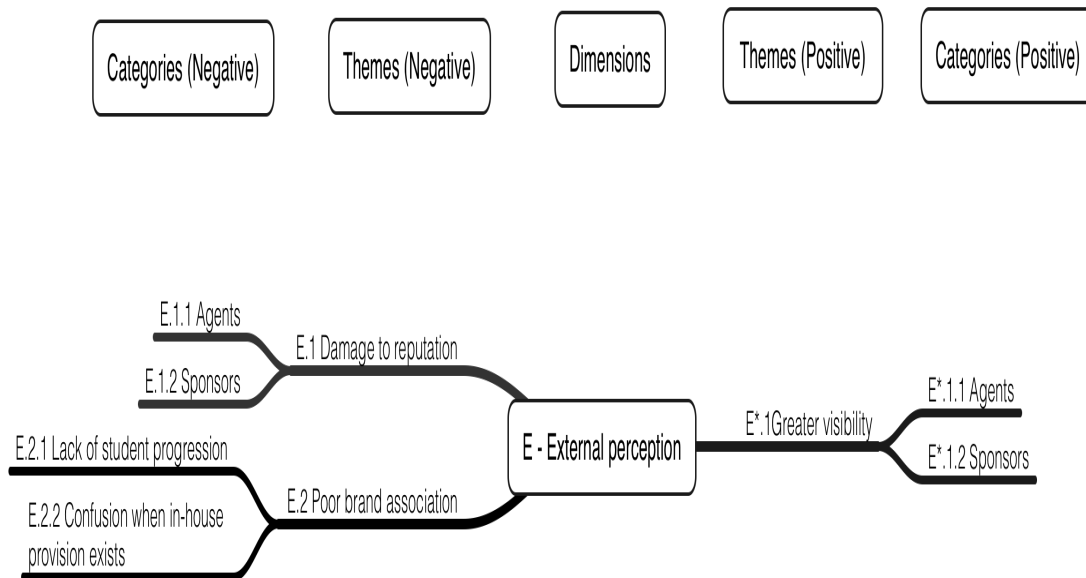


Figure 10: Thematic map – Types of unintended consequences – External perception dimension

#### 6.2.4.6 Damage to reputation with other key partners

Two types of partners are valuable to universities when working to attract overseas students: agents and governmental sponsors. **Agents** are useful allies when they are managed well and are kept ‘happy’, but they can also cause significant difficulties if they become ‘unhappy’ with certain universities. The definition of unhappy, as explored with the participants, can be quite broad, but it appears that at least in the early stages of the partnerships, many agents working with the universities involved became ‘unhappy’ for one reason or another. This source of dissatisfaction is often rooted in process changes or the use of different systems when dealing with the university and the IPP. This lack of transparency leads to frustration, especially for those universities that have decided to retain their own independent pathway provisions while also working with a pathway provider. This issue is similar to those faced by international office staff when articulating the changes to various markets, but the main difference is that a dissatisfied agent can decide to direct students to a university that is ‘easy’ to work with.

*‘The commission structure and how it would work with the agents – because that whole thing is very confusing to the agents. They’re just thinking what? I’m recruiting for the [University A] master’s or undergraduate programmes; what’s this about English language pre-sessional? Do I route applications via [Partner 1] instead of direct to the university? It was very confusing...then*

*that completely upsets your relationships with your agents because you're paying a university commission rate, so really complicated stuff, and I think it was new for [Partner 1] as well. I think they also found it complicated and confusing, and for me that should just never have been in the contract' (Functional Specialist, University A).*

Similarly, **governmental sponsors** can be demanding but are an important source of income for both universities and IPPs. This is especially the case for RIUs, as many sponsors only place students at highly ranked universities. In the early years, when IPPs were not well-known to sponsors, participants reported that many refused to work with them and the universities they were associated with. This was a cause of deep concern as sponsors fund students at all levels, not just those in pathway programmes, which deprives the universities of income that they would have previously been relying on. This situation has changed drastically over the years, and some governmental sponsors now favour IPPs for the bespoke level of teaching they provide to students, their extreme flexibility and their ability to provide differential treatment for sponsored students, which many RIUs are not able to offer. One university shared their experience of losing a sponsor relationship when their IPP struck an exclusive deal with a key overseas governmental agency, for the reasons listed above.

#### **6.2.4.7 Poor brand association with students**

One of the indirect consequences of the partnerships is the impact on their brand and its perception by potential applicants and their parents (or those influencing students' decision-making). Participants expressed worries about how their **university brand** presented in the market and how they are prioritised when their pathway provider also works with competitor universities. Unlike the majority, one university found that they did not seem to benefit from their partnership in term of increased visibility in smaller markets and wondered whether their pathway partners were prioritising some of their competitors instead.

We found two unintended consequences in this area, the most impactful of which is linked to the significant number of **students who do not progress** to their intended university programme. For the majority of those interviewed, this is a significant issue. If students in their pathway centre do not progress to the university, this can more widely damage their reputation on the market, especially with their applicant pool, as the university will appear to have misled students who never had a chance to join their chosen programme in the first place.

*'My concern was that really what we were, I suppose mis-selling's too strong a word, but I could easily see a student being told that they can go to a top ten RG university by an agent and yet the agent knew, in their heart of hearts, they weren't going to do it. Nothing worse than students*

*not fulfilling their dreams, right? If the progression rate is at 56%, nearly one in two students are not coming into this programme; has anyone asked the students how they feel?’ (Senior manager, University E).*

Similar to the confusion caused when an independent university pathway provision exists in parallel to that of the IPP’s, participants expressed concerns around the confusion amongst applicants who appear to be unable to differentiate between the two offers (this is often because IPPs are allowed to use the university brand in their promotional activities), leading some to choose a university clearly signposts them to what they need.

#### **6.2.4.8 Greater visibility**

Despite the above negative consequences, which are usually found when the partnerships are first initiated, the majority of participants expressed that working with IPPs has had a positive effect on their recruitment practices and provided them with greater visibility in key markets.

According to some of the interviewees, one of the unanticipated benefits of working with an IPP is that it has enabled them to expand their **agents’ network**, thereby reducing their reliance on their current set of agents and increasing their direct recruitment into university programmes.

*‘The importance has been huge for us in terms of before the signing off of the partnership...we didn’t really have much interaction with the agents, to be honest. The [Partner 2] partnership has really opened the doors for us in terms of getting into that agent network, and we then signed a number of their key agents to begin with, and we’ve seen the numbers really increase. Not only through the centre, but from direct, and just from having more of that presence in-country’ (Mid-level manager, University B).*

Similarly, as time went on and, as indicated above, **governmental sponsors** were increasingly used for pathway providers, many middle managers have acknowledged that working with IPPs has enabled their university to extend their sponsorship network at all levels of studies.

#### **6.2.5 Infrastructure**

The sixth type of unintended consequence falls under the category of the university’s ‘infrastructure’ (figure 11). This is the only category where all unintended consequences were negative and related to issues regarding access to services and the status of students studying in pathway programmes.

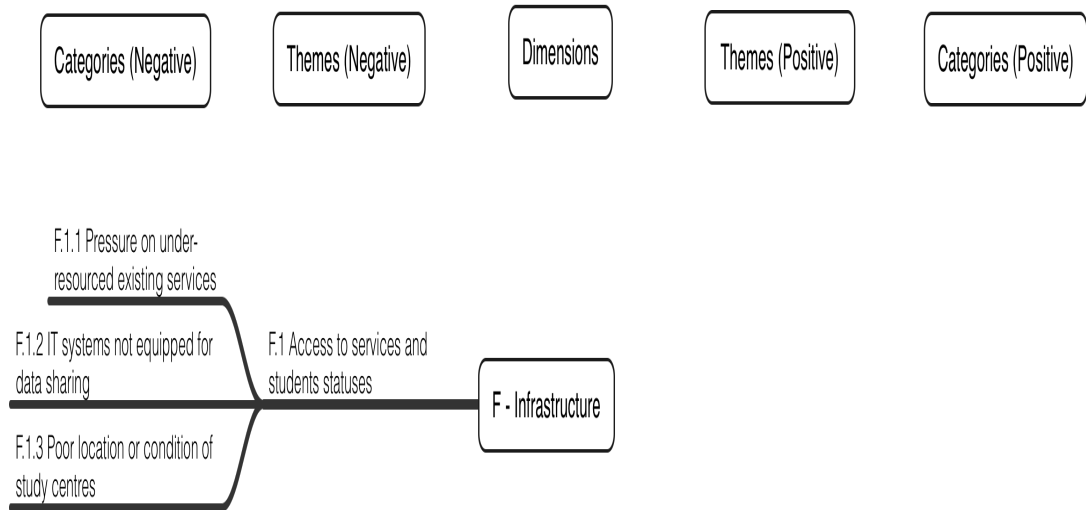


Figure 11: Thematic map – Types of unintended consequences – Infrastructure dimension

#### 6.2.5.1 Access to services and student statuses

From the interviews, it became clear that although students in pathway programmes are taught on campus, often in university-owned facilities, they do not have equal status to university-enrolled students when it comes to practical matters of infrastructure. University systems are not always able to handle the operational requirements of working with an external partner, especially when pathway students do not have full student status; In effect, they are studying in a programme that is at the ‘pre-university’ level and does not exist as far as various systems are concerned. This lack of formal status for students studying at embedded colleges is a major issue. The infrastructure and wider support services aspect of the partnership is commonly forgotten at the time of partnership development and only identified once students arrive on campus, which is often too late. Three categories of unintended consequences fall under this theme.

Because of lack of forward planning, effective resource allocation and integration, pathway students do not always have access to the same services as other students. This may be because these services were not explicitly required at the time of contract negotiation, because top-level staff often assume that services will simply be absorbed into the additional workload (we have found this to be a general impression held in most universities, one that is quite far

from the reality of already **under-resourced services** that exist), or because systems are not equipped to handle ‘external’ users. All universities involved in the studies reported that their **IT systems were not equipped for data sharing**.

*‘When the students are at the foundation college, although it’s on campus, they do not necessarily have access to all university facilities. So, there’d be elements of negotiating SLAs with the university services round about that. So, this might be, for example, initially they didn’t have access to counselling services that [University C] students would have, so it’s round about that sort of thing’. (Functional Specialist, University C).*

Finally, the **poor location** or condition of study centres, which was found in most cases, contribute to the impression that the pathway students are, from an infrastructure perspective, an afterthought. Most participants have described that the location of the pathway study centre is inadequate (i.e., a building that no one wanted on campus or in a remote location), leading to students having a poor experience, feeling undervalued and isolated, as we will explore in the next section.

### 6.2.6 Student experience

The seventh type of unintended consequence falls under the category of ‘student experience’ (figure 12).

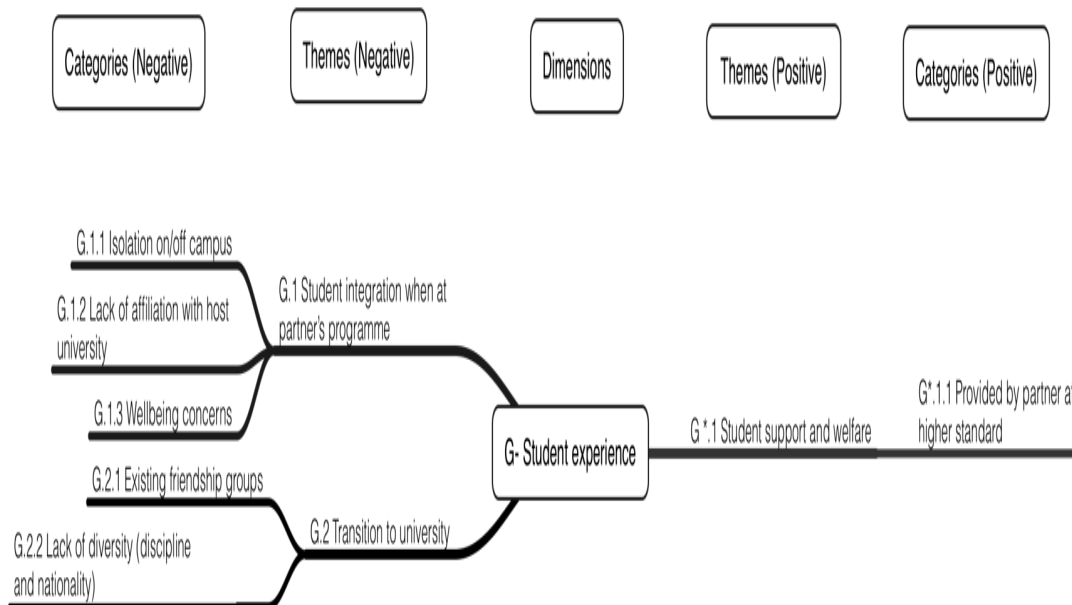


Figure 12: Thematic map – Types of unintended consequences – Student experience dimension

One positive and two negative consequences were identified in this area. The negative consequences are mostly about students’ difficulties integrating into university life, both while

studying in the pathway programmes and once joining the university's degree programme. The positive unexpected impact on the partnership is in the area of student welfare and support provisions from the pathway providers, which is seen as being of high quality in many cases; we also found that the best practices gained from the IPPs or the necessities triggered by the growth in student numbers coming from the International Pathway programme has led some universities to improve their own services.

#### **6.2.6.1 Student integration in the partner's programme**

Lack of student integration within campus life was identified as one of the indirect negative unintended circumstances of partnerships with IPPs.

As mentioned in the previous section, pathway study centres are often located in less desirable locations on campus due to a lack of forward planning at the onset of the partnerships, leading to a feeling of *isolation and a lack of affiliation* with the host university. In one extreme case, the partners' centre is located on a small satellite campus, about 30 miles from the host university, which is now solely used by the partner, with no other university students in attendance. International pathway students are also accommodated on the same campus and rarely visit their host university, leading to difficulties in creating a sense of belonging.

In addition, at two specific universities, concerns over *students' welfare* were raised. These concerns were in response to the way that students were coached to pass language exams, requiring intensive support and repetitive testing until they finally manage to obtain the score needed to progress to their chosen course.

*'I just have an overall concern that they push the students too quickly to meet the English language standards and therefore do flounder a bit, once they come to the university and that as a professional kind of wellbeing, that's my professional background, that's not nice, kids, it's hard enough going to a different country, but to then be pushed through... I think for someone coming through their standard of English is so low, and you just think, 'How did you pass an exam?' and I think it could be the coaching, it could be the kind of pressure that [Partner 2] are under to get them through. They are meeting the standards, but it's such an intense way of teaching, ...; they are passing their exams entry standards because we have quality controls in place to do it, but there's just a phenomenal amount that fail and then pass on resit and you just think, how did you improve that much in four weeks?' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B).*

#### **6.2.6.2 Student integration following transition to the university**

Once enrolled at the university, international pathway students often require additional support and face integration issues. Pathway centres were described as creating a protected environment, where even in some cases students are woken up in the morning to go to courses and are constantly surrounded by academic or professional services staff. Transition to university, and the sudden independence that this new environment brings, is therefore not always easy for a significant proportion of students.

One of the key barriers to integration is the fact that students have already spent a year together, and many are working towards similar degrees (usually business or engineering). Once at the university, **existing friendship groups** are therefore already well-established, and it was found they do not always integrate with the wider cohort.

*'The [Partner 4] students because they've had a year to get used to the area and probably got private accommodation, have opted out of college and that actually isn't good because that means they're not integrated in the area that they should be...They chose not to take it, and we think it's 'cause they just already know and they've got friends and they get a house and it's probably cheaper than college but they're missing that aspect of support as well' (Senior manager, University G).*

**Lack of diversity**, at both the national and discipline level, is also a key unintended consequence for RIUs, leading to significant impact on internal stakeholders and the university itself, which we will be discussing in the next section. The lack of diversity is evident at the discipline level, and the concentration of students of the same nationality (usually Chinese) in a small number of departments impacts the student experience. This was raised as a significant concern by the participants, with some reporting up to 85–90% of their pathway intake coming from China.

### **6.2.6.3 Student support and welfare**

In some universities, having an IPP in place has led to strong improvements in the area of international student support and welfare, either **provided directly by the partner** or due to the improved services put in place by the university. In some cases, the pathway provider is the one responsible for providing welfare support, which was recognised as a significant improvement. Those who have this system in place have admitted that their university would not be able to provide support at the same level. In other cases, the university has put measures in place to improve the international student experience as a consequence of the partnership, benefiting all international students and sometimes also UK students from a more diverse or widening participation background.



*'I think people don't often recognise the significant amount of added value that we as a department provide to our students on the welfare front; you know, I have a team of around eight people whose sole purpose is to look after the welfare of our students. Now, as it happens, their salary is paid by [Partner 1]...quite frankly that's pretty immaterial really in terms of the service they provide for students; so no, from my perspective our relationship with [Partner 1] is much more than just a recruitment one. It's about providing you know absolutely top-quality student support for them as well' (Senior Relationship Manager, University A).*

### 6.2.7 Partners' perspective

As demonstrated above, the middle managers involved in partnerships with IPPs identified a wide variety of types of unintended consequences. We will cross-reference those findings below with the views of the four partners involved in the cases studied in this research project. Twelve categories of factors were identified from the interviews conducted with the representatives of the IPPs. When presented with the initial findings from our interviews with middle managers from the RUIs, they mostly agreed that these reflected their experience too, although they sometimes saw the various dimensions, themes and categories from different perspective. The pathway providers identified six themes of high importance. These are summarised in Figure 13. Representative data can also be found in Table 7 below. These echo closely some of the findings described in the above section.

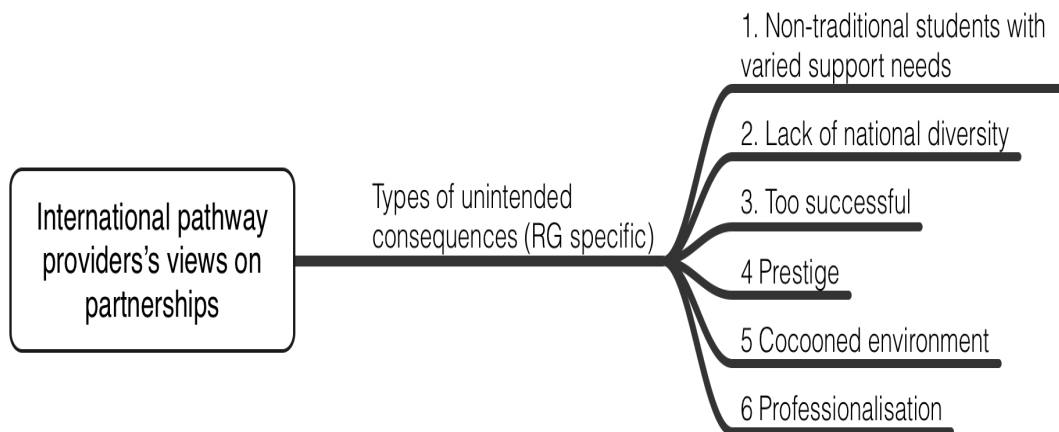


Figure 13: Thematic map -Types of unintended consequences (Partners' perspective)

Table 7: International Pathway providers' view (Types of unintended consequences) - Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data

Dimensions, themes and categories	Representative data
<p><u>Overarching Dimension: Factors leading to unintended consequences</u></p> <p>A.1 Infrastructure and environment</p> <p>A.2 Level of institutional commercial awareness</p> <p>A.3 Expectations regarding types of students</p> <p>A.4 Willingness to invest</p> <p>A.5 Organisational structure</p> <p>A.6 Decision making structures</p>	<p>A.1: "It's not just about the teaching, it's the whole learning environment, it's the atmosphere on campus. [...]. There are so many elements to this. It's so complex that when you talk to people in terms of things which are complex, they close down. (Senior Relationship Manager, Partner 1)</p> <p>A.2: "I still feel that, as you move higher up in universities, you are more focused on academia, maybe on research. I don't believe that happens in private providers. You don't move up to focus on research, [...], you move up for the money. (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 2)</p> <p>A.3: "The students, in an ideal world, get it and they rush off to the library to do all the research and then produce a paper. But you know, international students from a lot of countries just aren't like that, they expect a very different relationship with their teachers. In fact, their teachers become surrogate parents. (Senior Relationship Manager, Partner 1)</p> <p>A.4: "The investment into their recruitment activities in terms of people was quite... it was pretty... what's the word, pretty Spartan" (Senior Relationship Manager, Partner 1)</p> <p>A.5: "This is a long-term strategic partnership which involves the universities creating structures within their organisation to partner with a private provider" (Senior Relationship Manager, Partner 1)</p>

<p>A.7 Pathway providers changes in priorities</p>	<p>A.6: “Universities move at a glacial pace and it’s because things go through very rigorous procedures and checking and authorising and discussing. Things at private providers move much quicker. (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 2)</p> <p>A.7: “There are more markets than just the UK” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, partner 3)</p>
<p>A.8 Clarity of partnerships aims</p>	<p>A.8: “The Heads of Centres were under immense pressure to get more students, not necessarily for them to progress, but to at least have more students” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 2)</p>
<p>A.9 Pre-existing internal perception</p>	<p>A.9:” I think there is a bit of misconception of what [Partner 3] really is...” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 3)</p>
<p>A.10 Students as customers</p>	<p>A.10: “We need to grow the university network because our customers – the students- are saying that [...] the choice is too limited in comparison to everyone else”. (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 3).</p>
<p>A.11 Institutional experience and staff competence</p>	<p>A.11: “You know the turnaround with international offices is pretty high, so what’s happening is that some universities now have international offices with not even one single person have has ever worked with [Partner 3]” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 3)</p>
<p>A.12 Scrutiny and lack of trust</p>	<p>A.12: “This was a very new arrangement [...] they kept a very very close eye on us. We had to be meticulous in what we were doing and why we were doing it. (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 2)</p>

### **6.2.7.1 Non-traditional students with varied support needs**

The general consensus from all four of the IPP representatives is that their role is to provide opportunities to students who do not have the traditional profile needed to access HE at RG universities. However, these students require different types of support that the universities are not always able to provide. The view from those interviewed is that this should not come as a surprise to universities, but they do acknowledge that the 'type' of students is not often discussed in contract negotiations and that RIUs are usually concerned about nationality and disciplinary diversity and rarely, during the initial stages, query the background of the students. This lack of focus in contract negotiations was especially the case in early partnerships, but this attitude is now changing with new partnerships that pay special attention to entry requirements, leading to difficulties in achieving nationality and disciplinary diversification.

*'The students in an ideal world get it, and they rush off to the library to do all the research and then produce a paper. I said to our partners, but you know, international students from a lot of countries just aren't like that; they expect a very different relationship with their teachers. In fact, their teachers become surrogate parents...That's an expectation. But, of course, one of the...parts of my job...was to try and align the expectations of students and parents with the kind of experience that they would actually have once they got into a UK university; from my own experience and obviously from others we're talking about, is that you're not going to have the same kind of relationship with your teacher' (Partner 2).*

All IPP representatives acknowledged that because of their varied backgrounds, it is indeed true that a significant proportion of students do not progress to RIUs. However, the majority of students usually progress to a British university and are satisfied with that outcome. This view relates back to the fact that IPPs see the students as their primary customers and not the universities. Although when pushed on this later in their interviews, some participants strongly objected and ensured us that both were equally important (even though they had clearly stated this earlier in their interviews).

### **6.2.7.2 Lack of national diversity**

All participants acknowledged that the lack of national diversity in their cohorts was an issue for their RIU partners and that this led to other types of unintended consequences, such as poor integration on campus and subpar student experiences. They explained that this situation was actually the result of the RIUs' high entry standards and their focus on academic quality rather than just revenue. The IPP representatives describe this problem as a 'chicken and egg' situation: RIUs demand students that can meet high entry standards, but these students

can only be found in China and/or in certain disciplines. Thus, the blame for this unintended consequence is shifting from one party to another and can create frictions in the partnership. This issue was pointed out as one of the main differences in working with RG universities. Lower-ranked universities are less concerned about student quality and are therefore content with the general approach taken by their partners in ensuring that their revenue target is met.

*'And there is the whole issue of how many students we recruit from China...well, quite frankly, this is just the consequence of having very high entry requirements!' (Partner 1)*

### **6.2.7.3 Too successful**

When discussing the specific point of 'over-recruitment', as described in 6.2.2.3, it was mentioned that overshooting the target can also bring about unintended consequences for the universities. However, this was described in fairly positive terms by the IPP representatives. When probed about this, they described the phenomenon as being 'too successful' and appeared to not understand why universities were so unhappy when this happened. Once again, this perspective demonstrates the fact that the key priority for IPPs is to bring in volume rather than take a more refined approach to student recruitment and integration on campus. They are also less worried about having large cohorts in their study centres with many not progressing to the partner university but to a lower-ranked university instead.

*'I think also, the [Partner 4] offices abroad, just recruit huge numbers not really thinking how that's going to work in reality, and it can be damaging in the long terms if they think we're recruiting all these students. It could potentially anger agents, it could anger parents...yeah, we'll see what happens' [Partner 4].*

### **6.2.7.4 Prestige**

The interviewees stated that having a RG university within their portfolio brings high prestige and enhances their own brand visibility in the market. For that reason, and despite the fact the many issues of these partnerships, they are considered of strategic importance. No one overtly expressed this opinion, but it was implied that by utilising a RG brand, they were able to attract larger number of students than they would to lower-ranked universities, benefiting their entire portfolio of partners (with students not progressing to their original RG choice, being pointed to an alternative in the IPP's portfolio).

*'Money was no object, and I was stunned by that because I honestly thought, rightly or wrongly, that they would be penny pinching. That's how it is usually...I definitely knew it was a feather in*

*[Partner 4]'s cap. A lot of important people came to the launch; they patted each other on the back [laugh]' (Partner 4).*

#### **6.2.7.5 Cocooned environment**

The interviewees agreed with the view that students enrolled in pathway centres are quite sheltered and receive extensive support. Although they understood the position of the universities in this area, they did not completely agree that this environment does not prepare them for real life at the university and argued that universities should provide greater support to their international students in general, especially those coming from a less traditional background, in the same way that they do with Widening Participation students.

*'That was a fair point, and it was a discussion we had in the centre that if we're going above and beyond, like really above and beyond, is it fair because they won't survive at university?' (Partner 4).*

#### **6.2.7.6 Professionalisation**

One consistent observation, which related to the main type of unintended consequences identified, around the 'Commercial Awareness' dimension, is that universities are slowly changing, becoming more commercially aware and starting to professionalise. IPP representatives observed that RG universities have historically recruited overseas students at the postgraduate level but generally lack experience at the undergraduate level. This was especially true in the earlier partnerships.

Responding to the issues regarding the demands to invest more resources, the interviewees described experiencing two opposite phenomena. IPP staff feel as if they are under intense scrutiny from their university partners, who are seen as unwilling to relinquish control in any area. However, they also seem reluctant to actively participate in the partnership and invest themselves fully. IPPs are surprised by the lack of resources dedicated to overseas student marketing and recruitment activities within RIUs and the lack of general support or prioritisation of overseas students once on campus. Top-level staff, in particular, are seen as incompetent, being slow to react and deficient in professionalism (with two out of the four participants describing instances when they witnessed university staff publicly disagreeing with each other and arguing in front of them). However, all expressed that all of this is changing, albeit slowly.

*'I feel like universities share with us more because it's a safe space and we're not going to use it and we understand that it's commercially sensitive and stuff like that. You can see so well which universities are really on top of their game. It's a huge difference between certain universities,*

*and in all honesty Russell Group is way behind everybody else. Way behind everyone else, and you can see it. You talk to people and they say, 'They don't even have a proper legal team'. That's like the basics and I feel that working with private providers is also backfiring on the universities in the sense that we give them this extensive really complicated contract and universities are starting to think, what do we do with it? How do we move forward? Do we need now to make everyone sign something similar? It's also professionalising them in some way' (Partner 3).*

We identified seven types of unintended consequences, clustered in broad dimensions, that were reported by the middle managers involved in the development and management of partnerships with IPPs. These dimensions included the following: (1) student performance, (2) commercial, (3) educational, (4) internal culture, (5) external perception, (6) infrastructure and (7) student experience. Having developed a comprehensive typology of unintended consequences, it is important to try to ascertain the factors leading to those consequences. We will address these points in the next section.

### **6.3 Research Question 2: What factors, as perceived by middle managers, produce unintended consequences when developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs and whom do they impact?**

This section presents a summary of the key findings and discusses the themes identified in relation to the factors that were identified as leading to unintended consequences in partnerships between RG universities and IPPs, thereby addressing our second research question.

During the study, a number of key factors were identified as leading to unintended consequences and can be divided into two dimensions: (1) decision-making and (2) communication. We found that the way decision-making was carried out during the development and implementation phases of the partnerships was a major factor influencing the actions of the actors and stakeholders involved in the partnerships and is expressed by the level of experience, both at the operational and strategic level of the individuals in charge of decision-making. We also identified two themes under the communication dimension: internal communications and partnership relationship management.

The findings, including the initial categories that led to the identification of themes and dimensions, are described in detail below and are also summarised in Figure 14. Additionally, Table 8 presents representative data for each of the categories and themes.

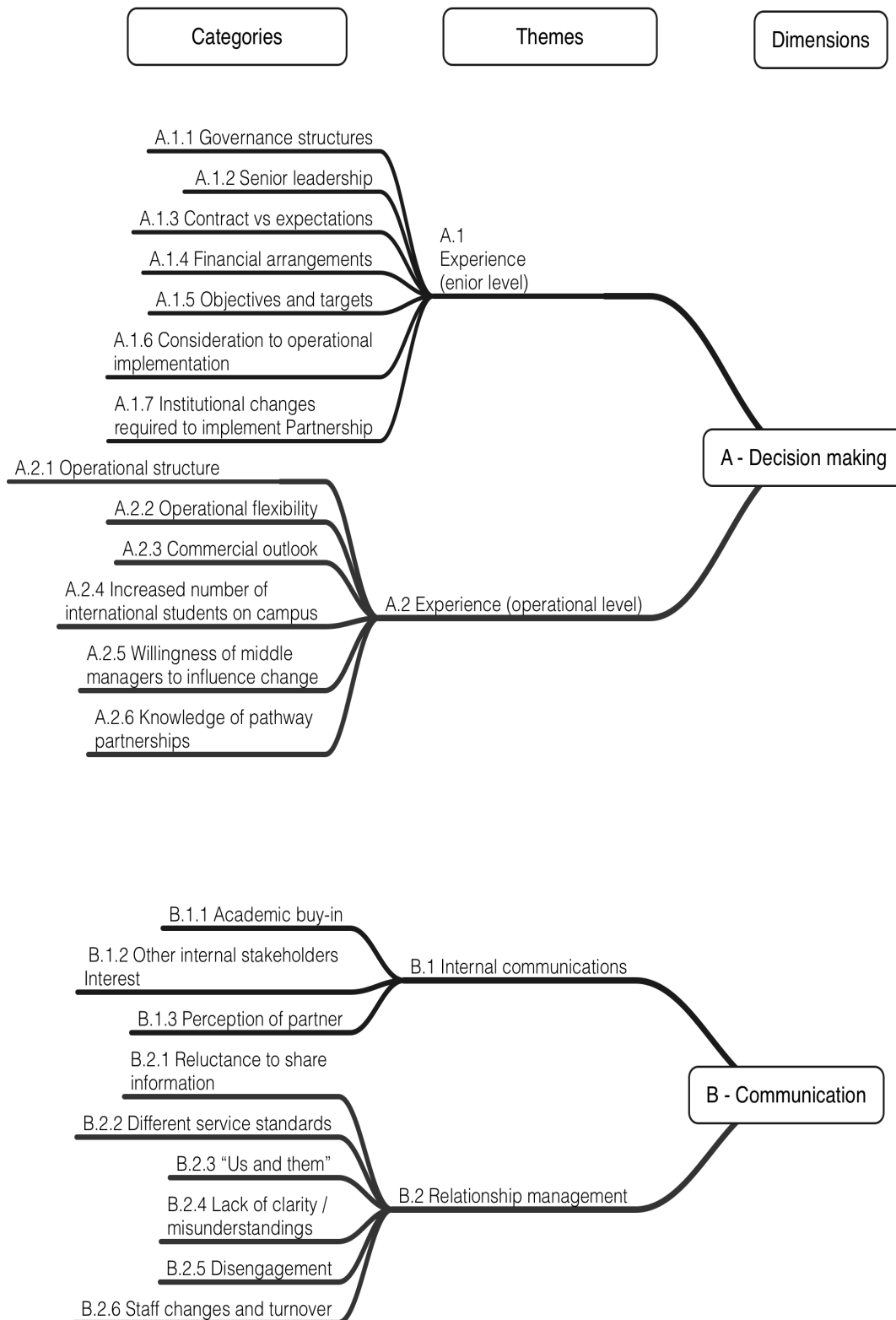


Figure 14: Thematic map – Factors leading to unintended consequences



Table 8: Factors leading to unintended consequences - Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data

Dimensions, themes and categories	Representative data
<p><u>Overarching Dimension A:</u> <u>Decision-making</u></p> <p>A.1 Experience (Senior level)</p> <p>A.1.1 Governance Structures</p> <p>A.1.2 Senior leadership</p> <p>A.1.3 Contract vs expectations</p> <p>A.1.4 Financial arrangements</p>	<p>A1: “I think there was a lack of experience right at the top level when the contract was set up [...] they just charged ahead without any experience” (Senior Relationship Manager, University G)</p> <p>A.1.1: So, all these groups feed into the steering group and they have their own meetings and their own chairs, and it’s all lovely. But a lot of it just wasn’t working or actually making things change. Nobody was following up or making things happen.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J).</p> <p>A.1.2: “It was hard because all of a sudden [we] were asked tough decisions about commercial operations overseas and that was the first time that we were being asked to think about that sort of thing and I think most of us were a bit out of our depth and so we were very conservative and said ‘don’t do anything don’t try this [...] as a Russell Group member we were more cautious about the use of [our] brand in other countries and how the relationship would be marketed. [...] I think we are now better equipped to have commercial negotiation rather than just agreeing to anything” (Senior Relationship Manager, University F).</p> <p>A.1.3: “It surprises me a little and it doesn’t surprise me at the same time that universities don’t always consider the importance of the contract... or the centrality of the contract in the relationship [...] and at the end of the day that is the heart of... the contract is the heart of the relationship’ (Senior Relationship Manager, university K).</p> <p>A.1.4: “There was nothing in the contract. [...] I think it was just ‘more’. Generally speaking, at [University E] there was a lot less use of hard targets. It was always just ‘more’” (Functional Specialist, University E).</p> <p>A.1.5: “The only KPI that was set was about income generation, not about the breakdown, not about anything else really...” (Functional Specialist, university C)</p>

A.1.5: Objectives and targets	A.1.6: “I think assumptions were made on both sides around what sustainable recruitment meant. [...] I also think that because [the contract] was negotiated by academic staff rather than by recruitment staff, that oversight of what would the ideal recruitment stream look like and what we are looking for from [the partner] was never really discussed” (Functional Specialist, University C).
A.1.6 Considerations to operational implementation	A.1.7: “I think at this stage it’s quite a delicate balance to get right because I feel that some of the things that [Partner 1] are recommended for investment at the university are absolutely needed [...] but at the same time, there needs to be a bit of a stronger line taken [...] to say “Look, it really is your job to recruit these numbers and these are the proportions we want and need” and if those aren’t going to be delivered in the next stages of the contract then there need to be some kind of stick” (Functional Specialist, University A).
A.1.7 Institutional changes required to implement partnership	A.2: “The first thing that we’ve gained is a huge amount of experience and that experience is invaluable. If only I could have taken that experience back to 2007....” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University J)
A.2: Experience (Operational Level)	A.2.1: “I just thought, how do they do it, I mean there’s so few of them. But [...] if you are one person and you’ve got to look after 15 countries, I mean, what can you do?” (Senior Relationship Manager, Partner 2)
A.2.1 Operational Structure	A.2.2: “they’ve got the responsibility but not the authority” (Senior Relationship Manager, university H)
A.2.2 Operational flexibility	A.2.3: “That comes down to the kind of age-old conversation that you have in these kinds of universities where you have to get the academic staff on board but they don’t understand the commercial side of it and when they hear it, it’s almost like a dirty word and they want to disassociate and that was certainly the fall out of that conversation’ (Functional Specialist, University C).
A.2.3 Commercial outlook	A.2.4: “One of the big issues we came across were that academics were very passive about it as well or very surprised about this whole stream of students that arrived” (Senior Relationship Manager, University H).
A.2.4 Increased numbers of International students	A.2.5: “My concern about the whole process is that we haven’t been in control. We haven’t been strict enough around diversity, around pushing areas. So [Partner 4] have done what private providers always do, they take the easy route, they take Business, they take Postgraduate, they take China and that’s what they’ve delivered. And in a way that’s exactly what we didn’t need.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University G)

<p>A.2.5 Ability of middle managers to influence change</p> <p>A.2.6 Knowledge of International Pathway Partnerships</p>	<p>A.2.6: “[University G] also is an incredibly naïve university, [...] very inward looking and therefore they didn’t really understand what was happening and so I think I talked to people about this and say: ‘this will mean a different type of student coming to [University G], these aren’t going to be your beautifully formed A*A*A, well-fed, Southern, privately educated students. They’re gonna be different’” (Senior Relationship Manager, University G).</p>
<p><u>Overarching Dimension B:</u></p> <p><u>Communication</u></p> <p>B.1: Internal Communications</p> <p>B.1.1 Academic Buy-In</p> <p>B.1.2 Other internal stakeholders’ interest</p> <p>B.1.3 Perception of Partner</p>	<p>B.1: “I think I’d probably start off by doing more work to talk about why this was being done, why it was so important for the University, and why we need to go in with this fully committed. [...] I think there maybe wasn’t much understanding across the University. [...] I think in order to get it through, the partnership had to be positioned as a certain thing which was never entirely realistic. The internal story did not match the full reality”. (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University A).</p> <p>B.1.1: “It didn’t enthuse people to support the partnership and support progression [...], we had a lot of issues trying to get the schools to work pro-actively with [Partner 2]” (Functional Specialist, University B).</p> <p>B.1.2: “It’s so commercial it needs translating every step of the way with our academic colleagues, they don’t understand any of the language, [...] colleagues don’t get it. But it’s been a fascinating journey for me” (Senior Relationship Manager, University F).</p> <p>B.1.3: “Once one person says something, the whole school or faculty, or whatever, will have that view, potentially, and nobody really knows what that was based on.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University F)</p> <p>B2: “Both sides have to trust each other” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p>

B.2: Relationship Management	B.2.1: “So we made a decision locally. It wasn’t communicated back to [Partner 2] head office, so when it came to [a specific criteria related to accepting students on courses] they didn’t know that we had said no, so we had to get through the whole thing again, which was a complete waste of time and just doesn’t help the relationship” (Functional Specialist, University B).
B.2.1 Reluctance to share information	
B.2.2 Different standards	B.2.2: “One of the challenges we have with Private Providers is that they are always faster than universities are so, actually, trying to meet their service standards can be a bit OF a challenge. (Functional Specialist, University C).
B.2.3 “Us and Them	B.2.3: “For the language centre staff, really just this is the end of the world: “what are your doing, you’re so naïve and stupid if you think that you can have this without them coming and taking over our language centre.”.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University F)
B.2.4 Lack of clarity/misunderstandings	B.2.4: “So in terms of targets, they went off, they weren’t sending data regularly, the data they sent changes – it changes in terms of the headings of the different fields, it changes in the format, it changes in all sorts of ways. Again, the cynic in me thinks deliberately. They present data in a way they want rather than in a way that we need, so it’s a constant battle with them to have consistent reporting” (Senior Relationship Manager, University G).
B.2.5 Disengagement	B.2.5: “My link person didn’t take engage. [...] they had no interest in coming [...] that person never got to meet me, never got to see the centre and never would have met the students. [...] I fed that back to the steering committee. [...] I don’t know what happened, it’s probably none of my business what happened to that person. Potentially nothing happened.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 4)
B.2.6 Staff changes and turnover	B.2.6: “We had hand-overs that weren’t helpful. So, the project manager through the procurement process left, wasn’t replaced so there was no project manager. The [Top-level Manager] moved on. He’s signed the contract, so he moved on to the next big thing and handed over to the new [Top-level Manager] who still hasn’t quite got to grips with it and hasn’t got experience of it in a previous university.” (Senior Relationship Manager, university G)

### 6.3.1 Decision-making

The first of the two dimensions relates to how decisions are made within universities, both at the strategic and operational levels. All participants were asked to describe, to the best of their knowledge, the strategic governance of the partnerships. All reported that a clear governance structure was in place; however, there were divergent views in various universities about whether the structure was allowing for effective and clear decision-making.

A classification comprising 13 specific categories of factors originating from decision-making practices and staff experience, grouped under two themes, was compiled from the analysis of all participants' accounts of their experience with IPPs. These are presented below.

#### 6.3.1.1 Experience at the senior level

*'The first thing that we've gained is a huge amount of experience and that experience is invaluable. If only I could have taken that experience back to 2007...'* (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University J).

Most RG staff at all levels lacked any experience of working with a commercial company in what is, in effect, a collaborative venture (in some cases an actual joint venture). IPPs were a fairly new concept for many of those universities at the time they entered into the partnerships. Lack of commercial experience at the senior level, in particular, was identified as a key factor leading to unnecessary complications and unintended consequences.

Universities that have been in a partnership for a significant amount of time acknowledged they were lacking experience initially fairly openly; they also admitted that they are now more commercially aware and, as a consequence, better prepared to deal with external partners than they had been prior to partnering with an IPP.

All partnerships have fairly well-defined **governance structures** at the strategic level, comprising a number of boards that include representatives from both parties. Aside from an overall partnership board, we often found sub-boards or groups focusing on academic, operational, marketing and recruitment matters. In particular, in partnerships where the strategic governance structure appears to work well, we found strong support from top-level managers who take responsibility for the high-level relationship management with the partner.

The majority of pivotal decisions are made by the main partnership boards/steering groups, which comprises senior members of the universities and partners. In some cases, middle managers work closely with university board members to prepare and brief them on issues they will be required to consider at board meetings. However, this is not always the case; instead, a

more common theme that emerged around problematic decision-making was linked to senior leadership in more general terms, in particular when middle managers are not able to advise or influence top-level managers.

A number of elements that can be directly attributed to poor **senior leadership** at the top-level were identified as leading to unintended consequences. These include (1) lack of senior engagement in longer-term relationships when partners are 'taken for granted' or new top-level managers not understanding the strategic importance of the partnership; (2) lack of interest in the implementation of the partnerships once the initial agreement has been signed; (3) those required to make strategic decisions lack the experience to do so and do not consult with others who may be able to advise them; (4) lack of consultation, in turn, leads to lack of effective communication and relationship management (which we will address below) and, in the worst case identified, the collapse of the partnership.

*'So, all these groups feed into the steering group, and they have their own meetings and their own chairs, and it's all lovely. But a lot of it just wasn't working or actually making things change. Nobody was following up or making things happen' (Senior Relation Manager, University J).*

At several universities, strategic responsibility for the partnership was held by a top-level manager other than the one leading on international matters (usually the education lead), which has also led to decisions being made with less consideration for the commercial aspects of the partnership.

One striking source of unintended consequences comes from the fact that the majority of top-level managers involved in partnerships with IPPs appear to have ***different expectations from what is actually stated in their contracts***. This was found in all but two of the partnerships studied and can be attributed mostly to a difference in culture between the private sector and HE, especially highly selective and research-focused universities such as the RG. Most participants reported a rush to sign a deal, often led by top-level managers, which led to a lack of scenario planning or forecasting of possible future issues as well as poorly identified interdependencies. One respondent indicated that this could be due to the fact that if they *'insisted on some of those things at the time, we may not have got the deal'* (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University A).

We found that much frustration exists amongst middle managers over ***financial arrangements*** and the fact that most contracts do not include penalties for lack of performance as many agreed that *'the finances drive people's behaviour'* (Assessment and Improvement, University J). This has led one university to attempt, in vain, to refuse to pay the commission,

causing general bitterness within the partnership. Some have attempted to change this situation later on but, of those who identified this as a key issue, none have found a solution that has been mutually agreed. The partnerships that appear to be the most problematic do not have set targets nor penalties included in their contract; instead, performance is measured through the attainment of a broad financial target for the pathway programmes only.

*‘There was nothing in the contract...I think it was just “more”. Generally speaking, at [University E] there was a lot less use of hard targets. It was always just “more” (Functional Specialist, University E).*

Another issue arising from the lack of a detailed contract, including clear **targets and objectives**, is a common misunderstanding between the universities and their partners about how success is measured. This issue was described on a number of occasions as ‘not talking the same language’. This general frustration stems from the fact that many partnerships have agreed upon targets for student enrolment in the pathway programmes but none for those progressing to the university. Most participants expressed that view while it is expected that the majority of students would progress to the university, the reality is often different. Issues of student quality and background will also be explored in further details below and is another source of frustration and misunderstanding stemming from a lack of clear targets and objectives in the contracts.

In most instances, participants admitted that when the contracts were negotiated by the top-level team (members of which often have an academic rather than commercial background) without input from operational leads, they did **not consider operational matters** and were generally vague (and therefore possibly opened to interpretation). This scenario leads to different understandings of what needs to be delivered and to ‘assumptions’ (a term mentioned by many participants) being made. The fluid nature of many contracts has led to unintended consequences that will be explored in the next section in greater detail.

Finally, the fact that partnerships are usually negotiated by top-level managers (such as pro-vice chancellors and vice-presidents), many with an academic background and lacking commercial experience, leads to divergent views over who should take charge of certain aspects of the work to be delivered. Although middle managers often recognise that some **changes are needed in order to ensure a successful partnership**, they are usually not given the means to do so as their top-level managers may not recognise the need for further investment once a partnership has been established. Top-level managers see the partners as solely responsible for

the delivery of the objectives, which leads to frustration when partners request support and collaboration.

### 6.3.1.2 Experience at the operational level

At the operational level, issues related to decision-making mirror those found at the strategic level. At several universities, middle managers reported being able to work within well-defined decision-making and **operational structures** where they are able to escalate issues, if necessary, and some found very few issues, especially when working with peers. As noted above, all partnerships have formal structures in place, which includes operational groups leading in specific areas. This may appear to be, on paper at least, an effective way to embed the partnership; however, many participants reported inertia and lack of direction in those groups.

*‘There was a whole load of structure and a whole load of formal governance and whole load of minutes, and none of the bloody actions were being done’ (Senior Relationship Manager, University J).*

Many have found partners to be ‘pushy’ and requesting **flexibility** that often makes risk-adverse universities uncomfortable. The partners blame their inability to deliver the target on the university’s lack of flexibility, especially when it comes to entry requirements. This will be explored later when we discuss the types of unintended consequences identified in this study. Middle managers sometimes feel that the pressures from the partners are unreasonable. Most IPPs expect universities to adapt and remain flexible, placing middle managers in a position that straddles both sides, which is especially difficult if their sphere of influence is limited.

Some parts of the universities lack **commercial outlook** and are therefore reluctant to work with companies they view as profit driven. However, this reluctance often reduces with time once the faculties start seeing the benefits of increased international student numbers.

Participants reported that some academic departments associate the **increased number in international students on campus** with the perception that students coming from IPPs are less qualified and therefore are reluctant to accept them, creating difficulties for the middle manager in charge of delivering the partnership. This perception of the lack of quality of these new groups of students is not always founded and can be attributed to the teaching staff’s lack of experience working with multicultural groups.

The experience and beliefs of the **middle managers** can influence their way of thinking and decision-making and affect their **willingness to influence change**, leading to unintended



consequences. The commercial nature of the partnership may conflict with the personal values of the managers in charge of implementing them. One of the senior relationship managers involved in a long-term partnership expressed this clearly: '*[University E] is supposed to be...a forever university, but [Partner 2], not necessarily*' (Senior Relationship Manager, University E). Additionally, we recorded that in several universities, IPPs appear to have overpromised on what could be delivered, which leads to pressures on the middle managers to then compensate when the results do not materialise. Finally, the IPP is sometimes seen as a threat to middle managers. Some participants (in particular, those who felt disgruntled about not being consulted in decisions about the partnership) felt that it internally undermined their credibility. Because the IPPs have direct access to top-level management and middle managers do not some fear that the partner could take over international student recruitment activities for the whole of the university rather than just the pathways.

Partnerships with IPPs are still a relatively new concept at RG universities, and this has meant that staff involved in the partnerships at the operational level rarely have the necessary **knowledge** and experience for working within this context. Many of the middle managers we interviewed did not have a commercial background themselves, having spent the majority of their career in universities, many of whom have worked at RUIs/RG universities exclusively. This has led to unnecessary complications and unintended consequences. Over time, the two cultures have started to work well together, but initial interactions, as described by the majority of participants, were difficult due to the fact that they were dealing with approaches and behaviours they had not experienced before.

*'So, my perception of them was that it was just a very blokey kind of culture in the company that I hadn't encountered before and wasn't what I was used to in the university at all, and everything was about agents'* (Assessment and Improvement, University E).

### **6.3.2 Communication**

Communication, both internally and in terms of relationship management with external partners, is the second dimension that featured prominently in discussions with participants about the factors they believed led to unintended consequences.

#### **6.3.2.1 Internal communications**

Study participants identified a lack of clear internal communications or misleading communications related to the partnerships as key factors leading to unintended consequences due to misunderstandings and varying expectations. A middle manager, reflecting on what they would have done differently if they had another chance, articulated this opinion quite clearly:

*'I think I'd probably start off by doing more work to talk about why this was being done, why it was so important for the university and why we need to go in with this fully committed...I think there maybe wasn't much understanding across the university...I think in order to get it through, the partnership had to be positioned as a certain thing which was never entirely realistic. The internal story did not match the full reality' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University A).*

Lack of internal engagement was stated as a key reason for poor staff buy-in, especially in academic departments. As explored above, partnerships with IPPs are often developed and agreed upon at the top level within universities. However, these partnerships require involvement from both professional and academic departments to be successful. Lack of **internal academic buy-in**, in particular from academic departments, is therefore a key factor leading to unintended consequences. Losing internal support from academic colleagues has been described as *'a dangerous place to be in an RG university'* (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University A) because academic influence is greater in this grouping of universities than in other universities that are more teaching oriented. Lack of academic buy-in seems to happen result from five sub-factors: (1) poorly articulated purpose of partnership, (2) bias, (3) disappointment, (4) fear of change and (5) general disinterest.

(1) Since partnerships are usually negotiated by a small group of top-level staff, information regarding it and its meaning in day-to-day practice is not always properly disseminated, and details of the partnership are not clearly explained to key academic groups.

(2) Lack of information is not the only factor leading to poor academic buy-in. Misinformation is also a key aspect to be considered. Academic departments often show reluctance to engage with the partners due to pre-existing biases towards private education providers and the perceived issues that accompany these types of partnerships. In some cases, this is a valid concern, but oftentimes the perception emanating from academic departments is not supported by the evidence.

(3) In some cases, usually in academic departments that are involved in delivering activities that duplicate those of the new IPP, there is a reluctance to engage that can be linked to staff feeling threatened by the partnership, leading to unintended consequences.

(4) In other cases, buy-in was lost following an initial disappointing interaction between academic staff and representatives from the IPP. This is often caused by the fact that some universities had high expectations and that in order to win the contract, the private providers had *'promised us the world'* (Senior Relationship Manager, University J). As a result, many

departments were originally keen to engage as they believed that the partnership would lead to an increased number of students joining their courses; however, when these results did not materialise, staff became disengaged, leading to complications and unintended consequences.

(5) Finally, a number of participants indicated that due to the fact that RG universities are RIUs, academic staff are less inclined to take an interest in activities that are purely teaching focused, particularly if they are perceived to be commercially oriented. This reluctance occurs despite a strategic push from top-level management.

The majority of these sub-factors may seem to place the blame on academic staff, and one may argue that a lack of academic involvement may be better suited to describe the situation. However, the study focuses on the way these are perceived by middle managers, many of them representing professional services rather than academic departments; we can therefore assume a certain amount of bias in the way the situations were described during the interviews.

Aside from academic departments, support from most parts of professional services is required to ensure the success of the partnerships. However, ***outside of the international office, there is very little understanding and buy-in*** at most universities for the partnerships, and in two instances, those in charge of student recruitment did not view the partnership as part of their remit, with one middle manager stating, *'ultimately we're not responsible for the recruitment to it'* (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University A).

It was found that most of the participants reported a general negative perception, at least initially, of the IPPs, from themselves but also the wider set of internal stakeholders required to work with them within the universities. While these negative perceptions are not always based on hard evidence but rather hear-say or reputation within the sector, they can potentially influence middle manager's decision-making and their ability to make unbiased decisions. This negative feeling is sometimes localised in specific parts of a university – *'[Specific School] hates them with a passion'* (Senior Relationship Manager, University G) – or it can just be a general feeling of suspicion, often found in the initial stages of the partnership.

*'I know, pretty much for a fact, that going back a few years, I think when the university first started to work with [Partner 4], in the academic community, it was quite negatively perceived'* (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University F).

### **6.3.2.2 Relationship management**

Finally, a lack of effective relationship management between the university and the partner is a key factor in the generation of unintended consequences and was mentioned in eight of the universities studied. The majority of participants indicated that communication lines with partners are often problematic. This topic is multifaceted and in its widest form, covers anything from staff turnover, day-to-day reluctance to engage, lack of central point of contact, to disengagement over the years when the partnerships seems well embedded. This issue is felt strongly by universities, partners alike. Six categories can be clustered under this theme and are explored below.

Participants from the universities studied sometimes reported a certain lack of trust in their partners, leading to **poor information sharing**. This was recognised directly by some of the participants from the universities as well as some of the partners. However, lack of effective information sharing is not always due to distrust but more often due to that fact that universities do not always realise that local decisions may impact the partnership. A faculty participant articulated this quite well:

*'So, for example, in our [specific programme named], we decided that we wanted to put up the entry grades...from say 70% to 85%. [Partner 4] found out and said 'look, that's not viable, none of [the students] are going to progress'. But [Partner 4] will be completely in breach of contract, and we are apparently allowed to do that' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University J).*

A related reason for poor relationship management often stems from the fact that universities are not as well-resourced as IPPs and are therefore not able to respond to their partners' demands and queries in a timely manner. This difference in service standards leads to frustration or the feeling that they are being 'pushed' or 'forced' into certain decisions. This sentiment is echoed by partner participants who expressed surprise at the lack of investment and resources in certain parts of the universities.

As mentioned earlier, universities often expect that very little will be required of them and that the partner is solely responsible for achieving the objectives of the partnership. This assumption sometimes creates an **'us and them'** situation that can become **'confrontational'** (Senior Relationship Manager, University J).

Academic staff expressed doubt over the quality of staff employed by IPP and the fact that they are not **'like us'** (Senior manager, University J), which again requires the middle manager to work in an environment where they have to counteract this perception in order to deliver their objectives.

*'I hear "they have an awful lot of adverts; they are always looking for new staff and they take these...hourly paid staff. So, it's quite easy to look at some other organisation and comment ...; but put any part of the university in the same situation, suddenly expanding, they'd be scrabbling about to recruit people...So sometimes I have to remind people, let's reflect about that and not just get too carried away' (Senior Relationship Manager, University F).*

Sometimes, however, the **lack of clarity** appears to come from the partners, and it was reported by participants that this behaviour usually occurred when reporting on progress and achievements.

In some specific cases, **disengagement** was often described as 'taking the partnership for granted' in those that have been established for longer periods of time. Changes in senior as well as operational staff involved in the partnerships on both sides can cause issues and therefore unintended consequences. Lack of corporate memory can lead to a lack of understanding of the importance of the partnership within the university.

For partnerships that are at a more mature stage, a certain disengagement can be found, sometimes by both parties or more often from the universities. The later feel like they are being neglected and that they have become less of a priority for their partner who have developed numerous other relationships with universities that are their competitors.

Finally, frequent **staff changes** on the partners' side can also lead to frustrations and issues, as expressed by one of the middle managers:

*'I suppose I didn't anticipate the sheer amount of staff turnover at the centre. There's been a lot. I don't know how much this has contributed over the years to some of the challenges we've had' (Functional Specialist, University B).*

### **6.3.3 Partners' perspective**

As demonstrated above, a wide variety of factors were identified as leading to unintended consequences. This section will cross-reference those findings with the views of the four partners involved in the cases studied in this research project. Twelve categories of factors were identified based on the interviews conducted with the IPP representatives. These are summarised in Figure 15 below. Representative data can also be found in Table 9. These echo closely some of the findings described in the above section.

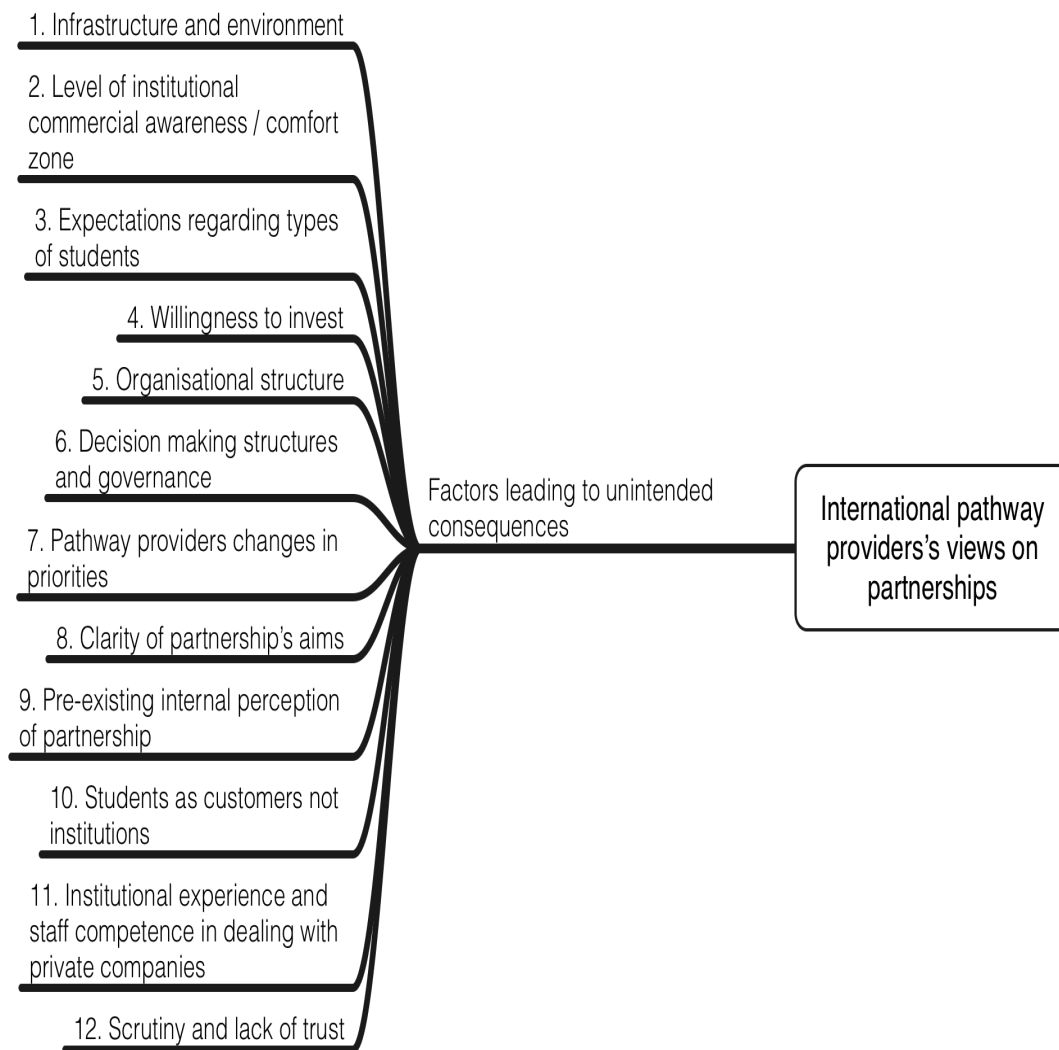


Figure 15:Thematic map – Factors leading to unintended consequences – Partners’ perspective

Table 9: International Pathway providers' view (Factors leading to unintended consequences) - Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data

Dimensions, themes and categories	Representative data
<p><u>Overarching Dimension : Types of unintended consequences</u></p> <p>B.1 Non-traditional students with varied support needs</p> <p>B.2 Lack of national diversity</p> <p>B.3 Too successful</p> <p>B.4 Prestige</p> <p>B.5 Cocooned environment</p> <p>B.6 Professionalisation</p>	<p>B.1: "They were all international and 100 of them were law students and law students usually need a great deal of additional support because their workload is normally much higher than for other students." (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 2)</p> <p>B.2: "We have so many Chinese students. [...] We have quite a lot of Korean students here in the Centre [...], Sometimes when they are in the same class, they sit there and speak Korean" (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 2)</p> <p>B.3: "We just recruited huge numbers, not really thinking how that's going to work in reality" (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 2)</p> <p>B.4: "It was easily the highest-ranking partnership [Partner 2] had, [...] it was a bit of a feather in [Partner 2]'s cap." (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 2)</p> <p>B.5: "It was a discussion we had in the centre that if we're going above and beyond, like really above and beyond, is it fair, because they won't survive at university?" (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 2)</p> <p>B.6: "The Universities started professionalising themselves" (Assessment and Improvement Manager, Partner 3)</p>

### **6.3.3.1 Infrastructure and environment**

IPP representatives acknowledged that issues arise when universities do not plan for the integration of the various partnership elements in their environment. This lack of adaptation and preparedness to handle the changing student population, in particular, tends to lead to student experience problems; this outcome is particularly striking in universities that have not been historically attractive to large numbers of overseas students.

*'It's not just about teaching; it's the whole learning environment, it's the atmosphere on campus, the levels of engagement with international students that exist. I mean there are so many elements to this' (Partner 1).*

### **6.3.3.2 Level of institutional commercial awareness**

Tensions arise because there are major differences in the ways of working between the private sector, which has a more commercial outlook, and universities, which are more collegiate in approach. Top-level IPP leaders are focused on revenue generation, whereas within universities, their priorities are more varied.

*'I still feel that as you move higher up in university, you are more focused on academia, maybe on research; I don't believe that happens in private providers. You don't move up to be a research associate, you don't move up. You move up for the money, and I think it happens quite high up. Anybody that's a head of centre...is still a director of a centre, is still student focused. They have operational pressures, and they have to consider money, but I think the higher-up people in university and higher-up people in a private provider are different' (Partner 2).*

### **6.3.3.3 Expectations regarding types of students**

As most RG universities have not, in some cases, shown a willingness to adapt their environment to new types of students, IPP representatives indicated that many were not equipped to deal with students who need, for one reason or another, additional support. It was felt that academic staff resent the large influx of international students from the new international pathway and are therefore reluctant to adapt their ways of teaching to their new classroom composition.

*'The students, in an ideal world, get it, and they rush off to the library to do all the research and then produce a paper. I said, but you know, international students from a lot of countries just aren't like that, they expect a very different relationship with their teachers. In fact, their teachers become surrogate parents. So really, at a very different level to be successful, international*



*student recruitment...I mean for me as a teacher, one of the most powerful tools is to be able to grow...if you want to call it a business, to grow your business, is effectively student word-of-mouth that you are a great teacher' (Partner 1).*

#### **6.3.3.4 Willingness to invest**

As RG managers similarly pointed out, partners highlighted the lack of resources or investment in areas that are essential to supporting international student recruitment as a key issue, and they described the challenges of working with slow universities that cannot respond to suggestions on time to grasp certain opportunities when presented to them.

*'I mean, I can't remember exactly how many there were in the team at the time...I think no more than about half a dozen of them and I thought, unbelievable, they've got...they have all this responsibility to recruit students...the university obviously were putting on...the university was really trying to expand their international student numbers. But at the same time, there really wasn't a team in place to manage a global business' (Partner 1)*

#### **6.3.3.5 Organisational structure**

Partners are aware that organisational structures can be a barrier to success within universities. The devolved nature of RG universities' structures can be seen as unsurmountable and at complete odds with the way business is conducted in the corporate world.

*There's always this sort of joke that things at university move at a glacial pace, and it's because things go through very rigorous procedures and checking and authorising and discussing. Things at private providers move much quicker' (Partner 2).*

#### **6.3.3.6 Decision-making structures**

Similarly, internal decision-making structures can be a barrier to success within universities, as a decision may have been made by top-level managers but may be difficult to implement in various part of the universities, let alone be accepted. Some expressed frustration when describing how even though a decision may have been made at institutional level, this seemed to be questioned within academic departments in particular.

*'It was kind of unclear to me how the university was going to do that at a faculty level. Because I think, strategically, decisions were being made centrally. So, when you have a kind of a strategic centre making decisions and then you have a devolved...and a very strongly devolved faculty structure run by a very strong dean, that any kind of change is obviously to be discussed with their teams and any kind of move to reduce quality in terms of academic qualifications and the type of students we recruited, of course it's very strongly resisted' (Partner 1).*

### **6.3.3.7 Pathway providers' changes in priorities**

As suspected by some of the interviewed managers, the IPP representatives acknowledged that because they operate a network of partners, priorities have to be established, and there is a hierarchy amongst the various partner universities. As businesses, they also constantly aim to expand their network of clients in order to stimulate healthy competition, a situation that is felt uncomfortably by universities.

Partners are also aware that they sometimes find it difficult to satisfy all of their clients' demands and meet their expectations. Those interviewed also acknowledged that universities that show greater levels of engagement with the partners have their voices heard. They also echoed university middle managers and agreed that, in long-term partnerships, universities engage less and appear to take the partnership for granted. They find that new university partners are usually more engaged, and they therefore tend to dedicate more time to them. Finally, two of the participants expressed the view that universities of a certain level (i.e., the RG, excluding Oxbridge) are interchangeable and replaceable. However, they would not overtly admit that to partner universities.

*'Others are nervous because of the new partners that we've brought in, and it is down to having actual individual university to university competition; so, I think these are the ones that are the most nervous. I would say that the RG is...they're not necessarily nervous, rather upset because there is a sense when you speak to many of the RG universities of this feeling of entitlement, very much so' (Partner 3).*

### **6.3.3.8 Clarity of partnership aims**

University middle managers mentioned targets, aims and objectives as some of the most problematic aspects of the partnerships. This concern was somewhat echoed by the IPP managers, who agreed that although universities define targets from a financial perspective, they often have unrealistic expectations and rarely consider the realities of the market. For IPPs, the main priority is to ensure the commercial viability of their operations and to therefore recruit large volume of students. Further segmentation, whether by nationality or academic programmes, is secondary to their concerns. Furthermore, pathway programmes are understood by the IPPS as enabling students who would not otherwise be able to access UK HE to do so, however, the Universities do not always seem to have the same understanding.

*'Obviously, universities go into partnership to get students' (Partner 1).*

### **6.3.3.9 Pre-existing internal perceptions**

IPPs see the lack of faculty engagement as a factor in the production of unintended consequences. IPPs are aware that they are not always perceived in a positive light and that some think that they only recruit low-quality students, a perception that they are keen to change.

*'So, it was linked very much to an idea of recruiting the low-quality students. That's certainly how a lot of people saw it. But it really was...to just highlight to them the key benefits to them working with us and helping students who didn't actually have the qualifications to either go directly, so undergraduate first year' (Partner 1).*

#### **6.3.3.10 Students as customers**

A fact that seems to have been missed by university middle managers but mentioned by all IPPs' managers is that IPPs have two main customers: universities and students. The interviewees often hinted that students take precedent over the universities. While universities would like to have a predictable stream of students, pathway providers view student choice as an important factor.

*'We need to grow the university network...while we're giving this sort of guaranteed access to universities; the choice is too limited in comparison to everyone else' (Partner 3)*

#### **6.3.3.11 Institutional experience and staff competence**

A number of IPPs acknowledged that universities have been pushed into partnerships due to environmental pressures, putting them outside of their comfort zone. They are acutely aware that top-level university managers rarely have the necessary experience to work effectively with corporate partners and lack commercial awareness.

*'I think that, unfortunately, universities have been caught within a bit of a system which is compelling them to become more and more commercial, to develop very different kinds of relationships' (Partner 1).*

#### **6.3.3.12 Scrutiny and lack of trust**

IPPs believe that trust and personal connections are key to success, which is why they attempt to integrate themselves as much as possible with their university partners. As pathway providers become more established, personal connections become even more important and allow them to gain entry and respect in the sector. However, the path to trust and collaboration is often a difficult one, especially in the early stages of the partnerships.

*'The link tutor sent by the university said...that they had no interest in coming and that...they would try to send someone else, but only if they felt the need or were able to' (Partner 2).*

Despite the hurdles described above, with time, many of the factors described by middle managers (and IPPs) are minimised and relationships are improved. However, this outcome appears to be dependent on whether the middle managers involved in the management of the partnerships have been empowered to take charge of issues and resolve them.

*'Genuinely now, the relationships is, if we've got a problem, I'll pick up the phone to them, they'll pick up the phone to me, we'll just get it out, we'll talk openly and work out what we need to solve' (Senior Relationship Manager, University J).*

We have established that two broad overarching dimensions, (1) decision-making and (2) communication, were identified by the middle managers involved in the development and management of partnerships with IPPs as leading to unintended consequences. The next section addresses our third research question and identifies whether the unintended consequences identified above have led to organisational changes and adaptations.

#### **6.4 Research Question 3: Do unintended consequences of developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs, as perceived by middle managers, lead to organisational changes or adaptations?**

Our third research question aimed to ascertain whether the unintended consequences of developing and implementing IPPs partnerships in UK RIUs lead to organisational changes or adaptations. When analysing the themes that emerged from the interviews, we decided to answer this question from two different angles: (1) unexpected organisational changes and adaptations that are perceived to have an impact on stakeholders across campus; and (2) unexpected organisational changes and adaptations that impact various functional areas of the universities from a strategic planning perspective. Both are inter-linked, and only assessing the institutional impact without taking into account the impact of 'people' would not fully answer the research questions.

Both dimensions are therefore described in the sections below. The findings are also summarised in Figures 16 and 17 below. Additionally, Tables 10 and 11 present representative data for each of the categories and themes.

##### **6.4.1 Stakeholder impact**

Three types of stakeholders were identified as unexpectedly impacted by the partnerships, representing unintended consequences in and of themselves: students, staff within academic departments and staff within professional services. Considering the broad

nature of the unintended consequences identified in the previous section, aside from top-level management, all categories of university populations appear to be affected by the partnerships.

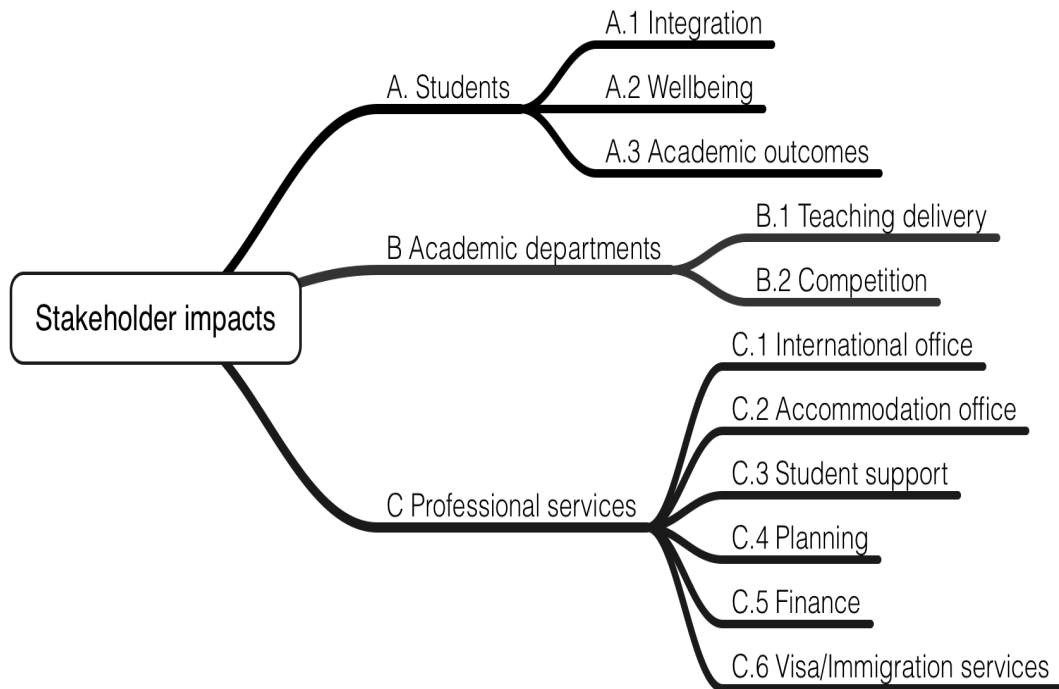


Figure 16: Thematic map – Stakeholder impact

#### 6.4.1.1 Students

The first category of stakeholders impacted by the partnerships are the students who are ‘brought into’ the university by means of the partnership itself. Data collected in the interviews showed that they are affected in three different ways: difficulties integrating while in the pathway programme, personal wellbeing and academic outcomes. This broader theme focuses mainly on the overlooked need to support pathway students in their transition to university. It was mentioned by the majority of participants as a fact that was not considered at the time of partnership development. Because the pathway centres are sheltered environments, transition to university is not always easy for students. Additionally, friendship groups are formed during the pathway course, and they therefore do not always integrate with the wider cohort when they join the university. Finally, students coming from the pathway programmes sometimes have knowledge gaps that can make their university start difficult and may jeopardise their overall academic success.

Table 10: Organisational changes and impacts -Stakeholders - Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data

Dimensions, themes and categories	Representative data
<p><u>Overarching DimensionA:</u> <u>Students</u></p> <p>A.1: Integration</p> <p>A.2: Wellbeing</p> <p>A.3: Academic outcomes</p> <p>A.4: Transition to University</p>	<p>A.1: “The centre is pivotal in our Internationalisation strategy which in turn is a key university strategy, so it’s fundamental to that, but in terms of the rest of what the university does, I guess it’s quite isolated.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>A.2: “I think how students are taught to pass examinations is not what we do at universities usually. Students being coached to pass exams, obviously that’s good, because they pass the exam but it’s not an education and I think some of the providers that we looked at, particularly were noteworthy because they had a particular approach for getting students through almost at all costs and that might have an impact on the students themselves). (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>A.3: “Those students are struggling and failing. [...] the progression rate of the current batch of students – I think they are now three years into the system – there are more failures than usual. We thought what on earth is going on. Why is the university doing this? These students are useless. [...] A lot of the failures we’re seeing in the first year.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University J)</p> <p>A.4: “when the students progressed to the university, despite [University C] vouching for [Partner 1]’s English programme, in reality the students were struggling to cope and some of that I think was because when they were at [Partner 1], they weren’t integrating, they were living with students from their own country and so on so actually their English wasn’t improving at all. So, when the students progressed again, they would tend to stay in groups. The other problem was because they were progressing and getting their exam results late in August, the time they were signing up for tutorial groups, they were the only ones left so extra tutorial groups were having to be put on for the [Partner 1] students so it would only be for [Partner1] students so it was a bit of a</p>

	ghetto. Now because their English language was poor the university had to put on extra language support so that was both free in-session courses, it was also bespoke staff members been employed to do extra tutorials with them to match what they'd had at [Partner1]." (Functional Specialist, University C)
<p><u>Overarching Dimension B:</u> <u>Academic Departments</u></p> <p>B.1: Teaching delivery</p> <p>B.2: Competition with internal provision</p>	<p>B.1: "For a number of years, the numbers coming through were just unmanageable and you were talking about specific programmes that maybe would have double the amount of students on them that then what the capacity was, teaching happening in evenings and this was all because of the pre-masters students." (Functional Specialist, University A)</p> <p>B.2: "Obviously, when we're talking to students, we make it clear there are two options. Some work that we did with [Partner 4] was to develop a flowchart, which really took quite a lot of negotiating, because, for them, it was also a case of actually, potentially, directing students away from your own pathway onto our own one. But it was just trying to be really clear about the different types of student and which student would suit which pathway best. A lot of work has gone into that and, as I say, I've overseen it rather than doing it. But I think that's been quite important, in terms of establishing the ground rules between the two foundations." (Assessment and Improvement Manager, university F)</p>
<p><u>Overarching Dimension C:</u> <u>Professional Services</u></p> <p>C.1: International Office</p> <p>C.2: Accommodation Office</p> <p>C.3: Student Support</p>	<p>C.1: "I suspect people outside the marketing communities don't understand quite how much work goes into maintaining those relationships because, of course, it's not just about the marketing, but also about the input into the – having an influence in the academic side of things [...]. But yeah, I suspect, more broadly in the university, people don't understand the amount of work that goes into this" (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University F)</p> <p>C.2: "It's also impacted in other areas like accommodation, you know having extra students come in at different times and that's had an impact" (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University A)</p> <p>C.3: "Where we have had to help them, that's where there maybe have under 18s and there's a duty of care issues for students who are ... two or three times in the last few years, there's been students with quite significant mental health issues and sometimes if they're under 18, the duty of care is drawn on the university expertise I guess because we're a big operation, we've done this management quite a lot. So, I've been quite involved there." (Assessment and Improvement Manager, university B)</p>

C.4: Planning	C.4: “I recall, the centre had a huge increase in numbers early on. Then we tried to have a more structured planning round with [Partner 2] because the numbers, in some of the courses, including in to the second-year entry, was unanticipated and that caused problems in the classroom, in terms of the sheer numbers that were coming through. So, we wanted to try and move to an integrated planning system, that never really worked.’ (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)
C.5: Finance	C.5: From a finance perspective, there is an impact there [...] when 15% or 20% of [the students] bomb out then the... you see the way the university’s financial model works is they say ‘well, looking at the last ten years, 90% of your first years progress to second year, then about 95 progress to third’, so they run this statistical model saying this is what you’ll have in three years’ time on your existing students. Now, if you have these students who are weaker coming in you’ve got to redo that analysis otherwise a year down the line, they will suddenly say the numbers are not adding up and you’re in deficit” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University J)
C.6: Visa/Immigration services	C.6: “We’ve had UKVI audits and people really take seriously - our licence and the need not to lose it - because actually [Partner 2] are a small cohort compared to all other students and so ... yeah, as I said that’s where some of the operational tension comes with [Partner 2] being involved with us and around the fact that we are blocking growth, not meeting with the KPIs and I know, to be fair, it’s probably that we’re stuck in the middle. (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)



The most frequently mentioned unintended consequence was the lack of student **integration** when they are enrolled in the pathway programmes. Students often end up feeling isolated on campus, that is, if their study centre is actually located on the university's main campus, which is not always the case. Even when they are on campus, many have difficulties integrating with the wider student population, remaining clustered in groups from the same nationality, due to the fact that they study at a partner's facility and that often technical and systemic issues prevent students from accessing the same services as university students.

In two specific universities, it was reported that **wellbeing** was a major concern, with the universities being unable to provide the pastoral and academic support needed by pathway students both while studying in the pathway programmes and once they have transitioned to their university programme. The interviewees were specifically concerned about the way students were pushed to pass language exams. This was actually also echoed by one of the pathway provider representatives interviewed. The mental health toll of the extreme coaching involved while on the pathway programme, shortly followed by very limited support provided by the universities once students have transitioned to degree programmes was specifically something that participants thought had not been considered at the time of the development of the partnerships and only became apparent once the first few cohorts of students had progressed to the university

Related to the above, a difference in **academic outcomes** was noted by most of those interviewed. Many mentioned that pathway students sometimes find it difficult to perform at the same level as direct entry students. When pressed for details, however, the respondents admitted that they could not completely substantiate the claim; instead, there was a perception of underperformance and that most participating universities do not effectively track academic outcomes. Additionally, some acknowledged that pathway students come from different backgrounds from direct entry students and therefore cannot be fairly compared to them.

#### **6.4.1.2 Academic departments**

The increase in a new 'type' of student, often perceived as being of poorer quality than those coming from a more traditional background, can be disruptive for academic departments; it was found that such a perception has an impact on the way academic staff teach and support students progressing onto full degree programme. In addition, in those universities that had maintained a competing internal pathway provision, academic staff who teach on the in-house pathway programmes were feeling under pressure to compete with the IPP's programmes.

**Teaching** international students, particularly those coming from a pathway programme, has been described as an *'inconvenient challenge'* (Senior Relationship Manager, University J) given the language barriers mentioned above and their academic backgrounds that differ from what teaching staff are used to in RG universities. Some academic departments have shown significance resistance to change; others, however, have embraced the challenge and taken responsibility for adapting to the students, even though this outcome was completely unexpected and unplanned. Those interviewed acknowledged that many students have issues adapting to a new academic culture. This issue was described both negatively and positively, with those looking at the problem from a more positive lens explaining the methods that teaching staff can adopt to ease transition and thus provide a more rewarding academic experience to the students.

Outside the core academic departments, fierce **competition** can exist where universities have retained their internal pathway provisions, which was the case in three out of the 11 universities studied. This phenomenon does not seem to have been (at least officially) foreseen by those who developed the partnership in the first place. Amongst the three universities concerned, two are in direct competition with the IPPs and find it fairly problematic. The third one has managed to avoid this situation by ensuring that the providers would focus on different disciplines than those already being delivered by the university. However, all three face issues when it comes to articulating to the students the difference between the two types of provisions.

*'Because the undergraduate students were coming into year two, having large cohorts of students that were academically in English language weaker, also put a huge amount of pressure on that same school. So, as a result, staffing decisions had to be made, and new staff members were hired to actually help that cohort with their progression, which was really positive, and it definitely helped the relationship but obviously wasn't really what was needed'* (Functional Specialist, University C).

#### **6.4.1.3 Professional services**

Academic departments are not the only areas that are unexpectedly impacted by pathway partnerships; interview participants also reported unanticipated disruptions in a number of professional services, in particular, the international, student support, planning and finance functions.

Whether positive or not, the unintended consequences of partnerships with IPPs have an important impact on universities' **international offices**. All but one of the participating

universities reported this was a specific unintended consequence that negatively impacted their staff. There are several areas where unexpected stress and pressure is created. One example of specific discontent is related to overseas governmental sponsors. As mentioned earlier, sponsors can be demanding but are an important source of income for both universities and pathway providers. Some sponsors refuse to work with pathway providers (although this is changing) and thus the universities who work with them. Some IPPs have requested flexibility or additional support for this category of student, de facto requesting different treatment, which RG universities are usually not prepared to provide.

Similarly, confusion amongst agents is a major issue for the international office and adds significant workload to ensure that any doubts or questions are dealt with promptly. Lack of student progression to university programmes also leads to pressure on the international office teams to compensate for the partner's lack of performance and explain why this is happening to sponsors and agents. Only one university indicated that there was limited impact at the operational level; thus, this result was considered an exception and not a rule.

Most professional services, from accommodations to student support, are affected by the unexpected consequences of the partnerships. Overall, this impact is a result of a lack of holistic strategic planning at the institutional level, which we will explore in the next section. As pathway students are not accounted for, at least in the initial stages of partnership development, their needs are often overlooked or completely ignored. In the case of **accommodation services**, for example, the influx of under 18s may cause serious safeguarding issues. Since universities do not usually have a large number of under-age students, they do not have the necessary processes and procedures to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and guidance. This issue has led most universities to eventually ask the IPP to also take responsibility for housing the pathway students, leading to further segregation and lack of integration. **Student support** in specific areas for the non-traditional students is also often overlooked in the initial planning stages, leading to an increased demand for services without the associated additional resources or knowledge required to effectively support the students. This problem is particularly prevalent in those universities that have an embedded pathway college, with **visa and immigration services** being affected the most.

From a **planning and finance** perspective, the unexpected yearly imbalances between pre-master's and foundation students, mentioned previously, also causes financial planning issues. It will also mean that year-to-year, the university must compensate by accepting more master's students, leading to a need to adapt growth plans and departmental structures in some

areas. Additionally, medium and long-term financial projections are also affected when progression targets are not met, or undergraduate attrition is higher than the historical average.

*'I suspect people outside the marketing communities don't understand quite how much work goes into maintaining those relationships because, of course, it's not just about the marketing, but also about the input into the – having an influence in the academic side of things...But yeah, I suspect, more broadly in the university, people don't understand the amount of work that goes into a pathway partnership' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University F).*

#### 6.4.2 Institutional and strategic planning impacts

This section summarises the institutional impact of the unintended consequences identified above. We will only provide a brief overview since they have been extensively described in the previous sections. We will specifically attempt to identify how these impacts affect strategic planning in the universities involved and outline how changes have been brought about because of the unintended consequences listed above. Figure 17 below shows that three specific themes have been identified that are of an operational, financial and academic nature.

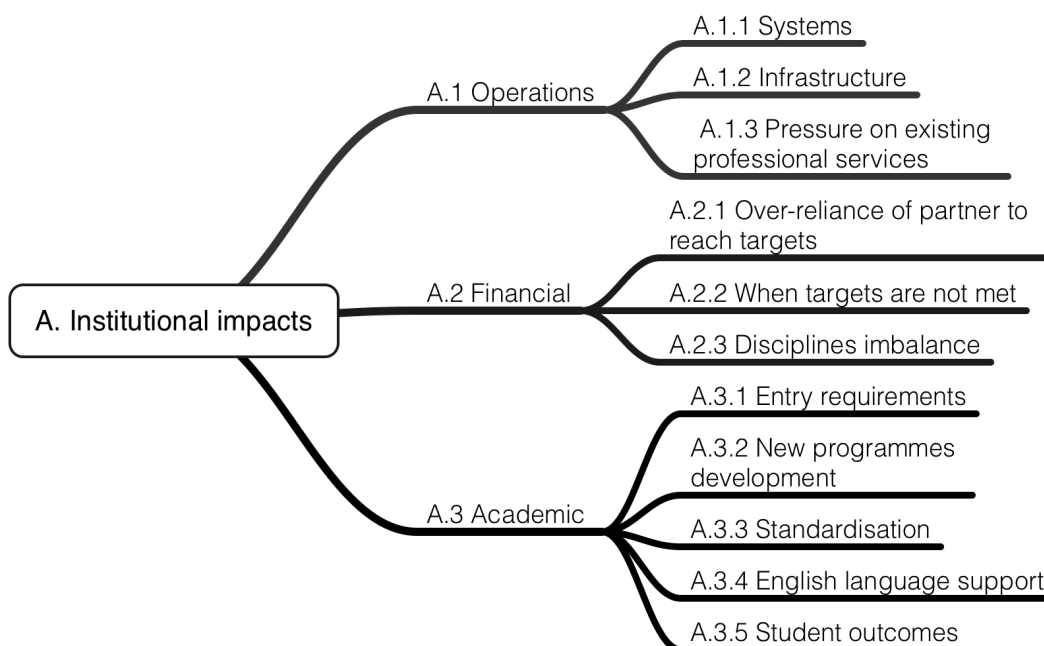


Figure 17:Thematic map – Institutional impact

Table 11: Organisational changes and impacts -Strategic Planning - Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data

Dimensions, themes and categories	Representative data
<p><u>Overarching Dimension A:</u> <u>Operational Impact</u></p> <p>A.1: Students and partners access to facilities</p> <p>A2: Location of student centre</p> <p>A3: Pressure on existing services</p>	<p>A.1: “When the students are at the foundation college, although it’s on campus, they do not necessarily have access to all university facilities. So, there’d be elements of negotiating SLAs with the university services round about that. So, this might be for example, initially they didn’t have access to counselling services.” (Functional Specialist, University C)</p> <p>A.2: “The campus here is a little bit spread out, so it is actually on the way up to accommodation. It’s very convenient for the students. They’re five minutes from accommodation, whereas the campus here might be 10 minutes, but it’s not right on site, so sometimes they do get forgotten about up there.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>A.3: “we are bringing increased numbers onto the campus - that puts greater demand on central services, be it from a student support side of things, be it from admissions, be it sort of behind-the-scenes registry type activities. International students often require more support than home students do, they need visas, and you know slightly more challenging welfare issues. (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University A)</p>

<p>B.1: Over-reliance on partner to reach targets</p> <p>B2: When targets are not met</p> <p>B3: Disciplines imbalance</p>	<p>B.1: “if you're successful in developing that pathway, sometimes the university can get complacent about having to put in the investment to develop its own channels and then you end up in a situation where large proportions of your international undergraduates are coming through and they're all the ones who need something extra and you haven't developed those other channels.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University K).</p> <p>B.2: “It was several hundred below the target, let's just say that. In terms of hitting our targets and you want that to be like your reliable pipeline, [...], financially that’s a big hole as well. There was definitely the pressure on us to sort it out. (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>B3: “we set a budget and that budget is predicated on us recruiting so many home students, so many international masters, so many undergraduate overseas, so that we profile it, right. Now the students that we have in the system we know those that are going to the next year then with the standard attrition rate how many will get to years three, four and so there is a model that profiles there. The model doesn’t seem to be very good at then suddenly saying ‘oh, these students have come into this year but now you’ve got your 30 students but they’re all now Masters’ students, so the system doesn’t seem to recognise for a full 12 months that actually they won’t be there and there and there. It can be don’t, but no-one ever thinks about it because everyone just narrowly thinks ‘oh, you’ve got 30 students so why are you worried?’ But there is an impact there.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University J)</p>
<p><u>Overarching Dimension C:</u></p> <p><u>Academic Impacts</u></p> <p>C.1: Entry requirements</p> <p>C.2: New Programme development</p> <p>C3: Standardisation</p>	<p>C.1: “The second thing that was relevant is the way that [Partner 1] approached the process for students who hadn’t quite made the grade. Students who had made the grade came to us, students who were well below the grade didn’t, but there was a borderline region and Kaplan would be very persuasive to try and convince us to take the students.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p> <p>C.2: Introducing new programmes – {Partner 2] do things really quickly. They want to introduce a new programme, they want to start in September, they tell you now, whereas it could take a full year to go through the university cycle in order to get some of those things through.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>C.3:” I suppose the rationale from [Partner 1]’s perspective that has been forward is that it means that they can have a standardised programme which means they can benchmark better high performances across centres, measure centre performance, measure our academic staff performance so it gives them</p>

<p>C4: English Language support</p>	<p>more control and therefore they've got better quality control. That's their rationale. However, it's a challenging one to sell." (Functional Specialist, University C)</p> <p>C.4: "Now, of course, the other thing is the English language qualification. We were persuaded, initially, that we could take students in with quite a low English language qualification and that they would be brought up to standard, in fact the first year that didn't happen. The first year the standard was really too low and consequently the students that came to us were not as well prepared as they might have been. Now that, I think, was a real shame because the memories of that first year are what stuck in my colleague's minds and they remembered that the international students weren't very good, they didn't know English as well as they should, they therefore failed some modules, and they were struggling to get through. The year after, our English language teaching centre became much more involved and indeed, the entire thing moved up a gear." (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)</p>
<p>C5: Student outcome</p>	<p>C.5: "A lot of the failures we're seeing in the first year, so that's the other thing that is different of getting students from the Middle East is that they enter our first year, so our first-year numbers are good but then when 15% or 20% of them bomb out ..." (Assessment and Improvement Manager, university J)</p>

#### 6.4.2.1 Operational impact

Three key categories of the operational impact of the unintended consequences of partnerships with IPPs were identified. These categories include **systems, infrastructure and professional services** as they are all associated with supporting international students. All universities indicated that changes were brought about as a direct result of the partnerships; these changes were not planned or foreseen and therefore disrupted the university's short, medium and long-term strategic planning. In some cases, systems and policies were updated to ensure that pathway students and staff could access facilities and services. With time, infrastructure concerns have been addressed by several universities, either moving the study centre to a more appropriate location on their estate or even building new facilities. Services that required additional resources were usually provided through the necessary means to deliver the level of service expected by students. If this was not possible, we have seen the extension of the partnership into areas such as student accommodations or wellbeing and welfare support as a way to mitigate the negative unintended consequences identified above.

*'Our numbers are also increasing as well, so a lot of the struggles at the moment is actually about where are we physically gonna put all these students? So been able to really plan and identify that in advance is becoming more and more important, especially as we go through this campus redevelopment as well' (Functional Specialist, University C).*

#### 6.4.2.2 Financial impact

The financial impact identified included three different types. First, on a basic level, when the partnership does not perform at the level expected and student recruitment and retention **targets** are not met, significant financial difficulties are experienced by the universities. Often, this means that new investments have to be postponed and plans reviewed to mitigate the shortfall in revenue.

Even when the partnerships perform well at the macro-level and overall targets are met, we have seen that **imbalances** in level of study or disciplines can lead to universities finding themselves in financial difficulties, having expected students from the partnerships that did not materialise; others are overwhelmed with demand and unable to effectively absorb the volumes generated by the partnership.



Finally, a few of the participants, usually from universities in a long-standing partnership with a pathway provider, voiced concerned about a certain **over-reliance** on their partners to reach their recruitment target every year, leading to a major institutional risk, due to the neglect or underinvestment in other recruitment pipelines.

*'The problems are perceptions and the opportunity cost of not having invested in the other channel. So, it just means that things are a bit skewed. So, what you end up with is, it's not really poor performance, it's just a lack of profile, a more limited profile at the top end of the bell curve'* (Senior Relationship Manager, University K).

#### **6.4.2.3 Academic impact**

Impact in the academic areas of the universities studied was also significant in both positive and negative ways. We found that pressure is placed on academic departments to lower their **entry requirements** in an attempt to meet student recruitment target. In the area of **English language** entry standards, this practice has led to the need of students progressing into the programmes concerned for additional English language support that is not usually provided to other international students. When flexibility was agreed upon in other core entry requirements, it was reported that knowledge gaps were clear and led to **student outcomes** being perceived as being poorer than that of international students with a more traditional background. The key implication here for academic departments is that the curriculum or level of staff support provided to students must be adapted, which was not accounted for or foreseen at the time of the partnership development.

A second impact identified is a consequence of the need for the pathway programmes to articulate as neatly as possible with the university courses to ensure students progression onto university full degree programmes. Here, two opposite phenomena were identified. On the one hand, IPPs have developed **new pathway programmes** to fit the university curriculum. These new programmes were found where high demand was predicted in an area that was not previously covered by the pathway provider. However, we were also made aware that, in some areas, pathway providers were reluctant to take a bespoke approach and preferred to **standardise** their programmes. This approach would ensure that if students fail to progress to the university of their choice, they could still be placed in another university within the provider's portfolio of partners. In some cases, both phenomena

occurred at the same university, with a bespoke approach offered at the beginning of the partnership and standardisation preferred later on to the surprise (and frustration) of the universities concerned.

Finally, we found that in some instances, the providers have suggested the development of *new programmes* at the university based on market intelligence. This suggestion was received in a lukewarm manner at some universities as an encroachment upon academic freedom; however, in the case of one specific university, the suggestion was embraced, leading to the successful recruitment in a set of disciplines that had previously failed to attract international students. This outcome also led to structural changes in several academic departments to adapt to this new programme portfolio.

*'This is where having that relationship with them to say 'we don't mind if you can't squeeze a quart into a pint pot' and all these things, but if you tell us what you are leaving out then we can make sure in the first couple of weeks the lecturers in year one introduce students and say 'look some of you may know...'* because even in the A-level syllabus and in the Indian year 12 and all these things, not everyone does exactly the same, so first year lecturers are encouraged to just not assume that they know everything' (Senior Relationship Manager, University J)

Interestingly, the areas listed as being impacted by the development of IPPs, although numerous, appear to be missing a couple of functions that one might have expected to be mentioned. The first one is Human Resources. Impacts mentioned by the middle managers relate to staff and people generally being affected by the introduction of an IPP in their universities. The Human Resources function of the university has however not been mentioned at all by any of the participants. This may well be because many of the grievances or issues mentioned are dealt with by line managers or heads of departments with support from the Human Resources department, rather than the Human Resources department being directly involved. Similarly, it may well be that staff resources and workload issues are seen by the middle managers are being related to "planning" rather than Human Resources.

Similarly, the Quality Assurance function is also absent from the list of functions that were mentioned as being impacted by the implementation of an IPP. Middle managers often referred to the concept of quality, but they usually meant the caliber of the student themselves rather than the types of processes and policies that may be put in place to assure that what the IPP programmes are delivering is fit for purpose. It is impossible to know why these two functions were not mentioned at all, one assumption may be that these may be seen as background operations with which middle managers have not had to deal with directly.

The wide nature of the identified impacts on stakeholders and entire institutions warrants us to question whether these result from strategy deviation or whether they can be considered collateral damage. The role of the middle managers in the situations described above is also of high importance to this study – lying at the core of our central research question – and findings concerning their ability to influence the strategy process will be explored in the next section.

#### **6.5 Research Question 4: Can any level of deviation existing between the intended and realised strategies supporting the development and implementation of IPP partnerships in UK RIUs be attributed to the actions of middle managers?**

Our fourth research question aimed to establish whether any level of deviation exists between the intended and realised strategies supporting the development and implementation of IPP partnerships in UK RIUs. We also examined whether any of these deviations can be attributed to the actions of middle managers as they exercise strategy as practice and influence the strategy process. Thus, we have taken a three-step approach. First, we identified the main reasons and rationales for universities to enter into partnerships with IPPs. This represents the intended strategy and was discussed at length with all interview participants. We also described this set of strategic objectives for the partnerships as ‘expectations’ since this is an expression that was often used by the participants. Next, we classified the key elements named by participants as forming a deviation from the intended strategy when reflecting on what the partnership has, in effect, realised. Finally, we reflected on whether any of these deviations can be attributed to the middle

manager’s actions. This last element will be addressed in detail in the Chapter 7. The findings are also summarised in Figure 18. Additionally, Table 12 presents representative data for each of the categories and themes.

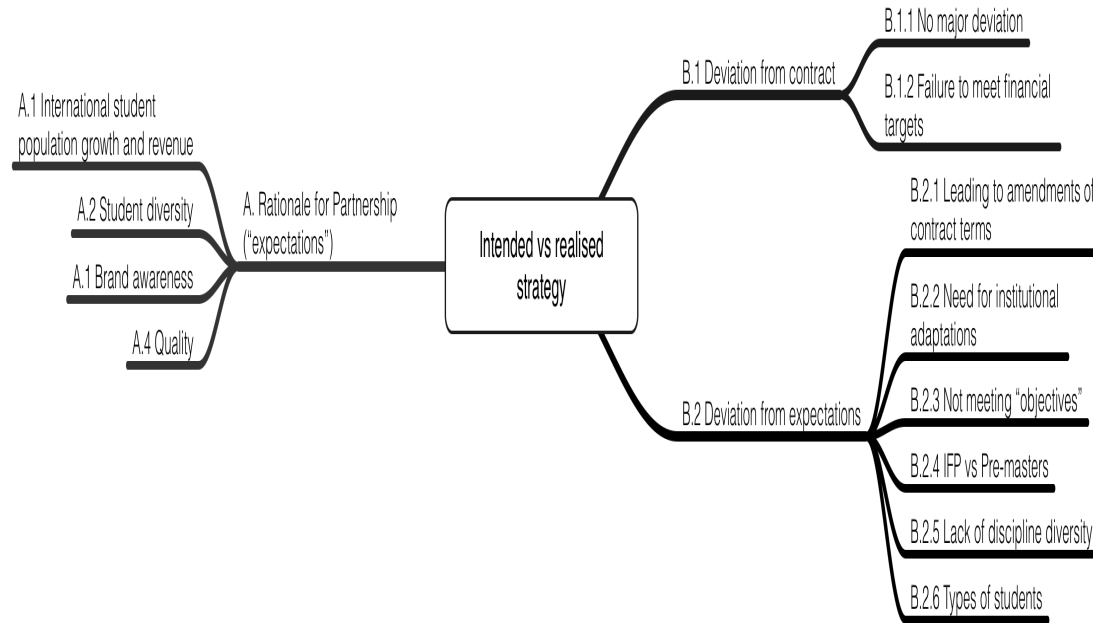


Figure 18: Thematic map – Intended vs realised strategy

### 6.5.1 Rationale for partnerships ('expectations')

Table 12: Intended vs realised Strategies - Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data

Dimensions, themes and categories	Representative data
<p><u>Overarching Dimension A:</u> <u>Rationale for Partnerships</u> <u>(“Expectations”)</u></p> <p>A.1: Brand Awareness</p> <p>A.2: Student Diversity</p> <p>A.3: International Student population growth and revenue</p> <p>A.4: Quality</p>	<p>A.1: “The drive was progression to the university and developing a brand awareness.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p> <p>A.2: “Part of the rationale for setting up the pathway college was not just growth but also diversity and leveraging some of [Partner1]’s marketing power in regions that we haven’t really got the resources to compete effectively with some of our peer institutions” (Functional Specialist, University A)</p> <p>A.3: “So the reason why it was set up in 2006 is that they realised, the senior management of the university, realised that it needed to turbo charge its international student recruitment. It was still relatively small scale at that stage, and we did have our own provision, have our own foundation programme, but it was tiny, I don’t remember the numbers, but I think it could have been like around 100 or probably less and it was small scale.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University E)</p> <p>A.4: “Quality as well and I think the university wanted to put the emphasis on the quality side so the gold standard pathway colleges” (Senior Relationship Manager, University A)</p>
<p><u>Overarching Dimension B.1:</u> <u>Deviation from contract</u></p> <p>B.1.1: No major deviation</p>	<p>B.1.1: “I mean in numerical terms it's been very successful.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University K)</p> <p>B.1.2: “The centre hasn’t really met its student number business plan targets, and so as a consequence there is often a number of challenges around the financial position of the centre.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B)</p>

B1.2: Failure to meet financial targets	
<p><u>Overarching Dimension B.2:</u> <u>Deviation from “Expectations”</u></p> <p>B.2.1: Bulk-buying vs fine-tuning</p> <p>B.2.2: Imbalances</p>	<p>B.2.1: “it’s about student numbers for them and it’s about the management of – it’s about balancing those student numbers and the academic quality for us so they’re the things that you come into conflict about.” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University H)</p> <p>B.2.2: “So as I mentioned earlier, a foundation student going onto an undergraduate degree is potentially gonna lead to an additional three years of fees from the university whereas a master’s student, alright it might be a nice year but it’s one year and the contract that we had didn’t really give any extra reward or penalty for that which I think was strange given the importance of how, you know those students so there’ve been discussions around what can be done to address this?” (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University A)</p>

Interview participants listed many reasons when asked why they believe their university decided to enter a partnership. These reasons were clustered in the following four broad categories: (1) international student population growth and revenue; (2) student diversity; (3); brand awareness; and (4) student quality. All four will be described in turn below.

#### **6.5.1.1 International student population growth and revenue**

All participants stated that growth and revenue generation was the main strategic imperative for partnering with IPPs. Universities feel like they had no choice but to become more entrepreneurial due to external environment demands, such as the deregulation of student numbers and governmental funding changes, leading to a need to generate greater income. In some cases, they are also being approached by foreign governments looking for capacity building and pathway programmes to help students from non-traditional backgrounds join their universities. This need for growth and revenue generation is often championed by top-level staff who then ensure that the partnership is understood by all as being of high strategic importance.

We found that when partnerships have been developed, they usually form part of a general international student population growth plan aimed at ensuring the financial sustainability of the universities in the long term. This result took place regardless of whether the universities considered themselves to be already successful in the area of international student recruitment or not.

*'Yes, but I mean I can understand why the Provost and CFO wanted it to come in so quickly because in order to do what the VC wants to do, in order to recruit more students, in order to build specific departments to the scale he wants them, they need income. They need new buildings, they need income' (Senior Relationship Manager, University G).*

#### **6.5.1.2 Student diversity**

Secondary to revenue, we found that 'diversity' was also a key driver for entering the partnerships. Diversity can be defined in three different ways. For some, it means national diversity. Many RG universities heavily rely on the Chinese market for their international student recruitment. Diversification of the student body from a nationality perspective was considered crucial and a de-risking strategy. The second type of diversification that some expected is at discipline level. Some disciplines or degree programmes are generally able to attract decent numbers of international students; these popular programmes are generally found in business schools, social sciences and engineering faculties. A number of universities expected that the pathway programme would support international student recruitment in disciplines that usually struggle to attract students, such as the hard sciences and the arts.

Finally, the majority of participants stated that their universities aimed to diversify in terms of the level of studies. RG universities generally perform well in terms of international student recruitment at the postgraduate level but have greater difficulties attracting undergraduate students, who, from a financial perspective, are more lucrative. Many expected that the majority of students would be enrolled in a foundation programme (which leads to undergraduate programmes), and very few would join the pre-master's pathway programmes.

*'The rationale was to increase diversity both in terms of nationality and in terms of programme of study and to create a sustainable recruitment stream to the university' (Functional Specialist, University C).*

#### **6.5.1.3 Brand awareness**

For some universities, usually those in the lower tier of the RG and who tend to have a lower profile awareness than others, increasing their brand visibility in key markets was a major driver for partnering with a pathway provider. They expected that working in partnership with a large, global provider would benefit the university's own profile and help them develop their individual presence overseas.

*'Being part of an established network, growing your exposure or raising your profile worldwide, creating new recruitment opportunities by attending their events and getting that exposure into new countries' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University F).*

#### **6.5.1.4 Quality**

Three universities stated that one of their strategic objectives was to attract high-quality students. This was not the primary objective, which was growth and revenue, but was a close second and was part of the internal narrative that had been created by the top-level managers who had been leading the initial development of the partnerships.

*'Equally important is making sure that the students that come through from [Partner 2] can then survive in an RG university, and I have to say that the university's been very clear on that, which I think is the right thing to do. Not necessarily commercially the right thing to do, but I think in terms of student wellbeing and student progression, it's the right thing to do to make sure that the students that come through have the right standing and can then survive once they're into the university' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B).*

Considering the intended strategy in terms of the broad themes identified above, we compared these themes with the realised strategy, or more precisely, how much deviation there had been from the intended strategy. In so doing, we first identified whether there was any



deviation when looking at what was actually agreed upon by the two parties and second, whether there was any deviation when considering what was 'expected' by the universities.

#### **6.5.1.5 Deviation from contract**

When compared to the contracts – which usually, as mentioned above when considering the factors that have led to unintended consequences, contain very broad institutional targets – it appears that, in general, there has been **very little strategy deviation** from the intended strategies. Some partnerships have not achieved their overall targets, but the majority have, at least in broad terms and as contractually agreed upon. For the majority of universities, therefore, the general 'growth' – which was the main and only measurable target (whether concerning the pathway programme only or progression to university programme, when included in the contract), has been achieved.

Three universities disclosed that their pathway centres had not met their overall **targets**, causing financial difficulties and therefore leading to only the partial realisation of the strategy.

*'I think that's what it boils down to as well that ultimately we don't have the diversity we want but around six hundred students were progressing every year and that's a huge number, you know' (Functional Specialist, University C).*

#### **6.5.2 Deviation from 'expectations'**

One can wonder whether a partnership can be reduced to a simple contract, however. Many of the participants from the universities studied would argue that we cannot. When discussing with middle managers whether the institutional strategy had been fully realised or incurred any deviation (due to their involvement or not), we found that in most of the partnerships, expectations have not been met. This has had a major impact on the university as an organisation and on stakeholders across it, with adaptations required, as detailed earlier. The main striking source of unintended consequences (on the universities side) comes from the fact that the majority of universities studied had different expectations of the partnership compared to what is actually stated in their contracts. This was true for all but two of the partnerships studied, which can be attributed mostly to a difference in culture between the private sector and HE, especially highly selective universities such as the RG.

##### **6.5.2.1 Bulk-buying vs fine-tuning**

One of the main issues is the fact the contracts appear are vague, lacking targets and details. This is especially the case at universities where the middle managers were not consulted

during contract negotiation. Several universities managed to amend their contracts over the years to include more specific targets and other clauses, such as capping numbers in certain areas. One university learned lessons from the past and implemented tougher clauses with a new partner, only for this to backfire and for the objectives of the partnerships to be deemed unachievable and unrealistic by both parties after a period of time. Finally, a common frustration relates to the fact that many partnerships have agreed targets for student enrolment in the pathway programmes but none for those progressing to the university. The 'expectation' from the universities is that the majority of students would progress to the university, but the reality is often quite different, with some claiming that as few as less than 50% of the students enrolled in the pathway programmes actually progress to their chosen university.

*'These are by nature very long-term partnerships and I'm not sure if you look at the timeline of thinking of the time that decisions are made, I'm not sure how much consideration there is of the sort of the future direction and how that informs the way the contracts are formulated and how targets are set... it surprises me a little and it doesn't surprise me at the same time that universities don't always consider the importance of the contract as... or the centrality of the contract of the relationship... I mean our finance team are very strong and actually the members of the senior team that were involved in the implementation were really quite commercially savvy. Even then... and I think this is general' (Senior Relationship Manager, University K).*

#### **6.5.2.2 Imbalances**

The lack of detailed targets means that the "expected" fine-tuning and balancing of types of students is rarely achieved. Thus, for most universities, the intended strategy of growing their undergraduate international student population fails to materialise in the volume envisioned. Instead, the majority of their growth take place at the postgraduate level where most universities are usually already performing well.

Similarly, the 'expected' wide variety of nationalities within the pathway student population is also rarely achieved and in reality, the majority remain Chinese, in some cases a very large majority (with a university indicated that over 90% of their intake was from China). The same problem remains within the 'expected' balanced intake, which would have seen pathway students join the majority of university programmes. The reality remains quite different with students being clustered around a small number of (often already successful) programmes.

Finally, the issue of student quality, which for a minority was of high importance, remains unaddressed and leads to disgruntlement in academic staff who did not 'expect' to have

to make special arrangements for the pathway students. As acknowledged previously, the types of students recruited from pathway providers are different from the ones that staff at RG universities are used to, especially those universities that do not have large numbers of international students.

*'It's about student numbers for them and it's about the management of – it's about balancing those student numbers and the academic quality for us so they're the things that you come into conflict about' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University H).*

In general, it was found that the main root of frustrations and unintended consequence comes from the fact that objectives and targets of the partnership (real or expected), and by association the intended strategies, are unrealistic. The reasons for this either seems to come from the fact that the partner promised unrealistic results in order to succeed in the initial procurement process, or the university (or parts of) have unrealistic expectations about what the partnerships should deliver, meaning that the intended strategy and the partnership have, in effect, different objectives and therefore were never aligned in the first place.

### **6.5.3 Role of middle managers**

Of interest in this study are the unintended consequences as observed by the middle managers. Middle Managers, themselves, are also influenced by factors outlined above, often originating from the way decision-making structures allow them to evolve and behave. We have identified two types of middle managers: (1) those that are empowered to act and are therefore able to influence outcomes and (2) those who feel that they are mere implementers and less able to exercise control over their environments. Underpinning both types are the personal views and feelings (informed by their knowledge, opinion, and values (Merton, 1936)) that the middle managers hold towards the IPP they partner with. These can certainly be a source of unintended consequences, and they are therefore documented below. The findings are summarised in Figure 19 below. Additionally, Table 13 presents representative data for each of the categories and themes.

#### **6.5.3.1 Empowered middle managers**

In the majority of the universities studied (7) we found middle managers who felt empowered to make and influence decisions with regards to the partnerships they were involved in. As a matter of fact, a handful of them were the driving forces (usually in the background, influencing top-level managers) behind the partnerships that exist today, having sown seeds at the right time and effectively influenced key decision-makers.

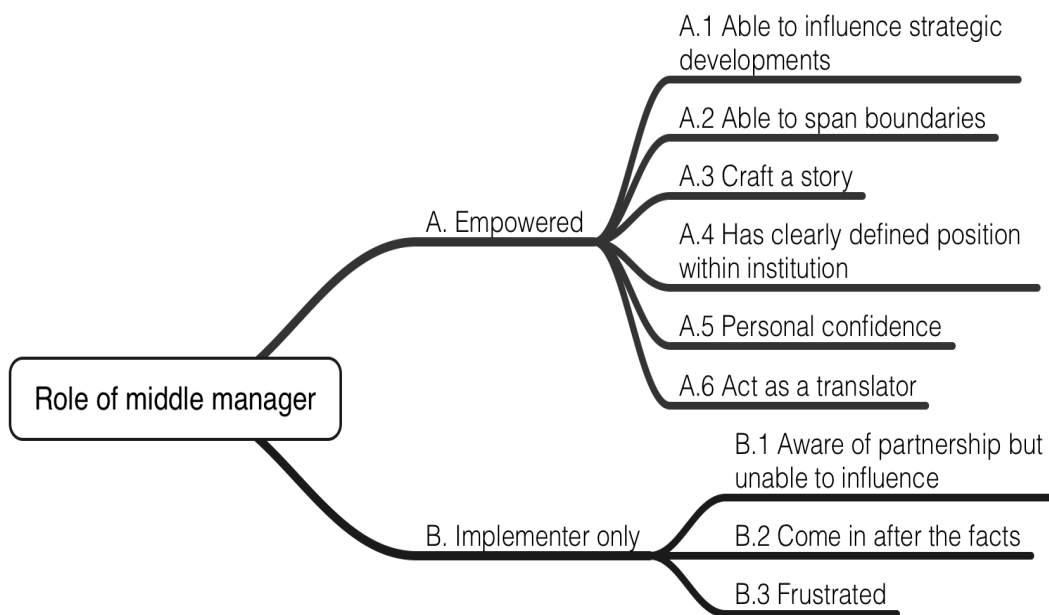


Figure 19: Thematic map – Role of the middle manager

*'I started the conversation with [Partner 4]...but not many people know about that...I was trying to keep it a secret from everybody because I knew that the private provider concept was tricky at the time and there'd been a lot of negativity about what was happening at [another university]'* (Senior Relationship Manager, University F)

Those middle managers who can be seen as successful and empowered demonstrate the following key characteristics:

(1) They were able to gain support and trust from their senior management team and are therefore able to **influence** the universities' strategic agenda.

*'I feel like I had a reasonable voice actually because I've worked quite closely with [top-level manager]. Ultimately it will be his decision but he's come and asked for input and advice so I feel like there's been good consultation, as much as I would expect, yes'* (Senior Relationship Manager, University A).

(2) They are able to **span internal boundaries** and skilfully communicate with key stakeholders a **narrative** that is accepted by the majority of staff.

Table 13: Role of Middle Managers - Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data

Dimensions, themes and categories	Representative data
<p><u>Overarching Dimension A:</u> <u>Empowered</u></p> <p>A.1 Able to influence strategic developments</p> <p>A.2 Act as translator</p> <p>A.3: Craft a story</p> <p>A.4: Has clearly defined position in university</p> <p>A.5: Personal confidence</p> <p>A.6: Able to span boundaries</p>	<p>A.1: “I started the conversation with [Partner 4] [...] but not many people know about that. [...] I was trying to keep it a secret from everybody because I knew that the private provider concept was tricky at the time and there’d been a lot of negativity about what was happening at [another university].” (Senior Relationship Manager, University F).</p> <p>A.2: “I was the only person that really had oversight of what was going on, so [...] when I made a recommendation or when I was asked to make a recommendation, it was generally taken on board” (Functional Specialist, University C).</p> <p>A.3: “ I constantly needed to be a champion – the perception of [Partner 1] and foundation providers, Pathway providers, was so negative across the University and I felt like I was constantly championing it and trying to win over people because I think that what they do is really important, providing that pathway and that bridge to students from other cultures who cannot access universities. It’s like widening participating, just in an international arena.” (Functional Specialist, University C)</p> <p>A.4: “I feel like I had a reasonable voice actually because I’ve worked quite closely with [Top-level Manager]. Ultimately it will be his decision but he’s come and asked for input and advice so I feel like there’s been good consultation, as much as I would expect, yes.” (Senior Relationship Manager, University A).</p> <p>A.5: “It requires a Director with a certain pragmatism, so that’s the starting point. You need your International Director to be engaged and, I think, that cuts both ways. In the International Office, the Director has to be engaged otherwise they’re going to marginalise themselves and lead to those problems arising.” (Senior Relationship Manager, university K).</p> <p>A.6: I’ve just sort of grown into this role and have had to take responsibility for certain things that don’t think actually sit here [...] Sometimes my role is about warning colleagues about what may come, I’ve been through a partnership with another provider in a different university so sometimes I’m sort of the voice of</p>

	<p>doom and gloom [...], sometimes I'm actually a fixer for [Partner 4] in areas of the university that have never dealt with a partnership like this. [...] so, my role spans a whole range." (Senior Relationship Manager, university G)</p>
<p><u>Overarching Dimension B:</u>  <u>Implementer only or</u>  <u>marginalised</u></p> <p>B.1: Aware of partnership but unable to influence</p> <p>B.2: Come in after the facts</p> <p>B.3: Frustrated</p> <p>B.4: Out of touch</p>	<p>B.1: "I [...] predicted quite a lot of things but we weren't listened to at the time because it was a big exciting sort of tick box for a new [Top-level manager] and a relatively new [Top-level Manager] and they charged ahead without really using the experience. [...] How did it make me feel? Not great but you know, hum, well, okey, on you go. You'll live and learn" (Senior Relationship Manager, university G).</p> <p>B.2: "Yeah, I failed. There were things I was desperate to stop [...] and because I wasn't working directly with the [Top-level Manager] [...] all that came back was: "[name of Top-level Manager] has decided that we're definitely doing it and so it's just going ahead and now you have to implement this relationship" (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University E).</p> <p>B.3: "Relationship with senior management towards the end was absolutely dire. The whole thing about having people going over your head, [...] my manager and I both felt undermined that the [Top-level Manager] was having a separate conversation and I wasn't even in the room, and I was trying to influence through different channels" (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University E).</p> <p>B.4: "the contract had been negotiated by people with very little experience in the field of international student recruitment" (Functional Specialist, University C).</p>

*'I constantly needed to be a champion – the perception of [Partner 1] and foundation providers, Pathway providers, was so negative across the university and I felt like I was constantly championing it and trying to win over people because I think that what they do is really important, providing that pathway and that bridge to students from other cultures who cannot access universities. It's like widening participation, just in an international arena' (Functional Specialist, University C).*

(3) They are able to work effectively with a more commercially oriented partner and **act as translators** between the two parties involved in the partnership, playing a facilitation role.

*'It's so commercial it needs translating every step of the way with our academic colleagues, they don't understand any of the language...academic colleagues don't get it. But it's been a fascinating journey for me' (Senior Relationship Manager, University F).*

This need for translation as been noticed, in particular, where partnerships and communications structures were unclear at the time of the formation of the partnership, thereby creating a space for the middle managers to establish themselves to effectively manage relationships. Some managers found themselves 'empowered' and responsible for partnership development simply because there was no one else to carry out this role. The authority was therefore conferred to them as a de facto position rather than an official appointment.

*'I've just sort of grown into this role and have had to take responsibility for certain things that don't think actually sit her...Sometimes my role is about warning colleagues about what may come, I've been through a partnership with another provider in a different university so sometimes I'm sort of the voice of doom and gloom ..., sometimes I'm actually a fixer for [Partner 4] in areas of the university that have never dealt with a partnership like this...so, my role spans a whole range' (Senior Relationship Manager, University G).*

Empowerment appears to come from two types of circumstances. In some cases, the middle managers are **officially 'empowered'** to act via the organisational structure they sit in, which gives them clear authority over certain areas of strategy development and implementation. Some partnerships have a dedicated coordinator appointed to facilitate operations, and this appears to work well, although it also can lead to a possible single point of failure as knowledge of most aspects of the partnership is held by one specific individual.

*'I was the only person that really had oversight of what was going on, so...when I made a recommendation or when I was asked to make a recommendation, it was generally taken on*

*board' (Functional Specialist, University C).*

However, this formal coordinating role was only found in two universities; other 'empowered' middle managers we have encountered only appear to be more 'confident' and experienced than others and take responsibility for driving change, usually to suit their own agenda and (re)gain control of a zone they see has being within their area of responsibility. Those middle managers are successful in influencing decision-making because they are able to look at issues from a variety of angles and bring people together to solve problems. They are also able to navigate internal resistance and withstand challenges, showing strong resilience.

*'It requires a Director with a certain pragmatism, so that's the starting point. You need your International Director to be engaged and, I think, that cuts both ways. In the international office, the Director has to be engaged otherwise they're going to marginalise themselves and lead to those problems arising' (Senior Relationship Manager, University K).*

In several universities we therefore found strong evidence of middle manager's influencing skills. These skills were utilised to influence top-level managers as well as a wide variety of stakeholders. We also found that middle managers were able to shape the strategic agenda and the outcome of the implementation of the IPPs. However, in a few cases middle managers did not demonstrate a ability to influence change, we will explore this in the next section.

### **6.5.3.2 Middle managers as implementer only or marginalised**

In universities where we did not find empowered middle managers, those in charge of the delivery of the partnerships often saw themselves as a simple implementer, detached from strategic decision-making (although often frustrated about it) and **unable to influence** change; they felt like *'they've got the responsibility but not the authority'* (Senior Relationship Manager, University H). Some clearly stated that they *'just have to deliver the KPI'* (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University B) or were brought in when negotiations had concluded to *'make it happen'* (Senior Relationship Manager, University A).

Some middle managers said that despite their awareness of developments and offers of help, they were not asked to provide advice and therefore watched development from afar, knowing that issues would emerge.

*'I...predicted quite a lot of things but we weren't listened to at the time because it was a big, exciting sort of tick box for a new [top-level manager] and a relatively new [top-level manager] and they charged ahead without really using the experience...How did it make me feel? Not great*



*but you know, hum, well, okey, on you go. You'll live and learn' (Senior Relationship Manager, University G).*

Although **brought in after the facts**, some middle managers have managed to successfully influence decisions and the overall direction of the partnership. We found that, in one university, the middle manager *'managed to put an amendment to the contract'* to address an *'extremely challenging situation'* resulting from the fact that the contract *'had been negotiated by people with very little experience in the field [of international student recruitment]'* (Functional Specialist, University C).

However, those who have been kept out of strategic decision-making felt **frustrated** by what they considered to be unnecessary complications that could have been avoided if they had been included or consulted prior to a decision being made.

*'Relationship with senior management towards the end was absolutely dire. The whole thing about having people going over your head...my manager and I both felt undermined that the [top-level manager] was having a separate conversation and I wasn't even in the room, and I was trying to influence through different channels' (Assessment and Improvement Manager, University E).*

In this particular case, the middle manager fought hard to try to influence decision-making but was unsuccessful because of a lack of direct contact with top-level staff, admitting: *'Yeah, I failed. There were things I was desperate to stop...and because I wasn't working directly with the [top-level manager]...all I got back was: '[name of top-level manager] has decided that we're definitely doing it and so it's just going ahead and now you have to implement this relationship'.*(Assessment and Improvement Manager, University E).

Whether empowered or not, middle managers' decisions and actions are influenced by their own experience, bias and general perception of the partner they have to work with. It seems evident that not being involved in the development of the partnership results in issues at the implementation stages, but in addition to this, further factors, including personal experience and values, influence the way that IPPs are perceived by the middle managers who interact with them on a day-to-day basis.

Having outlined the findings of the study, it is appropriate to confirm that these have been mapped back to the original framework first noted in chapter 2 and are therefore explicitly linked to both the literature review and the resulting research questions. In conclusion, the

pattern suggested is of two key broad factors responsible for generating unintended consequences in partnerships between RIUs and IPPs; these are linked to dimensions related to decision-making and communication. The typology of unintended consequences that was created shows that most areas of the universities' involved are affected by the development of the IPP partnerships and that a whole university approach may therefore be necessary when developing and implementing such partnerships.

These organisational changes have a significant impact on internal stakeholders and may require institutional adaptations in the short, medium and long term from a strategic planning perspective. Middle managers play an important role in influencing strategic decision-making, although this was not found to be the case at all institutions. Finally, one of the primary findings is of a possible misinterpretation of the intended strategy, including by the middle managers in charge of sense-giving, leading to unmet 'expectations' despite the realisation of the original strategy on the surface. These hypotheses and their implications will be discussed further in the next chapter.

## **7 CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION**

This chapter discusses the major findings as related to the literature on unintended consequences, strategy as practice, organisational culture and international partnerships in HEIs. It also incorporates a discussion addressing the implications of the findings for the theory and research as well as for practice, which may be valuable for use by HEI middle managers and other practitioners planning to develop new IPP partnerships.

**The central research question** was ‘How do the roles and decisions of middle managers leading the development and implementation of IPP partnerships in UK RIUs impact the strategy development process?’ Additionally, four, more detailed research questions were developed to help address the central research question in a more comprehensive manner. These are listed below.

### **Research Question 1**

What are the types of unintended consequences of developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs, as described by middle managers?

### **Research Question 2**

What factors, as perceived by middle managers, produce unintended consequences when developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs and whom do they impact?

### **Research Question 3**

Do the unintended consequences of developing and implementing IPP partnerships in UK RIUs, as perceived by the middle managers, lead to organisational changes or adaptations?

### **Research Question 4**

Can any level of deviation existing between the intended and realised strategies supporting the development and implementation of IPP partnerships in UK RIUs be attributed to the actions of middle managers?

Findings for each of the research questions were described in detail in the previous chapter. When interpreting the findings in the next sections, we will discuss the most prevalent themes identified based on the theories forming our research framework (described in Chapter 4), the relevant literature (identified in Chapter 3) and the context of the study (acknowledged in Chapter 2).

## **7.1 Interpretation of the findings**

When interpreting the findings, we will take a step back from the vast amount of details that was presented in the previous chapter and focus on four broad multi-dimensional themes that were commonly cited by all participants. These include the following: (1) organisational culture in decision-making and communication as central factors that lead to unintended consequences; (2) understanding the unintended consequences themselves and what would qualify as success factors should they be addressed in the type of partnerships studied; (3) assessing whether strategy deviation actually took place and discussing the difference between strategic objectives and stakeholder expectations; and (4) moving towards a more developed understanding of the role of middle managers within the context of this study. Each theme is discussed in the following sections.

### **7.1.1 Organisational culture, decision-making and communication**

This study's findings concluded that two main factors contributed to the generation of unintended consequences, as experienced by middle managers: decision-making and communication. This outcome, explored in more detail below, is in line with the historical literature that has attempted to define universities as organisations from the perspective of the decision-making process, developing a variety of models and cultural types (Baldrige, 1971; Berquist, 1992; Blau, 1973; Cohen et al., 1972; Goodman, 1962; Marginson and Considine, 2000; McNay, 1995; Millet, 1962; Mintzberg, 1979).

#### **7.1.1.1 Organisational culture and decision-making: dominance of the corporate model**

In this study, the middle managers interviewed emphasised that the two key factors leading to unintended consequences were the nature of decision-making practices at the top level within their universities and how these decisions were then communicated both internally and externally. Reflecting on the way this was expressed by the participants, we found that often what the participants were referring to were the assumptions, values and philosophies that underline the culture of their organisation as described by Johnson (2015).

We established that the findings aligned well with the way Davies (2001) argued that universities have slowly moved in recent years from having a low corporate identity with its leadership usually adopting a non-interventionist attitude in most areas of university life to becoming more entrepreneurial and corporate in their strategic thinking. We certainly found that the traditional collegial model (Millet, 1962) did not exist in any of the universities involved in the study. Rather, a corporate model was dominant (McNay, 1995) in top-level management, and decision-making was usually described as being made by a small circle of individuals at the

executive level. Top-level managers were described as dominant at the time of decision-making, leading to unintended consequences further down the line.

But while a decision can be imposed by top-level executives, one cannot force its implementation in specific areas of the university, especially when they are faced with competing cultures in other areas of university life, in particular the collegiate culture in academic departments and the bureaucratic culture in professional services. Berquist (1992) concluded that cultures are present in three key domains: structure, process and attitude. Organisational change can only be successfully implemented if all three are included. The findings of this study also align with this idea. While some participants admitted that the decision of their top-level managers was sufficient to open the channels needed to implement the partnership, all agreed that this was not enough to ensure the successful implementation of all aspects of the partnership and that internal resistance and lack of buy-in continued to be challenges.

#### **7.1.1.2 Organisational culture and communication: Evidence of loosely coupled systems**

All participants described a genuine existence of the often cited 'loosely coupled social systems' coined by Weick (1976). Participants cited that difficulties usually arose from the low level of internal integration existing within the various parts of their university, with the diffusion of major changes presenting a real challenge while small adjustments were easier to accomplish. This phenomenon was often described by the participants as parts of the university lacking flexibility or agility, instead preferring stability, resistance, lack of buy-in, or simply being unwilling to engage due to prioritising other activities. In this study, we also confirmed what had been observed by Denis et al. (2001), that is, different levels of 'coupling' need to occur simultaneously for change to be successful.

The first level is within the top-leadership team. The findings of the study show that in all cases, the top leadership was in agreement (at least publicly) about what they were aiming to achieve. The second level is between the top leadership and its internal organisational constituents. Here, the findings clearly showed that there is a certain level of disconnect between at least some parts of the universities and the leaderships team. More worryingly, we also found that there was a disconnect in several universities between the top leadership and the middle managers who should be entrusted to lead the implementation of the partnership. Finally, the third level of connection required between the leadership team and the external constituents of the organisation is the IPPs. Oftentimes, a disconnect was perceived with the

top-leadership team either taking the partnership for granted once established or assuming that their involvement was no longer required once implementation had started.

#### **7.1.1.3 Large-scale change management: The importance of top-level leadership and stakeholder engagement**

Even those middle managers that felt empowered and did not experience major challenges or unintended consequences within their organisation emphasised the link between leadership and successful organisational change. Throughout most interviews, the middle managers expressed frustration over having to deal with the consequences of the autonomy of academic departments and diffused decision-making, often attributing this to a lack of top-level leadership and stakeholder engagement. Even in the few cases where the implementation of the partnerships was described as more successful and leading to fewer unintended consequences, we found that none followed the model recommended by Eckel et al. (1999), which suggested that large-scale change required (1) using change teams charged with strategic purpose; (2) engaging the campus community; and (3) aligning time, resources, and attention with the major change effort.

More commonly, participants felt that the change effort was not a concerted one, often led by themselves alone or a small group of individuals. This meant that the engagement with the campus community was not optimal, however skilful the middle managers were at spanning boundaries. Finally, as noted in the typology of unintended consequences, the alignment of time and resources with the change effort was completely overlooked by the top-level managers in most cases. This leads us to conclude that the study by Rahilly and Hudson (in Agosti and Bernat, 2018) described an exception rather than a rule. We did not find a comparable set of results in any of the universities included in this study.

#### **7.1.1.4 Lack of knowledge and experience**

There was a general consensus from most of the middle managers involved in the partnerships studied that within their university, staff at various levels lacked the experience required to effectively develop and implement partnerships with IPPs. This lack of experience and knowledge was described more often as occurring at senior levels during the decision-making process and therefore leading to unintended consequences. However, some middle managers pointed to the lack of experience and knowledge within various operational functions of their university including their own (and themselves). This observation aligns with Merton's view that social action is driven by 'opinion and estimate' (Merton, 1936, p. 900) and supports

Burlyuk (2017)'s idea that ignorance can influence actions and lead to unintended consequences.

The lack of knowledge and experience has also been described as dovetailing with attitudes that result from the 'imperious immediacy of interest' (Merton, 1936, p. 901). Because top-level managers want to act quickly and see returns from their decisions and actions rapidly, they act without gathering sufficient knowledge or consulting with those who may either have pre-existing knowledge or are able to provide advice on the possible operational implications of the decisions. We heard this being described by many of the participants when expressing the view that had they been consulted, some of the unintended consequences could have been avoided, or when describing the decision to go ahead with the partnership being made and with no opportunity to discuss its implications prior to launching the partnership. The study therefore demonstrates the perceived 'myopia' (McAulay, 2017) or 'blind spot' (Lodge, 2019) that is found within top-level management in RIUs when IPP partnerships are developed.

It is useful to understand how organisational cultures and the way they influence decision-making and communication within RIUs can lead to unintended consequences when developing partnerships with IPPs. Taking a step back from the findings described in 6.2, we will investigate whether the typology of unintended consequences produced as an outcome of this study can help us understand what could ensure the success of a partnership between RIUs and IPPs from the outset, should the unintended consequences be understood and taken into account as part of the partnership planning process.

### **7.1.2 Partnerships' unintended consequences and possible success factors**

Understanding unintended consequences may help us identify what is needed to avoid them and therefore ensure success in partnership development between universities IPPs and in implementing whole or parts of internationalisation strategies in general.

This section overviews three key points, or factors, that are based on the findings related to the types of unintended consequences that were identified: (1) the fact that partnerships with IPP were, and still are to some, a new type of partnership never experienced by RIUs for two specific reasons – they are of high intensity and focus on teaching and education; (2) the fact that stakeholder engagement, due to the loosely coupled nature of RIUs and the corporate decision-making process that was identified earlier, has been lacking and appears to be a central cause of unintended consequences; (3) the expectations that were often cited by participants, and how this may be related to the status enjoyed by RG universities within the UK HE sector.

### **7.1.2.1 High intensity educational partnerships: the unknown for research intensive universities**

As noted by Agosti and Bernat (2018), the proliferation of study programmes that offer non-traditional students pathways to university education is a new phenomenon that has slowly become more significant in international HE over the past 20 years. IPP partnerships may well now be seen as a must-have, with more than half of the RG having developed an arrangement. Nevertheless, they were and still are a unique type of partnership that would not have been encountered previously in RIUs and generally any universities prior to the early 2000s. The pace of development is accelerating and in the past two years alone (since the data collection for this study was conducted), three additional RG universities have now entered into partnership with IPPs.

We agree with Wilkins et al. (2017) that the concept of international partnerships is difficult to define. One could argue that IPP partnerships are not international in any way and are simply a commercial arrangement to procure a commodity (in this case the students). We found evidence that some within top-level management, whether they were aware of this or not, believe this sentiment, which is why necessary internal consultation may not have been carried out in this case. While all participants expressed an understanding of the commercial arrangement across all universities, we found that the partnerships were not developed with the same rigour as other commercial arrangements. Indeed, procurement processes were followed but other implications were not considered.

In simple terms, if a university was to procure a contract for a new catering provider, it would have considered the practicalities and implications of the partnership from a logistical perspective (where will they operate from if they are to be based on campus, what type of food will they sell, will they compete with other services provided by the university elsewhere, do they require support from existing services or integration with existing systems, do they need access to various buildings and so forth). The fact that such details were not always considered leads us to believe that the new partnerships were treated, at least initially, like any other international collaboration, with the majority led by relevant members of the executive team in charge of internationalisation (such as the pro-vice chancellor, vice-president international and in some cases the registrar).

Specifically, the findings show that, at least in the early stages of the partnerships, the contracts were treated as 'cooperative agreements' of the type that are usually developed with other HEIs for the purpose of sharing resources or coordinating activities towards a common



goal (Kinser and Green, 2009). These are often softly focused and rely on academic cooperation. It is uncommon for large-scale international partnerships to be completely developed ‘top-down’, and although they require various levels of collaboration and efforts in their delivery (De Wit, 2002), ‘high intensity’ instructional partnerships, demanding significant transformation and adaptation of practices, as described by Sakamoto and Chapman (2011) are rare. However, we argue that the findings show that IPP partnerships should be treated as such and, because they are usually not, unintended consequences tend to exist.

Underlying the above is also the fact that partnerships solely focused on education activities are uncommon in RIUs, and even more uncommon are collaborations in this area with commercial ‘for-profit’ partners. A culture clash is evident and was described in the findings as an ‘us and them’ confrontational situation in many of the partnerships, at least at the early stages, linking well with the way Hofstede et al. (2002), in their cultural dimension theory, described the extent to which people are comfortable dealing with the unknown. Introducing an ‘unknown’ or new type of partnership into an organisation that is used to doing things a very specific (or, rather, in many cases, un-specific) way, makes stakeholder engagement all the more important.

#### **7.1.2.2 Importance of academic engagement and essential linkages for success**

Santhi (2010) made reference to ten success factors for the internationalisation of HEIs, which we have outlined in 3.2.2.. Comparing these factors with the findings of the studies, we concluded that in most cases, at least some of the success factors were not present in most of the universities studied at the time of the partnership development and implementation. Should they all have co-existed, it is highly possible that the majority of the unintended consequences identified in this study would not have occurred or would have been minimised.

Although RIUs appear to excel in teaching and the interdependent relationship between research and teaching is often described as being at the heart of such universities (Brennan 2017), the findings of the study align with the view that teaching and education activities are secondary to research in terms of priorities. Teaching is seen as deriving from research activities; hence, we documented that academic departments rarely welcomed any suggestions for changes in their portfolio of programmes or curriculum. The Research Excellence Framework, research income and international research publications remain a key priority for RIUs (Locke, 2014,) and education is not always valued in the same way as research. This transpired in the results of the first Teaching Excellence Framework, where only eight of the RG universities

secured a Gold rating<sup>4</sup>.

The study's findings emphasise the need for academic engagement and clear communication as well as the importance of having a number of champions in this area (these were often the link tutors, but also heads of schools and departments, and more generally, middle managers from professional services that are well integrated and trusted within academic departments). Should those key contacts be uninterested, sceptical or opposed to the partnership, issues and unintended consequences are naturally generated. This is in line with the literature on internationalisation strategy and the internationalisation process (Childress, 2010; Knight 1995), which shows that academic engagement and internal stakeholder engagement in its broadest sense is of the utmost importance.

Finally, our findings also align with Manning's (in Agosti and Bernat, 2018) suggested 'linkages and connections of pathway programmes with the host HEIs' (p. 248). We concluded, in a similar way, that linkages are essential in recruitment and admission, curriculum development, pathway staff recruitment and training, facilities access, student support and general experience. Our findings also confirmed that tailoring in areas of subject specialism and languages skills is necessary and that a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate. Our study took a broader focus than Manning's and as a result, we found that linkages are not only necessary between the partner and various areas of the universities, but that, as important, if not more important, are the internal linkages that need to exist to champion the partnership, ensure effective coordination and guarantee long-term success and stability in a way that is beneficial for both the university and the IPP.

The study has consistently concluded that although the main objectives of the partnerships were usually delivered, the way these were delivered was unsatisfactory. For that reason, we would recommend an additional linkage between the partner and the HEIs in the area of long-term student number planning, which is quite different from being linked with the university's admissions function. The latter provides a useful linkage for efficient work during the academic year but does not allow for longer-term discussion and vision. Linking with the university's strategic planning function or process would allow for long-term change in response

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4 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/top-uk-university-rankings-gold-silver-bronze-oxford-cambridge-tef-teaching-excellence-framework-new-government-a7801681.html> (Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021)

to market demands, for example, in academic departments' teaching portfolios but also their size and shape. This may be relevant only to RIUs where academic departments enjoy greater autonomy than in teaching-oriented universities, requiring a more tailored approach in areas related to student quality, nationality and discipline diversification and the underlying planning activities supporting this.

### **7.1.2.3 Expectations and the Russel Group status**

This study focused on the RG – a membership organisation of large RIUs, represents a higher stratum (Fell et al., 2015), as an organisational field. The RG comprises the most RIUs (which account for around 15% of the sector but 75% of all research income [RG, 2017]) and positions itself quite separately from other groups (Aghion et al., 2010; McCormack et al., 2014). The RG has no official status, but it can play a influential part in the governmental sphere, and membership is considered to be a benchmark for institutional status. It has been extremely successful at promoting its members as the '24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector' (Russell Group, 2017). One of our initial assumptions was that the RG would be, because of their research-intensive nature, behaving differently from other types of universities and that stronger themes would emerge if it was to be treated as an organisational field of its own than if we included non-RIUs in the study. Although it is impossible to confirm without conducting a similar study including non-RIUs, the study's findings have consistently shown, as stated by the participants, that certain criteria were of high importance, or 'expected', due to the nature of the universities involved in the partnerships. There were many examples where participants cited that student quality was of the utmost importance, and that this was due to the fact that the students were to progress to very selective, high-status universities.

Sauntson and Morrish (2010) demonstrated in their study of RG mission statements that, compared to other universities, RG statements presuppose confidence in their quality and impact in all aspects of university activities. Examining the perception of the partnership through the lens of middle managers, who by nature have a vested interest in maintaining the reputation of their universities, demonstrated that at the core of the participants' arguments on quality and diversification was the concept of excellence, as found in highly performing RIUs.

### **7.1.3 Strategy deviation and institutional adaptation**

Intended and realised strategies often differ, and we set out to identify in this study

whether any deviation could be found between the intended and the realised strategy as perceived by the middle managers involved in the partnerships being developed and implemented with IPPs. This study's results emphasised that revenue, by means of the growth of International fee-paying student population, was the main driver for the development of the partnership, followed by reputation/raising brand awareness, diversity (in nationality, discipline and programme levels) and finally student quality, for a few. Keeping in mind that 'unintended consequences need to be distinguished from a failure to achieve the intended consequences' (Aoi et al., 2007, p. 6), we will reflect in this section of three key themes that have been extracted from our findings: the imperative of revenue generation within the context of the marketisation of HE; the possible reasons why participants have identified numerous unintended consequences despite the partnerships seemingly achieving their main strategic objectives; and how unintended consequences are treated in planned organisational change.

#### **7.1.3.1 Revenue and reputation**

Increasingly, HE policy discourses are being driven by international league tables, market competition and the dominance of prestige culture (Ordorika and Lloyd, 2015), profoundly reshaping the sector, driven by economic imperatives to develop 'global, entrepreneurial, corporate, commercialised universities' (Stevenson et al., 2014) or otherwise described as 'ideal' universities (Elken et al., 2016). While this is an increasingly global phenomenon it is, it manifests itself clearly in the UK. Under neo-liberal influences, a new managerial culture is reinforced in UK HEIs (Badat, 2010) and this study demonstrates these tendencies.

Among fundamental transformations affecting HE universities (and linked with neo-liberal policies implemented in recent years in several parts of the world) are major reductions in government funding, and the decline of the public sphere in general (Pusser et al., 2012), which have been replaced by notions of individual responsibility and what Slaughter and Leslie have termed 'academic capitalism'. Our findings align well with this theory and provide a good example of the phenomenon in which universities act like profit-seeking organisations that market the knowledge that they can give to students, or clients.

Universities are increasingly relying on internationalisation to grow their global reputation and generate substantial revenues, and, for this reason, many now find that what used to be seen as an add-on or a hobby of some kind of a small proportion of academic staff, now requires a strategic approach (Neale et al., 2018). A number of publications have attempted

to establish a definition for corporate reputation (e.g. Barnett et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2006; Pires and Trez, 2018). In their conceptualisation of reputation, Barnett et al. (2006) imply that corporate reputation relies on a general, global assessment; reputation is reflected in common judgements and is evaluative (i.e., good vs. bad). We found in our study that reputation was of particular concern to the middle managers interviewed, with some hoping that the partnerships would help raise the profile of their universities in key markets and others more sceptical and worried that the association with a commercial provider would damage their university's reputation.

Organisational reputation refers to stakeholders' perceptions about an organisation's ability to create value relative to their competitors (Rindova et al., 2005; Dowling, 2016). Organisations build reputation through signals, including patterns of resource deployment and levels of performance and through endorsements from third parties such as the media (Deephouse 1999; Rindova et al., 2005; Mason, 2019). As organisations acquire reputation, they can attract more resources from their environment and enjoy better financial performance (Jessop, 2018). In this sense, as we see in the findings of this study, very often universities were entering into partnerships with IPPs in the hope that it would help them benefit from a higher status in various markets and attract more international fee-paying students.

#### **7.1.3.2 Strategy deviation or misunderstood strategy?**

The literature emphasises the importance of understanding that unintended consequences need to be distinguished from the failure to achieve the intended consequence (Merton, 1936; Aoi et al., 2007). The findings of this study show that, if revenue generation is the primary outcome expected from the strategy driving the development of IPP partnerships within RIUs, the vast majority of partnerships have been successful, and the strategy has been realised. For all intents and purposes, it appears that top-level managers were mostly interested in the financial bottom line and worried less about the actual consequences (intended or not) of the partnerships. When questioned about this, many middle managers admitted that this was indeed the case and that having 'succeeded', the top-level managers had shifted their attention to other initiatives, leaving the middle managers to deal with the issues that were not considered at the time of partnership development.

However, universities are complex organisations, accountable to numerous stakeholders, to varying degrees (Miller et al., 2014). As demonstrated above, the corporate style of decision-making associated with the way most IPP partnerships in this study have been

developed does not sit well with the fact that individual stakeholders (including the middle managers themselves) have their own objectives and concerns (Foster and Jonker, 2005), leading to a divergence in understanding. Some of the participants also indicated that top-level managers may have misled internal stakeholders by promising a variety of outcome from the partnerships in order to get buy-in for the initial set up, despite the fact that these were most likely unrealistic.

Our findings lead us to conclude that it is highly likely that the overall original intended strategy was truly only about generating additional revenue (as one participant simply put it, his top-level leadership team just wanted '*more*' (Functional Specialist, University D)) and that this was willingly or not miscommunicated at various stages of the partnership development. We will explore this further when discussing the role of the middle managers in the generation of unintended consequences in 7.1.4 below.

### **7.1.3.3 Positive unintended consequences of planned organisational change and organisational learning**

Researchers have long recognised that planned organisational change often produces unintended consequences, and this study adds to the numerous examples that already exist (Cameron, 2005; Carey et al., 2018; Fairhurst, Cooren, and Cahill, 2002; Gilmore, Shea, and Unseem, 1997; Jian, 2007; McNamara, Moon, and Bromiley, 2002; White and Ramsey, 1978). Most studies focus on the negative impacts of unintended consequences. Any large-scale organisational changes come with unintended consequences and is 'dynamic, emergent and non-linear but also frustrating and daunting' (Balogun, 2006, p. 30). Linking to the theory of diffusion of innovation (Rogers, 1995), one could argue is that what has been witnessed in this study are the consequences of the rapid diffusion of something quite novel across organisations that historically have only experienced incremental changes over long periods of time.

Taking time to analyse and understand the typology of unintended consequences produced in this study can lead to improvements that may benefit those organisations in the long term. Numerous positive unintended consequences were identified with examples spanning from academic departments adopting new ways of teaching or developing new programmes, utilising market driven knowledge, to institutional adaptations in areas related to student support, international recruitment, marketing and admissions, estates and strategic planning. Similarly, we have seen that systems and infrastructures were improved with time in most partnerships. All of which, initially triggered by unintended consequences from the

partners, eventually had university-wide benefits.

In addition to unexpected positive consequences, the study's findings have shown that, although lack of experience and knowledge was a key factor in the production of unintended consequences, organisational learning has occurred. This was particularly notable in those universities that had been in an IPP partnership for several years. Those universities have shown signs of having been through the "wheel of learning" (Senge, 1990) – doing, reflecting, connecting, and deciding, with participants stating that a number of issues that would have been treated as unintended consequences in the initial stages of the partnership, have now been addressed. For example, some have amended the terms of their contracts, issues related to facilities, or IT access have been addressed, etc.

Perhaps the most interesting insight here was gained from the university that had decided to terminate an IPP partnership and start a new one with a different provider. Lessons had clearly been learned and the unintended consequences that had been found with the first partner were not repeated, or were very limited. This demonstrates that, at least in this case, the lessons had not just been learned by the individuals involved in the original partnership but that knowledge had become institutionally available and part of the "organisational memory" (Nevis, et al., 1996, p. 74). We also found evidence that Russell Group Universities have learnt at systemic level, with less unintended consequences being mentioned by those discussing partnerships developed recently, showing that experience and lessons had been shared within the RG field.

The results of this study indicate that the intended strategy supporting the development of the partnerships may have been much simpler than most internal stakeholders would believe and they there may have been an element of 'over-translation'. The realised strategies, despite all their associated unintended consequences, may have actually gone far beyond the intended strategy itself. This may be because all strategic change is dependent on the way the change agents make sense of the strategy and can allow top-level management to edit plans (Balogun, 2006). This could explain why, somehow, most of the middle managers interviewed feel that expectations (possibly their own) were not met. In the next sections, we will explore the role played by middle managers in the development and implementation of the partnerships included in this study.

#### **7.1.4 Middle managers: empowered or implementers**

Numerous studies have demonstrated that middle managers are not merely compliant agents utilised by their senior leaders to disseminate their visions throughout the organisation,

but they act as facilitators of organisational change (Balogun, 2003; Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Bower, 1972; Fryer et al., 2017; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau and Balogun, 2008; Westley, 1990). In this section, we will reflect on the role of the middle managers in sense-making and sense-giving and their level of empowerment within their organisation as demonstrated in the role they played in the development and implementation of the IPP partnerships.

#### **7.1.4.1 Sense-making, sense-giving and narrative**

In times of change, middle managers are expected to help their staff to make sense of change and deal with it for the benefit of the organisation (Bencherki et al., 2019). In order to do so, they need to make sense of what is happening for them initially (Morikuni, 2019). This study helps recognise the importance that sense-making plays in middle managers' implementation of change (Loukopoulos and Garreau, 2018; Neumann et al., 2019). We have gathered numerous examples of the way middle managers comprehend, explain, generate and disseminate the meaning of the information surrounding a strategic change – in the case of this study, the introduction of a new high intensity partnership with a new type of external partner. Our findings align with what Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) described as middle managers 'synthesising information' in order to help others make sense of the changes that are happening and to answer questions such as 'what should we do next?' or 'what does this mean in practice?' (Steinberg, 2018).

Several participants have recalled how they had to use their sense-making skills to turn chaotic situations and events into understandable ones that helped others to move on and look forward to the new state of play (Holt, 2009). The fact that all those interviewed had a clear idea of what the unintended consequences of the partnerships were shows their deep level of engagement and how involved they are in sense-making and sense-giving. Most had clearly rationalised decision-making and consequences and had crafted a clear story – sometimes sharing their official story as well as what they truly thought was happening. Within the context of this study, partnerships with IPPs can be seen as highly disruptive to a specific group of staff or department. The findings show that middle managers have played an important role in sense-giving (Engle et al., 2017) and align with Pfeffer's (1981) argument that one of their key tasks is to provide explanations, rationalisations and legitimisation for the activities undertaken by an organisation.

As Cameron and Green (2004) showed, the role of middle managers is to translate the purpose of change into an understandable and realistic way of doing things differently. We



found in this study that middle managers have been key to sense-giving when it comes to influencing staff's perceptions, attitudes and beliefs and strengthen their commitment to their organisation's goals, avoiding resistance to change (Awamleh and Gardner, 1999; Bass, 1985; Heyden et al., 2017). We also found strong evidence that they were critical to effective communication and the reduction of uncertainty within their wider network as part of their daily activities.

Because the role middle managers play in sense-making and sense-giving is intrinsically linked with their practice and the way they communicate, it is important for them to establish a solid network, thus building trust and credibility in order to be in a better position to 'sell' change to others (Huy, 2001). Rouleau and Balogun (2008) argued that 'enacting conversations' and 'enrolling networks' by middle managers are crucial for their strategic sense-making role and can lead to having a significant impact due to self-reinforcing feedback loops and relationships in social networks (Boonstra, 2004; Tichy and Bennis, 2007). The findings have indeed confirmed that this is generally happening in the universities involved in the study.

By considering the micro-activities of the middle manager, we concluded that the importance of the role of middle managers in sense-making and sense-giving is undeniable. Two key elements are needed, however, to ensure that they can fully and effectively perform their role. First, they require accurate and up-to-date information. Second, they need to be seen as credible messengers and therefore have the necessary legitimacy within their networks. Lack of information and/or credibility makes sense-making and sense-giving difficult for middle managers and significantly reduces their effectiveness as change intermediaries (Shreeve-Fawkes et al., 2016). This effect was observed in the few cases where middle managers did not feel empowered to cross boundaries and act as change agents.

We have noted previously, however, that lines of communications were not always optimal between the top-level managers and the middle managers, and in an extreme case had completely broken down due to lack of trust between the parties involved. In this example, participants expressed that because of this, it may have been possible for mistranslation to occur when exercising sense-giving to others across the university. Considering the importance of sense-making and sense-giving played by middle managers, it is conceivable that strategies may produce unintended outcomes as well as realise the originally intended strategies. Some of these may results from the actions of the middle managers, especially if they are lacking the information required to provide an accurate narrative to internal stakeholders, and they are motivated to keep control of the situation, and particularly, the resources associated with the

partnerships.

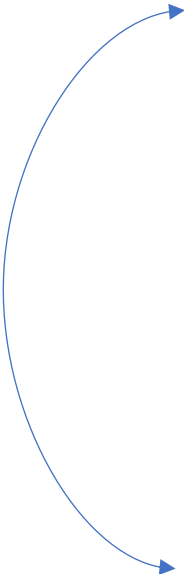
#### **7.1.4.2 Ability to influence strategic developments and outcomes**

In the previous literature, we noted that the importance of the middle manager in the strategy-making process may have been commonly generalised and possibly over-estimated (Floyd and Woolridge, 2017). In line with numerous other studies, the participants in this study did not perceive themselves as passive ‘messengers’ (Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau and Balogun, 2008; Fryer et al., 2017); on the contrary, they all proved to be vocal and confident in the fact that they played a key role in facilitating organisational change as well as influencing strategic outcomes. We agree with Floyd and Woolridge (2017) that not all middle managers are equal in their ability to influence the strategic process. For this reason, from the outset, we decided to focus on two types of boundary-spanning manager as categorised by Floyd and Wooldridge (see Table 1 in Chapter 2): the ‘senior relationship managers’ and the ‘assessment and improvement managers’. We also added an additional type of manager, relevant to the partnerships studied, which we called ‘functional specialist’. Focusing on those three categories and excluding those middle managers with less of a boundary-spanning role, enabled a more accurate comparison. The findings of this study allowed us to identify a more thorough set of attributes associated with the three classes of middle managers involved in the study, which are summarised in Table 14 below. Using Floyd and Woolridge’s (1992) type of middle management strategic role, classified by their type of influence (upward or downward) and the impact they have on strategy (integrative, in support of the company’s deliberate strategy; or divergent, encouraging the company in new strategic directions), we identified the type of influence of each of the categories of middle managers that appeared most frequently within this study (upward, downward, integrative and divergent). We also included Bulgerman’s (1983) middle manager strategic behaviours, which he portrayed as either induced (i.e., aligned to upper management and supporting the firm’s deliberate strategy); or autonomous. This enabled us to portray each of the categories of middle managers in a more precise way.

We found that senior relationship managers show traits of autonomous empowerment mostly because they are both internally and externally boundary-spanning and have direct access to the upper management; most of them citing that they proactively took an interest in the partnership development whether this was seen as part of their official responsibilities or not. Often the most knowledgeable about IPP partnerships, we found that they claimed to have

Table 14: Middle managers' ability to influence strategy process

Most common type of empowerment	Middle manager category	Attributes/Most likely to...	Most common type of influence
Autonomous	Senior relationship managers	Initiate partnerships or plant ideas with top-level managers	Upward, downward and divergent
		Be aware of potential implications	
		Prevent and address unintended consequences	
		Be in conflict with top-level managers	
Induced	Assessment and improvements managers	See themselves as implementors only	Downward and integrative
		Have detailed operational knowledge	
		Address unintended consequences once identified	
		Feel side-lined or ignored	
Induced	Functional specialist	See themselves as implementors only	Upward and integrative
		Are expert story tellers with solid internal network	
		Facilitate day-to-day incremental change	
		Quickly identify issues as they occur and escalate them to senior colleagues	



been able to anticipate and even prevent a good proportion of unintended consequences. They were the most likely to be in direct conflict with top managers and voiced their frustrations extensively when they felt that their recommendations were not heard. They were also the only type that truly have shown that they had the ability to influence the strategic development. In a small number of cases, they were actually the initiators of the partnerships or the ones who

planted the idea in the heads of the top-level team. They are therefore usually able (although not always successful in doing so) to influence in an upward, downward and divergent manner, leading to emergent strategies and possibly unintended consequences.

Assessment and improvement managers, on the other hand, appeared to exercise their direct line with the top-level managers (when it exists) in a more induced manner and therefore were generally accepting of the strategic direction, seeing themselves as implementors charged with delivering the institutional intended strategy. They had very detailed knowledge of their own area of work, and although they often did not have the experience or knowledge required to foresee any of unintended consequences from the new partnerships, they were usually quick to spot issues and able to address them efficiently should these sit within their own area of responsibility. This group however often felt side-lined or forgotten and, as a result, some had no real interest in influencing the development or implementation of the partnership. These types of managers were often found in academic departments or specialist professional services (for ex: student support or accommodation). We found that, when they exercised it, the assessment and improvement managers could influence in a downward and integrative way. In the cases where good relationships existed with the senior relationship manager, we found that they could prove to be useful and provide information and the necessary alliances needed for the senior relationships managers to advocate for changes.

Finally, the functional specialists were found to also be most commonly empowered in an induced manner, usually by the senior relationship managers. Working closely with internal stakeholders, they usually described themselves as being brought in to get the job done without questioning the overall strategic direction of their universities and the rationale for the partnerships. They showed great story-telling skills and understood that a large part of their work was to get stakeholders on board and get buy-in for the partnership. They were also the most knowledgeable about all types of unintended consequences that exist, being closest to the operations and the stakeholders impacted by the partnerships. We found that they therefore were well placed to influence the senior relationship managers, who in turn could utilise this knowledge to enable changes at strategic level.

Having discussed the key findings from the study, we will now summarise their implications for the research and theory in the next section.

## **7.2 Implications for the research and theory**

Chapter 4 described the research framework used within this study. The framework was inspired by two main theories: Merton's theory of the unanticipated consequences of purposive social action (1936) and the theory of strategy as practice. Underpinning the framework are a number of key concepts taken from the literature in the areas of organisational culture, internationalisation strategy and international partnerships in HEIs. We will discuss how the findings relate to the theoretical framework and their connections to the research and theory in the sections below.

### **7.2.1 Merton's theory of the unanticipated consequences of purposive social action**

Merton's (1964) theory of the unanticipated consequences of purposes social action identified five limiting factors as the possible causes of unintended consequences: ignorance, error, immediacy of interest, values and self-fulfilling prophecy. In this study, the findings point to the fact that the majority of unintended consequences were generated either due to ignorance, error or the immediacy of interest, or most often, a combination of these three factors.

The results of this study aligned with Merton's theory that ignorance or lack of pre-existing experience can influence actions and lead to unanticipated consequences. In the view of the middle managers taking part in the study, this factor was one of the primary causes of unintended consequences, either due to lack of knowledge within top-level management or at various other levels within the universities. The results of this study confirmed that 'action involves motive and consequently a choice between alternatives' (Merton, 1936, p. 896). If choice is mis-informed, unintended consequences can occur.

The motivations of top-level managers to rapidly develop the partnerships and reap its benefits as quickly as possible are also important. Merton described the need for immediate results as the 'imperious immediacy of interest' (Merton, 1936, p. 901). As this study emphasised, middle managers often described this phenomenon as a key factor in the generation of unintended consequences. The short-term need to generate revenue, and act quickly due to a wish to make a mark during their tenure, means that Top-level Managers seem to be blind to any longer-term consequences.

Finally, the findings indicated that wrong assumptions may have been used by both the top-level managers and the middle managers when they were lacking clear information, leading to mistakes made at the time of implementation or expectations raised in an unrealistic manner with internal stakeholders. This result is consistent with Merton's view that error can occur

when decisions are influenced by habit. In the case of the partnerships, we concluded that there is a strong possibility that IPP partnerships were often treated like another type of international collaboration rather than a commercial contract, and that RG universities, used to enjoying a privileged status and inexperienced in the area of commercial education partnerships, may have had unrealistic expectations about what could be achieved.

### **7.2.2 Theory of strategy as practice**

The theoretical framework used two key elements of strategy as practice theory: the concepts of intended and realised strategies (Balogun and Johnson, 2005) and the literature related to the roles of the middle managers in the strategy process (Floyd and Wooldridge, 2017).

When comparing this study's results with strategy as practice theory, similarities and differences exist. Strategic change is often described as an emergent process based on guidance from the top-level management team and feedback from middle management leading to the construction of a consensus with integrated goals (Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2007). Several participants cited that such a dynamic indeed existed, with two participants indicating that they were the initiators of the partnerships, initially developed behind the scenes as an emergent strategy that went on to be fully integrated into their university's international strategy. The study's findings showed that in most cases, the intended strategies were realised and that the feeling of dissatisfaction that many participants expressed about the partnerships was not about the fact that unintended consequences had led to a change in direction in the intended strategy. Rather, it is about the fact that the realised strategy deviated from the expectations of internal stakeholders.

Our findings lead us to conclude that in most cases, the feedback loop that is the basis of the theory of strategy as practice did not work effectively, and a consensus including integrated goals and expectation was not agreed upon between the top-level management team and the middle managers. This is something that we have not found discussed in the literature, which seems to presuppose that a certain level of cohesion already exists. Such a phenomenon was not always found in this study.

Strategy as practice theory emphasises the role of the middle managers and their influence on the strategy process. While the results of our study confirmed that middle managers are active contributors in this area, they also suggested that not all types of managers have a significant impact on the strategy process; those who are able to do so best are the

‘senior relationship managers’ (Floyd and Woolridge, 2017) as they are usually are autonomously empowered and have divergent influences on their organisation’s strategy.

### **7.2.3 Organisational culture**

While the results of this study confirmed that multiple types of organisational cultures co-exist within universities (McNay, 1995), the type of culture that dominated decision-making in top-level management within this study was the corporate one. This result may have been because of the high commercial value of the expected financial benefits of the partnerships. The majority of the participants expressed a genuine dislike for the way decisions were made with regards to the partnerships, in particular, the dominant senior management’s exertion of authority over them was a source of discontent.

In addition to the corporate culture described above, the results confirmed that academic departments favour operating within in a collegial manner while professional services tend to be more comfortable working within a bureaucratic culture.

### **7.2.4 International higher education**

The study has contributed to advancing knowledge in the field of international higher education, in particular in relation to capturing intended and unintended consequences of partnerships of a new nature, in RIUs in the UK.

Numerous studies have focused on providing ‘recipes’ for success in HEI internationalisation (for example Childress, 2010; Davies, 1992; Knight, 1995; Santhi, 2010). When considered as an element of an institutional internationalisation strategy, it was difficult to find any university that has followed the recommended path for success in the implementation of IPPs.

This study’s conceptual contribution in the field of international higher education lies in the fact that it has linked the concepts of leadership and communication with that of unintended consequences. We confirmed that staff at a variety of levels are vital to the success of the internationalisation of HE (Santhi, 2010) and that unintended consequences often stemmed from lack of clear leadership and communication. There are many dimensions in internationalisation of HEIs and all participants from top management and academic staff to professional services need to cooperate in the pursuit of specific initiatives (Taylor, 2010). When this dynamic is not found, unintended consequences start to emerge.

Faculty engagement (or a lack of it) was also identified as a key factor for unintended consequences. Within this area, the study has contributed to assessing whether Childress’ ‘Five

's of Faculty Engagement in Internationalisation' (p. 153) were present in the partnerships studied. We found that although two of the key elements were clearly present ('intentionality' and 'investments'), the three others ('infrastructure', 'institutional networks' and 'individual support') were often missing. Without these critical components, the development and implementation of IPPs were hindered with issues and unintended consequences arose.

Lastly, the models of organisational responses that we have found in the majority of the universities studied, align well with the 'leadership driven' model for managing international cooperation developed by Clark and Neave (1992, pp. 166–169), following a centralised approach to decision making.

### **7.2.5 International education partnerships**

Literature on international partnerships between HEIs has flourished over the past two decades. However, the concept of 'international partnership' in HE is still difficult to define (Butterfield et al., 2016; Wilkins et al., 2017), and many use 'confuse and imprecise' terminology (Lang, 2002) when discussing it. This study has demonstrated that IPPs are not just a type of common 'cooperative agreement' of the sort that are often developed in research and teaching collaboration with institutional partners overseas (Kinser and Green, 2009), but are more akin to commercial partnerships that a university would enter to procure goods and services.

Our main conceptual contribution to the field international education partnership is the definition of IPPs as high-intensity instructional partnerships. The new type of partnership was brought about by bringing together the concept of high-intensity partnerships (Beerkens, 2002; De Wit, 2002) with that of instructional partnerships (Sakamoto and Chapman (2011)).

Finally, this study has contributed to the emergent literature that specifically focuses on the study on International Pathway Programmes and IPPs. Building on Manning's (in Agosti and Bernat, 2018) suggested 'linkages and connections of pathway programmes with the host HEIs' (p. 248), this study suggested in addition to recruitment and admission, curriculum development, pathway staff recruitment and training, facilities access, student support and general experience, strategic planning should also be considered an essential linkage. It studied IPP from a broader perspective than previous studies, which focused primarily on the educational and academic aspects of the programmes.

The study has also contributed to developing a helpful guide outlining how IPPs are developed, implemented, and evaluated in RIUs in the UK. The extensive typology of unintended consequences that was created as part of the study contributes to justifying that the development of such partnerships requires a significant transformation and adaptation of



practices by both partners to ensure success (Lane, 2011). As pointed out previously, we hope that this study will, in addition to contributing to research, provide useful pointers to practitioners. The implications for practice are outlined below.

### **7.3 Implications for practice**

This study was written by a practitioner-researcher and, with this in mind, aims to make a useful contribution to practice within the HE sector. Below we will focus on what can be taken away as helpful pointers by practitioners who are either thinking of or in the process of developing partnerships with IPPs. Although the study focused on a subset of UK RIUs, some of the conclusions below may be applicable to other types of universities in the UK and beyond.

#### **7.3.1 Use of the typology of unintended consequence**

The typology of unintended consequences produced by this study offers evidence that high intensity partnerships such as those with IPPs cannot simply be ‘bolted-on’ to the university structures and promptly neglected. The findings strongly imply that a holistic approach is required in order to avoid unnecessary unintended consequences and delays in implementation. One could argue that signing a contract and hoping for the best is never a good idea, but in the case of IPP partnerships, the consequences of poor initial planning can be quite drastic. Although the themes that were identified in the typology of unintended consequences are all interrelated, it is possible to reflect on them both individually and as clusters to learn lessons that can be applied to future partnerships of similar types in other universities.

First, when considering the theme of “Student Performance”, it is striking to see that when discussing “quality” the middle managers referred to the students themselves rather than the academic programme that is delivered by the IPP. Lack of student progression was blamed on entry requirements and students’ knowledge gaps but only rarely middle managers openly discussed whether the programme delivered by the IPP was itself fit for purpose. Considering this, those planning to partner with an IPP should review with greater scrutiny the academic programme itself during the early stages of development of the partnership – possibly even as part of the procurement process - in addition to considerations of entry requirements.

Second, it may be argued that the “commercial” and “education” unintended consequences, are the two sides of the same coin. With the commercial imperatives pushing for students to be considered as a commodity that will bring revenue to the institution, new pressures that can be felt uncomfortably are placed on academic departments. This is all the more evident in more recent partnerships. As IPPs are now less negatively perceived externally,

an fairly common, what would have been seen as intruding on academic matters (such as suggesting changes to entry requirements or the development of new programmes/“products”) are a more regular occurrence. This clash of cultures needs to be considered and balanced careful from the outset, in particular in universities where top-level leadership has evolved to a more corporate or entrepreneurial culture but where faculties an professional services are still very much dominated by collegial and bureaucratic cultures. We have found that some universities have shown signed of organisational learning and adaptation, however, this evaluation can take quiet some time.

Lastly, findings within the typology, lead us to recommend that areas that may be perceived by top-level managers as operational matters be considered from the early stages of development of the IPP to avoid unexpected expenditure (in particular in costly areas such a as infrastructure and staffing) and poor student experience.

### **7.3.2 Middle managers’ roles in mitigating unintended consequences**

The study also suggests that the corporate decision-making style of the top-level managers in the early days of partnership development can be identified as the sources of numerous unintended consequences. It is the view of the majority of the middle managers that, should they have been consulted more extensively, many of the unintended consequences could have been avoided and, perhaps, the partnership would have been developed and implemented in a different way. Therefore, it is recommended that top-level managers consider early involvement of key middle managers to guarantee a smoother and more successful implementation. In addition to the consultation of middle managers, the study supports the argument that internal stakeholder engagement (both from academic and professional services) is essential to successfully delivering large-scale organisational change. Internal stakeholders help create a more balance approach to the development of the partnerships, especially in regard to any potential impact of a rapid growth in the international student population within a university and the linkages between academic programmes and the curriculum.

Middle managers can play a pivotal role in mitigating unintended consequences, by minimising the impact of top-level managers decision-making style, lack of knowledge and inadequate communication and relationship management. Each type of middle manager included in this study can contribute as follows:

- (1) Senior relationship managers can play a key role in influencing top-level managers and feed them the information and knowledge necessary to make well-informed and comprehensive decision in the initial stages of the partnership development. They

can also play a key role in helping to shape contracts and manage expectations internally and with the IPP provider. They can take ownership in leading the development and implementation of the IPPs as a large-scale strategic programme of activities and empower other types of middle managers to enable efficient information flows. Finally they can play a key role in clarifying the rationale and objectives of the partnerships and obtain buy-in from internal stakeholders.

- (2) Assessment and improvement managers can play a central role in embedding governance structures, amending and updating policies and process in an efficient manner. Their contribution is crucial in enabling change needed at unit level to help integrate the IPP with key university functions. They can also support the top-level manager in shaping the contracts financial arrangements and targets.
- (3) Functional specialist can play a very important role on a day-to-day basis in delivering operational matters during implementation, and, if they are given an opportunity to feedback and escalate issues, can help identify unintended consequences as they arise, addressing them rapidly. They can also play an essential part in story telling at local level and help spread practical information about what is happening, why and what people need to do about it.

Finally, the results of the study demonstrated the importance of clearly articulating the rationale of any new strategic initiative to the wider stakeholder community in order to avoid raising expectations in an unrealistic manner. There are also limitations to what middle managers can do and Top-level managers need to be seen to be championing any new initiatives such as an IPP. This is of course easier said than done at loosely coupled universities. Additionally, it is likely that some element of opacity has enabled top-level managers to launch initiatives that may have been rejected outright if more detailed information had been provided to internal stakeholders. This may seem to imply a certain lack of trust in intra-university relations. It is not to say that this actually is the case, but it is how the majority of participants appear to have perceived the situation.

## **8 CHAPTER 8 – EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the starting point for the study (the context and research questions) is brought together with a synthesis of the themes detailed in the findings and discussion chapters. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed, and suggestions for future research are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, areas for future research and a brief summary.

### **8.1 Lost in translation?**

This investigation aimed to explore (1) what types of unintended consequences of organisationally driven international education partnerships with IPPs exist within the RG, (2) what causes them, (3) who do they affect, and (4) whether middle managers contribute to the shaping or reshaping of the originally strategy and goals. To do so, the study was underpinned by the following four research questions: (1) what factors produce unintended consequences; (2) what types of unintended consequences exist; (3) do unintended consequences lead to organisational changes or adaptations; and (4) can any level of deviation between the intended and the realised strategies be attributed to the actions of the middle managers? The data gathered provided evidence to answer each of the research questions and provided a basis for developing understandings and new insights regarding the relationship between factors leading to unintended consequences, the actions of middle managers and the specificity of IPP partnerships.

Based on a qualitative thematic analysis of the evidence collected from the middle managers involved in the partnerships studied, it can be concluded that (1) unintended consequences are numerous and of various types (as demonstrated in the typology created within our findings); (2) they appear to be primarily caused by lack of experience or miscommunication; (3) they affect most parts of the universities but academic departments in particular and a few specific professional services such as the international office, student support, estates services and strategic planning; and (4) middle managers contribute to the generation of unintended consequences as well as the development of emergent strategies. The results indicate that senior relationship managers, who are usually autonomously empowered, can influence the strategy development process by having a divergent influence on their organisation's strategy.

The findings paint a picture of an evolving field where top-level management practices, moving to a corporate model, sit uneasily with the existence of other

organisational cultures within the RIUs studied (collegial and bureaucratic), thereby leading to unintended consequences. In parallel with why decisions are made (imposed with limited consultation), a certain lack of knowledge and experience at various levels within the RIUs also has been identified as a main source of unintended consequences in the development and implementation of high intensity educational partnerships within organisations that can mostly be defined as loosely coupled social systems (Weck, 1976). In some cases, disconnection between top-level management and middle manager has also led to misunderstanding and, as a consequence, mistranslation.

In such an environment, a decision may well be imposed, but it cannot be enforced, not without gaining buy-in from a variety of internal stakeholders. We found that middle managers usually hold high credentials within their internal networks and consistently showed strong involvement with the partnership development and implementation, especially the dissemination of information and helping others rationalise change as well as understanding what this meant for them. However, their actions and interventions were not always enough to prevent unintended consequences, and a lack of a university-wide approach to the partnerships from the outset was identified as a stumbling block. Moreover, the existence of numerous understandings (or expectations) of what the partnerships should deliver created a number of challenges and tensions related to inconsistent messaging surrounding the rationale behind the partnerships.

An interesting outcome of the findings was the evidence that strategy deviation was limited when defined narrowly around the key objectives found in the contracts between the universities and the IPPs. It was highlighted, however, that a wide set of stakeholders' expectations went unmet. This happens when a certain level of opacity exists around the aims of the partnerships, leading to numerous interpretations of the strategy behind the partnerships. This was particularly the case when middle managers did not have sufficient information to effectively practice sense-making and sense-giving, leading to mistranslation or over-translation of the objectives of the partnerships.

The overarching pattern suggested by the findings is that in most universities, middle managers when defined as 'senior relationship managers', play a critical role in the strategy process and, although they are not always able to do so, they usually operate between the traditional boundaries of faculty and administrative domains and the rapidly changing top-level leadership team, in a fairly autonomous manner. They also often were able to foresee the unintended consequences that would be generated by the new partnerships and identify ways to minimise them in some case, if not as they were occurring, at least shortly after they

were identified. This is particularly noticeable when feedback loops between the senior relationship manager and the other two types of boundary-spanning middle managers exist and work effectively.

A number of implications for practice, intended to provide useful pointers to those who may decide to develop high impact educational partnerships in the future are also offered. The findings indicate that middle managers play a significant role in the legitimisation of new educational development work such as IPP partnerships. As a result, a number of suggestions impacting practice are made. Further, recognising the centrality of influence of internal stakeholders, both within academic departments or professional services, it is suggested that clarity in communication is required along with extensive consultation in order to ensure the success of partnerships of the types that were studied and to minimise unintended consequences as well as unmet expectations.

The aims of this study have clearly been met. The research questions have been answered and further, they have been explored through an in-depth analysis of the findings to contribute to theory and to practice. While every effort has been made to design and implement this study to maximise its value, no study is without limitations. The following section reflects on the limitations of this work.

## **8.2 Limitations and trade-offs**

The limitations regarding the approach and methods chosen in this study along with the study boundaries and opportunity for generalisation are explored in the next sections.

### **8.2.1 Methods and approach**

Social constructivism is often criticised for its lack of scientific structures and for relying on subjective reports that may be incomplete and misleading. I concede that there could be dangers of biases and unreliability in the methods I have chosen, but I would argue that taking a different approach is irrelevant if the results are invalid in the first place (Chapman et al., 2005). The use of semi-structured interviews also has possible trade-offs. I am aware that errors may be introduced in a variety of ways, such as by the participants, the interview guide used, or by the interviewer (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Participants may have withheld information or attempted to give embellished answers. This could be true in this study, due to the fact that the partnerships studied are commercially sensitive and that the individuals involved may not wish to expose their personal and institutional weaknesses and

therefore avoid admitting to the existence of, in particular, unintended negative consequences.

Although checked before use, my interview guide could still have been ambiguous, or I could have been a poor interviewer. The latter is less of a worry as I conduct interviews, although not academic or research-focused ones, professionally on a regular basis; however, maintaining my neutrality may have been an issue since I am a practitioner with my own experience and views on the topic studied. As mentioned previously, the majority of the interviews were convivial and conversational, and I was able to build a rapport and trust with all the participants. Questions were therefore not asked in an identical manner to all participants, although I ensured that all were covered eventually in each interview. Although this may be considered a limitation, I do not see this as such. On the contrary, I believe that it improved the richness of understanding and quality of the insight gathered (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997).

Necessary conditions for a successful interview (May, 1997) include the following: accessibility (i.e. ensuring that participants have access to the information required), cognition (i.e. ensuring that participants understand what they are being asked) and motivation (i.e. ensuring that participant actually are interested in participating). In this study, all participants fit the above criteria; indeed, all were quite interested to find out how other universities have experienced partnerships with IPPs. In the same way that practitioners in HE often share best practices in a variety of areas, they were therefore very willing to participate and share details they would not have normally shared if I had not guaranteed them anonymity.

### **8.2.2 Study boundaries and generalisation**

I deliberately chose to focus the study on a grouping of universities that share common characteristics, those who are part of the RG and partner with IPPs. Although the universities have many common features, they each differ in size, shape and general aims, and some may see the boundary that I have chosen as being artificial and leading the distortion of the data collected. In particular, one of my assumptions was that RIUs are less commercially aware than teaching-intensive universities, leading to complications or unexpected outcomes when partnering with private companies. This is why I chose to limit my study to the RG and not widen it to include a sample of universities that have IPP partnerships in place.

Additionally, the fact that I am studying what is a similar phenomenon in a number of universities through the lens of middle managers' experience has meant that I had to integrate two levels of analysis: that of the individual and that of the organisation (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003). These are combined in the same study and can possibly lead to difficulties of interpretation. Moreover, each of the 11 universities are at different stages of development in their partnerships with IPPs, the findings therefore point to variation in the different aspects of the partnerships that may be due to the longevity of the partnerships themselves (older partnerships may have experienced more unintended consequences because these were a new type of partnerships and late comers have learned lessons from those who embraced the model before them).

Furthermore, the cross-sectional approach also places the study temporally and therefore limits the extent to which generalisable conclusions can be made. Considering all the above, it is therefore logical to conclude that the output of this study will indeed generate new knowledge that will contribute to the literature as well as 'best practices' that will be of interest to practitioners in the HE sector; however, the degree to which the specific knowledge and conclusions produced in this study will be substantially useful in other context will depend on the degree of similarity in the situations concerned. As Robinson and Lai (2006) pointed out:

*'In principle, there is a trade-off between relevance to a particular setting and generalisation to other settings. The better the piece of research captures the richness of a particular theory of action, the less likely, one would predict, that it will be applicable to other contexts where different theories operate' (p. 66).*

It is evident that there is generalisability within the universities studied, but there may be limited transferability, to universities that do not share the main characteristics of the RG universities. However, for those universities, whether in the UK or other parts of the world, that are more teaching-intensive than the RG and therefore may find less unintended consequences in implementing a high-intensity education partnership with an IPP, the findings related to factors leading to unintended consequence may still be of relevance. Additionally, the findings of this study could also be generalised to universities outside of the UK, and in Europe in particular, where the collegiate and bureaucratic culture still dominates and marketisation of higher education is not as intense as in the UK.

Finally, as commonly found in qualitative research, the possible biases of the participants, along with time and resources restrictions may have affected this study. While I endeavoured to gather data that I considered to be the most valid, used sources that I



viewed as being the most reliable and spent what I believe to be an appropriate amount of time, I recognised that inherent error and bias is still possible.

### 8.3 Recommendations for future research

Several themes for future research have emerged from the findings. Table 15 lists these suggestions.

Multiple aspects of how other organisational actors perceive high intensity educational partnerships such as IPP partnerships could be explored in future research. As discussed in the findings, those partnerships strongly impact academic departments. A study solely involving faculty members who are working in partnership with IPPs at the local level may garner additional insight into what barriers exist and what factors enable success. Moreover, this type of research may provide supplementary insights regarding the legitimisation of IPP partnerships and enable the researcher to evaluate the level of alignment with senior institutional leadership’s actions and views regarding the partnerships.

Table 15: Opportunities for further research

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a greater understanding of how other organisational actors perceive the purpose, roles and legitimacy of IPPs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further explore the topic of partnerships between RIUs and IPPs from the point of view of the pathway providers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop greater insight into the enablers or barriers of high impact educational partnership by studying IPPs in a non-RIU context.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test the findings of the study within a new regional context where IPPs are only just emerging.</li> </ul>

Similarly, research could further validate and explore the wider implications of an IPP partnership from the point of view of top-level managers. This approach may develop greater insight into characteristics expected of the partnerships from those who decided to initiate them but could also highlight the perceived differences between intended and realised strategy from their point of view. Furthermore, it may be interesting to test one of our key conclusions – that, in fact, there may actually be no strategy deviation, only unmet or unrealistic expectations.

Alternatively, research could develop greater insight into how RIUs have experienced the development of these new types of educational partnerships by focusing on how the partnerships were perceived by the IPPs. The findings in this study imply, for example, that institutional actors have low commercial awareness and understanding of what IPP partnerships are. The four interviews conducted with IPPs representatives validated this view in some way, but it may be interesting to develop more comprehensive case studies and focus solely on their views to find out what they believe are enablers or barriers to their work.

Finally, it may be interesting to test the findings of this study in countries where the partnership model studied is only just emerging (such as the Netherlands). This may generate additional insights regarding the impact of IPP partnerships on institutional structure and stakeholders as well as their perceived purpose.

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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### **Semi – Structure Interviews**

Data collection for this study will be carried out by the use of semi-structured interviews. The Interview Guide has been designed to elicit the interviewees' ideas and opinions on the topic of interest, as opposed to leading the interviewee toward preconceived choices. The framework for the semi-structured includes open-ended questions arranged in a logical order to cover the ground required. These will be followed up with probes to get in-depth information on topics of interest.

This method is appropriate as my professional knowledge and experience will allow me to frame the discussion in advance. Additionally, this will allow, for each of the interviews, to effectively integrate the contextual information and data collected in the desk research stage of data collection.

### Introduction

- Introduce myself, the University of Bath, DBA and ICHEM.
- Describe overall purpose of study (to research unintended consequences of International Education Partnerships in Research Intensive Universities (RUIs)).
- Describe intended use of data (for DBA research thesis only).
- Confirm confidentiality and anonymity processes (Thank interviewee for signing the Informed Consent form).
- Get permissions to record the conversation using tape recorder.

### Interviewee "Warm Up":

- Confirm name, job title and general responsibilities.
- How long have you worked at the university/in your current role?
- Confirm that we will be discussing partnership X.

(Start recording).

Opening broad statement: "I'd like to discuss with you / for you to tell me about the story of the Kaplan/Study Group/INTO/NCUK partnership, from your point of view, and the role you have played in its development and implementation"

### Theme 1: Development:

*Question:* “Let’s start with how the Partnership was initially developed. Can you tell me about the initial stages of development of the Kaplan/ Study Group/INTO Partnership?”

*Follow up probes* (non-exhaustive – others may naturally be pursued depending on emerging themes):

- Why was this partnership considered of strategic importance?
- How important is this partnership in relation to your institutional strategy/international strategy?
- What was the rationale behind the choice of partner? How was the partner selected (who made the decision)?
- What were the strategic objectives/aims of partnership?
- What was your role in its development?
- Who did you work with? What interactions did you have with them? Which reactions did you experience?
- When it came to decision making regarding the development of partnership, how would you describe the process (decision always made within formal decision-making process/committee/ decision shaped/made/influenced outside the formal decision-making process)?
- What unexpected situation (neutral/positive/negative) did you encounter? How/why did this happen?
- Why do you think you faced these issues /positive surprises/unexpected changes that were not initially planned? How/why do you think these came about?

### Theme 2: Implementation

*Question:* “Let’s move on to the implementation side of the Partnerships. Can you tell me about how the Partnership has performed since its establishment?”

*Follow up probes* (non-exhaustive – others may naturally be pursued depending on emerging themes):

- How long has the partnership now been in operation?
- What has been your role throughout the development of the partnership?
- Has the partnership achieved its original objectives?
- if not, what prevented it to happen?
- When it came to decision making regarding the development of partnership, how would you describe the process (decision always made within formal decision-making process/committee/ decision shaped/made/influenced outside the formal decision-making process)?
- Who did you work with? What interactions did you have with them? Which reactions did you experience?

- What difficulties/unexpected situation did you encounter? How/why did this happen?
- Why do you think you faced issues/difficulties/positive surprises that were not initially planned?

Theme 3: Consequences/outcomes

*Question:* “Let’s finally talk about the outcome of the Partnership: Have there been any unintended / unanticipated outcome (positive, neutral or negative) at any point during the lifetime of the partnerships?”

Or “You mentioned earlier that xxxxx occurred and that this was not planned, can you tell me more about this??

*Follow up probes* (non-exhaustive – others may naturally be pursued depending on emerging themes):

- What type of unplanned outcome have you identified? can you give me some examples?
- Why/how do you think these unplanned outcomes occurred? What caused them to occur?
- Who has been affected by those unintended consequences?
- Did they lead to any major changes in any aspect of the partnership?
- Have there been any changes in the university international strategy objectives or the specific objectives of current or new education partnerships that can be attributed to lessons learned from partnership X and the unintended consequences you have identified early in our conversation?

Conclusion:

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
- Confirm agreement to being contacted following the interview to clarify anything if needed.
- Thank you for your time!



**APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Research Project**

**Unintended consequences of international education  
partnerships in UK research intensive universities**

**Researcher:**

Caroline Baylon, part-time DBA (Higher Education Management) student and member of the University of Bath International Centre for Higher Education management (ICHEM).

Caroline is also Director International at the University of Bristol.

I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above project and that I agree to take part in the study as described. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask any questions that I may have and that I may keep the Information Sheet for my records.

As part of this project I would like to audio record the interview, and use it for academic research. Please indicate below what uses of the interview you are willing to consent to. This is completely up to you. I will only use the records in ways that you agree to.

**In any use of these records, personal names will be anonymised.**

*Please indicate your consent in the table below:*

1. My organisation's name can be identified in the thesis.	Yes	No
2. The interview can be audio recorded.	Yes	No
	<b>Transcript (Yes/No)</b>	<b>Audio Recording (Yes/No)</b>

	Please use ✓ or X	Please use ✓ or X
3. The record of the interview can be studied by the researcher for use in the research project.		
4. The record of the interview can be used for academic and professional publications.		
5. Extracts from the interview can be shown/played at meetings of academics and professionals interested in the research topic.		
6. Extracts from the interview can be shown/played in public presentations to non-specialist groups.		
7. Extracts from the interview can be shown/played to participants in other studies.		
8. The record of the interview can be made available to other academic researchers.		

*I have read the above descriptions and give my consent for the use of the records as indicated in the table above.*

Name (Please print):

Signature:

Email:

Date:

## APPENDIX 3: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

### **Research Project**

## **Unintended consequences of international education partnerships in UK research intensive universities**

### ***Information Sheet for Participants***

#### **Researcher:**

Caroline Baylon, part-time DBA (Higher Education Management) student and member of the University of Bath International Centre for Higher Education management (ICHEM).

Caroline is also Director International at the University of Bristol.

#### **Aims of the Project:**

- to understand how the roles and decisions of managers leading the development and implementation of International Education Partnerships influence the strategy process;
- to identify the factors leading to those unanticipated outcomes;
- to categorise the types of unanticipated outcomes arising from those partnerships;
- To understand whether unanticipated outcomes lead to organisational changes or adaptations, and if so, what level of deviation exist between the intended and realised strategies supporting development/implementation of international education partnerships.

#### **Participation:**

I would very much value your participation in this research project as follows:

- An interview, lasting up to ninety minutes.

I may wish to conduct a second interview with you, if there was a theme or a point that emerged from our conversation or from the interviews with other participating universities, which would merit further enquiry.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary; you may refuse to participate from the very beginning or withdraw at any time; your refusal to participate or your withdrawal will not have any negative consequences for you or your organisation.

**Benefits:**

- The opportunity to gain insights from your own and other colleagues' reflections on strategic education partnerships between Russell Group Universities and International Pathway providers.
- If requested, you will receive a summary of my findings.

**Confidentiality:**

- All names of people and places will be kept confidential, although I would like to be able to include the names of institutions that agreed to participate in the research in the methodology section of my dissertation.
- Records of research data will be stored in a secure location and destroyed within 10 years of completion of the research project.

**Use of the Data**

The data will only be used for academic research purposes only, i.e., my DBA thesis.

For further information or queries, or for any requests for additional feedback, please contact:

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