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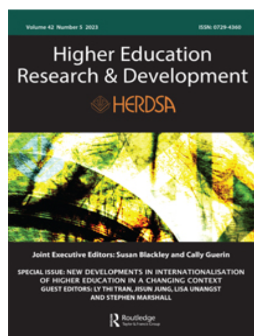

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Typologising internationalisation in UK university strategies: reputation, mission and attitude

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ABSTRACT

Although internationalisation underpins many practices in higher education, its adopted approaches can be uneven between institutions and create ambiguous conceptualisations of how it is enacted in practice. Therefore, a whole-sector analysis can provide insight into whether spaces exist for new and innovative approaches to internationalisation, or whether they might be limited by structural inequalities and pressures in the sector. Using the UK as an illustrative case, our research has conducted a qualitative ideal-type analysis of 132 institutional approaches to internationalisation across the sector, as codified in university internationalisation strategy documents and through secondary quantitative data about key internationalisation metrics. Our typology developed three dimensions that shape internationalisation approaches: reputation, mission, and attitude. Our findings outline that universities use their understanding of their reputations and material contexts to determine their missions, and the combination of these shape the dominant emotional tone of strategic approaches to internationalisation. We outline how institutions, on the whole, shape their approaches to internationalisation to fit an existing status quo of global elitism, rather than highlighting new and innovative approaches to internationalisation. The UK case can provide an illustrative example for other diverse sectors in marketised and internationalising contexts.

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Introduction

The internationalisation of higher education (HE) is shaping and disrupting institutional strategies and practices globally (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). ‘Internationalisation’ is commonly defined as ‘the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education’ (Knight, 2004, p. 11). In practice, the sector has attached diverse definitions and practices to internationalisation (Hudzik, 2014; Kehm & Teichler, 2007), from recruiting international students to globalising the curriculum and research. Yet frequently,

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internationalisation as practice is conceptually reduced to the recruitment of international students or international research partnerships.

Internationalisation is often constructed as a normative common good, frequently aimed at creating 'global graduates' who become global citizens (Dippold et al., 2019). It is also positioned as a moral good that brings unequivocal benefits to communities, institutions, and countries (Servage & Yochim, 2020). Incorporating global research into the curriculum is likewise invoked as indicating quality (although see Cadez et al., 2017). This is perpetuated by global internationalisation rankings which engage institutions in a race to become 'most international' (Hauptman Komotar, 2019; Lomer et al., 2022). Therefore, one consideration is whether existing structural pressures encourage or stifle new approaches to internationalisation.

In this normative context, previous studies of internationalisation policies and strategies have been predominantly functionalist; that is, delivery-focused and techno-rational (Lewis, 2021). To our knowledge, there has been no critical systematic review of policies that incorporates an analysis of power relations and positions at the whole-sector level in the UK or similarly internationalised contexts. This is problematic, given that internationalisation signifies an intervention into HE practices and corporate identities which impact students' experiences. We also argue that definitional 'fuzziness' creates an unexamined policy arena which disadvantages marginalised actors and reproduces inequality across HE globally. While this may be typical of strategies and policies in general, in internationalisation this fuzziness exists at the conceptual and practice level as well as the strategic, and therefore merits further investigation. Studies conducted at the national policy level (Geddie, 2015) outline the discourses, rhetorics, and assumptions that shape internationalisation. However, important questions remain concerning internationalisation strategies as developed and integrated across different areas of activities in universities positioned hierarchically in unequal sectors. In doing so, we ask whether institutions are imagining internationalisation in divergent ways and if so, how this relates to their differential status and projected identity of these HEI.

This study is a whole-sector analysis of how internationalisation is conceptualised and enacted through specific strategies within and across institutions, as well as the relationships between internationalisation and inequality. Our project addresses the following questions:

- How do institutional strategies construct varied understandings of internationalisation?
- How are understandings of internationalisation structured and made consequential within an unequal higher education sector?

We present our analysis primarily through a novel typology of internationalisation in UK HE mission statements, an innovation in HE internationalisation studies. Our contribution is consequently empirical and conceptual. We take the UK as our field of study, not only because we are based here, but also because the UK is a model for internationalisation, as an early adopter of national-level policies to attract international students. The global growth of international student mobility encouraged similar approaches in Canada (Geddie, 2015), Malaysia (Tham, 2013), South Korea (Cho & Palmer, 2013), and at least 13 European countries (Crăciun, 2018). Therefore, this analysis has global

significance because the UK case exemplifies dynamics of internationalisation in marketised HE systems internationally.

Internationalisation in a changing landscape

Internationalisation performs diverse normative functions, but policy often focuses primarily on international student recruitment (Knight, 2004), and, of late, transnational higher education (TNHE). Globally, there are 5 million students studying outside their home country (OECD, 2021). In the UK, 452,225 students paid international, non-European Union (EU) fees in 2021 (HESA, 2022), though since then, EU students began to pay international fees and the EU/non-EU distinction loses relevance. In many major host countries (USA, Australia, Canada, UK), international students represent a significant proportion of the student population, though distribute themselves unevenly within the sectors (Cantwell, 2015). Yet national-level policy accounts of internationalisation often elide sector diversity (Geddie, 2015). In the UK, national policy portrays higher education institutions (HEI) as ubiquitously intercultural, outward-looking, and globally influential (Lomer, 2017a; Courtney, 2015).

The dominant policy narrative is economic, though internationalisation of curriculum is often included as a secondary rationale. For example, the most recent UK national International Education Strategy justifies their ambitious recruitment target by stating that international students 'bring important revenue to the UK higher education sector and to the UK economy' – £20 billion in economic revenue (DfIT, 2019). This national narrative has been identified in the UK (Tannock, 2018), Australia (Robertson, 2011), and the US (Choudaha, 2017), all destinations with higher international tuition fees. While viewing international students as 'cash cows' is unethical and damages universities' reputations (Choudaha, 2017), the emphasis on international students as a revenue source has long been the default of many HEIs in the UK.

This economic rationale becomes essential in quasi-marketised contexts (Marginson, 2013). Many institutions rely heavily on international tuition fees in the UK (HESA, 2022), Australia (Calderon, 2020), Canada (Marom, 2023), and the USA (Cantwell, 2015), amongst others. In the UK, Brexit has massively reduced student recruitment from the EU and available research funding (Courtois & Veiga, 2020). An inability to recruit international students can, therefore, threaten institutions with closure, if they become financially unviable (Hunt & Boliver, 2021). This uncertainty is experienced differently across the UK's four nations, which have different funding arrangements (Dearden et al., 2010). This concern became urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite limited state intervention intended to prevent '*disorderly* market exit' (DfE, 2020). The economic rationale for internationalisation therefore dominates the marketised landscape of the UK sector (2017a) and potentially limits divergence of approach.

Internationalisation is often operationalised through a global rankings culture that privileges easily quantifiable university outcomes or activities, particularly through rankings such as the Times Higher Education's (THE) 'most international' universities (Hazelkorn, 2015). However, these measures – proportions of international students and staff, international co-authorship, etc. – are often those captured by 'elite' institutions (Delgado-Márquez et al., 2013), which then capitalise on reputation to recruit more international students (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018) and staff in a virtuous cycle.

Institutions outside this loop seek to mimic 'world-class universities', as in Malaysia and Kazakhstan, for example (Lee & Naidoo, 2020). However, peer evaluations, an important methodological component of global rankings, are themselves often shaped by reputations (Bowman & Bastedo, 2011). Therefore, changing reputation is challenging. These factors exemplify how internationalisation is inherently unequal between countries and institutions and, over time, entrenches privilege. More privileged institutions may, for example, consider themselves to be in a phase of 'post-internationalisation', to be already globalised or globally engaged. The practices of internationalisation are, thus, likely to be shaped by institutional spaces and global sector positions, thereby potentially limiting more creative approaches.

Mindful of these challenges, we typologise HEIs positionings of internationalisation; ask whether the outlined tensions allow space for new developments; and consider multiple interpretations of how internationalisation can and should function.

Methodology

We addressed our research questions through qualitative ideal-type analysis (Stapley et al., 2022), using qualitative data to develop typologies. Building on Max Weber's work, this heuristic device simplifies complex terrains, based on empirical observation (Swedberg, 2018). Similar to qualitative cluster analysis, both establish groups within datasets using rich descriptions. It is appropriate for examining definitions and perceptions of concepts, and for large heterogeneous samples (Stapley et al., 2022). Ideal-type analysis should be comprehensive (i.e., not exclude key information), minimalist (use as few categories as possible), and verifiable in reality (Gerhardt, 1994). But as a heuristic device, definitions are necessarily 'loose' (Gunter & Ribbins, 2003) and cannot not fully 'capture reality' (Shepherd, 2018). Loose typologies enable researchers to explore types that may overlap or diverge from the core characteristics of the type (Lomer, 2015). The term 'ideal' type does not imply a normative exercise; rather it describes practices and features under a set of assumptions (Gerhardt, 1994). Education research has adapted ideal types in various forms (Lomer, 2015), yet it is less common in higher education studies (Shepherd, 2018). Our methodology, therefore, contributes to approaches in higher education studies.

Dataset

We began with HESA unique identifiers of HEIs in the UK, which rendered a list of 163 universities. For each institution, we looked for the most recent publicly available institutional strategy or policy document related to internationalisation, which, following previous HE policy studies (Evans et al., 2019), we interpreted as authoritative policy artefacts, that is, indicative of institutionally approved stances but not of institutional practices or internal contestations. This search was conducted between January and August 2021. This included 36 explicit internationalisation strategies, and 116 university-wide strategies or vision documents which mentioned internationalisation. We identified documents from all but 8 institutions (n = 159). This dataset spans the period of Brexit. In this analysis, we use the phrase 'international students' to mean all students not classified as home students (including EU and non-EU students), as used in the documents. These documents and data are publicly available, so we considered

it ethical to report institutional names; we thereby retain the 'situatedness and context' of strategy discourses (Moore, 2012).

We also compiled a statistical dataset with available secondary data. This included information from the Higher Education Statistics Authority, SciVal publication metrics, and previous publications (e.g., Boliver, 2015). We used the Times Higher Education world university rankings as a widely accepted indicator of reputation, despite critiques of the metrics used (Collins & Park, 2016). These were descriptively analysed to depict how uneven internationalisation is across the sector, offering the empirical verification of Weberian ideal-types.

Analysis approach

We divided all strategy documents among the research team to read and make summary notes before comparing and contrasting to identify types (Gerhardt, 1994). We inductively generated qualitative summaries for 40 documents and developed five dimensions that represented common themes within the strategies and tensions between institutional discourses. For the purposes of this article, we report on the three most conceptually rich dimensions (described in Table 1).

Within each dimension, we identified three or, in one case, four potential positions, to create composite types such that an institution could occupy any position on each dimension.

Next, we coded every institution on each dimension. We excluded specialist institutions, whose strategies depended on discipline (n = 27). Our final sample was therefore n = 132. 20% of the documents were double-coded.

The results of our analysis portray the multifaceted ways internationalisation is conceptualised in university strategy documents across the UK sector.

Mission, reputation and attitude: dimensions of ideal types

Our analysis developed three dimensions with three or four positions each, as detailed in Table 1. These dimensions are: reputation, mission, and attitude.

Table 1. Multidimensional typology of internationalisation in UK HEIs.

Dimension	Definition
Reputation	How the strategy positioned the institution's international reputation
Stellar	International reputation seen as world-leading excellence
Established	International reputation seen as significant and established over time
Emerging	International reputation seen as limited but improving
Unrecognised	International reputation seen as limited or nonexistent
Mission	How universities portrayed their aim or purpose in relation to internationalisation
Global saviour	Institutions as solutions to global problems
Institutional prioritiser	Institutions prioritising their own reputation and survival
Global-local bridge	Institutions as bringing the world to their local community
Local hero	Institutions as anchors for their local community
Attitude	The dominant emotional tone of the text
Optimism	Positioning internationalisation as an exclusively positive, inspirational, exciting process
Pragmatic	Positioning internationalisation as a goal or achievement accomplished through key performance indicators
Fear	Positioning the world as threatening, higher education as unstable, and internationalisation as a challenge

Reputation referred to the strategy's positioning of the institution in relation to internationalisation. We identified four positions, defined in Table 1: unrecognised (n = 16), emerging (n = 53), established (n = 33), and stellar (n = 30). Reputation is a particularly important dimension to answer Research Question 2: how do understandings of internationalisation relate to an unequal higher education sector since it is the inequalities of the sector that inform relative reputation?

Mission referred to how universities portrayed their aim or purpose in relation to internationalisation within their strategy documents. We identified four common types: local heroes (n = 19), institutional prioritisers (n = 45), global-local bridges (n = 50), and global saviours (n = 18).

We identified three predominant attitudes, meaning the emotional tone of the documents: optimism (n = 58), pragmatism (n = 55), and fear (n = 19).

This approach does not apply normative standards of 'good' or 'bad' types on these dimensions. We do not argue, for example, that institutions 'should' position themselves as 'global saviours' rather than 'local heroes'. While it may be commonly believed that 'no university of ambition officially claims to be local' (Stevens & Giebel, 2020), institutions whose orientation is primarily local may still be significant, as anchor institutions, for instance (Smolentseva, 2023). These types are a heuristic to understand the complexity of position-taking in internationalisation strategies and how they are potentially constrained.

Below we present four combined types, with example quotes and supporting quantitative indicators. Collectively, these strategies reflected a significant focus on international student recruitment, with curricula, staff-facing initiatives, and research often backgrounded or missing. Further, while there are multiple potential ways of defining 'international students', most strategies did not create operational definitions. While several included separate targets for European Union students, many did not since, post-Brexit, the distinction no longer has financial implications.

Full details of the secondary dataset and document analysis are available in an Open Access database (2022).

Stellar global-saviour optimist

'Stellar' (n = 30) institutions constructed themselves as world-leading, exceptional, innovative, and extraordinary institutions. Most stellar institutions were those ranked among the global elite (e.g., Edinburgh, Kent, Liverpool, Leeds, Warwick). They depicted themselves as already global in reach and outlook, having 'a long and proud history as an internationally focused university', for instance (University of Edinburgh, p. 2). Many use the language of 'global engagement' (e.g., Nottingham) in contrast to internationalisation, reflecting their status as already exceptional in their internationality.

'Global saviours' (n = 18) positioned themselves as institutions that can solve global challenges and society's 'biggest problems' (University of York, 2020). Many of these strategies used the language of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and emphasised their capacity to solve global problems through innovative research. The University of Edinburgh (2009), for instance, cited 'our collaborations that tackle problems transcending national boundaries, and in the important intellectual and societal contributions we make.' Similarly, the University of Reading (2019) claimed,

'We … deliver a better world through the transformational power of quality education and research.' Universities listed social, cultural, economic, medical, technological, and global impacts, but this was particularly salient for medical and STEM research that would generate 'real-world' applications, solving global challenges of poverty, deprivation, and illness.

Optimistic (n = 57) institutions often used vague language like 'enable, enhance, connect'. Unlike pragmatic strategies, optimistic strategies lacked detailed performance indicators or action plans, dominated instead by 'vision' or 'values'. Missions categorised as 'global saviours' were frequently optimistic (n = 13), and this was also dominant amongst 'stellar' (n = 15) and 'established' institutions (n = 16). Implicitly, the absence of defined key performance indicators or specific numerical targets suggested that these institutions do not 'need' to govern through targets, but rather need to sustain an 'environment' conducive to innovation (University of Manchester, 2020). Specific actions, commitments, or resourcing were not in vogue here, with goals more likely to seek to 'play an active role' and 'support excellent research' (University of York, 2020). Yet, the reader was assured that the sheer brilliance and excellence of the institution will compensate for these lacunae. Therefore, we constructed the combined type of stellar global-saviour optimists.

The confidence in this type was supported to an extent by the quantitative data. **Stellar global-saviour optimists** (n = 9) are highly ranked (with an average THE rank of 17), mostly Russell Group, ancient or nineteenth-century institutions, and more selective (Boliver cluster 2), and research-active or intensive HEIs. These institutions published in the most international collaborations (21,424 in 2019, where the next highest group is 17,594). International grant capture substantially outperformed the sector average, at £4,394,000 vs £2,460,000 (although fearful and pragmatic global saviours outperform this). In describing research as 'world-leading' (University of Manchester, 2020), there is therefore some support, although the claim to impact civilisation itself (University of Glasgow, n.d.) is perhaps harder to substantiate.

Stellar global-saviour optimistic institutions are large (with 25,291 students on average), and their sheer size offers security against demographic shifts. They attract large numbers of 'high-quality' international students, on average 7,943 (over double the sector average of 3,508), attributed to their international history, (e.g., University of Edinburgh). This corresponds to an average of 31% international/home students (sector average 19%). They also hosted high rates of TNHE enrollments, at an average of 2,380, and an average proportion of 21.7% international staff, though this is not much higher than the sector average of 17%. Perhaps this is a more secure position, in light of geopolitical shifts like Brexit, conferring less exposure to risks of migration policy changes.

Established institutional-prioritising pragmatists

'Established' institutions (n = 33) referred to less exceptional, though still secure and stable international reputations. Vocabulary in this type was shaped by 'continuing', 'strengthening', 'expanding', or 'building on strength' (Durham University, 2016). 'International recognition' indicated established status (University of Stirling, 2015).

HEIs categorised as 'institutional prioritisers' (n = 46) tended to frame their mission, and the ultimate purpose of internationalisation, as their own reputation and survival.

For example, the University of Birmingham (2022) presented its international strategy in service to 'further developing our international profile and reputation'. Institutional prioritisers tended to minimise their mention of the specific region, city, or town. For example, while the Stirling strategy mentioned 'local partnerships' and 'creating opportunities in Stirling' (p. 9), there were few other references to the specific local area and far more to 'all over the world'.

'Pragmatism' (n = 56) creates an apparently rational, technical, and neutral vision. Pragmatic plans often included specific 'key performance indicators' with quantifiable operational targets, often regarding international student recruitment, research income, and ranking improvement. The motivation for financial sustainability was made explicit, with targets set, for example, of an annual income of over £500 million by 2027 (Durham University, 2016). Institutional prioritisers tended to project a 'pragmatic' (n = 28) tone. We, therefore, identified the combined type of established institutional-prioritising pragmatists.

Established institutional-prioritising pragmatists (n = 5) outperformed sector averages in some areas, but not all. Their THE ranking was on average 61 (91 sector average), with student bodies of 16,821 (17,353 sector average), an average international student population of 4,489 (3,508 sector average) or a 22% international student ratio (19% sector average), and 782 international staff (633 sector average) for a 20% international staff ratio (17% sector average). On TNHE enrollments, they fell below sector averages at 2,264 (sector average 2,989). However, they brought in £1,334,000 of international research income compared to a sector average of £2,462,000. However, 'established' institutions are the second largest international research income-generating type, constituting 12% of their total research income. These institutions produced on average 1,233 publications through international collaborations, exceeding the sector average of 971.

This portrait could be considered a normative approach to internationalisation in the UK, with a focus on international student recruitment representing in the data a common default understanding of internationalisation. Being pragmatic, these self-assessments corresponded to the quantitative picture drawn of internationalisation in these institutions. Their 'good but not world-leading' status makes a pragmatic approach appear necessary under the pressures of rankings and marketisation.

Emerging optimistic global-local bridges

'Emerging' institutions (n = 53) presented themselves as 'challenger institutions' with nascent international reputations and niche expertise. These were typically institutions with lower but developing international profiles. For example, 'Aberystwyth is a leading university in Wales with an excellent global reputation' (Lomer, 2017b, p. 4). They envisioned 'a heightened engagement with international partners and institutions' (University of Portsmouth, 2016, p. 3), implying that emerging institutions are currently internationalising and have space to grow. Emerging institutions appear particularly conscious of the unequal terrain of HE in the UK.

'Global-local bridges' (n = 50) identified their mission as gateways, bringing international and global connections into the local region through 'effective regional and global collaborations' (Swansea University, n.d., p. 4). This approach was also particularly

prominent in the devolved nations of Scotland and Wales, for example, the University of Aberystwyth described its mission to 'contribute to society in Wales and the wider world' (Lomer, 2017b, p. 3). Often situated in education cold spots or less developed regions, these institutions positioned their value as bringing the world into their town or region through their students, partnerships, and research, and emphasised diversity and local widening participation as 'anchor institutions' (e.g., York St John), and 'close integration' with local businesses and communities (University of Gloucestershire, 2011). 'Emerging' universities accounted for half the 'global-local bridge' mission (n = 25), and tended to adopt a broadly optimistic tone (described above).

The combined type of **emerging global-local bridge optimists** constituted the single largest category (n = 13). They were quite diverse in institutional terms, ranging in THE ranking from 30 to 200 or unranked. In size, they hovered around average, from 6,600–26,500 total students. The average international student body was 2,345 or 13% of the total, slightly below the sector average at 3,508 and 19% respectively. This concealed, again, a wide range: proportions varied from 5–23% of the student body. They were mostly less selective (Boliver, 2015), post-1992 or 1960s universities with a heritage of vocational education. They exceeded the sector average of 2,989 TNHE enrolments at 5,035 on average but fell below on international staff (325–633, or 13% to 17%). They brought in international research funding of £549,000 on average, well below the national average of £2,462,000, which constituted 15% of their total research income. Their international collaborations were similarly respectable, but below the sector average at 406 on average, compared to 970 at the sector level. Broad objectives to 'facilitate international research collaborations' and 'support and enhance our research and innovation activities in a global context' (University of Portsmouth, 2016, p. 13) seemed appropriate to this characterisation. In general, despite the wide range, emerging global-local bridge optimists were more teaching than research focused and less internationalised than the sector.

Unrecognised fearful local heroes

The 'unrecognised' (n = 17) reputational position constructed HEIs as limitedly known beyond its immediate region or close partners. These institutions frequently positioned internationalisation as developing, in progress, or unestablished. For example, Newman University aimed 'to raise our regional, national and international profile' through establishing 'a limited number of targeted collaborations' and 'build on progress made' (2013, p. 19). These modest goals avoided the self-description present in nearly every other type as already 'international' or 'global in scope'. Unrecognised institutions are the most disadvantaged by an unequal HE sector.

Within the 'unrecognised' reputation, the mission was fairly evenly split between 'local heroes' (n = 8) and 'institutional prioritisers' (n = 9, discussed above). 'Local heroes' (n = 18) prioritise their impact and engagement within their immediate local community or region: 'rooted in our community' (Abertay, 2020, p. 6). For example, Bishop Grosseteste University described itself as 'part of the fabric that makes Lincoln unique' (2019), making reference to the region of Greater Lincolnshire, the East Midlands, and even specifically to 'uphill Lincoln'. Newman University was similarly 'mindful of our location in the diverse community that is Birmingham' (2013, p. 7). This contrasts with 'global

saviours' and 'institutional prioritisers', who often elided their location entirely. No 'stellar' institutions characterised their mission as a 'local hero', framing their missions as 'global', consistent with Stevens and Giebel's (2020) analysis.

'Fearful' (n = 19) strategies were framed as responding to 'unprecedented challenges' (Bishop Grosseteste, 2018, p.6). Hartpury also signalled 'a regulatory approach … not afraid to hold providers to account' (2019, p. 4), echoing the concerns about the policy context raised above. These universities still presented themselves as 'excellent' and 'proud of our record' (Abertay, 2020, p. 3), with positive language and proactive objectives. Still, the sense of responding to external threats underpinned the framework. Fearful was the least common attitude and was more common amongst emerging (n = 10) and 'unrecognised' (n = 4) institutions than amongst 'established' (n = 3) and 'stellar' (n = 2) institutions. We, therefore, highlighted a combined type of **unrecognised fearful local heroes.**

Unrecognised fearful local heroes (n = 4) were the newest, smallest, most locally oriented, and least known internationally. Most 'unrecognised' universities were small (average student body 2,292), less selective, and new (university status awarded within the last decade) with lower THE rankings (200 or unranked). They hosted on average 60 international students and had few TNHE enrolments – 410 on average. With fewer international staff on average (27 compared to the sector average of 633, or 7% compared to 17%), limited research income, and fewer international collaborative publications (11 compared to the sector average of 971), the general emphasis on teaching over research compromises 'unrecognised' institutions' capacity to build a wider global reputation, but responds realistically to their relative position. As Newman University (2013, p. 11) stated: 'The probability of institutions similar to Newman University increasing their share of research funding is low.'

Implicitly, they saw themselves as at risk of closure or merger in light of British marketisation policies. They made a virtue of their local orientation, which larger, more global institutions might read as a virtue of necessity. Their emphasis on internationalisation was, therefore, limited and primarily aspirational, with substantial barriers to overcome. Yet these local heroes still sought to 'create international opportunities for all students' (Bishop Grosseteste, 2018, p. 6). This suggested a level of disciplinarity to internationalisation in the UK context: it is not optional, but a prerequisite for institutional survival.

Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis suggests that reputation and material realities shape approaches to internationalisation that institutions adopted in relation to their central mission, which in turn often limits how varied approaches can be (research question 1). Convention suggests that internationalisation reflects institutional practices most often associated with large elite universities (Delgado-Márquez et al., 2013) – global research collaborations with potential global impact, extensive international student recruitment, curricula shaped by staff with extensive international experiences, and so on. But many institutions in the UK HE sector, as in many countries, lack the historic and contemporary reputation, research infrastructure and funding to engage in these ways, highlighting the unequal environment posited in our second research question and through the secondary data

included in our analysis. Many small universities that remain 'unrecognised' on a global scale have, however, essential local and regional impact, serving important community roles. For these universities, as shown through the language embedded within their institutional strategies, internationalisation is part of the turbulent and competitive space of marketised HE (Lee & Naidoo, 2020). Within this, there is limited security offered by national policy which remains committed to a neo-liberal ideology that supports 'market exit' for HE providers (2017a).

Departments, faculties and universities closing is a very real threat in the UK setting, particularly if they cannot recruit international students (Hunt & Boliver, 2021). Collectively, these strategies therefore reflected a significant focus on international student recruitment, perhaps in part because it is so easily measured. Institutions located in cities with good tourist reputations (Manchester, Bath, and especially London), with 'established' institutional reputations, can rely on a steady stream of income from international student fees, and of prestige from international collaborations in research and teaching. 'Stellar' institutions, often of double or triple the median size, capture the vast majority of this advantage. In so doing, by positioning themselves as 'global saviours' they frequently sacrifice in their strategic visions a sense of the specific place they occupy. The 'global-local bridge' institutions alternatively seek to meet both priorities, by locating themselves in their place and community but emphasising their unique capacity to bring the global into the local, through research, exchange, and community outreach. The inequality inherent in the UK HE sector therefore shapes approaches to, and understandings of, internationalisation. In particular, strategy documents lead to assumptions that internationalisation equals international students, at the expense of including other forms such as internationalised pedagogy or curricula.

All these mission statements make clear that, while they frame themselves as constituted of ambitious targets, they are largely already fulfilled; they describe the current nature of the institution in its best light. The vision is a function of what HEIs want the institution to become, mediated heavily by what they believe it already is. For most institutions in this study, therefore, internationalisation is not positioned in ways that diverge from the norm and does not highlight a process of change or development towards an ultimate goal of peak 'international-ness'. Rather, it is about positioning their institution and its unique characteristics in relation to the existing global environment and status quo, particularly the market and metrics (Hazelkorn, 2015).

What this study shows is that, while contemporary internationalisation is a heterogenous endeavour in the UK sector, divergent approaches to internationalisation are often constrained by material circumstances. Institutions map themselves in terms of their relative reputation, geography, student body size and characteristics, research profile, and curricula. Against the backdrop of a deeply neo-liberal marketised policy setting (2017a; Tannock, 2018), institutions appear to deploy a range of interpretations of internationalisation as a threat, opportunity, or intrinsic part of their functioning. In some strategies, we saw activities re-interpreted as 'global engagement' rather than internationalisation, further consolidating these institutions' international status by avoiding depicting their institution as currently 'not international'. This uneven shift towards 'post-internationalisation' language speaks to differential power relations across the sector expressed as status and capital, where such differences produce new possibilities or constraints for institutional identity and practice. Indeed, we note that the evidence

of institutional identity formation expressed in these policies-as-artefacts reflects similar processes of dialectic identity formation in individuals, in that identity claims tended not to exceed the target audience's anticipated willingness to accept them. This emphasises HEIs' acknowledgement that they function within relational power structures which depend as much on recognition as on assertion.

This analysis has, therefore, direct implications for practice, not only in the UK but also in other comparably marketised, internationalised sectors. Institutional and sector leaders may feel pressured to adopt the dispositions and practices of the global elite universities (Delgado-Márquez et al., 2013), and for example, incentivise international collaborative publications in high-ranking journals. Diversity of approach to internationalisation reflects not only the status of the HEI, but also the function that 'doing internationalisation' is intended to fulfil. Internationalisation may be a product of existing elite status and activities, or it may be a claimed mechanism to achieve a higher status. We see analogies with the literature on school effectiveness, which misconstructs the direction of the causal relationship between what is deemed 'effective' and 'what effective institutions do' (Thrupp, 2001). In other words, lower-ranked HEIs ticking off suggested numbers one to ten on the 'what highly internationalised HEI do' list is unlikely to recreate the structural conditions that make elite institutions look international. Our data and typology show that HEIs largely know this, and make strategic and differential use of internationalisation in order to fulfil particular agendas and construct an institutional identity. Ultimately, we found little evidence within this that institutions adopt, or feel able to adopt, divergent approaches to internationalisation in an unequal and marketised environment.

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Appendix

1. Documents referred to

Abertay University. Strategic Plan 2020-2025.
Bishop Grossteste University, Lincoln. Strategy 2019-2025.
Hartpury University. Academic Strategy 2020-2025.
Newman University. Strategic Plan 2014-2020.
University of Gloucestershire at Cheltenham and Gloucester. Strategic plan 2017-2022.
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