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How can an academic accounting education
remain relevant given that the use of
technology is transforming the role of the
accountant?

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PhD

2023

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Abstract

How can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?

Technology use has led to entry level roles within professional firms and commercial finance departments disappearing while creating career opportunities which require different skills. Traditional accounting education curriculum appears ill equipped to instil such skills into graduates, decreasing their employment opportunities, and threatening the relevance of accounting education to the professional bodies (PABs). The objective of this study is to provide accounting faculty with a curriculum framework which enhances accounting education relevance and increase the employability of accounting graduates.

Understanding multiple perspectives ('realities') of the obstacles to creating a more relevant accounting education curriculum is required. By adopting a qualitative interpretivist approach, a clearer awareness of the issues surrounding accounting education curriculum change emerges as the interactions and relationships between stakeholders are investigated. Using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) to analyse semi structured interviews, several themes emerged.

This study makes several important contributions to the existing body of knowledge. Firstly, it argues that the expectation gap between the PABs and accounting educators cannot be closed and that collaboration between the parties is difficult to achieve. Secondly, it found that the complex web of institutional logics at play in HEIs obstructs those intent on curriculum change. Further it emerged that accounting faculty were complicit in pushing exaggerated employability claims for their courses and were complacent to the consequences of discovery. Methodologically, this study was the first to explore accounting education relevance from the perspectives of all interested parties, the PABs, accounting faculty, and students, gaining a holistic view of the issue.

The above poses significant threats to accounting education viability. Short-term, the cash generated by accounting degrees gives accounting faculty some security. Longer-term the PABs will create more innovative curriculum and without change, the relevance of accounting education will diminish further negatively impacting the employability of accounting graduates. The future viability of accountancy as a degree is, potentially, in question. In creating this curriculum framework, the study makes a practical contribution to the benefit of all interested stakeholders.

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List of abbreviations

AACSB	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.
ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants.
AI	Artificial Intelligence.
AICPA	Association of International Certified Professional Accountants.
AIS	Accounting Information Systems.
BI	Business Intelligence.
CABS	Chartered Association of Business Schools.
CAI	Chartered Accountants of Ireland.
CFO	Chief Financial Officer.
CIMA	Chartered Institute of Management Accountant in England and Wales.
CIPFA	Certified Institute of Public Finance Accountants
CPD	Continuous Professional Development.
FRC	Financial Reporting Council.
HE	Higher Education.
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England.
HEI	Higher Education Institution.
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency.
ICAEW	Institute of Chartered Accountants England and Wales.
ICAS	Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland.
IFAC	International Federation of Accountants.
IFRS	International Financial Reporting Standards.
IMA	Institute of Mngement Accountants.
IoT	Internet of Things.
NPM	New Public Management.
NSS	National Student Survey.
PAB(s)	Professional Accounting Body (ies).
OfS	Office for Students.

QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis.
QRI	Qualitative Research Interview.
REF	Research Excellence Framework.
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise.
TEF	Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework.
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.
WEF	World Economic Forum.
WIL	Work Integrated Learning.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas, and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this commentary has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted through the Researcher's submission to Northumbria University's Ethics Online System on 15th January 2020 - Submission Ref: 17953

I declare that the word count for this thesis is 91,931.

Chapter 1 Introduction.

1.1 Background and research problem.

As early as 2017 Brynjolfsson and Mitchell (2017) stated that the future implications of artificial intelligence (AI) for the global economy and employment, though limited then, would become increasingly significant. Subsequently, a report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), (2020) found that: ‘The pace of technology adoption is expected to remain unabated and may accelerate in some areas’ (World Economic Forum, 2020, p. 5).

The WEF report stated that the utilisation of cloud computing, big data, and e-commerce remained high priorities for business leaders, following a trend which began several years earlier. The report also highlighted the significant rise in interest for encryption, nonhumanoid robots, and AI. It added that automation, in conjunction with the economic impact of COVID-19, is creating a ‘double-disruption’ scenario for the global workforce. Combined with the lasting economic effects of the pandemic, technological adoption will transform tasks, jobs, and skills by 2025. Forty-three percent of businesses surveyed by the WEF (2020) are set to reduce their workforce. To paraphrase William Gibson¹, - the Economist December 4th, 2003: ‘The future (of finance) is already here – it is just not evenly distributed.’

The future of work has already arrived for a large majority of the online white-collar workforce. Within the accounting profession² (‘the profession’), technological developments are having significant effects. The use of AI, mass-automation, big-data analytics, and hyper-connectivity already are and will continue to impact on the role of the accountant. Academics (Munoko, Brown-Liburd, & Vasarhelyi, 2020; Stancheva-Todorova, 2018), the profession (ACCA, 2020; AICPA, 2019; ICAEW, 2018), and the business community (Robert Half, 2019a, 2019b)³ all identify technology as currently the biggest single factor impacting the profession. The WEF report (2020) forecasts that the shift in tasks, jobs, and skills of the profession, caused by technological adoption, will place accounting and audit amongst the top four industry sectors impacted by 2025, see Table 1. This forecast is echoed by the Employer Skills Survey 2019: Skills Needs (Department of Education, 2020) and ‘the future of work; adapting to technological change’ survey (Robert Half, 2019a). These surveys indicate that one in three accounting employers are, or will be, redesigning roles to focus more on digital, technical, and soft skills. Post-lockdown, accountancy firms and finance teams have struggled to recruit the right people for these evolving roles. This skills shortage has been exacerbated by the after-effects of the COVID-19, with accountants either

¹ William Ford Gibson (born March 17, 1948) is an American Canadian speculative fiction writer and essayist.

² The accounting profession is defined as individuals who are members or trainees with each of the following professional bodies (Institute of Chartered Accountants England and Wales (ICAEW), Institute of Chartered Accountants Scotland (ICAS), Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), Association of Certified Accountants (ACCA), Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants (CIPFA).

³ The last definitive employer survey carried out of the profession.

becoming risk-averse and not wanting to switch employers, or because COVID-19 has encouraged more experienced accountants to take early retirement.

Table 1 Top twenty job roles in decreasing demand across industries (2020-2025)

1	Data Entry Clerks	11	Financial Analysts
2	Administrative and Executive Secretaries	12	Postal Service Clerks
3	Accounting, Bookkeeping and Payroll Clerks	13	Sales Rep., Wholesale and Manuf., Tech. and Sci. Products
4	Accountants and Auditors	14	Relationship Managers
5	Assembly and Factory Workers	15	Bank Tellers and Related Clerks
6	Business Services and Administration Managers	16	Door-To-Door Sales, News and Street Vendors
7	Client Information and Customer Service Workers	17	Electronics and Telecoms Installers and Repairers
8	General and Operations Managers	18	Human Resources Specialists
9	Mechanics and Machinery Repairers	19	Training and Development Specialists
10	Material-Recording and Stock-Keeping Clerks	20	Construction Laborers

Source – World Economic Forum – ‘The future of jobs’ (2020). Formatting added by the researcher.

As the pace of digitalisation increases, the need for IT skills, data-analytic expertise, and ‘professional skills’ e.g., communication, inter-personal, and flexibility, grows rapidly. Accounting bodies and recruitment companies have all reported a fall in the number of traditional roles available to student members, as technology now performs many analytical roles (IFAC, 2019; Kruskopf, Lobbas, Meinander, & Söderling, 2019; Robert Half, 2019a; World Economic Forum, 2020).

In 2014, Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) stated that: ‘Acquiring an education is the best way to not be left behind as technology races ahead.’ However, in the literature, it still appears that the primary goal of the undergraduate accounting curricula remains equipping students to pass exams and gain exemptions from parts of the professional qualification (Asonitou, 2021; Ellington, 2017; Fogerty & Lowensohn, 2017). Others cite the focus on accreditations as a barrier to curricula change (Ellington & Williams, 2017; Kafaji, 2020; Paisey & Paisey, 2010) arguing that this constrains the ability of academics to amend accounting curricula, pedagogy, and assessment, resulting in courses full of mostly technical content. Such busy curricula leave little opportunity to develop generic lifelong learning skills in undergraduates. These scholars, and others, consider these current curricula inappropriate for providing the core

competencies required by the modern accountant (Caulfield, 2015; Lansdell, Marx, & Mohammadali-Haji, 2020; Lawson, Pincus, Sorensen, Stocks, & Stout, 2017). For years, scholars have argued that accounting educators need to adapt the curricula to include life-long learning skills which meet the evolving requirements of the profession and business community or risk an accounting education becoming irrelevant. As highlighted by the WEF report above, the threat of irrelevance, is real, not perceived, and increasing steadily.

There is broad agreement among accounting educators that professional skills need a place in the accounting curriculum. Accounting degrees need both academic and vocational content as an accounting degree is both an objective, to attain a recognised Higher Education (HE) qualification, and a foundation for a later professional career (Paisey & Paisey, 2007). Both academics and Professional Accounting Bodies (PABs)⁴ have attempted to amend the accounting curriculum to assist the shift of accountants from ‘bean-counters’ to valuable members of the management team (Boyce, Narayanan, Greer, & Blair, 2019; Hagel, 2015; Pincus, Stout, Sorensen, Stocks, & Lawson, 2017; Stephenson, 2017). However, recent surveys show that reform has not been fully completed. Gaps remain in the soft skills possessed by accountants, especially in the areas of communication, presentation, negotiation, and relationship building (ACCA, 2016b; Al-Htaybat, Von Alberti-Alhtaybat, & Alhatabat, 2018; Asonitou, 2021; de Villiers, 2019; IFAC, 2019). It is hard for an undergraduate accounting education to fill these gaps as, firstly, there is constant flux in employers’ and society’s demand for skills (Council of the European Union, 2018; Howcroft, 2017) and secondly, structures and attitudes within HE need to change to overcome the diverse barriers which impede institutional reform (Asonitou, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020).

Some propose that these softer skills are better developed in the ‘real world’ rather than within an accounting degree (Ali, Kamarudin, Suriani, Saad, & Afandi, 2016; Asonitou, 2021; Lansdell et al., 2020). The primary reason given is that the accounting curriculum is already full of mandatory technical content (Ellington & Williams, 2017; Stoner & Milner, 2010). Conversely, as students are increasingly seen as ‘consumers’ (Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2017; Hubble, Foster, & Bolton, 2016; Raaper, 2019) some authors argue that the continued failure to bridge this widening expectation gap between the PABs and HE will exacerbate the issue of relevance and bring the viability of accounting education increasingly into question. These academics postulate that students will cease to enrol onto courses which they (the student) perceive fail to equip them to succeed in their future career (Asonitou, 2021; Chaffer & Webb, 2017; Pincus et al., 2017).

Finally, as Ellington (2017) pointed out, unlike in the United States (e.g. the Bedford Committee Report (1986), or the Pathways Commission (2012)), there has been little attempt to create a formal agenda for the improvement of the accounting curricula in the UK, despite accomplished research in this field, such as that of Milner and Hill (2008) or Stoner (2010). In 2023, still no formal agenda seems to exist.

As evident from the above, without a crystal ball, the overall future impact of technology use on the nature of the profession and the role of the accountant remains unclear. However, there is broad consensus amongst both academics and professional accountants that the impact will be significant. The

⁴ In this study the PABs refer to the following bodies, ICAEW, ACCA, CIMA, ICAS and CIPFA.

overarching research problem for this study is to identify how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant, whether in practice or industry.

Having stated the overarching research problem and explained the background, I believe that a brief discussion of my interest in the relevance of an accounting education will help to contextualise this research project.

1.2 Motivations for this research.

In 2018 I was enrolled on a MSc. programme in forensic accounting, during which I met several recent accounting graduates doing the same course. When asked why they had enrolled, the most frequent answer was that they had been unsuccessful in securing their desired employment and hoped that the MSc. would improve their prospects. Some, though not all, openly questioned whether their undergraduate accounting studies had been value for money. Nevertheless, each one was prepared to invest more time, effort, and money in further study to attain their goal of a successful accounting career.

This struck a chord with me as I realised that in a thirty year plus accounting career, I had recruited for numerous positions but had never once appointed an accounting graduate to a role. Asking myself why? I concluded, firstly, that as we (the company) had invested heavily in automating the technical functions of the finance department, other candidates, whether graduates or non-graduates, more closely matched the skills profile required. Secondly, I was increasingly aware that the PABs were beginning to rework their competency frameworks and incorporating digital content into their syllabi. These two realisations led me to think that a more appropriate accounting education curriculum should be developed.

However, if this was a simple process then accounting faculties would have already amended their own curriculum, but they have not. A cursory look through the accounting education literature revealed numerous articles by renowned scholars in accounting education chiding faculty for not responding to the needs of the PABs and alluding to an ‘expectations gap’. These scholars proposed various solutions to address the issue of the gap but few recommendations, if any, gained significant traction. Questioning why this may be, I believed that by understanding the underlying behaviours and attitudes of all the stakeholders involved in accounting education, the PABs, HEIs, and students, a path to a more appropriate accounting education curriculum would emerge.

My final motivation came from a sense of injustice that increased as my research journey progressed. Students enrol on accountancy courses, investing significant time and money, with the expectation of achieving gainful employment. As discussed throughout this thesis, this expectation is often not met. I developed the feeling that potential accounting undergraduates were being misled which I believe is unjust.

1.3 Research aims and objectives.

Accountants are increasingly seen as key to the strategic decision-making process, providing insight into, and interpretation of, a wealth of data to management or clients in a clear, concise, intelligible format.

This study aims to provide HE accounting educators with a curriculum framework which will enhance the relevance of accounting education to the evolving profession.

Accounting education relevance to the profession is worth investigating given the widening choice of study disciplines available to potential undergraduates. 'Selling' accounting as a degree discipline is increasingly competitive. This research aims to identify themes and explore issues to aid curriculum content development so that an undergraduate accounting education enhances the accounting graduates' chances of securing rewarding employment within the profession. This curriculum content change needs to reflect the changing nature of the skills set required by new entrants into the PABs because of increasing technology use by the profession.

Table 1 highlighted that the pace of technology adoption is increasing swiftly and is having a considerable impact on the profession, particularly in the areas of bookkeeping and audit (World Economic Forum, 2020). As disruptive digital technology changes the function of accountants and is automating many lower-level tasks, the PABs are redefining and repositioning themselves. Such repositioning involves exploiting technology, adopting new and emerging skills together with a continuous learning process to create value for clients and business owners and shape the future direction of business. The PABs recognise that future recruits will need to be able to understand, use, and communicate machine generated data. Consequently, the PABs are redesigning programmes and revisiting exam syllabi to make future accountants more business and technology ready. These changes to training programmes and exam design have increased access to the PABs for a less traditional talent pool, one less reliant of having a technical accounting background.

The impact of this digital revolution in accounting functions means that the relevance of accounting education is of interest to accounting academics and students alike. This research will focus on the question 'How can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?'

It has long been accepted that career prospects, earnings, and other opportunities associated with working in the accountancy or finance sector, in themselves, are attractive to undergraduates. This is borne out by the high levels of graduates applying for student membership of the various PABs (FRC, 2011-2022; Highflyers, 2022). However, when examining the make-up of applicants, the value of studying accounting at university appears to be waning (FRC, 2011-2022). The study will investigate if this is the case and, if so, examine the reasons for this phenomenon. Certainly, the traditional image of accounting being perceived as dry, repetitive, mechanical, and staid which fails to encapsulate the important purpose of the accounting discipline (M. Jones & Stanton, 2021; Stevenson-Smith, 2015; Tucker & Scully, 2020) is not an attraction. However, partly due to technology use, the profession is evolving away from this 'gatekeeper' role, towards the more strategic role of business partner.

The move towards business partnering will ensure that the profession remains in the vanguard of preparing for, and responding to, the major business challenges of the future. These challenges include, but are not limited to, mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on business performance, managing the fallout from Brexit, and achieving the United Nation Global Goals for Sustainable Development. Perhaps, the

most significant challenge currently, and of significant to this study, is that of embracing the risks and opportunities presented by Industry 4.0⁵ (Schwab, 2017).

Rising to the challenge posed by Industry 4.0, the PABs are publishing significant volumes of information, advice, education, and guidance to help equip their members for the digital future (ACCA, 2019a, 2020; AICPA, 2019; CIMA, 2019c; ICAEW, 2019c, 2019d). Simultaneously, PABs are redesigning their professional examination syllabi to include topics such as big data, digitalisation, soft skills, and the ethics of AI (ACCA, 2020; CIMA, 2019a, 2019b; ICAEW, 2020a). This has reinvigorated the professional study of accounting and impacted upon the core skills and attributes required by future student members of the PABs.

This in turn challenges academia to give the academic study of accounting renewed purpose. Commercial awareness, a key employability competency for graduates, has long been the bed rock of accountancy study. However, lately scholars increasingly argue that accounting study be extended to include an awareness of sustainability and the impact of a business's activity on the environment (Kopnina & Meijers, 2014; W. E. Lee, Birkey, & Patten, 2017; U. Sharma & Kelly, 2014; Wyness & Dalton, 2018). This is seen as valuable for promoting individual interest, increasing knowledge, and motivating students. Integrating real life cases into the course curriculum has been shown to make students feel more comfortable as well as developing sensitivity and responsibility. It is important that university accounting qualifications consider building developing topics (e.g., big data, digitalisation, soft skills, the ethics of AI, real-life cases) into what is already a very busy curriculum. Finding opportunity and expertise to discuss these issues within the accounting curriculum appears surmountable given the institutions' freedom and theoretical expertise, yet universities may well lack the practical commercial experience necessary (Rebele & St. Pierre, 2019).

Academics, PABs, and businesses need to collaborate to build an attractive suite of resources, case studies, and real time experiences under some form of common licence to stimulate, educate, and judge students so that life skills learning, key to success in the profession, becomes a core component of accounting curricula.

However, curriculum change is difficult and strewn with obstacles, including the fluidity of skills required by employers and society (Council of the European Union, 2018; Howcroft, 2017) and the structures and attitudes ingrained within HE which impede institutional reform (Asonitou, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020). Also, in making any change care needs to be taken in managing any implementation to ensure that such change is beneficial (Lawson et al., 2017). In this regard, student motivation is a key consideration, and the value of any proposed changes will need careful assessment.

1.4 Research questions.

The literature review (Chapter 3) focusses on articles, both academic and professional, to understand fully the current opinions surrounding the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs. Regarding the relevance of an accounting education, three broad groups of interested stakeholders have been

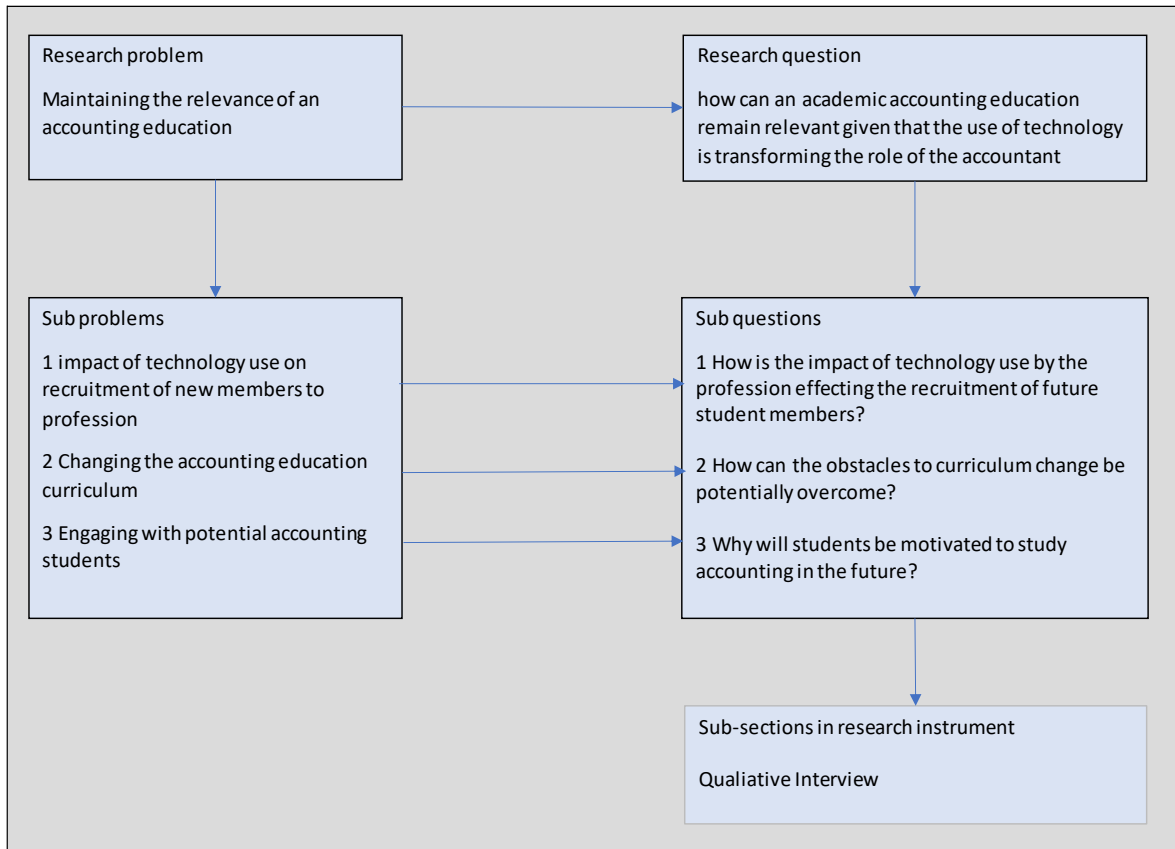
⁵ Industry 4.0 – The accepted name for the 4th industrial (digital) revolution.

identified. These stakeholders comprise; the PABs as custodians of the professional education curriculum, accounting academia (accounting academics and faculty administrators) as practitioners and functionaries of accounting education, and potential and current undergraduates studying accounting. The interests, needs, actions, and behaviours of each of these groups exert influence on the content of accounting education curriculum and its relevance to the PABs.

Professional and commercial logics are driving change in the nature of the profession and compelling the PABs to amend the professional accounting education curriculum to accommodate this evolution and maintain their professional status. While aware that the changes occurring in the profession are likely to mean academic accounting curriculum needs amending, HEIs are ham-stung in making the necessary curriculum change. The logics at play within HE, including state, market, academic, academic capitalism, professional, managerial, and business, exert pressure on academic institutions to behave in certain ways. Often multiple logics are present simultaneously, creating conflict and leading to issues arising which make curricula amendments more challenging. These challenges are made more complex by the relatively recent emergence of the concept of the student as a consumer (Jabbar, Analoui, Kong, & Mirz, 2018). This concept has shifted the power balance within HE to favour the student, compelling HEIs to put a greater emphasis on student focus within the curriculum. This dynamic creates obstacles for accounting faculty which negatively effects their ability to make wholesale accounting curriculum change.

For this study, three key sub problems have been identified as needing to be addressed if the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs is to be maintained. These sub problems are 1) to understand the impact that technology use by the profession is having on the recruitment of future student members, 2) exploring obstacles to amending the accounting curriculum in the context of competing logics, and 3) motivating and engaging with potential accounting students in the future. Respectively, the identified sub problems have the following associated research sub questions; how is the impact of technology use by the profession affecting the recruitment of future student members? how can the obstacles to curriculum change in the context of logics be overcome? why will students remain motivated to study accounting in the future? Figure 1, adapted from the work of Klopper and Lubbe (2011), illustrates the relationship between the general research problem in this study, maintaining the relevance of an accounting education, and the respective sub-problems and associated sub-questions which need addressing. While Table 2 - overall aims and research objectives, links the research sub problems identified with the goal of the study, in the context of a sample of the existing literature and theory. These and other papers are discussed in greater detail in the literature review.

Figure 1 Alignment of research problem to research sub problems.



1.4.1 Research sub question1 how is the impact of technology use by the profession affecting the recruitment of future student members?

The term ‘profession’ is often used to describe occupations that are structured in institutional form i.e., are organised by an intentional, purposeful design. In such occupations members are devoted to serve the public interest, and offer services to clients based on an intellectually based body of knowledge (T. Lee, 1995). The term ‘profession’ is grounded in the idea of a promise to provide a communal benefit to society. As described in the 2012 Pathways Commission (Behn et al., 2012), a profession operates ‘under the terms of a social contract, whereby the profession is granted a degree of latitude in the management of its affairs in exchange for a commitment to serve this broad public interest’.

The profession’s social contract comprises assurances and obligations focussing on producing and distributing reliable accounting information. Throughout the world, the existence of trustworthy accounting information is common to all thriving economies. A prerequisite for the availability of trustworthy accounting information is a dynamic and robust profession. Thus, the role of the professional accountant revolves around being a trusted business advisor across a diverse range of organisations be they; public, private, non-profit, or governmental.

As AI development led by internet giants such as Google, Microsoft, and Amazon increases, our daily lives are being significantly affected by AI systems (e.g., chat bots, purchase prediction, news generation). The global economic landscape and the nature of work are markedly changing (Munoko et al., 2020; Ojanperä, O’Clery, & Graham, 2018; Whittlestone, Nyrupe, Alexandrova, Dihal, & Cave,

2019). The working environment is becoming more complex and evolving rapidly (Kanioura & Lucini, 2020).

Table 2 Overall aims and research objectives.

Research aims.	Context – sample literature.	Research questions.
<p>Objective 1.</p> <p>To understand how the use of technology by the profession is impacting on the recruitment of student members.</p>	<p>Professional theory:</p> <p>- Effect of Artificial intelligence (AI) - Brynjolfsson & Mitchell, 2017; Kanioura & Lucini 2020; Bughin et al., 2018; Daugherty & Wilson, 2018; Kolbjørnsrud, Amico, & Thomas, 2017; Bowles, Ghosh, & Thomas, 2020.</p> <p>- the Human Factor - Kruskopf, Lobbas, Meinander, & Söderling, 2019; Cotteleer & Snidermann, 2017; Marr, 2018; Hoffman, 2017; Lake, Ullman, Tenenbaum, & Gershman, 2017; Daugherty & Wilson, 2018.</p> <p>- Skills requirements - Weston, 2019; Thomson, 2017; Calhoun & Karreman, 2014; Gray & Collison, 2002; Howcroft, 2017</p>	<p>Research sub question 1.</p> <p>How is the impact of technology use by the profession affecting the recruitment of future student members?</p> <p>Method - Qualitative interviews.</p>
<p>Objective 2.</p> <p>To explore amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics.</p>	<p>The institutional challenge.</p> <p>Bunney, Sharplin, & Howitt, 2015; Chaffer & Webb, 2017; Jackling & De Lange, 2009; Bui & Porter, 2010; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Seow, Pan, & Koh, 2019; Islam, 2017; Sledgianowski et al., 2017; Buddery, Frank, & Martinoff, 2014; Martin, Shilton, & Smith, 2019; Owen, 2019; Evans, Burritt, & Guthrie, 2011; Jones, 2014, 2017.</p> <p>- Influence of the profession</p> <p>Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; Ellington & Williams, 2017; Kotb, Abdel-Kader, Allam, Halabi, & Franklin, 2019; Schoenberger-Orgad & Spiller, 2014; van Mourik & Wilkin, 2019; Hooper 2013.</p>	<p>Research sub question 2.</p> <p>How can the obstacles to curriculum change in the context of institutional logics be overcome?</p> <p>Method - Qualitative interview & Desk research.</p>
<p>Objective 3.</p> <p>To understand the motivation of potential accounting students.</p>	<p>Motivation.</p> <p>Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2017; Komljenovic, Ashwin, McArthur, & Rosewell, 2018; Raaper, 2019; Jabber 2018; Coffey, Farivar, & Cameron, 2021; Sin, Tavares, & Amaral, 2019; Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Kafaji, 2020; van Zanten, McKinley, Durante Montiel, & Pijano, 2012.</p>	<p>Research sub question 3 .</p> <p>Why will students be motivated to study accounting in the future?</p>

In accounting, the use of technology is continuing to change the nature of the profession. Technology has accelerated the globalisation of the market, increased competition and added a further layer of legal and ethical requirements (Boyce, 2014; Boyce et al., 2019; Perera, Rahman, & Cahan, 2003). Together these are radically altering the professional accounting landscape which has become ever changing and

more complex. As a result, technological innovation has received more attention from both practitioners and academics. The potential for technology to disrupt established organisations or professions, like accounting (Christensen, McDonald, Altman, & Palmer, 2018), has provided focus for this recent attention. Accounting, like other professions, faces significant technology disruption yet little specific sector research assessing what impact technological change will have (Murthy, 2016) has currently been undertaken. However, in certain non-sector specific studies technology driven automation has been argued to have a negative impact on the status of professions, such as accounting (Frey & Osborne, 2013; Susskind, 2015).

The PABs acknowledge that digital disruption is threatening their influence, and is changing how society interacts with the profession (van Mourik & Wilkin, 2019). By adapting to new technological and commercial environments the profession attempts to reshape itself (CIMA, 2015; ICAEW, 2019d). As a whole, professional accountants are moving away from their tradition remit of protecting the public interest, to one of being business partners and members of strategic management teams (AACSB, 2018; Dancey, 2019)⁶. The role of the accountant, whether in practice or commerce, is moving from accounting for the balance sheet to accounting for the business and value creation (Dancey, 2019; Richins, Stapleton, Stratopoulos, & Wong, 2017; Vasarhelyi, Kogan, & Tuttle, 2015). Professionals play an increasingly crucial role in the collection, analysis, recording, reporting, interpretation, and verification of financial and non-financial information. Accountants inform a diverse cross-section of the global economy, supplying trustworthy information to governments, business leaders, and the public accurately and promptly. Technology use only enhances the accuracy and speed of this delivery.

Consequently, future accountants require different skills from those traditionally possessed. While remaining important, the need to demonstrate technical accounting ability will diminish with greater emphasis given to interpretive abilities, compelling communication, and ethical understanding. Also, calls for emerging data-related skills which are already high continues to grow.

Digital technology (Data analytics, AI, and machine learning) is shaping both new job descriptions and skills requirements (Kruskopf et al., 2019; World Economic Forum, 2020). Accounting tasks are already being automated and, as technology use increases, the continuing evolution of roles and functions is inevitable (Thomson, 2018). Machines will continue to do the grunt work, but, importantly, accountants will remain the decision makers. While many junior (entry level) roles and tasks will disappear (Marrone & Hazelton, 2019), the PABs recognises that other tasks will emerge requiring future recruits to be able to interpret machine generated data quickly and have the ability to communicate and explain data meanings to numerous stakeholders effectively (ICAEW, 2018).

The recruitment criteria and assessment process at the interview stage for potential accounting roles is changing to reflect the above. Therefore, the first sub problem for this study is to gain an understanding of the impact that technology use by the profession is having on the recruitment of future student members. This will involve reviewing the current literature around the evolution of the profession both from a commercial and professional aspect. This will lead to an examination of the literature surrounding

⁶ Kevin Dancey is IFAC's Chief Executive Officer in January 2019 and Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants President and CEO.

any changing skills requirements of student members by the PABs. The PABs publications and initiatives for instilling these changing skills into new members will be analysed and any impact on recruitment processes explored. Finally, data will be gathered from interested stakeholders and analysed to explore any gaps in the current literature.

1.4.2 Research sub question 2 how can the obstacles to curriculum change in the context of logics be overcome?

The role formal tertiary education plays in the knowledge-based economy, to prepare graduates for flexible careers in the constantly evolving global marketplace is under the spotlight (de Villiers, 2019; Mulholland & Turner, 2019; Serdyukov, 2017). Since Zeff (1989) made his call for changes in accounting education, many others have followed (Amernic & Craig, 2004; Asonitou, 2021; Flood, 2014; Pincus et al., 2017; Rebele, 2002; Sledgianowski, Gomaa, & Tan, 2017; R. Wilson, 2014), calling for, among others things, change to restore trust in accountants, improving the relevance of the academic discipline, and to incorporate teaching of technology into the curriculum.

As the profession continues to evolve, accounting and finance faculties are under mounting pressure to instil in undergraduates the focus, attitudes, attributes, and competencies that the future profession needs. Recently numerous issues, relating to accounting education, have been explored in the literature. Of most relevance to this study is research addressing challenges surrounding the rigour and relevance of accounting curricula given today's complex business environment (Bui & Porter, 2010; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Seow, Pan, & Koh, 2019) and research into students' exposure to technology applications (Islam, 2017; Sledgianowski et al., 2017), coupled with the associated ethical impact technology will have on the profession (Buddery, Frank, & Martinoff, 2014; Martin, Shilton, & Smith, 2019; Owen, 2019).

There are increasingly divergent views of the relevance of an accounting education, expressed by the PABs and by HE (Bunney, Sharplin, & Howitt, 2015; Kokina & Davenport, 2017; Webb & Chaffer, 2016). The PABs are actively redesigning training programmes and examination syllabi, taking the lead role in developing and implementing technology education for student accountants (ACCA, 2020; CIMA, 2019b; ICAEW, 2020a). In contrast, the universities, being theory led, still advocate that the primary focus of an accounting education should be to develop the intellectual capabilities of students, seen by some as failing to address the needs of the PABs (Ellington, 2017; Flood, 2014). Other scholars argue that university accounting education remains primarily technical and vocational (Ellington & Williams, 2017; Gray, Brennan, & Malpas, 2014), limiting student's exposure to the context in which this knowledge is to be applied (Bayerlein, 2015). Educators are accused of continuing to teach to the exam to maximise accreditations and exemptions, failing to equip undergraduates with the skills required for future employment (Ellington & Williams, 2017; Fogerty & Lowensohn, 2017; Lansdell et al., 2020).

As undergraduate choices increase (Bunce et al., 2017; Hubble et al., 2016; Raaper, 2019) failure to bridge the widening expectations gap between the PABs and HE in terms of skills required, will bring the financial viability of accounting education into question. Students will choose courses they perceive as more relevant to their future career prospects (Chaffer & Webb, 2017; Pincus et al., 2017).

Importantly, as Ellington (2017) pointed out, there was and still is no formal agenda for the improvement or evolution of accounting curricula in the UK.

As the PABs increasingly require a broad range of knowledge, skills, values, and attributes, much of the accounting education literature calls for a change in teaching emphasis. Many scholars advocate lessening the focus on technical skills while developing generic skills linked to critical thinking and the promoting of values, attitudes, and attributes (Al-Htaybat et al., 2018; Asonitou, 2021; Bowles, Ghosh, & Thomas, 2020; Coffey, Farivar, & Cameron, 2021; de Villiers, 2019; Rebele & St. Pierre, 2019). However, relatively few articles address the wider question of the nature and purpose of an accounting education. Similarly, the obstacles that HEIs face to initiating curriculum reform, despite significant barriers to successful change existing is also under researched (Asonitou, 2021; Cooper, 2017; de Villiers, 2019; Nicholas, 2021; Pegg, 2013). While there are notable exceptions, Hooper (2013), Duff and Marriott (2017), and Ancelin-Bourguignon (2019), generally, academics raising issues about accounting education appear to have little voice (Ellington, 2017).

Consequently, the second sub problem for this study is exploring obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of logics. As with the PABs and recruitment above, this will involve reviewing the current literature around curriculum change and the perceived barriers to success because of tensions between conflicting logics. This will lead to an analysis of potential methods of curriculum change espoused by scholars in the literature. The issue of collaboration between the PABs and HE will be discussed, and tensions highlighted. Finally, data will be gathered from interested stakeholders and analysed to see if conflicting logics do indeed constrain curriculum change and how participants envisage solving such conflicts to enable change to take place.

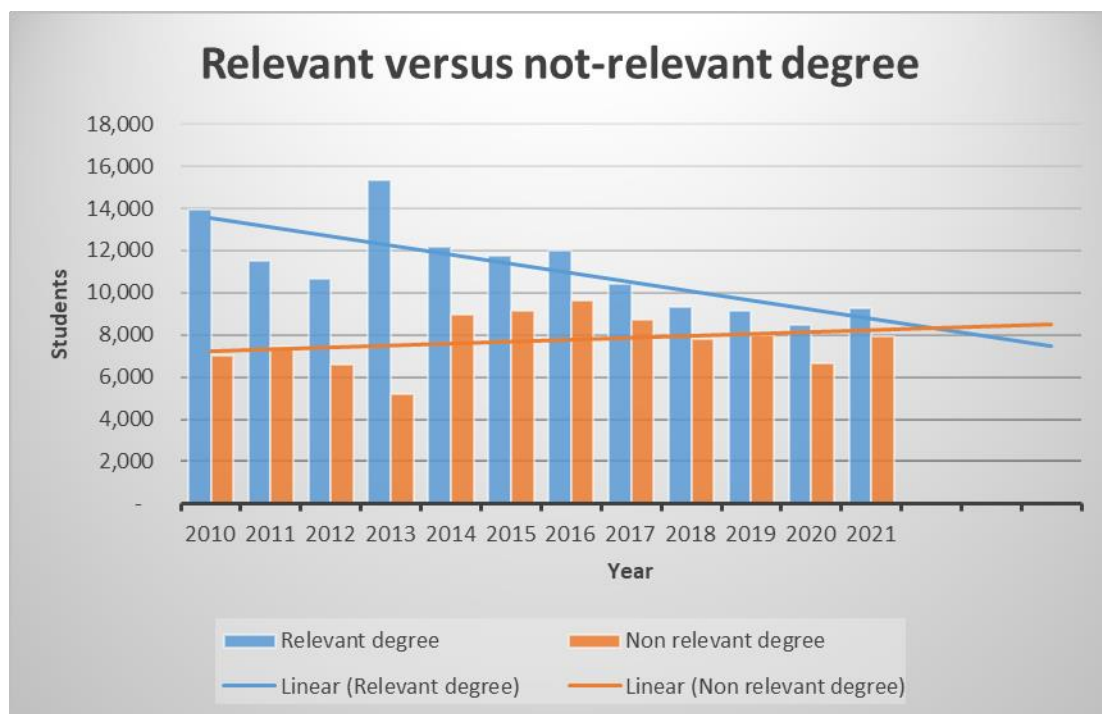
1.4.3 Research sub question 3 why will students remain motivated to study accounting in the future?

The publication in October 2019 of the Office for Students (OfS) ‘value for money strategy - 2019 to 2021’ report makes clear that the perception of value for money in HE is ‘in the eye of the beholder’, namely students and that employment outcomes are a key driver of value for money. Defining students as consumers, seeking to maximise value for money, has lead UK HE to increase its focus on graduate employability (Coffey et al., 2021; Sin, Tavares, & Amaral, 2019). Similarly, students faced with increasing instability in the labour market (disruptions caused by COVID-19, Brexit, automation, and technology advances for example) view employability as a central motivator when choosing a course of study (Jackson & Wilton, 2017).

From the student perspective, it has long been accepted that career prospects, earnings, and other opportunities associated with working in accountancy or finance are attractive. A fact illustrated by the high numbers of graduates applying for student membership of the PABs (FRC, 2011-2022; Highflyers, 2022). However, the percentage of accounting and finance graduates being accepted as student member of the PABs is declining (Figure 2). This trend is worrying to accounting faculties as future employability is seen as a key motivator in course selection by undergraduates. Students, like employers, are increasingly regarding degrees in disciplines such as mathematics, the sciences, the arts, and information technology as a solid grounding for a career in the profession (Gray & Collison, 2002; Howcroft, 2017).

The issue of accreditation and exemptions also needs addressing. HE accounting faculties view accreditation as a key marketing tool to prospective students (S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Duff & Marriott, 2017; Ellington & Williams, 2017). Similarly, anecdotal evidence suggests that undergraduates value accredited courses, which are seen as relevant, up-to-date, and offering prized exemptions (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014). These anecdotal findings are supported by what little literature exists (Kafaji, 2020; van Zanten, McKinley, Durante Montiel, & Pijano, 2012). Accreditation appears to be a prime motivator in undergraduate accounting course selection. In turn, this leads to accounting programmes that are designed with a technical focus to the detriment of developing other skills (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Ellington & Williams, 2017). Educators often teach and examine technical capabilities rather than establishing understanding of an issue.

Figure 2 Student enrolment to the PABs, relevant versus non-relevant degree (2010-2021).



Source - Annual Report into Key Facts and Trends in the Profession' (FRC, 2011-2022).

(S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019). Students, likewise, may be tempted to rote-learn facts rather than to comprehend the application of the theory being taught.

As the use of technology within the profession accelerates, continuing to focus on technical skills, which the accreditation process encourages, becomes less relevant. Yet while students view exemptions as a short cut to qualification and HEIs see accreditation as a key recruitment tool, there is little or no motivation to change the situation.

Finally, the concept of marketisation is considered. Sector marketisation has increased competition between HE institutions (Kopljenovic, Ashwin, McArthur, & Rosewell, 2018). This increased competition and associated student recruitment has become a key concern for universities (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Each university vies with similar institutions to attract prospective undergraduates, while, within institutions, faculties or courses compete for prospective candidates. Student performance

has an impact on university rankings, the reputation of the university, student applications, and potentially the survival of a course in an increasingly competitive market.

Resulting from the above, a third sub problem is identified, motivating, and engaging with potential accounting students in the future. As with the preceding sub problems, this will first involve reviewing the current literature around student motivation and engagement. This will lead to a discussion of value for money and the perceived benefits and drawbacks of accreditation and exemptions. The concept of marketisation and the 'student as consumer' within the literature will be explored. Finally, data will also be gathered from interested stakeholders and analysed to ascertain whether students and institutions do value accreditation and exemptions highly, whether a student focussed curriculum benefits students and improves learning outcomes, and whether an accounting education provides value for money, often measured in terms of employability.

1.5 Contribution to knowledge.

The present study attempts to address multiple gaps and in doing so makes important contributions.

Firstly, little research has been undertaken to understand the attitude of the PABs to the value of an accounting education. Secondly, although it is widely accepted that technology is changing the nature of the profession (Bhimani, 2021), the effects that this changing nature is having on student recruitment is under-researched. Thirdly, many scholars have called for accounting curriculum change but few academic papers focus on the obstacles to curriculum change (Asonitou, 2021). Also, the motivation to study accounting at university and the true value of accreditation and exemptions is not fully understood. Finally, the impact of the emergence of the student as a consumer (Bunce et al., 2017) upon the value of an accounting education needs further assessment.

Based on the identified gaps, the following research contributions are identified.

Firstly, in determining that the existing and growing expectation gap between what the PABs require and what HE offers will not be closed by curriculum change alone. Secondly, this study argues that large scale collaboration between the PABs and HEIs to develop a more robust accounting curriculum is unlikely to occur. There is no formal agenda for such collaboration and where collaboration does occur it is vague and based on personal contacts. Thirdly, while there are notable exceptions, Hooper (2013), Duff and Marriott (2017), and Ancelin-Bourguignon (2019), this study supports the premise that academics raising issues about accounting education appear to have little voice.

This research, as far as the researcher is aware, is the first to explicitly investigate the difficulties of making accounting education curriculum change against the background of dynamic, conflicting, institutional logics relationships. This study identifies that the complex web of institutional logics at play within HEIs often obstructs those faculty members intent on accounting education curriculum change. Of greatest significance, this study found that the primacy of research over teaching at many institutions was a substantial barrier to curriculum change, impacting the motivation of educators wanting to develop content. The study further explores the role of market logics on the behaviour of accounting educators and the roles such logics play in the way accounting education is presented to potential undergraduates.

From a methodological perspective, numerous studies addressing accounting curriculum change have been published. However, many of these studies tended to focus on one group of stakeholders, showing only cursory interest in other potential stakeholders. The researcher believes that this work is the first to examine accounting education relevance through exploring the views and attitudes of all interested parties, the PABs, accounting faculty, and students. By examining what drives each stakeholder group to act in any given way and understanding the impact of the relationships and interdependency created by such behaviours, this study develops a holistic view of the relevance of an accounting education.

Finally, through the development of a framework for a more robust accounting curriculum, this study makes a tangible, practical contribution to accounting education development. This framework addresses the needs of the profession regarding the changing skills and attributes required by future student members. This results in the employability of accounting graduates being improved, increasing the prospects of future gainful employment. From the HEIs viewpoint, the framework developed allows the maintenance of professional accreditation and exemptions, viewed as valuable by potential undergraduates. The framework also allows accounting faculty to deliver their employability promise by equipping graduates with the skills and attributes the PABs require.

The theoretical lens for this study is institutional logics ('logics') theory in the context of neoliberalism. Logics theory examines the mechanisms by which processes (rules, norms, and routines) become settled as dominant guidelines for behaviour. This theory has been found to be a powerful theory in the understanding of how broad belief systems impact the thought processes and actions of individuals or organisations. Therefore, based on logics theory, the study aims to identify changes to the accounting education curriculum that will enhance accounting graduates' attractiveness to both professional firms and commercial employers. The study adds to theoretical development by analysing how neoliberal values have affect the processes of curriculum change.

1.6 Key findings.

Reviewing interviews with representatives of the PABs confirmed that the PABs were universally dismissive of the value of an accounting education, believing it to be almost irrelevant. The PABs repeatedly questioned the HE focus on teaching technical skills, highlighting that employers sought less technical and more professional skills and attributes. The analysis revealed that the PABs could easily facilitate the technical teaching and wanted the HEIs to add value by teaching complimentary content. The PABs value work ready graduates and professional skills are in much demand. Technical skills and a host of exemptions are not sufficient to become a successful accountant. Consequently, the PABs are strengthening their control of accounting education curriculum development through actively promoting their own pedagogy, designing the content, supplying the learning materials, and setting the examinations, while sub-contracting out the delivery (e.g., Kaplan). This control is strengthened by universities seeking accreditation and exemptions for their degrees. Contemporaneously, the PABs have created multiple tiers of entry to the profession embracing school leavers, apprenticeships, and individuals qualified by experience, alongside graduates with both relevant and non-relevant degrees. As a result, the PABs are not suddenly going to embrace the value of academic accounting education, they

have moved too far, and the expectations gap identified will not close. The best accounting faculty can do is to develop a curriculum which will enhance the prospects of an accounting education.

In interviews, collaboration was championed as a way of improving accounting education relevance. However, through the exemptions process, the PABs exert considerable control on accounting curriculum content and are the senior partner in an unequal relationship. In meeting the criteria for exemptions HEIs are left little room to broaden the curriculum. Having forced the creation of a busy curriculum, the PABs still chide accounting faculty for focussing too narrowly on technical skills. The PABs belief that accounting education should produce work-ready graduates clashes with HEIs view that accounting education should challenge and develop a students' intellectual capability. These polarised views of the purpose of an accounting education, coupled with the PABs perception of the value of accounting education research, which they often view as unintelligible and irrelevant, makes collaboration on curriculum development less likely.

The presence of, and conflicts between, logics in the HEI environment complicates the task of making curriculum change. The market and managerial logics introduced by the neo-liberal approach of HEIs creates bureaucratic organisations which reduces the flexibility to make change. Processes are too complex, the pace too slow, management support is often lacking, and exemptions must be retained regardless. Market and business logics also drive HE to become a more managerial, competitive, and profit (revenue) focussed environment. In this environment, accounting education often assumes the role of cash cow, a role many interviewees see as the potential saviour of accounting as a discipline. While this may be true in the short-term, accounting as a cash cow does disservice to accounting undergraduates who enrol on accounting courses with the aim of attaining gainful and well remunerated employment. This potential disservice is also recognised by the interviewees.

In an increasingly competitive environment attracting undergraduates to accounting courses becomes ever more difficult. Emerging from this competition is a series of rankings and league tables which have altered the HE market dynamic. The market is now more transactional and hierarchical, compelling institutions to adopt behaviours which will improve their rankings. For accounting faculty this includes maximising accreditation and exemptions and producing more quality research output. However, focussing on research alters the balance of the research teaching nexus. The relationship between research and teaching is complex and is subject to intense debate but the primacy of the research focus in many institutions is unquestionable. This causes frustration among teaching focussed staff, particularly surrounding reward systems (promotion, prestige, and status) which are often viewed as weighted to research. Consequently, academics driven by their academic professionalism, devote more time and effort to research and less to curriculum enhancement as the personal rewards are greater.

A key motivator for accounting undergraduates is employability, the prospect of attaining a rewarding, well paid role in practice or commerce. Promised employability underpins the marketing of the currently available accounting courses, with accounting educators regularly stressing the value of the degree in terms of employability to prospective students. Unfortunately, accounting faculty over sell this

employability promise, as statistics from graduate surveys indicate⁷. More concerning is the discovery that overstating the employability promise is done knowingly. The study finds that accounting faculty are willingly complicit in pushing exaggerated employability claims and often complacent to the consequences of discovery. Interviewees express a belief that prospective accounting students would be either unaware or uninterested in the fact that the employability promise was overstated. This raises ethical and moral issues; however, accounting educators appear willing to discount these concerns for the benefit of maintaining revenue streams. Consequently, potential undergraduates are being misinformed and making life choices with incomplete information, a situation difficult to support.

1.7 Structure of the thesis.

The remainder of the thesis will be structured as follows.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical lens justifies the choice of logics as an appropriate theoretical lens for this study. Firstly, the chapter details how competing logics, commercial and professional, are changing the nature of the profession and the impact that this is having on the recruitment of new entrants to the PABs. Following which, the focus of this chapter, which competing logics are affecting HE behaviour is discussed. An exploration of the dynamic and conflicting nature of such logics on the ability to make curriculum change is considered. Further, by examining logics in the context of neoliberalism, the chapter examines the effect that ‘marketisation’ is having on the way universities operate and the impact that this has on the ability of accounting faculty to amend the curriculum. Logics will form the backbone of the literature review, inform the method choices of the study, and guide the data analysis and conclusions.

Chapter 3 comprises a comprehensive literature review focussing on articles, both academic and professional, to understand fully the current opinions surrounding the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs. Regarding the relevance of an accounting education, three broad groups of interested stakeholders are identified. These stakeholders comprise; the PABs as custodians of the professional education curriculum, accounting academia (accounting academics and faculty administrators) as practitioners and functionaries of accounting education, and potential and current undergraduates studying accounting. The interests, needs, actions, and behaviours of each of these groups exert influence on the content of accounting education curriculum and its relevance to the PABs. Throughout this and subsequent chapters, logics will be applied to assess why both the PABs and, more importantly, academia behave in certain ways. This will enable the study to explain the changing skills requirements of the PABs, explore the problems faced by accounting faculties in incorporating those skills into the existing curriculum, and propose appropriate amendments to curricula content.

Having outlined the theoretical underpinning of the study, stated the research goal and related research questions for the study, and extensively reviewed the current literature surrounding the topic, chapter 4

⁷ For accounting, the gap between expected graduate employment outcomes (final year) and actual achieved employment outcomes (eighteen months post-graduation) is 16.8% a percentage higher than for any other discipline. (Table 19 page 206)

justifies the methodology of the study. Opening with a brief overview of the historical dominance of the quantitative positivist approach to accounting education research, the chapter explains why this traditional approach is inappropriate here. The appropriateness and benefits of the adoption of qualitative research to studies where the ontology⁸ is relativist, differing realities emerging from discussions with the different stakeholder groups, and the epistemology⁹ is subjective, are discussed. A key part of this discussion is a statement of the researcher's own positionality in relation to the study. Understanding researcher positionality is critical for methodological decision making (Broadbent & Unerman, 2011).

The chapter then explains the selection of the interpretivist paradigm as the methodological basis for the study and outlines both the benefits and the drawbacks of the interpretivist paradigm. The chapter demonstrates why interpretivist enquiry is appropriate for this study, it sits comfortably within the theoretical perspective of institutional theorists who believe that the world is mainly a product of subjective interpretation (Suddaby, 2015). The concepts of emergence and reflexivity, key to interpretivist enquiry are introduced. The chapter concludes by discussing evaluation in interpretivist research and justifies the adoption of 'subtle realism' (Angen, 2000) as the method of evaluating the research findings.

Following on from the discussion of methodology, chapter 5 explains the process used to conduct the research. This chapter focusses on the plan of enquiry for qualitative interpretive research and illustrates the method used in this study. Qualitative research approaches the design, sampling, instrumentation, and data analysis of research in ways that are different from more traditional research methods. The chapter rationalises the choice of Maxwell's (2013) 'Qualitative research design: an interactive approach' as the foundation for the research design of this study.

The chapter explains how the identified sub problems; the impact that technology use by the profession is having on the recruitment of future student members, the obstacles to curriculum change presented by logics, and motivating future accounting undergraduates to study are aligned with the overarching research goal of maintaining accounting education relevance to the PABs. Following which, the chapter discusses the use of semi-structured qualitative interviews as the study's primary research instrument. As with the methodology chapter, researcher positionality, in this case in relation to data collection and bias, is addressed. The interview planning process of the study and the creation of an interview guide and data collection planning matrix is explained, and the initial interview guide created. The importance of interview question design, and interview guide and planning matrix validation, pilot study, and close reading, is addressed.

Participant selection is then explored. The sample pool is defined – stakeholders in accounting education. An estimate of sample size is discussed, a purposive method of sample selection justified, and the specific process for participant selection is outlined. Finally, the chapter addresses data collection and data

⁸ Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being, becoming, existence, or reality. Effectively what is reality?

⁹ Epistemology concerns the theory of knowledge and its nature and limits, how people develop and accept knowledge (Guba, 1990), and the relationship between what is researched and those who research it. Essentially, 'how we know what we know' (Crotty, 1998, p. 8)

analysis in this study. The data collection section acknowledges the importance of both fidelity¹⁰ and structure to data capture. The data analysis section considers the role of inductive reasoning in qualitative research data analysis and justifies the choice of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) as the data analysis tool of the study.

Chapter 6 marries together content from the literature review and data gathered from interviews and desk research to build a complete picture of how accounting faculty could improve the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs, the overarching aim of this research. This chapter includes a brief outline of the idiosyncrasies of the UK accounting market followed by a discussion of maintaining accounting education relevance to the PABs. The chapter addresses each of the research sub-questions, the answers to which form the foundations of the proposed curriculum framework. Interviewee opinions and views of the current relevance of an accounting education, the challenges to curriculum change and student motivation are collated, and emerging themes identified. These emerging themes are used to design a curriculum framework for a more PAB relevant accounting degree.

The concluding chapter, chapter 7, summarises this research project. A brief overview of the research is followed by a summary of the answers to the research question and associated sub questions. The contribution that this study makes to the existing body of knowledge and theory is outlined along with its distinct methodological and practical contributions. Finally, the limitations of the research and the areas for potential future research are outlined.

¹⁰ Data fidelity means that the data recorded are accurate and precise and that no data are missing.

Chapter 2 Theoretical lens.

2.1 Introduction.

The theoretical framework is the *raison d'être* for any research project. It determines how the research problem is defined, the methodology of the investigation, and the meaning attached to the resulting data. Crotty (1998, p. 3) underlined the importance of theoretical perspective describing his design framework as 'the philosophical stance informing the methodology'. While Grant and Osanloo (Grant & Osanloo, 2014), stated:

Without a theoretical framework, the structure and vision for a study is unclear... By contrast, a research plan that contains a theoretical framework allows the dissertation study to be strong and structured with an organised flow from one chapter to the next.

Yet, while much agreement exists that theoretical perspective directs systematic, controlled, empirical research, there is less consensus about the role of theoretical perspective in qualitative interpretivist research, such as this study (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). Generally, interpretivist research aims to develop theories that are grounded in data which is collected and evaluated methodically so as to discover what is really going on throughout research process (Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2010). Emerging theories are continually refined. The theoretical framework helps to organise and structure the research process.

The chapter justifies the choice of logics as an appropriate theoretical lens for this study. The chapter briefly details how competing logics, commercial and professional, are changing the nature of the profession and the impact that this is having on the recruitment of new entrants to the PABs. However, the focus of this chapter is on which competing logics are affecting HE, exploring the dynamic and conflicting nature of such logics. Further, by examining logics in the context of neoliberalism, the chapter examines the effect that 'marketisation' is having on the way universities operate and the impact that this has on the ability of accounting faculty to amend the curriculum.

Through-out the study, logics will be applied to assess why both the PABs, and more importantly, academia behave in certain ways. This will enable the study to explain the changing skills requirements of the PABs, explore the problems faced by accounting faculty in incorporating those skills into the existing curriculum and propose appropriate amendments to curricula content. Logics will form the backbone of the literature review, inform the method choices of the study, and guide the data analysis and conclusions.

2.2 Background of institutional logics theory.

2.1.1 Neo-institutionalism and neoliberalism.

The study of institutions, lasting and predictable forms of social organisation, is of an enduring interest to social research (Giddens, 1984). By the 1970s, the concept of neo-institutionalism was being developed to explain actions and patterns or organisational behaviour that did not sit right with the behaviours described by classic organisational theorists (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014). Differing from

classical institutional theory, the neo-institutional approach emphasises the importance of shared rationalisations or ‘logics’ in defining institutions (Freidland & Alford, 1991; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020). Neo-institutional theorists argue that these logics, ‘organising principles, practices and symbols’ (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012, p. 2) are often more important in influencing organisations than any functional concerns, drives for greater efficiency, or coercive power. As defined by Suddaby, this theory

is an approach to understanding organisations and management practices as the product of social rather than economic pressures. It has become a popular perspective within management theory because of its ability to explain organisational behaviours that defy economic rationality.

(Suddaby, 2013, p. 379).

2.1.2 The concept of institutional logics.

Although occasionally noted prior to 1990, the literature on logics began in 1991 with the publication of ‘Bringing society back in. Symbols, practices, and institutional contradictions’ (Freidland & Alford, 1991). In their essay they identified capitalism, democracy, and bureaucracy as three contending societal institutional orders which have different practices and beliefs. Subsequently, the literature has grown significantly and become a diverse area of organisational research. Multiple descriptions of logics have been formulated by academics. Suddaby and Greenwood (2006) described them as taken for granted social prescriptions establishing boundaries and rules. Cloutier and Langley (2013, p. 361) stated they were a ‘higher order of meanings, values, norms/or rules that frame how individuals make sense of the world around them and consequently know how to act’. While Haveman and Gualtieri (2017, p. 1) declare them to be, ‘systems of cultural elements (values, beliefs, and normative expectations) by which people, groups, and organisations make sense of and evaluate their everyday activities, and organise those activities in time and space’. At its heart, logics theory argues that a central logic, made up of guiding principles, creates a set of assumptions and values which instils a sense of identity in an individual. The individual or their organisation can then use this sense of identity for their own advantage (Freidland & Alford, 1991). Logics defines what is supposed to be done by individuals, who those individuals are, and how they are inter-related within society (Pache & Santos, 2013). So defined, logics differs from both isomorphic institutional analysis, which focusses on organisational, not individual, conformity to norms and practices, espoused by Zucker (1977) or DiMaggio and Powell (2005) and from rational choice theories with their risk-reward analysis.

Logics theorists emphasise that the value of logics stems from the hypothesis that the ‘pattern of an organisational design is a function of an underlying interpretive scheme, or set of beliefs or values’ (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993, p. 1055). The set of assumptions and values become interwoven into the institution (Seo & Creed, 2002; Suddaby, 2015), giving the assumptions or values a rule-like status, which Seo and Creed (2002) termed ‘embedded agency’. Scholars use this theory to address the questions of when and how people can engage in change-orientated behaviour (Lok & Willmott, 2019) within the institutions that have had a major hand in conditioning them (the people), a seeming paradox (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009).

However, the concept of logics is not straight forward. Logics is widely utilised (including in HE studies) because of its effectiveness in aiding researchers to navigate the complexity in studies of stable, dynamic, or emerging fields (Cai & Mountford, 2021). However, even the creators of logics theory have recognised ‘sources of confusion’ within the concept (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 4). Suddaby (2010, p. 15) cites concerns that ‘any change, however slight, is now ‘institutional’’, where any set of relationships between one group of variables (e.g., words or behaviours.) and the meanings which are attached to those relationships is deemed ‘institutional logic’, disregarding the fact that logics should require significant change. Likewise, Ocasio, Thornton, and Lounsbury angst that the sheer volume of logics articles has caused confusion as to the conceptualisation and application of the logics viewpoint. In doing so, they call for more research ‘on the degree of coherence of logics [and how they are] differentiated from societal logics.’ (Ocasio, Thornton, & Lounsbury, 2017, p. 511).

2.2 Institutionalism and the PABs.

Briefly, the PABs are facing their own competing logics. The PABs are increasingly impacted by both professional and commercial logics (Duff, Hancock, & Marriott, 2020; Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, Lounsbury, & Greenwood, 2011). Professional logics are those which underpin many of the traditional activities of accountants, e.g., audit and accountancy services, financial reporting, and management information. Guided by professional logics, members (of the PABs) share a sense of kindred spirit, and are devoted to serving the public interest, a notion allied to public benefit (Dellaportas & Davenport, 2008; Duff et al., 2020), with services offered to clients founded on an intellectually based body of knowledge (Boyce, 2014). However, the notion of public benefit is essentially an externality¹¹, incompatible with the other logics impacting professional behaviour, -commercial logics (Gendron, 2002; Killian & O'Regan, 2020). Commercial logics recognise the need to generate profit and to act entrepreneurially (Duff et al., 2020). Accountants focus on the client, the management team, or the board to offer strategic management or advisory services, becoming partners of business or senior managers within organisations. Accountants add value by understanding the nature of the client’s or management’s issues and proposing solutions to challenges that the business faces (Dancey, 2019; Spence & Carter, 2014).

Several researchers have suggested that the balance within the logics affecting the PABs is shifting from professional to commercial logics (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Busco, Giovannoni, & Riccaboni, 2017; Lander, Koene, & Linssen, 2013; Nielsen, Lueg, & van Liempd, 2019; Thornton, 2004). Other scholars recognise that professional and commercial logics co-exist creating tension within organisations between institutional demands e.g., Lander et.al. (2013) and complexity (Fatania, 2018; Raynard et al., 2011). Automation and the use of innovative technology has replaced a number of traditional roles (Lander et al., 2013; Nielsen et al., 2019), creating tension which is affecting decision-making and changing the way the PABs view their value to society (Bowles et al., 2020; Ojanperä et al., 2018). The role of the profession is changing, from ‘gatekeeping’ and information producing to business partnering and

¹¹ An externality is an indirect cost or benefit to an uninvolved third party that arises as an effect of another party's activity.

strategic development, requiring the possession of a differing skills set. The impact these changing skills will have on the recruitment of student membership of the PABs is a key research area for this study.

2.3 Neo-institutionalism and education.

Neo-institutional theorists contend that HE is a cultural field as its output - learning, is not an easily measurable product. Unlike industrial organisations that produce ‘things,’ HEIs produce knowledge through interactional, social, and unspoken teaching processes. Like other cultural fields, neo-institutionalists argue that education is more driven by legitimacy and prestige than profit (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006; Toma, 2012). A key challenge faced by neo-institutionalists was how to define and reward such concepts. To solve this challenge, they devised a system of measurement founded on the volume of quality research publications, the establishment of a research reputation and media attention (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014). Neo-institutionalists argue that the creation of such a measurement system provides a sound explanation of why HEIs focus much attention on attaining specific performance measures, such as better rankings in league tables or professional accreditation.

Neo-institutionalism sheds light on why a university or faculty may pursue certain behaviours to maintain or enhance its reputation or prestige. However, neo-institutionalism ignores the fact that some of these measures (e.g., citation rates, research output) are increasingly used by commercial organisations to create a HE environment which has many of the characteristics of a market. Over the past few decades, numerous academics have evidenced academia’s major challenges. A core theme to emerge from this volume of work was how HE was moving steadily towards replicating the actions, values, and characteristics of the free market (Gonzales, Martinez, & Ordu, 2014; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Last century, Slaughter and Leslie (1997) were writing in terms of ‘academic capitalism’, highlighting neoliberalism as the inspiration behind ideological shifts into how public goods, such as education, may be understood. Recently this neoliberal perspective has attained a position of dominance in the education sector.

2.4 Neoliberalism.

In his seminal work, Harvey defined neoliberalism thus:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade...
(Harvey, 2007, p. 2)

In short, neoliberalism enables an understanding of how cultural resources, like education, have been connected to the market dynamics. Neoliberalism centres on the free market, simultaneously paring back governmental involvement and public investment (Harvey, 2007). Vitaly, neoliberalism assumes that all activities and goods can be and should be measured for comparative and competitive purposes (Gonzales et al., 2014). The neoliberal agenda has been imposed on society through the adoption of New Public Management (NPM). Public service organisations have been increasingly impacted by policy discussion and organisational practices allied to NPM (Pollitt, 2013). According to Deem et.al (2007)

NPM has redrawn the essence and legitimacy of certain forms of public service provision. This redefinition, they argue, legitimises extensive use of market-based resource allocation mechanisms and control regimes, creating a shift in institutional environments in which competition has become the dominant factor, in sectors such as HE.

2.4.1 Neoliberalism, New Public Management (NPM), and education.

It is impossible to deny that UK HE is now pervaded by the influence of neoliberalism and the associated speed and scope of change (Shahjahan, 2014). HE is now justified on the grounds of economic imperative. Specifically, the end of the 20th century saw the adoption of the private sector principle of efficiency (Bleiklie & Powell, 2005). Universities began to transform into ‘managerial’ and ‘entrepreneurial’ institutions (Buckner & Zapp, 2021). Replacing previous public good models of governance and social democratic values which are underpinned by state logics (Alexander, Phillips, & Kapletia, 2018), neoliberalism and NPM created a culture of accountability and monitoring. This new culture, being backed up by incentives and performance measurements, created a focus on corporatisation, privatisation, and reduced governmental support (Bagley & Portnoi, 2014), benefiting market development and the knowledge economy (Levin, 2017). As a result, HE was (and is) increasingly described not in educational, but in commercial terms, defining education as a ‘market’ and a money-making export (H. Fraser, 2016; Heath & Burdon, 2013). Marketisation has led to education assuming commodity status where students are consumers (Jabbar et al., 2018) and lecturers are seen as ‘labourers’, not producers of knowledge or deliverers of the teaching experience (Buckner & Zapp, 2021; Gonzales & Núñez, 2014). Faculties and departments are increasingly identified as small business units that use NPM approaches to focus on economies of scale, changing working practices, improving rankings, and positive identification and associated branding. This process has created dynamic market forces which compel HEIs to adapt to remain legitimate and competitive (Prakash, 2018).

2.4.2 Institutional logics and higher education.

Until relatively recently, HE was viewed as having a singular, robust logic, based on academic excellence and the search for and production of knowledge (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014; Mohrman & Lawler, 2010). Academic logics draws chiefly on Merton’s model of science, stressing the search for fundamental knowledge, research freedom, peer recognition, and the sharing of research results (Fini & Toschi, 2016; Sauermann & Stephan, 2013). Academic logics confers academic freedom and autonomy to faculty while legitimising both teaching and research (Fini & Toschi, 2016). This freedom and autonomy have been a foundation of the importance of a university for centuries (Tierney & Blumberg Corwin, 2007). However, more recently there has been mounting pressure for increased productivity and efficiency, as well as changes to the way universities are financed. These pressures for reform, or change, are not only generated by HE policymakers, but also stem from forces inside and outside HE, such as perceived or real demographic, economic, and social change. Universities are no longer the only contributors to knowledge production. Research institutes, private firms, and governments are increasingly active in knowledge generation (Bleiklie & Powell, 2005). These changes (in societal norms and organisational practices) have significantly altered university environments (Fini & Toschi, 2016) and induced a culture

shift which Steven Ward (2011, p. 1) has described as ‘one of the most sweeping and dramatic social experiments of the last few centuries’ (p.1).

Starting with Gumpert (2000) and her concept of academia as an industry, the rise of consumer-like and market behaviours within universities has been well documented (Bunce et al., 2017; Hubble et al., 2016; Raaper, 2019; Shore & Taitz, 2012; Upton & Warshaw, 2017). Concomitant with this, the recent past has seen the introduction of processes for measuring teaching performance, judging research quality, and assessing institutional effectiveness, all processes readily associated with a business environment (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014). Such mechanisms are designed to engender accountability, justified on the logical principle that those who spend taxpayers' money should be answerable to the public. Measuring performance is often framed as 'improving quality' and 'empowerment', as though these processes were liberating and enabling. In the UK, the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) has created what Apple (2013) coined an ‘audit culture’ aimed at transforming the curriculum by producing evidence that institutions are behaving properly, essentially acting like a business, not a pure learning environment. Unfortunately most of these performance measurement systems rely on single, simplistic, and narrow measurements of quality, with quality only vaguely defined (Charles, 2018).

Within the neoliberal context, the logic of measuring, evaluating, and competing has become normalised and accepted. While originally seen as suffering under this process, universities now apply neoliberal values, goals, and processes to their operations (H. Fraser, 2016; Maisuria & Cole, 2017). As Gonzales et al. (2014, p. 1098), wrote universities engage ‘in market-like behaviours at unprecedented levels and from an offensive rather than defensive position.’ The result has been to increase competition amongst HEIs to attract undergraduates firstly to their institution and secondly to specific courses (Komljenovic et al., 2018; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Further, it has created a transactional market within HE where some institutions win, and some lose (Cantwell & Taylor, 2013), and introduced a ranking system to structure HE hierarchically (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014).

The marketisation of HE, including the introduction of tuition fees and subsequent increases of the fees cap, market information through university ranking tables, the TEF, and the establishment of The OfS, has made student choice a key driver for improving quality and assessing value for money (Jabbar et al., 2018). Simultaneously, the structure of institutions, the need to generate supplementary income, the primacy of research over teaching, the need for funding (Cadez, Dimovski, & Zaman Groff, 2017; A. Douglas, 2013; L. Parker, 2012a), and the need to maintain professional, as well as academic accreditation (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; Ellington & Williams, 2017) present significant obstacles to curriculum change.

Lately, HE researchers have displayed increased awareness of the complex nature of their institutional environment. Scholars seeking to explain how HEIs behave and evolve within the neoliberal context look to the existence of multiple logics within the organisation (Buckner & Zapp, 2021; Lepori, 2016; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020; Upton & Warshaw, 2017). A review of recent research papers by Cai and Mountford (2021) found that over fifty logics were attributed to HE. These logics span both societal level logics, as defined by Alford and Freidland (1991) and extended by Thornton et.al. (2012) and field-level logics (Cai & Mountford, 2021). These multiple logics both compete and conflict to varying degrees. According to Upton and Warshaw (2017), a major issue is how many HEIs have moved from

serving the public good to supporting their own agenda of generating revenue. They argue that logics, commercial (termed ‘industrial’ in their study), and social logics co-exist and conflict.

Similarly, in their study concerning the impact of the ranking regime on the production of knowledge, Gonzales and Nunez (2014) argued that the ranking regime affects knowledge creation by promoting individualism, standardisation, commodification, and homogenisation. They posit that ranking, a key component of marketisation, pits individuals and institutions against one another. Ranking and performance evaluations typically focus on the extent to which academics publish as the only author. When such individual efforts are emphasised, competition and individualism increase, and the sense of community among faculty members is diminished. They further noted that individualism challenges faculty who want to use their work to advance a broader, communal good.

In their study, Shields and Watermeyer (2020) identify three logics; autonomy (the ‘ivory tower’), utilitarianism (the development of human capital), and managerialism (bureaucracy) as competing within HE. They highlight that these logics, while independent of one another, often intersect, (e.g., the autonomous and utilitarian logics both view innovation as a key characteristic of universities, while the utilitarian and managerial logics both view universities as competitive environments). They argue that the balance between these competing logics within specific institutions significantly affects decision making and drives course and curriculum restructuring.

In his study, Lepori (2016) contends that the logics theory perspective is particularly salient to the study of HE, positing that ‘logics theory could provide a more nuanced and flexible framework, which takes into account the role of (embedded) human agency and the multi-level nature of societal dynamics’ (p. 245). However, as Bastado (2009) or Shields and Watermeyer (2020) point out, HE represents a complex institutional system which contains multiple and often conflicting logics. The sheer number of logics identified in HE research, over fifty (Cai & Mountford, 2021), and their contested nature has caused confusion surrounding how to use logics in empirical research. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to which logics to apply to HE research, and the challenges faced in applying those logics.

2.5 Application to this study.

As institutional theorists believe that the world is mainly a product of subjective interpretation (Suddaby, 2015), a position fitting well with the researcher’s own viewpoint, logics within the neoliberalist context, provides this study with an appropriate theoretical lens. This study explores how the tensions created by multiple logics impact on the ability of accounting faculties, specifically, to revise the accounting education curriculum to maintain the relevance of an undergraduate accounting qualification. As highlighted by R. Scott (2005), competing logics still seem to be making it increasingly difficult for HE to meet the changing needs of the PABs.

Using the logics lens, the study explores why accountants or academics behave in the way they do and focusses on the impact that this behaviour has on the continuing appropriateness of accounting education. As discussed above, logics argues that a central logic of guiding principles exists, which creates a set of assumptions and values and instils a sense of identity in an individual, which they or their organisations can use for their own advantage (Freidland & Alford, 1991). However, as many studies highlight, the

potential for conflict within these logics raises issues which need to be addressed to make effective curriculum change.

While focussing on the dynamics of logics within HE, the study will first explore how the balance of logics, within the PABs, is changing. The study will assess the effect that this changing balance is having on the skills required of new entrants. Until the end of the 20th century professional logics was the driving force of the PABs. Members were devoted to serve the public interest and offer services to clients based on an intellectually based body of knowledge (Boyce, 2014). However, since the beginning of the 21st century commercial logics has assumed the ascendancy. Due in part to the increasing use of technology, the diminishing profitability of core products, such as audit, has driven the rise of commercial logics. The modus operandi of the PABs has altered significantly, becoming more focussed on the client, advisory services, and business partnering, rather than ‘gate-keeping’ (Dancey, 2019). Lately, the speed and level of this technological innovation has received increasing attention from both practitioners and academics alike, due to technology’s potential to disrupt established organisations or professions (Christensen et al., 2018).

For some time, the PABs have recognised the potential for technologies (e.g., Big Data analytics) to radically change the professional landscape (CIMA, 2017c; ICAEW, 2017a; Islam, 2017). However, both the PABs and certain academics have long understood that this transformation is not without risks and could negatively impact the status of the PABs (Frey & Osborne, 2013; ICAEW, 2019d; Stancheva-Todorova, 2018; Susskind, 2015). Technology is changing societal expectations quickly and altering the scope and nature of what is expected of accounting (Andreassen, 2020; Islam, 2017; Melnyk, Trachova, Kolesnikova, Demchuk, & Golub, 2020). The accounting bodies (e.g. ICAEW, CIMA, ACCA) acknowledge that digital disruption potentially threatens the professional logics which underpins audit and accountancy and are actively embracing the more commercial logics of client focus, strategic management, and business partnering (CIMA, 2015; ICAEW, 2017b). Industry 4.0 is shaping the transformation of the profession, changing the traditional roles and the skills required to fulfil them, while also creating a need for new jobs and specialisms (IFAC, 2019). This transformation continues to open student membership to a host of divergent cohorts, including graduates from any other discipline, or non-graduates, to an increasing extent.

Notwithstanding that disruptive technology is accelerating the shift towards the primacy of commercial logics within the PABs, professional logics still have considerable influence on the behaviours of the PABs. The PABs understand the importance of maintaining the status of the profession (Killian & O'Regan, 2020). To achieve this the PABs constantly reinforce their cultural norms and values through a process of socialisation. Socialisation is defined in terms of behaviours, attitudes, and dispositions that are expected of members and new entrants. How maintaining professional status, alongside the changes in requirements for entry into the PABs, affects the relationships that the PABs have with accounting faculty will be examined.

As technology is driving the PABs to be more market focussed, the PABs continue to pivot away from their traditional ‘serving the public interest’ brief to one more commercially orientated (Nielsen et al., 2019). Success in this commercial environment requires an accountant with different skills. These new skills, e.g., interpretation, communication, data analytics, rely less on technical ability. Future

accountants must be professional communicators, able to interpret huge amounts of information and explain its significance to a client or senior management in simple, laypersons terms (Bhimani, 2021). The threat to accounting education is evident. Multiple other disciplines offer undergraduates the opportunity to acquire such skills, while the PABs are redesigning their examination syllabi to improve students learning outcomes. How accounting faculty incorporate these skills into an already busy curriculum is of interest to this study.

In the light of the above, faculties are facing a quandary. Accounting faculties are under increasing pressure to instil in their students the focus, attitudes, attributes, and competencies that the PABs needs. Yet to maintain accreditations and exemptions deemed important to undergraduates, accounting faculty are already confronted with a busy curriculum (van Mourik & Wilkin, 2019). In recent years numerous issues, pertaining to accounting education, have been explored in the literature which will be discussed in the following literature review. However, notwithstanding the volume of research papers suggesting numerous solutions to these issues, the gap between the PABs and HE concerning the relevance of an accounting education continues to grow (Dolce, Emanuel, Cisi, & Ghislieri, 2020). Many academics call for curriculum change, yet few research papers dwell too long on the obstacles that universities face to initiating curriculum reforms, despite significant barriers existing.

These barriers include the influence of the PABs over an accounting education, the institutional constraints that universities must operate under, and the professional identity of an accounting academic. The restrictive influence of the PABs apart, there are specific HE centric issues influencing the ability of accounting educators to amend the accounting curriculum. At the macro level these obstacles pertain to the structure of HE (state, academic, or market), the need to generate and maintain income (academic logics, academic capitalism, or commercial logics), the influence of league tables and other rankings (managerial logics or social logics), the research-teaching relationship, and the influence of the teaching excellence framework (managerial logics, academic capitalism, academic professionalism). In their own way, each of these often-conflicting logics force universities and faculties to behave in certain ways, impacting their ability to make effective curriculum change.

Broadly, HE is divided into two groups, a traditional grouping containing research led universities and underpinned by state logics and a more recent grouping, the teaching led universities, guided more by market logics (Stoner & Sangster, 2013). These two logics hold different ideals which, in turn, impact upon the teaching ethos of any given institution. Whichever logics holds ascendancy, the approach to teaching and learning will differ (Alexander et al., 2018). These disparate approaches to teaching affect the amount of flexibility that a given accounting faculty has in making curriculum change.

With the rise of neoliberalism came the notion that a different higher educational model was needed to serve the emerging global economy. This emerging model is significantly different from that of just a few decades ago (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020). Universities are increasingly affected by elements of both business and market logics while attempting to maintain their academic autonomy through the application of academic logics (K.-M. Kallio, Kallio, & Grossi, 2017). The adoption of more managerial logics and profit focus has led many universities to embrace an entrepreneurial culture. This often creates tension with academic logics and has met with significant academic resistance (Brink & Stoel, 2019).

This problem appears particularly acute in accounting faculty. In striving to maximise the returns generated by accounting education, accounting faculty risk losing sight of the importance of quality teaching and curriculum innovation.

Financially, teaching is the core function of nearly all British universities (Bolton & Hubble, 2021). However, in the belief that knowledge creation is their strategic mission (Cadez et al., 2017), many universities look to research to position themselves strategically. This relationship between research and teaching is subject to intense debate. Issues around the relevance of research to the curriculum, the differing attributes required by a teacher or researcher, the importance of developing professional rather than research skills, and the institutional focus on research at the expense of teaching, all influence the behaviours of academics (Duff & Marriott, 2017). Due to conflicting logics, the research teaching nexus is under constant strain. The academic logics underpinning research and knowledge creation are at odds with the managerial logics resulting from the implementation of the TEF. Academic capitalism (the monetising of research) often jars with academic professionalism (the prestige of publication and the free distribution of research results). Universities need to balance their three core functions, academic work, defined as the operating values and norms applied in carrying out research, teaching, and third-mission activities¹² (Guarini, Magli, & Francesconi, 2020). A challenging task as each of these functions is underpinned by differing academic logics. Academics identifying as teaching focussed, those most likely to lead curriculum development, often feel uneasy and unsupported in a research-intensive environment (McCune, 2021). Curriculum development would benefit from a more holistic approach, but with the primacy of research in many universities this appears unlikely.

Within HE, neoliberalism has normalised the logic of measuring, evaluating, and competing, with universities routinely applying neoliberal values and goals (Maisuria & Cole, 2017). University rankings have become a legitimate way of comparing the quality of HEIs (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014). Such comparisons have increased competition between institutions and faculty to attract undergraduates (Kojljenovic et al., 2018) and have created a transactional market within HE (Cantwell & Taylor, 2013). Where departments face greater competition to recruit students, such as accounting and finance, rankings and league tables have a greater impact and importance for student recruitment strategies (Gibbons, Neumayer, & Perkins, 2015). Accounting and finance departments emphasise the number of accreditations and exemptions they hold, believing this will attract more students. However, this unintentionally places constraints on academic freedom and curriculum development.

At a more micro level, professional logics also affect the ability to make curriculum change. Bui and Porter (2010) highlight differences in perception, between employers and academics, as to the *raison d'être* of an accounting education. Scholars argue that employers believe that universities should produce workforce ready students, while academics consider that the primary role of universities is in developing students' intellectual capacity. Tensions also arise due to differences existing between a research-led curriculum (academic perspective) and a practice-led curriculum (PABs and employer perspective) (Duff & Marriott, 2017). Several unresolved issues remain, for example, differences in meaning and context

¹² The Third Mission represents the economic and social mission of the university and its contribution to communities and territories.

of the purpose of an accounting education or issues surrounding the transferability of skills acquired at university into the work environment. These and other issues create difficulties in producing and maintaining a balanced and coherent curriculum (Duff & Marriott, 2017).

Finally, the process of implementing curriculum change needs to be carefully considered to ensure it is beneficial (Lawson et al., 2017). Sector marketisation has expanded student choice, resulting in value for money and employability becoming key motivational factors. Giving students some autonomy over their learning, and developing student engagement strategies are seen as important in attracting undergraduates (Groccia, 2018). Accounting faculties acknowledge the need for greater professional engagement, internships, and work placements. However, obstacles such as crowded curriculum, research responsibilities, administration intensity, and difficulty in securing sponsors make implementing curriculum amendments difficult. Faculties able to demonstrate value for money, employability, and produce work ready graduates will flourish.

2.6 Conclusion.

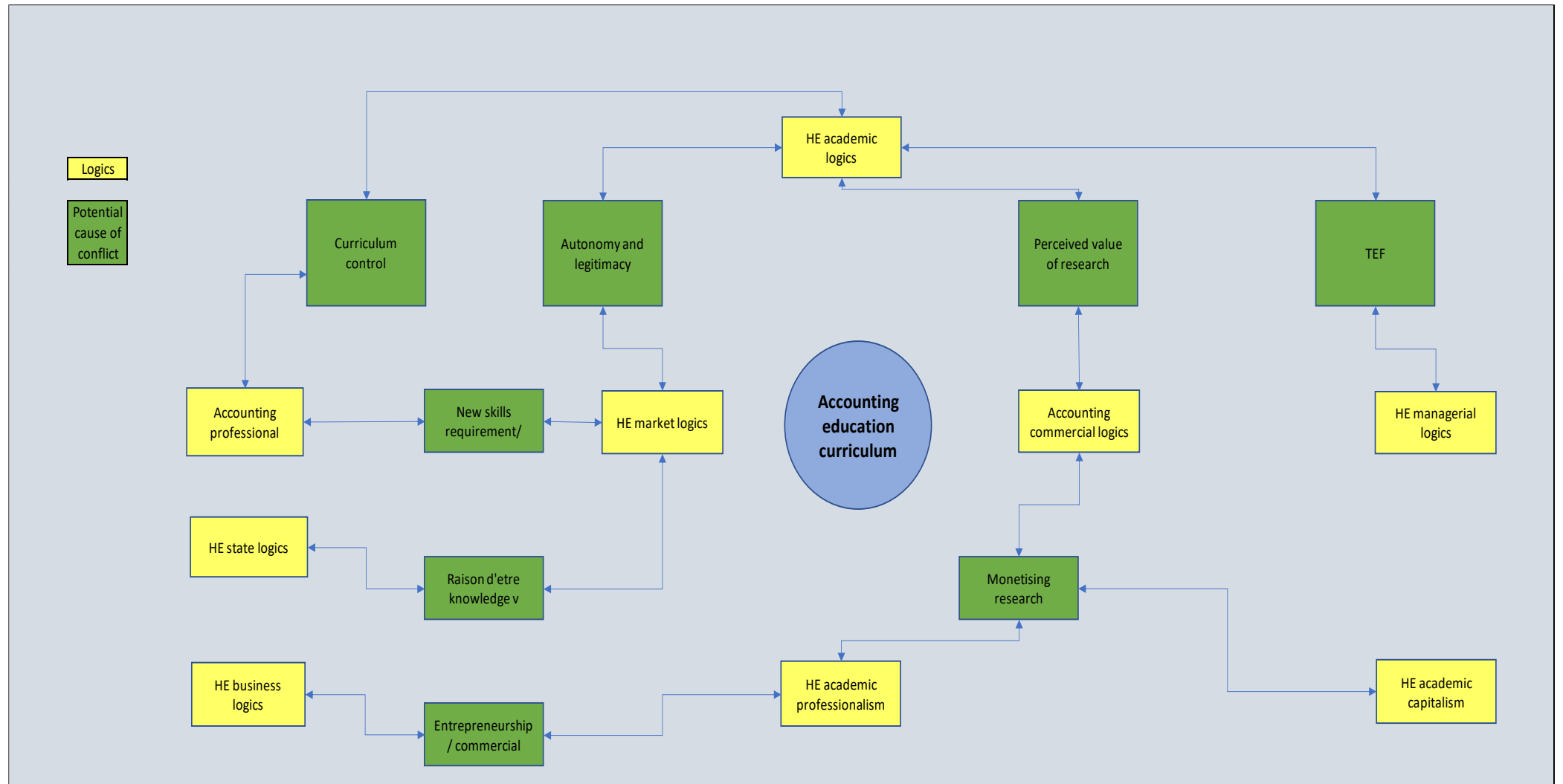
This chapter addressed the choice of logics as an appropriate theoretical lens for this study. The chapter began with a brief discussion of the effects of competing logics, commercial and professional, on the PABs and their recruitment of student members. Following which, the chapter centred on examining competing logics within HE in the context of neoliberal ideology. The ongoing marketisation of HE continues to complicate the interaction between the logics of the sector. Using the findings of several studies, the chapter then discussed the potential for conflict between these multiple logics within HE. The concluding section of the chapter summarised how specific logics interact and highlighted the potential these logics possess to disrupt curriculum change.

Taking each of the research sub problems in turn, the section firstly outlined how the professional and commercial logics of the PABs potentially impacts on the educational make-up of the student cohort. This was followed by a brief description of the interaction between logics in the context of the challenges faced by accounting educators in making curriculum change. The chapter highlighted the influence of, and potential for conflicts between, the logics present, and concluded with a brief review of the impact of marketisation on student motivation. Unfortunately, the multiplicity of logics present, state logics, market logics, business logics, managerial logics, academic logics, academic capitalism, legitimacy, and academic freedom, and their complex interconnectivity and potential for conflict initially overwhelmed me and created self-doubt in my ability to navigate this research. Designing Figure 3, enabled me to focus more clearly on the research problem, that of accounting education relevance.

This chapter enabled the study to understand more fully the challenges faced by accounting educators in making curriculum change. Logics theory will form the backbone of the literature review, inform the method choices of the study, and guide data collection, analysis, and conclusions. The following chapter comprises a review of published material surrounding the relevance of accounting education to the PABs. Firstly, reviewing salient literature and data, an understanding of the impact of technology use by the profession on student membership will be developed. This will be followed by an aggregation of relevant

literature surrounding the obstacles to curriculum change. Finally, literature focussing on student motivation will be considered.

Figure 3 Logics and potential conflicts surrounding the accounting education curriculum.



Chapter 3 Literature review.

3.1 Introduction.

This chapter will review current literature addressing the need to adapt the accounting education curriculum as the nature of the profession changes. Major changes in the social and economic environments are defining the way we live, work, and communicate with one another. These changes are driven by movement towards a resource-efficient and digital economy, the increased use of technology (AI, Robotics, Internet of Things (IoT), and changes in demographics (Lin & Edvinsson, 2021; Ordoñez de Pablos, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this digitalisation in many sectors including both accounting and education (Asonitou, 2021; IFAC, 2020; Sangster, Stoner, & Flood, 2020).

In moving towards a resource-efficient and digital economy, the working environment has become more complex (Howard, 2019; Kanioura & Lucini, 2020). Digital technology (e.g., data analytics, AI, robotics, IoT and machine learning) poses challenges for employment (Bughin et al., 2018). The PABs are not immune to these challenges (Stancheva-Todorova, 2018). Digitalisation is forcing the PABs to reassess their function within society and the business community (Bhimani, 2021). Traditionally, driven by a sense of professionalism, practicing accountants offered services to clients based on an intellectually based body of knowledge (Boyce, 2014). However, witnessing a fall in profitability of traditional products (auditing and tax for example), professional firms have embraced commercialism, adopting a client facing culture and becoming trusted business partners and advisors (Boyce et al., 2019; Stephenson, 2017). Likewise, accountants working in industry or commerce are moving towards more strategic, business defining roles. These roles involve interpreting and communicating the data, not merely producing the numbers. Successful accountants will need to possess a different skills set (Kruskopf et al., 2019; Mazzei, 2018). The pre-eminence of technical skills no longer holds true. Accountants are now professional communicators, interpreting huge amounts of complex information to present solutions to clients or management in simple, laypersons terms (Bhimani, 2021).

Consequently, the traditional accounting curriculum, heavily technical focussed, is becoming less relevant (Kruskopf et al., 2019; Ramachandran Rackliffe & Ragland, 2016). Accounting and finance faculty are under mounting pressure to instil in undergraduates the focus, attitudes, attributes, and competencies that the PABs need (Howcroft, 2017). While accounting faculty are aware of the need to amend the curriculum and cognisant of the threat posed to their business models, changing the curriculum is challenging as the institutional environment of HE is complex (Cai & Mountford, 2021). Increasing marketisation and accompanying measurement systems have altered the nature of

HEIs (Buckner & Zapp, 2021; Charles, 2018; del Cerro Santamaría, 2020), as evidenced by the introduction of systems for measuring teaching performance, judging research quality, and assessing institutional effectiveness. Marketisation has introduced entrepreneurial competition, compelling HEIs to replicate the behaviours of commercial enterprises (Czerniewicz et al., 2021; Gonzales et al., 2014), and forcing faculty to become business units.

This chapter examines the literature surrounding the role of the PABs. It assesses the impact of technology use in driving the adoption of a more commercial approach and the effect this has on recruiting student members. Highlighting the growing gap between the PABs' needs and current accounting curriculum content, the chapter then explores the literature surrounding obstacles to curriculum change. Finally, the motivation to study accounting will be explored and the difficulties of 'selling' curriculum change will be addressed.

Section one explores the changing nature of the profession. The implications that this evolution has for the skills and attributes required by future student members of the PABs (Kruskopf et al., 2019) is of significant interest to this study. As technology use within organisations increases, the role of the accountant is changing rapidly. Technology has also brought about the demise of many entry level roles (Kokina & Davenport, 2017; Marrone & Hazelton, 2019). Accountants are gravitating towards more client facing roles (Dancey, 2019) and becoming more involved in strategic management processes, creating value for the benefit of both business and wider society (Melnik et al., 2020).

Certain academics postulate that this more strategic focus gives commercial logics pre-eminence over traditional professional logics, creating tensions within the PABs (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Busco, Giovannoni, & Riccaboni, 2017; Nielsen, Lueg, & van Liempd, 2019). Accountants, whether in practice or commerce, are now advisors, councillors, partners, and strategic consultants, taking on operational roles outside of the finance function which require a different set of professional attributes (CIMA, 2020b). These attributes (e.g., collaboration, critical thinking, scepticism, communication) need to begin to be embedded gradually in students, as they are more difficult to acquire later in professional life (Asonitou, 2021). This section will explore the effect that the need to exhibit these attributes has on the awarding of student contracts and any implications this has for an accounting education.

Section two explores the difficulties faced by accounting faculty in successfully amending the accounting curriculum. The challenges to curriculum change, in the context of logics are investigated. Academics recognise that HEIs and PABs are trying to redefine the accounting curriculum (Boyce et al., 2019; Hagel, 2015; Lawson et al., 2017; Rebele & St. Pierre, 2019; Stephenson, 2017). However, these and others (ACCA, 2016a; Flood, 2014; IFAC, 2020) note that while some amendments have been implemented, several significant challenges remain, particularly

around communication and relationship building skills, skills which are highly regarded by the PABs (Carvalho & Carlos, 2022; Tan & Fawzi, 2017).

For several reasons, the accounting curriculum cannot address all of these issues (Rebele & St. Pierre, 2019). Firstly, there is constant flux in employers' and society's demand for skills (Council of the European Union, 2018; Howcroft, 2017). Secondly, structures within HE need to be altered to overcome the barriers of institutional reform (Asonitou, 2021; Buckner & Zapp, 2021; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020). Also, some posit that these softer skills are better developed in the real world rather than within an accounting degree (Ali et al., 2016; Asonitou, 2021; Lansdell et al., 2020). However, the primary reason cited is that the accounting curriculum is overcrowded with mandatory technical content (Ellington & Williams, 2017; Stoner & Milner, 2010), and, unlike in the USA (e.g. the Bedford Committee Report (1986), Pathways Commission (2012)), there is no formal agenda for curriculum change in the UK (Ellington, 2017).

Nevertheless, the chapter outlines the recent calls for accounting curriculum change. These include calls to restore trust in accounting, incorporate teaching of technology, improve the relevance of the accounting academic discipline, and to produce work ready graduates (Amernic & Craig, 2004; Asonitou, 2021; Flood, 2014; Herbert, Rothwell, Glover, & Lambert, 2021; Pincus et al., 2017; Rebele, 2002; Sledgianowski et al., 2017; R. Wilson, 2014). However, accounting faculty stand accused, by some, of being slow to respond (Carvalho & Carlos, 2022; Pincus et al., 2017) allowing the expectation gap between the PABs and the HEIs to continue to grow (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Kokina & Davenport, 2017; Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021).

However, there are significant barriers to achieving successful accounting curriculum change (Amernic & Craig, 2004; Asonitou, 2021; Boyce, 2014; Gray & Collison, 2002; Hopper, 2013). Broadly categorised, these include, the influence of the PABs over accounting curriculum (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Paisey & Paisey, 2010), the lack of collaboration between the PABs and HE (Bui & Porter, 2010; R. Jones, 2014, 2017), the institutional constraints that HEIs operate under (Behn et al., 2012; Bui & Porter, 2010; R. Jones, 2014; Pop-Vasileva, Baird, & Blair, 2014), and the professional identity of an academic (Clarke, Hyde, & Drennan, 2013; L. Evans, 2015; Moore, 2003). Using logics theory as a basis, an examination of each challenge will investigate the effect these issues have on accounting faculty's ability to successfully change the curriculum.

Finally, in making curriculum amendments care must be taken to manage the implementation to ensure that the change is beneficial (Lawson et al., 2017). Student motivation is one key consideration. Therefore, literature surrounding the question of 'why study accounting'? will be examined. Research addressing the relevance of an accounting education, value for money, employability, engagement, and student appetite for change is explored. The impact of marketisation,

on student choice and associated increased competition between HEIs, is assessed (Komljenovic et al., 2018; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Each HEI vies with similar institutions to attract prospective undergraduates, while, within an HEI, faculties compete for prospective candidates (Jabbar et al., 2018). Attracting students and improving their learning outcomes has an impact on faculty rankings, the reputation of the university, future student applications, and potentially faculty survival in an increasingly competitive market.

3.2 The PABs.

3.2.1 Overview.

Using academic literature, reports, surveys, and information produced by the PABs, this section highlights how the accounting environment is changing. It charts the PABs' transition from being grounded in professional logics, to one more guided by commercial logics. The impact of technology use by organisations on the skills required by future accountants is examined. This leads to an exploration of the interplay between machines and humans in performing accounting tasks, focusing on the risk that automation poses to traditional entry level (student) roles. The mitigating steps taken by the PABs, through re-designing their syllabi are outlined. Finally, extracted from data published by the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), the changing educational background of the student membership is investigated.

3.2.2 Background – the changing landscape.

AI development led by internet giants such as Google, Microsoft, and Amazon, is increasingly affecting our daily lives using chat bots, purchase prediction, news generation etc. For global employment, the future implications of AI, though still limited at present, will be increasingly significant (Brynjolfsson & Mitchell, 2017; Howard, 2019). The global workplace is complex and changing rapidly (Kanioura & Lucini, 2020), and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Asonitou, 2021; IFAC, 2020; Sangster et al., 2020). Many commentators highlight the risks posed by the acceleration of AI development (Benhamou, 2020; Bughin et al., 2018; Daugherty & Wilson, 2018; Kolbjørnsrud, Amico, & Thomas, 2017). However, the adoption of new technologies is also creating new opportunities (Bowles et al., 2020; Jarrahi, 2018; Ojanperä et al., 2018). The computational and analytical power of AI, coupled with big data, enables analysis of complex data sets to better inform decision makers (Jarrahi, 2018). Technology has widened market access, improved governance, increased efficiency, and opened channels for collaboration and learning (Bowles et al., 2020; Ojanperä et al., 2018). Nowhere is this better illustrated than within the field of accounting.

As Safra Catz, CEO – Oracle, put it:

Artificial intelligence and machine learning are radically transforming how business operates, especially finance. Routine tasks are being automated so that finance professionals can focus on what matters most: identifying the next growth markets. (AICPA, 2019).

Throughout the 20th century, the PABs were driven by professional logics. Members exhibited a high level of both practical and theoretical education, behaved ethically, served the public interest, and were socially responsible (Killian & O'Regan, 2020; Paisey & Paisey, 2020). However, increasing technology use has altered the PABs' guiding principles. Originally seen as an aid to accountants, technology has become central to their professional identity (Pimentel & Boulianne, 2021), leading to the primacy of commercial logics (Lander et al., 2013; Suddaby, Gendron, & Lam, 2009). Technology use has commercialised accounting practices by accelerating the globalisation of the accountancy market, increasing competition, and adding an extra layer of legal requirements and regulation (Boyce, 2014; Boyce et al., 2019; Perera et al., 2003). The accounting profession is now ever changing and more complex (Shore & Wright, 2018).

This increasing complexity creates the potential for technology to cause disruption within a profession (Christensen et al., 2018). McQuivey (2013) argued that technology disruption comes quickly, cheaply and not from traditional competitors, increasing its danger and significance. The disturbance created by technology has required the PABs to question established norms and approaches (Skog, Wimelius, & Sandberg, 2018; Weill & Woerner, 2015). This speed of technological innovation is concerning to the PABs as they face significant technology disruption (ICAEW, 2019a). However, little academic sector specific research has been undertaken to assess the impact that technological disruption may have on accountancy (Brennan, Subramaniam, & van Staden, 2019; Ibrahim, Yusoff, & Rashid, 2021; Murthy, 2016).

The PABs recognise this potential for technologies (AI, machine learning, robotic process automation, etc.) to alter the professional environment (CIMA, 2017c; ICAEW, 2017a; Islam, 2017), and understand that this transformation is not without risk (Frey & Osborne, 2013; Frizzo-Barker et al., 2020; ICAEW, 2019d; Stancheva-Todorova, 2018; Susskind, 2015). Conversely, some see technology creating opportunities for the PABs. For example, Bowles et al. (2020) argue that technology use will give rise to alternative accounting functions that will be delivered through digital and mobile channels to stakeholders, creating new roles and requirements for accountants.

Certainly, technology is altering the scope and nature of what is expected of accounting (Andreassen, 2020; Islam, 2017; Melnyk et al., 2020). The accounting bodies (e.g. ICAEW, CIMA, ACCA) acknowledge that digital disruption threatens the professional logics which underpin their status (Lander et al., 2013; Shore & Wright, 2018) leading to a refocussing of their priorities. The PABs increasingly require their members to act as business and management partners (CIMA, 2015;

ICAEW, 2019b). Searching for more resilient and sustainable business models, the PABs are adapting to new technological and commercial environments, repositioning themselves so as to influence future developments within the business environment (CIMA, 2015; ICAEW, 2019d) in the expectation of creating increased value (Melnyk et al., 2020). Accountants, auditors, financial officers, and finance teams are moving from accounting for the balance sheet to accounting for business and value creation (Dancey, 2019; Richins et al., 2017; Vasarhelyi et al., 2015). By assuming this entrepreneurial approach, the PABs increase their ability to achieve their economic and social development objectives (ICAEW, 2019d), bringing their skills and experience to help organisations build robust ethics and accountability frameworks around technology.

The changing emphasis towards client focus and business partnering requires accountants to develop and hone new skills (ACCA, 2019b; Asonitou, 2021; Hudson, 2021). For a business partner, the importance of technical skills, while still necessary, will diminish, with greater weight being given to interpretive abilities, compelling communication, and ethical understanding. As Chris Mazzei¹³ observed:

Key skills required in today's workplace include complex problem solving and critical thinking to interpret and act on analytics. Other skills that make us human — adaptability, creativity, and emotional intelligence — are also more important than ever, Cyber skills will continue to be very influential ...

(Mazzei, 2018, p. 3)

Summing up, growing technology use is creating the need for accountants that use and interpret data, not just gather data. By bringing data-driven insights and analysis to decision makers, accountants have increased their value as business partners or management advisors (Gould, 2021). Technology performs the mundane tasks, processing recurring transactions, generating reports, and gathering and collating performance measurement data. These tasks are logical processes and lend themselves to automation and AI (Kruskopf et al., 2019). Increasingly, accountants need valuable data-related skills which are in high demand but difficult to find (Thomson, 2017; Weston, 2019). It is vital for accountants to develop skills less at risk to automation. Data and programming skills, communication, interpretive and critical thinking, are quickly becoming as important as technical skills.

3.2.3 – Skills shortages.

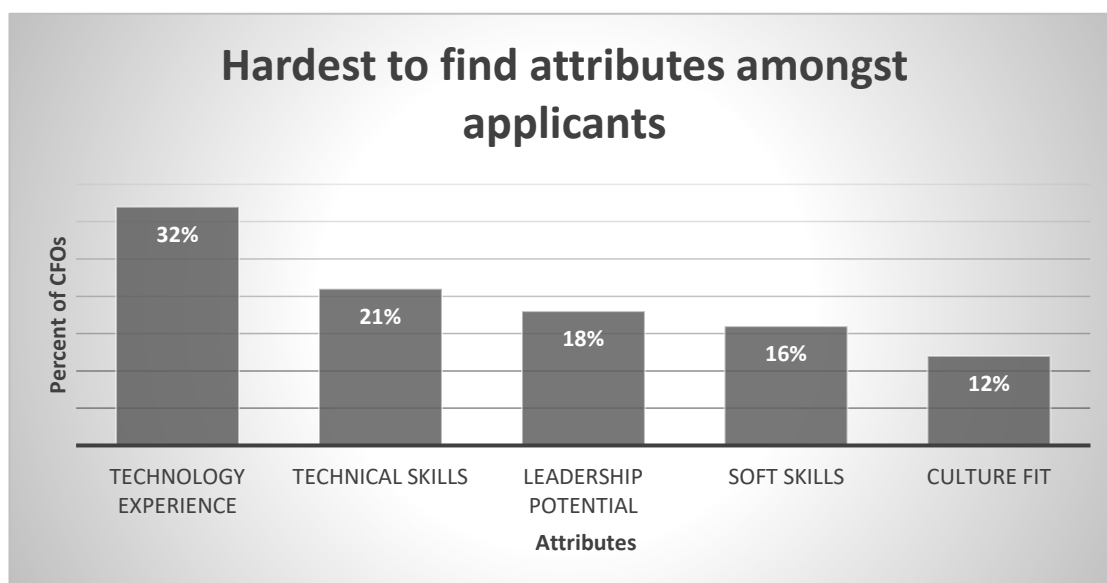
While the need for digital skills has been demonstrated, employers navigating an increasingly digitalised landscape are hampered by a shortage of key skills among their employees (Allas, Dimson, Foote, & Jeffery, 2019; ICAEW, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2020). According to

¹³ Chris Mazzei – Global Innovation Technologies Leader - Ernst and Young,

Robert Half Recruitment, 69% of Chief Financial Officers (CFO) acknowledge that finding candidates with data analysis and digital skills, coupled with softer skills, (e.g. resilience, adaptability to change, and critical thinking), is difficult (Weston, 2019). As previously noted, Industry 4.0 is transforming the profession, altering traditional roles, and requiring new skills and specialisms (IFAC, 2019; Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021), which has served to exacerbate what Thomson (2017) termed the ‘talent dilemma’¹⁴. The complexity of the modern business environment is accelerating the need to identify, attract, recruit, develop, and retain talent (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen, & Scullion, 2020). Employers are struggling to find professionals with the necessary skillsets to fill important positions within their companies (Weston, 2019).

Grant Thornton (2021) reported that talent management was a top priority for CFOs, finding two-thirds of CFOs were worried that talent shortages could impair their ability to implement short-term strategies. The survey also revealed that technology investment was a key concern. The CFOs surveyed outlined the following ‘tech’ investment as priority; cloud computing/storage 54%, cybersecurity and fraud protection 53%, and digital transformation 45%. A separate study of American CFOs (Robert Half, 2019b)¹⁵ showed technology skills were highly valued in job descriptions, but emphasised that these skills were in short supply, see Figure 4.

Figure 4 Percentage of American CFOs claiming applicants lack critical attributes.



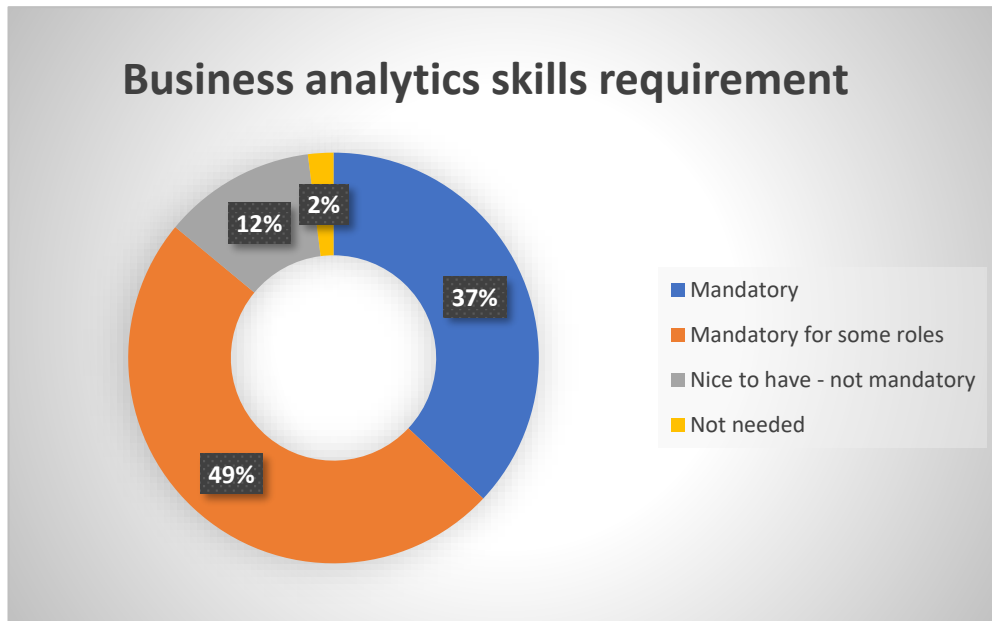
Source – Finance leaders report technology skills most difficult to find when hiring (Robert Half, 2019b)

¹⁴ The ‘talent dilemma’ the ability to find suitably qualified recruits exhibiting the necessary digital skills.

¹⁵ The survey was developed by Robert Half and conducted by independent research firms. The survey includes responses from more than 1,100 CFOs at companies in The United States with 20 or more employees.

The same survey found that business analytical skills were either mandatory or highly valued in 84% of advertised roles see Figure 5.

Figure 5 Accounting roles requiring business analytical skills.



Source – Finance leaders report technology skills most difficult to find when hiring (Robert Half, 2019b)

Finally, a supplementary study highlighted the speed of technology implementation within commercial organisations. (Robert Half, 2019a)¹⁶. Figure 6 shows the percentage of US businesses forecasting to be using selected technologies by 2024. The use of big data and advanced analytics, AI, and machine learning and automation, three technologies most likely to affect entry level roles, are predicted to more than double.

Figure 6 Technology used or expected to be used within five years.

Technology	Currently using	Expect to use within 3 years	Expect to use within 5 years	Forecast % using within 5 years	% coming on stream in next 5 years
Cloud	66%	19%	8%	93%	27%
Mobile apps	64%	21%	10%	95%	31%
Big data and advanced analytics	42%	27%	14%	83%	41%
Internet of Things	33%	29%	18%	80%	47%
AI and machine learning	24%	29%	21%	74%	50%
Automation	24%	29%	19%	72%	48%

Bold - has a direct impact on entry level roles

Source – adapted from Jobs and AI anxiety: The future of work; adapting to technological change (Robert Half, 2019a).(Formatting added by the researcher).

¹⁶ Jobs and AI Anxiety report- interviews with 250 accounting and finance managers in The United States.

While this data is American, a similar picture is emerging in the UK. BDO (2019)¹⁷ found that 87% of companies surveyed have automated all or part of their key business processes. Of these, 50% had automated transactional and analytic processes within their finance departments. Common technologies implemented included analytical algorithms 34%, AI 31%, and automation 24%. The survey also supported that finding appropriate recruits was difficult and revealed that respondents have a greater concern for the sustainability of traditional jobs (BDO, 2019; CIMA, 2017b; World Economic Forum, 2020).

3.2.4 Digital accounting and the human factor.

Recently, the emergence of the IoT and cyber-physical systems¹⁸ made industry 4.0 possible (Marr, 2018b). Now a network of interconnected smart machines can create, analyse, and share information rapidly. Smart connected technology is increasingly imbedded in the services offered by accountants allowing the development of analytical tools, machine learning, cognitive technologies, and AI amongst others (ICAEW, 2019c).

Within finance functions, new technology is driving the way data and information is used, increasing the efficiency of both business and the accountants (Cotteleer & Snidermann, 2017; Frizzo-Barker et al., 2020). Traditional accounting tasks are being automated (e.g., expense management, accounts receivable and payable processing, and AI powered invoice management). Accelerated technology use will inevitably change the roles and functions of accountants. As Jeffrey Thomson (2018, p. 8) observed:

These changes, AI, machine learning, robotic process automation, etc., are redefining and expanding the role of accountants and making our cultivation of skills such as data analytics, data visualisation, storytelling, and strategic management more important than ever before

In this new environment humans retain a pivotal role in the decision making process, especially intuitive decision making (Jarrahi, 2018). Machines can execute several tasks better, faster, and more accurately than humans, structured problem solving for example (Jarrahi, 2018). However, machines, cannot empathise or demonstrate deep emotional intelligence. Nor can they think critically, be creative, provide an over-arching strategy, plan and manage technological implementation, improvise or provide vision (Marr, 2018a). More significantly, machines cannot be held accountable for their decisions or make moral judgements (Hoffman, 2017; ICAEW, 2019d; Lake, Ullman, Tenenbaum, & Gershman, 2017). These machine ‘failings’ are key skills required by future accountants. People will remain both responsible and accountable for significant decisions,

¹⁷ BDO commissioned YouGov to survey more than 200 Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) and Financial Directors (FDs) from businesses across key regions in the UK.

¹⁸ Cyber physical system (CPS) is a system in which a mechanism is controlled or monitored by computer-based algorithms.

irrespective that much of the data will have been gathered, analysed, and communicated automatically (Coyne, Coyne, & Walker, 2018; Guszczka, Lewis, & Evans-Greenwood, 2017; Jarrahi, 2018). Harnessing the benefits that technology brings, (speed, accuracy, analytical capability) to the cognitive capabilities of people is an optimum way of improving business efficiency (Daugherty & Wilson, 2018; Jarrahi, 2018; Shrestha, Ben-Menahem, & Von Krogh, 2019).

Figure 7 below highlights tasks better suited to automation and tasks better suited to people. Adapted from Daugherty & Wilson (2018) and Marr (2018a), Figure 7 identifies whether humans or machines are more capable of performing certain tasks. The ‘machine only activity’ identified covers many traditional entry-level accounting tasks.

Figure 7 Activities appropriate for human or machine performance.

Vision/ strategy	Lead	Empathy	Critical thinking	Creativity	Amplify	Embody	Interact	Train	Sustain	Explain	Predict	Iterate	Adapt	Analyse	Transact
Human only activity					Machines complete humans			Humans complete machines			Machine only activity				
					Human-machine hybrid activity										

Source – based on Daugherty and Wilson (2018, p. 5) and Marr (2018a)

While technology use will remove several entry-level tasks, (Kokina & Davenport, 2017; Marrone & Hazelton, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2020), it has created other roles for entry level accountants, such as process improvement, cost control, and problem solving (Jackson, Michelson, & Munir, 2022). Future student members will need to be able to interpret machine generated data and communicate and explain their findings to numerous stakeholders (ICAEW, 2018). Consequently, the PABs have begun to redesign training programmes and revise exam syllabi to make future accountants more business and technology ready, as illustrated in the foreword to CIMA 2019 syllabus where Joe Kaeser¹⁹, stated ‘Digitalisation is transforming all industries. This is why digital skills should be conveyed at all levels and in all forms of education’ (CIMA, 2019b).

Through revised syllabi (ACCA, 2020; CIMA, 2019b; ICAEW, 2020a), the PABs focus on cultivating skills to enable student members to work with automated processes and become comfortable in virtual, multi-disciplinary teams (ACCA, 2020; CIMA, 2019a; ICAEW, 2018). The PABs are taking a leading role in developing and implementing technology education for their students (Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021), focussing on digitalisation and covering an increasingly wide

¹⁹ Joe Kaeser - President and CEO Siemens AG

range of skills, values, and attributes deemed necessary for an accounting career (ACCA, 2020; CIMA, 2019b; ICAEW, 2020a). By implementing these revised syllabi, the PABs are addressing the future needs of employers.

In contrast, the universities, being theory led, advocate that the primary focus of an accounting education is the development of intellectual capabilities (S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Duff & Marriott, 2017), potentially widening the gap between the PABs and HE (Ellington, 2017; Flood, 2014). Educators stand accused of teaching to the exam to maximise accreditations and exemptions, failing to equip undergraduates with the skills required for future employment (Ellington & Williams, 2017; Fogerty & Lowensohn, 2017; Lansdell et al., 2020).

The following section will examine the impact that the evolution of the profession and the associated revised syllabi is having on student membership.

3.2.5 Statistics on student membership to the PABs.

3.2.4.1 Introduction.

Much of the literature, both academic and professional, explores the evolution of the profession, focussing on the skills and attributes required to succeed as an accountant (ACCA, 2019b; Asonitou, 2021; Hudson, 2021; Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021). However, little analysis of the educational background of student entrants has been undertaken. Through analysis of data provided by the PABs and published by the FRC²⁰ in its 'Annual Report into Key Facts and Trends in the profession' (FRC, 2011-2022),²¹ this section develops an understanding of the make-up of student membership to assess the current relevance of an accounting education. The key findings are discussed below. Note each PAB has its own sectoral focus which may affect student selection. ICAEW and ICAS are primarily practice focussed, CIMA - industry and commerce centred and CIPFA - public sector. ACCA has significant student membership in all three sectors (practice, commerce, and public sector).

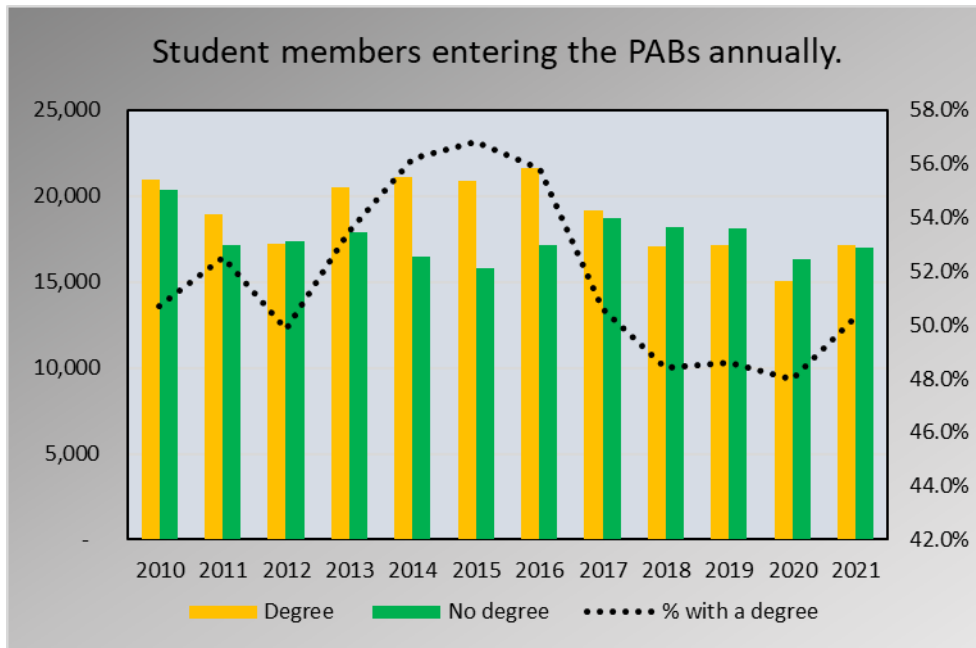
3.2.4.2 Students entering the PABs.

The number of students registering with the five UK based PABs (ICAEW, CIMA, ACCA, ICAS, and CIPFA) has declined steady from 41,251 in 2010 to 34,140 in 2021, a fall of 17%. In the same period, the balance between graduate entrants and non-graduate entrants has shifted. Since 2015 the number of graduate entrants to the PABs has fallen by 6.5% to 50.3% of all entrants. This fall coinciding with the PABs introducing recruitment initiatives to widen entry opportunities, Figure 8.

²⁰ Although the primary focus of the FRC is regulation of audit firms, they also report on membership data across all accounting bodies based in The UK and The Republic of Ireland.

²¹ Annual reports – Key facts and trends in the profession (2011 – 2022)

Figure 8 Student membership of the PABs by qualification.



Source - Annual Report into Key Facts and Trends in the Profession' (FRC, 2011-2022)

However when focussing on graduate entrants, comparisons, between graduates holding 'relevant' (accounting based) degrees and those with degrees in other disciplines, are difficult, as each PAB defines 'relevant' slightly differently (FRC, 2021). However, there is broad consensus that degrees in accountancy, finance, or a combination of the two, constitute relevant degrees, see Table 3 (FRC, 2021). The remaining analysis adopts this broad definition of relevant degree.

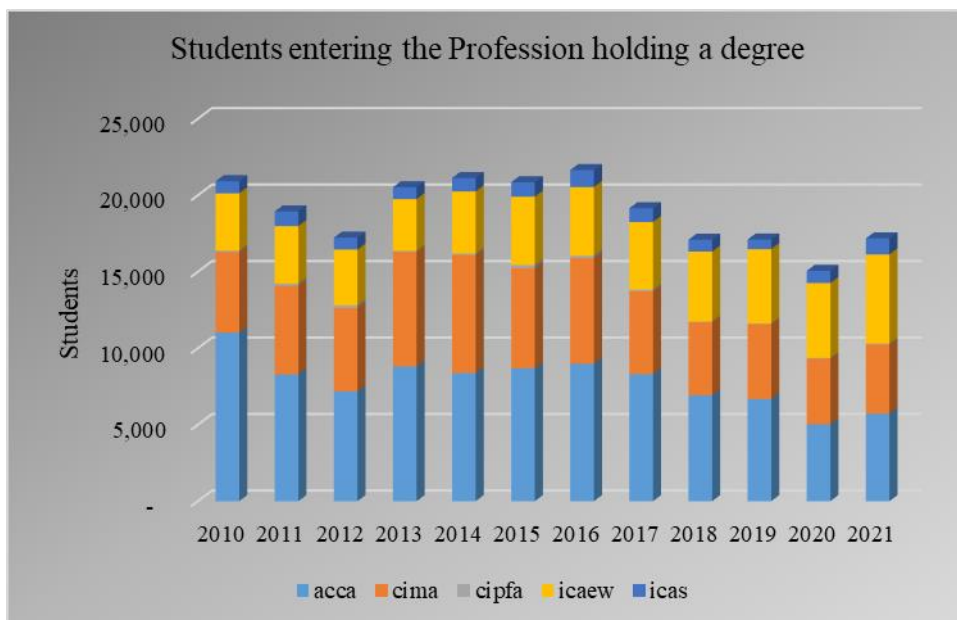
Table 3 Relevant degree subjects, (and combinations) by PAB.

Accounting body	Area of focus (practice, commerce, or public sector)	Any combination of the following:	Other subjects deemed relevant
ACCA	Across all three	Accounting or finance.	
CIMA	Commerce	Accounting or finance	Business studies or business administration
ICAEW	Practice	Accountancy or finance	
ICAS	Practice	Accountancy	
CIPFA	Public sector	Accountancy	

Source - Annual Report into Key Facts and Trends in the Profession (FRC, 2021)

The FRC (2011-2022) report that graduate new entrants²² (in any discipline) to the PABs has fallen from 20,917 registrations (2010) to 17,176 registrations (2021), a decrease of 17.9% (2010-2021), see Figure 9.

Figure 9 Number of graduate trainees entering the PABs.

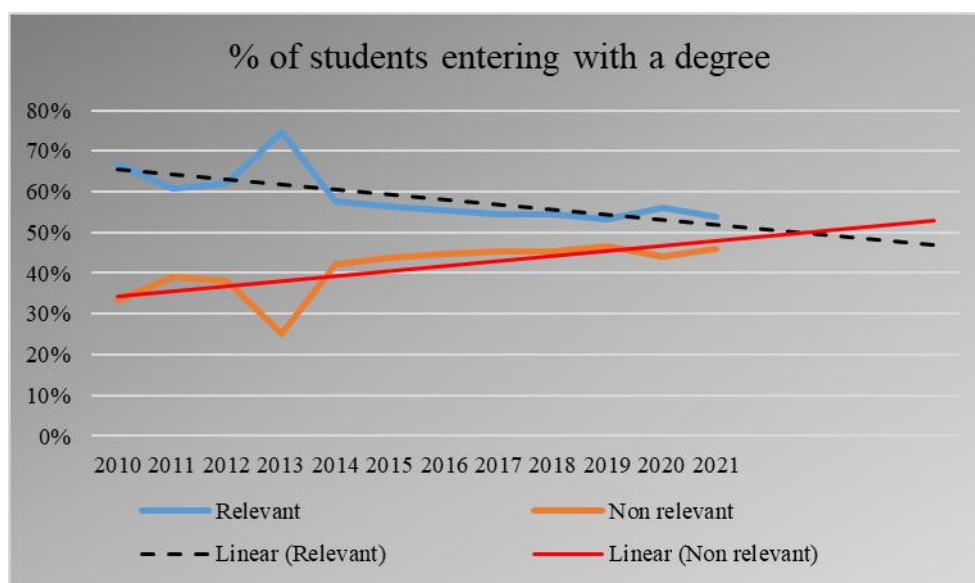


Source - Annual Report into Key Facts and Trends in the Profession (FRC, 2011-2022)

Figure 10 splits these graduate entrants to show the proportion holding a relevant degree. As is evident, the number of graduates holding a relevant degree has fallen significantly from 67% in 2010 to 54% in 2021. The trend lines indicate that relevant degree holders are shortly forecast to be in a minority of graduate entrants. As of 2021, relevant degree graduates accounted for only 27.2% (9,273/34,140) of all new student members, against 33.8% (13,937/41,251) in 2010. This significant fall results in part from employers now looking for data-related skills, often ahead of technical skills. Data and programming skills, communication, interpretive and critical thinking are seen as desirable. Graduates and non-graduates alike most able to demonstrate such skills are in high demand, to the detriment of an accounting education.

²² Graduate new entrants are defined as student members with both a degree and less than one year of membership of any of the following ICAEW, CIMA, ACCA, CIPFA, ICAS.

Figure 10 Graduate trainees holding a relevant versus non-relevant degrees.



Source - Annual Report into Key Facts and Trends in the Profession (FRC, 2011-2022).

3.2.4.3 Sectorial analysis of student membership.

The previous analysis showed that over time the relevance of an accounting education in gaining student membership of the PABs is diminishing. The following analysis will examine whether this diminishing relevance is reflected across both the practice and commercial sectors. Public sector accounting students were excluded from this analysis as the numbers entering the profession via this route were deemed too small.

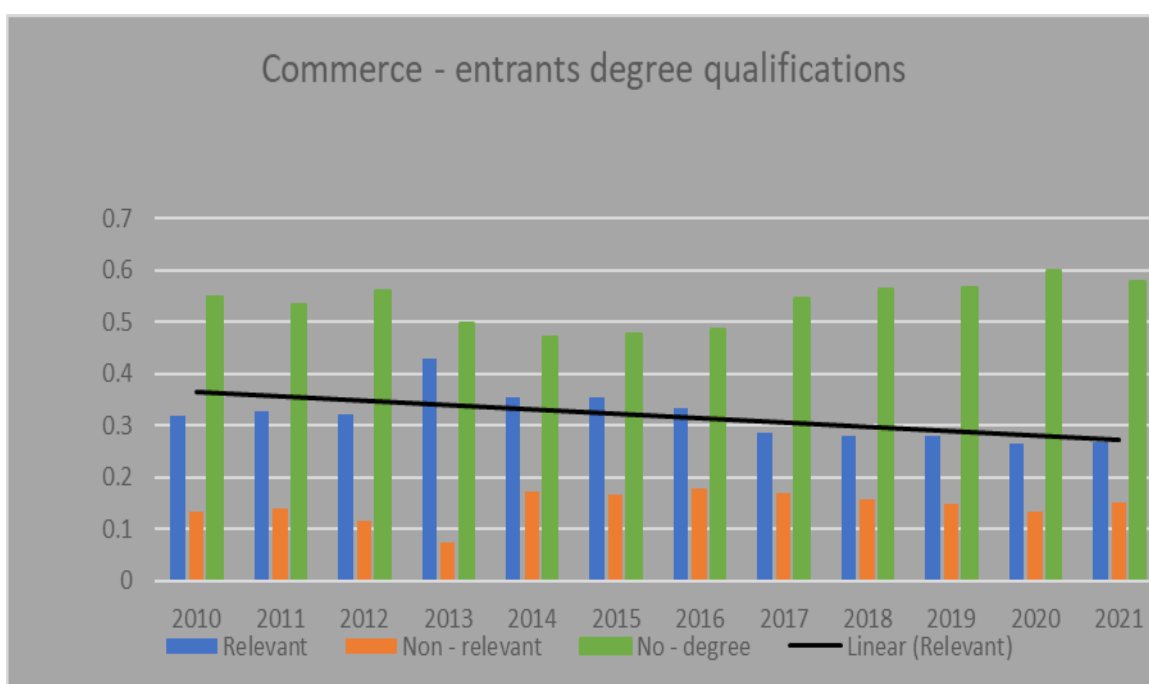
Commerce and industry.

As previously discussed, Industry 4.0 is transforming entry level roles to accounting and their associated job descriptions (Kruskopf et al., 2019; Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021). Within commercial accounting functions, new technology is driving the way data and information is used, aiming to increase efficiency, accuracy, and clarity of analysis (Cotteleer & Snidermann, 2017; Frizzo-Barker et al., 2020). Yet, as stated previously, CFOs acknowledge that finding candidates with data analysis and digital skills, coupled with softer skills, is difficult (Weston, 2019). From the student perspective, the implementation of big data and advanced analytics, AI and machine learning, and automation, significantly increases the threat to many traditional entry level roles. However, automation also creates new roles for entry level accountants which are not purely transactional and which require differing skill sets (Jackson et al., 2022).

When recruiting trainee accountants, commercial sector employers value candidates who possess attributes such as creativity, technology experience, communication, analytic and critical thinking, and imagination. In return employers often offer successful applicants sponsorship to attain

qualification and membership of an appropriate PAB (ACCA, 2021a; CIMA, 2020a) . Employer sponsorship, together with flexible entry routes offered by both CIMA and ACCA, open membership to a wider pool of talent, one not limited to graduates. An increasing number of students qualifying through industry or commerce hold no HE qualification. Where a degree is held, the importance of an accounting-based qualification is diminishing, Figure 11. Employers regard degrees in disciplines such as mathematics, science, and humanities as a solid grounding for trainee accountants, viewing technical capability as something that can be taught on the job (Eames, Luttmann, & Parker, 2018; Gray & Collison, 2002; Howcroft, 2017).

Figure 11 Student trainees in commerce, by educational background.



Source - Annual Report into Key Facts and Trends in the Profession (FRC, 2011-2022)

Practice.

Although the absolute numbers have reduced due to the impact of COVID-19, an analysis in the ‘Times top 100 UK graduate employers’²³ survey 2020, found accountancy and professional firms the second largest recruiters of new graduates. These firms recruited 4,726 graduates by December 2021 (up 9.9% on 2020) (Highflyers, 2022) and aimed to recruit 7,400 graduates in 2022. Although this is a significant increase, a 23% rise in applications from graduates has significantly increased competition for employment. Competition for training contracts within professional firms is intense. According to Robert Dyer, Head of Graduate Recruitment at Deloitte, 5% of graduate applications are successful. PwC and Ernst and Young state similar statistics. Professional firms have relaxed

²³ Accounting and professional service companies in ‘Times top 100 graduate recruiting firms’ are PwC, KPMG, Ernst and Young, Deloitte, BDO, Grant Thornton, Bain and Partners, Admiral, and McKinney’s.

their academic entry requirements and have started initiatives targeting non graduates. Large accounting firms have been particularly initiative taking when it comes to organising apprenticeships, school leaver programmes, and even running their own university courses. Ernst and Young offers a five-year structured training programme for school leavers. Deloitte runs a five-year structured 'Bright Start' programme for people who want to apply without going to university. KPMG has a school and college leavers programme for people who want to go into audit. While PwC runs a range of apprenticeships and a degree programme.

Nevertheless, graduates still account for 60-65% of the annual intake of new entrants (FRC, 2021), but an accounting degree is far from mandatory (Calhoun & Karreman, 2014), as emphasised in the following: '*You do not have to go to university to become an ICAEW Chartered Accountant in the UK. You can start your ACA training straight from school ...*' (ICAEW, 2020b). Indeed, an analysis of the graduate recruitment web pages of five top accounting firms (PwC, KPMG, Deloitte, BDO, and Grant Thornton) revealed that technical and accounting skills (degree relevance) are deemed less important than demonstrating decent overall academic success. The importance of characteristics such as curiosity, innovation, flexibility, and emotional intelligence was highlighted. Skills including technology knowledge and experience, communication, analytical and critical thinking, creativity, and team working also weigh heavily, Table 4. (Skills in blue specifically listed on the website).

Table 4 Analysis of graduate recruitment webpages 2022.

Characteristic or skill	PWC	KPMG	Deloitte	BDO	Grant Thornton
Technology knowledge					
Communication					
Analytical					
Critical thinking					
Creativity					
Team working					
Innovation					
Flexibility					
Curiosity					
Empathy					
Academic background	Any	Any	Any relevant	Any	Any relevant

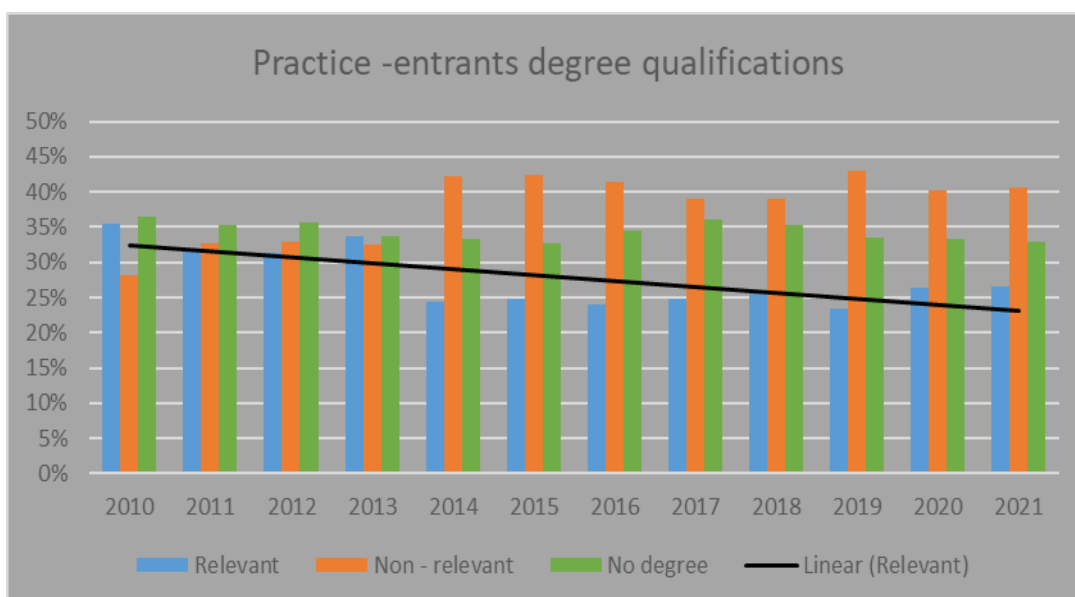
Source – the web pages of the stated firms accessed May 2022.

Most professional firms, including all the 'Big-four' (i.e., PwC, EY, KPMG, and Deloitte) have made significant changes to their academic entry requirements in recent years. For example, PwC have announced that a 2.1 is no longer the minimum requirement for graduate entry (Guardian, 2022). Applicants whose applications in previous years would not have got through initial screening may

now do so. Nevertheless, academic performance still plays a role. As EY’s Maggie Stilwell²⁴ explains, it (academic achievement) is ‘*still an important consideration when assessing candidates but will no longer function as a barrier to getting a foot in the door.*’

Figure 12 illustrates that accountancy firms take their trainees from a widening talent pool. Unlike commerce and industry, applicants holding a degree still account for most of the intake, broadly steady, at around 60%. However, the balance between relevant versus non relevant degree qualifications has shifted markedly. This shift appears to coincide with the introduction of initiatives to widen entry opportunities. Large accounting firms have been particularly proactive when it comes to organising apprenticeships, school leaver programmes, and even running their own university courses attracting increasing numbers of both non-relevant graduates and non-graduates.

Figure 12 Student trainees in practice, by educational background.



Source - Annual Report into Key Facts and Trends in the Profession’ (FRC, 2011-2022)

3.2.5 Conclusion, the PABs.

The PABs are currently driven by competing logics, professional logics, and commercial logics. Recently, the PABs have recognised that digital disruption threatens the professional logics which underpins audit and accountancy, reducing the profitability of these services (Lander et al., 2013; Shore & Wright, 2018). This recognition has led to major refocussing of priorities, leading the PABs to find new markets and adopt more commercial business strategies (Shore & Wright, 2018). Accountants now operate as business partners and management advisors (Dancey, 2019), in an increasingly complex business environment (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020; Shore & Wright, 2018).

²⁴ Maggie Stilwell – Partner EY forensics and integrity.

The skill set required by future accountants is changing significantly (Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021). As the PABs continue to reposition themselves to better exploit the benefits of technology, the calls for a different set of skills is increasing (Thomson, 2017; Weston, 2019). It is inevitable that, as technology use accelerates, and the analytical capabilities of machines increase, significant changes to the functions of accountants will follow. However, finding individuals equipped with the skills to perform such roles is currently difficult (Grant Thornton, 2021).

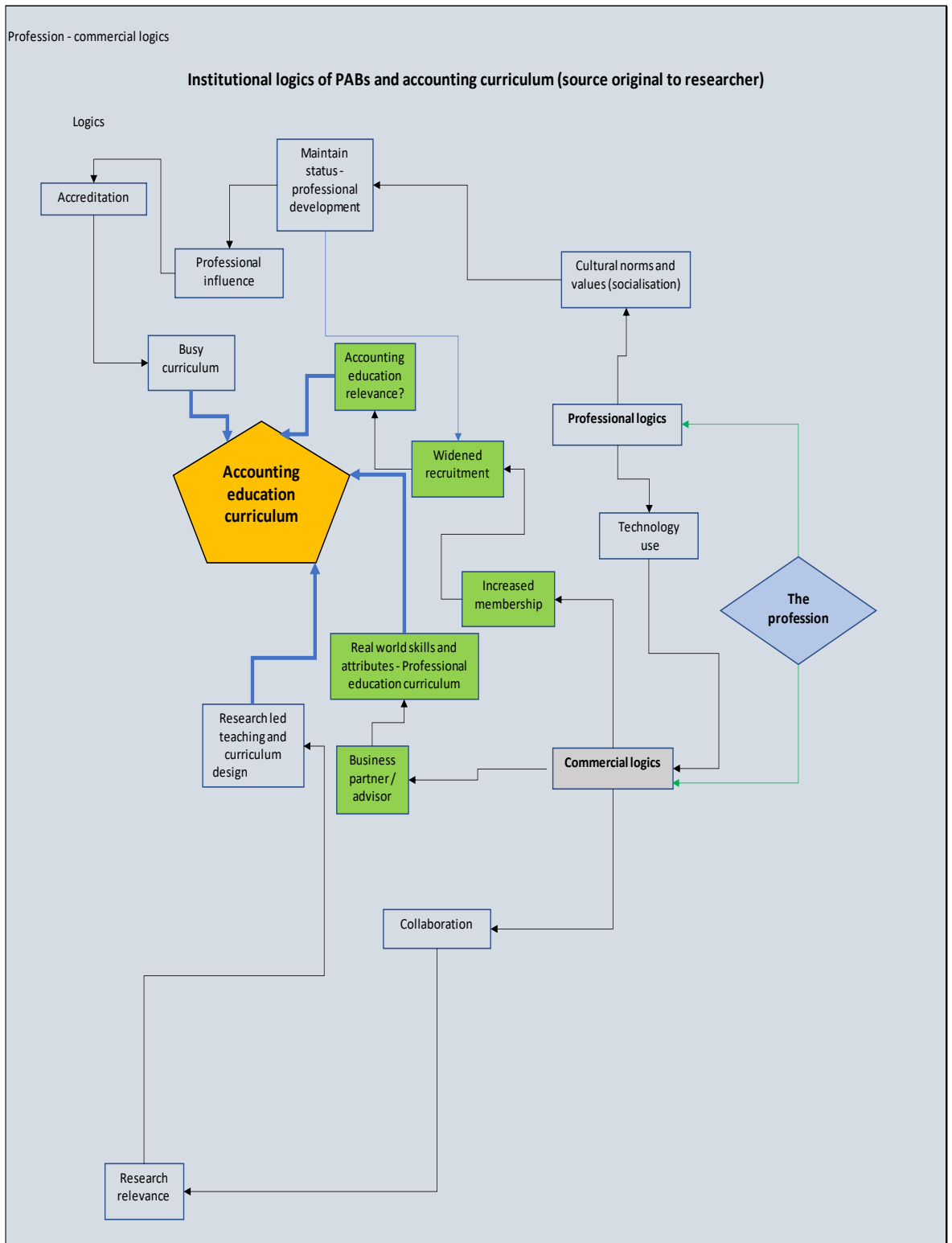
From the PABs' viewpoint there is an acceptance that digital technology is altering the function of accountants and is automating many entry-level tasks. They recognise that future recruits will need to be able to understand, use, and communicate machine generated data. As a result, training programmes are being redesigned and exam syllabi revisited to make future accountants more business and technology ready. Through revised syllabi, the PABs are focussing increasing attention on cultivating skills which enable trainee accountants to work with outputs generated by automated processes and become comfortable in virtual, multi-disciplinary teams (ACCA, 2020; CIMA, 2019a; ICAEW, 2018). By incorporating 'digitalisation' into professional syllabi, the PABs are taking a leading role in developing and implementing technology education for their student membership (Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021). The aim of these new syllabi is to produce newly qualified accountants able to successfully communicate with a variety of stakeholders and analyse, interpret, and explain complex data sets in a user-friendly way.

These changes, training programmes, new syllabi, and employer sponsorship have broadened access to the PABs for a wider talent pool, one less reliant on having a technical accounting background. As illustrated by the analysis above, this has led to the steady reduction of accountancy graduates joining the PABs, in both absolute and percentage terms, further bringing the relevance of an accounting education into question.

Figure 13 outlines the impact that the PABs commercial logics (green boxes) is having on the accounting curriculum. Technology use is a significant factor in shifting strategic focus towards the client, business partnering, and strategic management. This shift is driving the re-engineering of the professional education curriculum. In turn, this re-engineering has opened membership of the PABs to a wider talent pool, increasing competition for student membership, impacting the value of an accounting education.

Examining the professional logics at work, the following section of the review focusses on the HE perspective of curriculum change. The section examines the influence that the PABs exercise over the HE accounting curriculum, particularly through the accreditation process. This is followed by an exploration of why collaboration between the PABs and HE, although seen as desirable, proves problematic. Finally, an exploration of the institutional issues faced by accounting faculty in attempting curriculum change is undertaken.

Figure 13 Impact of the commercial logics of the PABs on the accounting education curriculum.



3.3 Higher Education.

3.3.1 Introduction.

The following begins with a brief look at the history of accounting as an academic discipline and the emergence of the expectations gap between the PABs and academia. Academic opinion on actions needed to reduce the expectations gap are discussed. The academic case for the development of real-world skills within the accounting curriculum is outlined and the obstacles to meaningful curriculum change investigated. Starting with obstacles arising from the relationship between the PABs and academia, the influence the PABs exercise over the accounting curriculum is explored, and the issues surrounding meaningful collaboration between the PABs and HEIs investigated. This is followed by a discussion of the obstacles inherent to HE. These obstacles include the structure of HE, the need to generate and maintain income, league tables and other rankings, the research-teaching relationship, and academic professionalism.

3.3.2 Background and context – accounting as an academic discipline.

Accounting as an academic discipline is a relatively recent event (Zeff, 1989), introduced as a master's degree at the London School of Economics after World War Two (Napier, 2011). Throughout the 1960's, driven in part by the Robbins²⁵ report, accounting degree programmes appeared more frequently (Stevenson, Power, Ferguson, & Collison, 2018) and grow rapidly through to the end of the 20th century. Initially, accounting degrees were viewed as a practical, rather than theoretical subject, but had recognised academic foundations; based on law (Scotland) or economics (England) (Stevenson et al., 2018). Early academics were free to develop their own understanding of the purpose of an accounting education, which they based on empowering students to achieve high academic standards (Watty, 2005). During this time, the PABs were mostly ambivalent to the emergence of accounting as an academic discipline (King & Davidson, 2009) leading to a lack of engagement taking place (Bui & Porter, 2010), despite calls for this to happen (Albrecht & Sack, 2000; ICAEW, 1997). Accounting educators' reluctance to give up their prized autonomy, coupled with the PABs ambivalence created a gap in expectation of an accounting degree, a gap that would widen throughout the 21st century (Bui & Porter, 2010; Francis & Minchington, 1999).

²⁵ The Robbins Report (1963) Higher Education -Report of The Committee appointed by The Prime Minister under The Chairmanship of Lord Robbins.

3.3.3 The call to action.

The role formal tertiary education plays in the knowledge-based economy to prepare graduates for flexible careers in the constantly evolving global marketplace is receiving increasing attention (de Villiers, 2019; Mulholland & Turner, 2019; Serdyukov, 2017). Since Zeff (1989) called for changes in accounting education, many others have followed (Albrecht & Sack, 2000; Amernic & Craig, 2004; Asonitou, 2021; Flood, 2014; Pincus et al., 2017; Rebele, 2002; Sledgianowski et al., 2017; R. Wilson, 2014), calling for, amongst other things, restoring trust in accountants, technology teaching and improvement in the relevance of the academic accounting discipline.

Recently, several issues have been explored. Examples include; course content and curricula (Carmona, 2013; Lucianelli & Citro, 2018; Yap, Ryan, & Yong, 2014), the delivery or teaching approach (Bayerlein, 2015; Fogerty & Lowensohn, 2017), faculty selection, staff's knowledge and ability to offer real-world skills (Borgonovo, Friedrich, & Wells, 2019; de Villiers, 2019), vocational versus academic focus (Howcroft, 2017), employability and work-readiness of graduates (Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021; Webb & Chaffer, 2016), the inclusion of generic skills into the curriculum (Bunney et al., 2015; Chaffer & Webb, 2017; Jackling & De Lange, 2009), and challenges surrounding the rigour and relevance of accounting curricula in today's complex business environment (Bui & Porter, 2010; Cooper, 2017; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Seow et al., 2019). Yet the expectations gap surrounding the relevance of an accounting education continues to grow (Bunney et al., 2015; Dolce et al., 2020; Kokina & Davenport, 2017; Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021; Webb & Chaffer, 2016).

Reasons cited for this continued growth in the expectations gap include claims that HE accounting education remains primarily technical (Boyce et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2014), and that it limits students exposure to the context in which accounting knowledge is to be applied (Bayerlein, 2015). Despite Brynjolfsson and McAfee's (2014) claim that '*acquiring an education is the best way to not be left behind as technology races ahead.*', accounting educators, some argue, still teach to the exam in order to maximise accreditations and exemptions, rather than equip undergraduates with the skills required for future employment (Ellington & Williams, 2017; Fogerty & Lowensohn, 2017). Indeed Hooper (2013) posited that accounting degrees are merely a substitute for professional courses and questioned whether they should remain in universities in their current state, a position supported by Al Mahameed, Riaz and Gee (2022).

This gap in expectation is exacerbated by the emergence of the concept of 'Education 4.0'. Education 4.0 is a process of learning connected with Industry 4.0 that focuses on transforming the future of education through advanced technology and automation (Bonfield, Salter, Longmuir, Benson, & Adachi, 2020). Smart technology, AI, and robotics form part of this transformation. Just as rising to the challenge posed by Industry 4.0 led to the PABs publishing significant volumes of information,

advice, education, and guidance to help equip their members for the digital future (ACCA, 2019a, 2020; AICPA, 2019; CIMA, 2019c; ICAEW, 2019c, 2019d), Education 4.0 is having a transformative effect on the HE sector. Education 4.0 seeks to develop highly competitive professionals with the cognitive, social, interpersonal, technical, and digital skills necessary to solve the ‘talent dilemma’, as defined by Thomson (2017) and provide solutions to future challenges (Miranda et al., 2021).

Since 2000, technology has increasingly penetrated the educational process. Education 2.0 witnessed the use of technology in fundamental ways within education (Cook & Grant-Davie, 2016), while Education 3.0 emerged as technology advanced to encompass the adoption of a more user-generated internet, accelerating the use of blended learning (Cliff, Fendri, & Mazzietti, 2022). Latterly, the COVID -19 pandemic forced institutions to turn again to technology to enable virtual tuition. As a result, the recognition of the power of AI to improve teaching and learning increased significantly (Qureshi, Khan, Raza, Imran, & Ismail, 2021). Education 4.0 aims to ensure the continuing improvement of learning and to equip students for employment in an increasingly digitalised environment (Miranda et al., 2021).

HEIs and accounting faculty must prepare their students for a world in which cyber-physical systems²⁶ are commonplace if they are to continue to produce successful work-ready graduates (Miranda et al., 2021). This involves incorporating technology into the curriculum, altering the learning process, and using the power of technology to enhance the university experience and improve student employability.

This is critically important because as students are increasingly seen as ‘consumers’ (Bunce et al., 2017; Hubble et al., 2016; Raaper, 2019), failure to address these perceived skills gaps could bring the financial viability of accounting education into question (Chaffer & Webb, 2017; Pincus et al., 2017). Students may cease to enrol onto courses which fail to equip them to succeed in their future careers.

With few exceptions e.g., Rebele & St. Pierre (2019), the literature calls for a move away from teaching predominantly focussed on technical skills. Scholars advocate that accounting education should focus on the development of skills linked to critical thinking and the promotion of values, attitudes, and attributes valued by the PABs and employers, with some authors appearing to encourage the PABs to take the lead (CIMA, 2019c; Ellington, 2017; Flood, 2014), a role the PABs are beginning to embrace (ACCA, 2020; CIMA, 2019b; ICAEW, 2020a). The PABs are increasingly demanding improved professional competence including a broad range of knowledge, skills, values, and attributes, which enable pro-active enquiry. Yet, few research papers dwell too long on the

²⁶ A cyber-physical system (CPS) is a computer system in which a mechanism is controlled or monitored by computer-based algorithms.

obstacles that HEIs face to initiating such changes, despite significant barriers to successful curriculum change existing (Asonitou, 2021; Cooper, 2017; Pegg, 2013). Academics raising issues around curriculum change appear to have little voice (Duff et al., 2020; Ellington, 2017).

3.3.4 Curriculum change - the obstacles.

Academics (Amernic & Craig, 2004; Asonitou, 2021; Boyce, 2014; Gray & Collison, 2002; Hopper, 2013) have outlined significant barriers to achieving successful curriculum change. Broadly categorised, these include; the influence of the PABs over accounting education (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Paisey & Paisey, 2010), the lack of engagement between the PABs and academia (Bui & Porter, 2010; R. Jones, 2014, 2017), the institutional constraints that HEIs operate under (Behn et al., 2012; Bui & Porter, 2010; R. Jones, 2014; Pop-Vasileva et al., 2014), and academic professionalism (Clarke et al., 2013; L. Evans, 2015; Moore, 2003). The following discusses each obstacle and examines the role of logics within each challenge.

3.3.4.1 *The influence of the PABs.*

As early as 1994, Becher (1994) argued that professional logics drove the PABs to exercise significant control over their relationship with both HEIs and the accounting curriculum. This relationship was spotlighted in the literature which followed the auditing scandals of the early 21st century (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; Kafaji, 2020; Sikka, Haslam, Kyriacou, & Agrizzi, 2007; Zarzycka, Krasodomska, & Biernacki, 2018). The PABs' influence is most visibly exerted through the accreditation process (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; Ellington & Williams, 2017) which acts 'to maintain their [the PABs] own privileged and powerful position as a controlling body' (Harvey, 2004, p. 212).

Through developing highly technical certificates and sponsored degree programmes, the influence of the PABs has increased significantly (ACCA, 2018; CIMA, 2017a; ICAEW, 2017b). Introduced to support the shift to a more consultative, commercial role, these programmes overtly teach to the professional syllabus and offer practical work experience to fast-track students to qualification. These initiatives, coupled with the prescriptive nature of the accreditation process, serve to stifle curriculum innovation within HEIs (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014). A position supported by Howieson et al. (2014) and S. Douglas and Gammie (2019) who acknowledge the lack of time and space within the curriculum once accreditation requirements are met. Teaching the required content to maintain accreditation creates busy curricula, induces formulaic methods, and is weighted firmly towards technical knowledge (Schoenberger-Orgad & Spiller, 2014; van Mourik & Wilkin, 2019). The scope for significant curriculum change is extremely limited without removing perceived core content.

The primary objective of accreditation is to ensure consistent quality of an accounting degree for prospective employers (Ellington & Williams, 2017). Superficially, this objective seems reasonable and fair to both the PABs and the HEIs. However, in practice the relationship is firmly biased toward the PABs, as faculty is continually forced to demonstrate that accounting courses meet the PABs ever evolving standards and criteria (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; Asonitou, 2021; Ellington & Williams, 2017). The problem created by accreditation centres on the control PABs have over how accounting education is developed and delivered. The PABs actively promote their own accounting pedagogy to support accountants' changing roles, in turn further strengthening their control over the accounting curriculum (Al Mahameed et al., 2022; Flood, 2014). As Duff, Hancock, and Marriot succinctly voice (2020, p. 1):

The primary stakeholders in the professional accounting curriculum development model are the [PABs] and employers, whilst the accounting academy is relatively absent... Academic research and technical activity have little influence on professional education.

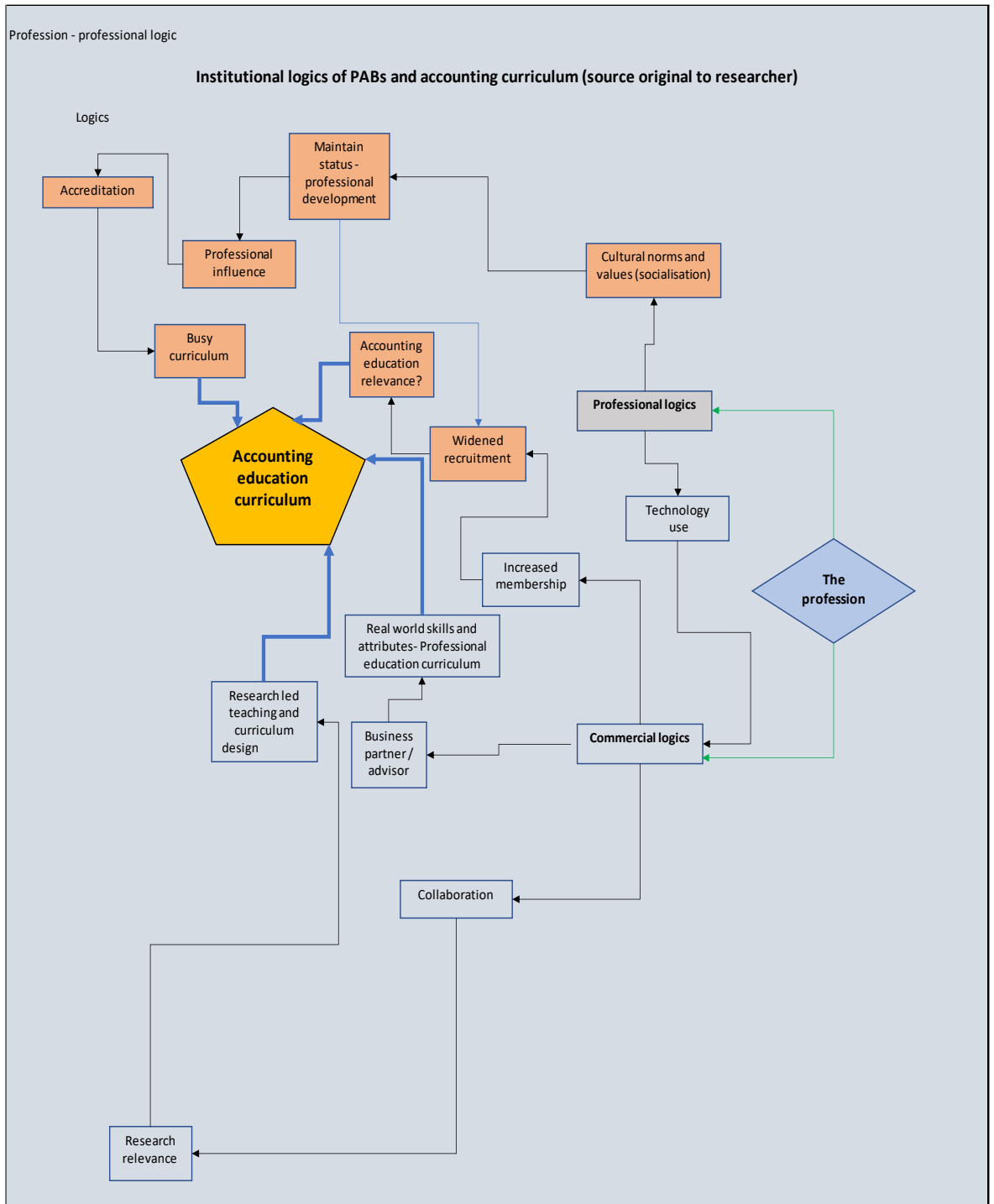
The result being, accounting educators slavishly following the professional curriculum rather than exercising academic freedom, which would, in the opinion of Ellington and Williams (2017) allow research to inform teaching and promote critical thinking.

The COVID-19 pandemic has served to exacerbate the inequality of the PAB–university relationship in two ways (Al Mahameed et al., 2022). Firstly, throughout the pandemic, the PABs and the HEIs debated temporary adaptations to the accreditation and exemptions schemes (Sangster et al., 2020). These discussions led to what Sangster et al., (2020) termed a 'somewhat worrying free for all'. However, they, and others, (Ackermann, 2021; Al Mahameed et al., 2022) argued that these discussions created an opportunity to re-shape the PAB – university relationship. The failure by HEIs to grasp this opportunity risks academic freedom and means that academics are becoming mere translators of the pedagogy of the PABs (Ackermann, 2021; Al Mahameed et al., 2022; Sikka et al., 2007). Secondly, by exacerbating the level of uncertainty in the business environment within which the PABs operate (Carracedo, Puertas, & Marti, 2021; P. Sharma, Leung, Kingshott, Davcik, & Cardinali, 2020). The PABs recognise that it is vital to engage positively with this uncertainty and use it as a chance to create new business opportunities (McKinsey, 2022). In the post-pandemic era, professionals understand the need to further commercialise their skill set, with new tools and a new way of thinking about client service (CIMA, 2020b). Inevitably, this will lead to further overhauls of professional examination syllabi and the accreditation cycle will commence once more.

In summary, the PABs are continually re-enforcing their professional identity by maintaining cultural norms and values (Paisey & Paisey, 2020). In this way, the PABs seek to maintain their professional status. Driven by these professional logics, the PABs, through the accreditation and exemptions

process, exercise considerable influence over the accounting curriculum. Such influence gives the PABs the reassurance that graduates attaining student membership have the necessary technical skills and competencies to be successful. However, it also creates a crowded curriculum, one which limits accounting faculty to make successful curriculum enhancements without jeopardising perceived core content. Simultaneously, the PABs need to maintain integrity, ethics, social responsibility, and relevance has led it to redesign its syllabi and training programmes. This has led to the widening of student membership. This behaviour by the PABs directly impacts accounting curriculum development as shown in Figure 14 (rust-colour).

Figure 14 Impact of the professional logics of the PABs on the accounting education curriculum.



The above has alluded to the difficulties that the PABs and HEIs face in collaborating because of their inequitable relationship. The following section explores the desirability of collaboration between the two parties and further reasons why this may be problematic.

3.3.4.2 HEIs and the PABs – the collaboration issue.

Introduction.

For the PABs, technology has accelerated the globalisation of the market, increased competition, and added a further layer of legal and ethical requirements (Boyce, 2014; Boyce et al., 2019; Perera et al., 2003). Professionals are unleashing the power of technology to transform the services they offer, while redefining their role in society (Bhimani, 2021). HE and accounting graduates need to adapt to these changes and garner the skills necessary to succeed in the modern workplace (Brink & Stoel, 2019; Carmona, 2013; Dolce et al., 2020; Howcroft, 2017; Kruskopf et al., 2019; Lucianelli & Citro, 2018; Yap et al., 2014). The stated aims of the Journal of Accounting Education (2016) include skills development which is testament to their importance. By inference, accounting educators need to understand the role of such skills within the profession if they are to instil these skills into their undergraduates (Rebele & St. Pierre, 2019). However, they question whether such skills can be taught successfully at undergraduate level, arguing that academics may not be fully equipped for the task of teaching such skills.

To have any chance to succeed it is essential that accounting educators are regularly updated as to the skills and attributes most valued by the PABs and employers (Carvalho & Carlos, 2022; Tan & Fawzi, 2017). Several authors scold accounting educators for being dilatory in responding to these needs, with progress in curriculum development deemed too slow (Carvalho & Carlos, 2022; Pincus et al., 2017). Yet, others point out (Al-Nimer & Mustafa, 2022; Howieson et al., 2014; Rebele & St. Pierre, 2019; Tan & Fawzi, 2017), that it is impossible for accounting educators to teach all the skills that are demanded by employers.

The accounting curriculum has been criticised as being too narrow, outdated, and failing to prepare students for the modern business environment (Dellaportas, 2019; Tan & Fawzi, 2017). The literature includes numerous studies focussing on skills requirements (Brink & Stoel, 2019; Bui & Porter, 2010; Carvalho & Carlos, 2022; Dolce et al., 2020; Jackling & De Lange, 2009; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008; Kruskopf et al., 2019; Ramachandran Rackliffe & Ragland, 2016; Stoner & Milner, 2010). These studies highlight the importance employers place on generic skills, such as communication, collaboration, initiative, and the ability to adapt to new challenges. The studies also emphasise the need for critical thinking and problem-solving skills coupled with interpersonal skills, to enhance employability. Technology skills were also cited with increasing frequency. A further group of studies (Gebreiter, 2020; Hancock et al., 2009; Howcroft, 2017; Jackling & De Lange, 2009; R. Jones, 2014) exploring the experiences of newly recruited accountants emphasise that alongside technical skills it is important to exhibit certain behaviours, attitudes, and dispositions. Attributes, such as, ethics, integrity, professional scepticism, cross cultural working, independence, and

reliability are highly valued by employers, but may be difficult to develop and assess in a lecture hall (Crawford, Helliard, & Monk, 2011; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019). Collectively these studies reinforce the existence of an expectation gap between the PABs and HEIs.

According to Bui and Porter (2010, p. 46), this expectation gap arises 'primarily from inadequate communication and understanding between employers and educators'. Closer collaboration between the two could resolve these issues and close the gap (R. Jones, 2014, 2017). Both Bui and Porter (2010) and R. Jones (2017) contend that long term co-operation would enrich academia's understanding of the accounting world, enabling academia to focus on the skills required for success in that environment.

Collaboration, question of purpose.

Co-operation requires two willing participants and which will occur only if both parties can readily see the benefits which would accrue (R. Jones, 2017), but these benefits are often being obfuscated. Bui and Porter (2010) highlight differences in perception, between employers and academics, as to the *raison d'être* of an accounting education. They, and others (Ali et al., 2016; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Mohrman & Lawler, 2014; Webb & Chaffer, 2016), argue that employers generally believe universities should produce workforce ready students, while academics consider development of intellectual capability paramount. Further tensions arise between a perceived research-led curriculum (academic perspective) and a practice-led curriculum (PABs and employer perspective) (Duff & Marriott, 2017). Difficulties exist in transferring the skills acquired at university into the work environment (R. Jones, 2017), and finally, defining, teaching and assessing attributes, such as scepticism, outside the culture of the workplace is problematic (S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019). Each of these positions and issues blur the understanding of the mutual benefits that exist and re-enforces the notion that the PABs and educators misunderstand one another's needs (Bui & Porter, 2010; R. Jones, 2017). In turn this makes producing and maintaining a balanced and coherent curriculum difficult (Duff & Marriott, 2017).

The case for collaboration.

Academics (Bui & Porter, 2010; E. Evans, Burritt, & Gutherie, 2011; R. Jones, 2014, 2017; Seow, Pan, & Koh, 2019; C. Sin, Tavares, & Amaral, 2019) argue that a close relationship between universities and PABs is essential and beneficial to both. HEIs, they argue, cannot develop meaningful academic context without the assistance of PABs, while PABs need the reassurance that graduates entering the PABs have the necessary skills and competencies to be successful. By collaborating, these academics claim accounting educators learn how the real world adapts theory and that the PABs enrich their own learning methodology. Others state that collaboration will allow

HEIs to fully participate in the pre-employment socialisation process, essential for developing the expected behaviours, attitudes, and dispositions of the PABs (Gebreiter, 2020; Howcroft, 2017). Further studies supported this belief, concluding that cultural norms and ideals are developed through this socialisation process (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 1998; Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2000; Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2002; Ferguson, Collison, Power, & Stevenson, 2011; Gebreiter, 2020).

Socialisation is defined in terms of behaviours, attitudes, and dispositions (e.g., ethics, integrity, professional scepticism, cross cultural working, independence, and reliability), rather than the development of technical and generic skills (R. Jones, 2017). By engaging with the PABs, accounting educators will better understand the weight the PABs attach to such attributes (Gebreiter, 2020). This will allow curriculum amendments which better address the changing nature of the profession.

Academics further argue that engagement between the PABs and academia benefits the PABs as it leads to better quality research outputs emerging (Duff et al., 2020; R. Jones, 2017; Scapens & Bromwich, 2010; Tucker & Scully, 2020). They argue that by producing greater knowledge and high quality research, academia can aid the PABs in developing and managing new entrants (R. Jones, 2017). Yet the PABs seems not to recognise the benefit of research-led teaching (Duff et al., 2020), sponsoring a limited range of very targeted research. Tucker and Scully (2020) and Scapens and Bromwich (2010) assert that producing relevant accounting research for the PABs would also benefit academia as it impacts the prestige and value of academic research to both the PABs and the wider society. Collaboration, they argue, is the only way to achieve the goal of research relevance.

Despite the benefits which should accrue from collaboration, much of the literature offers few recommendations as to how closer co-operation could be achieved other than a feeling that closer collaboration is necessary (R. Jones, 2017). Duff et al., (2020) does make recommendations of how the PABs could facilitate closer ties, but as both R. Jones (2017) and Tucker and Scully (2020) have observed, a number of barriers to collaboration exist, which makes successful co-operation difficult. The following section briefly addresses these issues.

The barriers to collaboration.

The importance of collaboration between academic researchers and the PABs is slowly gaining traction (R. Jones, 2017; L. Parker, Guthrie, & Linacre, 2011). However, for significant collaboration to occur both academics and practitioners need to gain benefit from any engagement (Albrecht & Sack, 2000; R. Jones, 2017). Academics need to see a contribution to curriculum design, while practitioners, driven by commercial logics (Duff et al., 2020), need to be convinced that tangible benefits will emerge from the collaborative process.

Convincing the PABs that tangible benefits will arise is hampered by issues surrounding accounting education research. Firstly, accounting research is often perceived as out of date (Tucker & Scully, 2020), partly resulting from a peer review process which can take years to complete before research is published. As a result, academic research is seen to follow rather than lead practice and the research is often perceived as backward looking (Basu, 2012). This outdatedness, coupled with the PABs perception of research relevance (Duff et al., 2020; L. Parker et al., 2011; Tharapos & Marriott, 2020) leads to much accounting education research being ignored, with many accountants admitting to struggling to understand the value of the research. This irrelevance of accounting research diminishes the appetite for closer engagement (Tucker & Scully, 2020). Moon & Wood (2020) claim that accounting faculty would benefit from greater knowledge of what makes research more practice-relevant. This, they claim, would facilitate the choosing of research topics and questions which are of significant interest to the PABs, making research more engaging and worthwhile.

A secondary issue is the unintelligible language used in many academic articles (Hopper, 2013; Hoque, 2018). Accountants state that the academic language used causes the meaning of the papers to be obfuscated (Tucker & Scully, 2020). Academics are failing to connect with, and transmit this new knowledge to, their intended audience (accountants). Engagement would be improved if research was presented in a user-friendly way, if the research was more up to date, and if its contribution was more grounded in the 'real world' (Hopper, 2013; Tucker & Scully, 2020). However, academic articles are aimed at an academic, not professional audience, with a view to publication in quality journals (e.g., journals featured in the CABS²⁷ list or Financial Times 50 list). The primary objective is enhancing the prestige of the author and the institution they represent, not appealing to the PABs (Annala, Mäkinen, Lindén, & Henriksson, 2022; Bourdieu, 2020; Guarini et al., 2020). Published research is presented in a prescribed format and subject to stringent writing conventions which makes lay-person understanding and engagement difficult. While some argue that the need to publish in certain journals (e.g., the Journal of Contemporary Accounting Research) has a distorting and negative effect on the reputation of accounting education research (R. Jones, 2017; Sangster, 2013; R. Wilson, 2014). They claim accounting education papers are less likely to be published in ABS listed journals as they are viewed as too specialised. Sangster (2013) argues forcibly that:

To all intents and purposes, scholarship in accounting education in the UK is being terminated ... publishing what [accounting educators] are doing is becoming less and less a by-product of the process ... We are returning to our education silos. This change is entirely due to ill-informed managerial adherence to a ranking of publication outlets which minimises credit for anyone who seeks to publish in a specialist outlet. (Sangster, 2013, p. 3).

²⁷ CABS – Chartered Association of Business Schools.

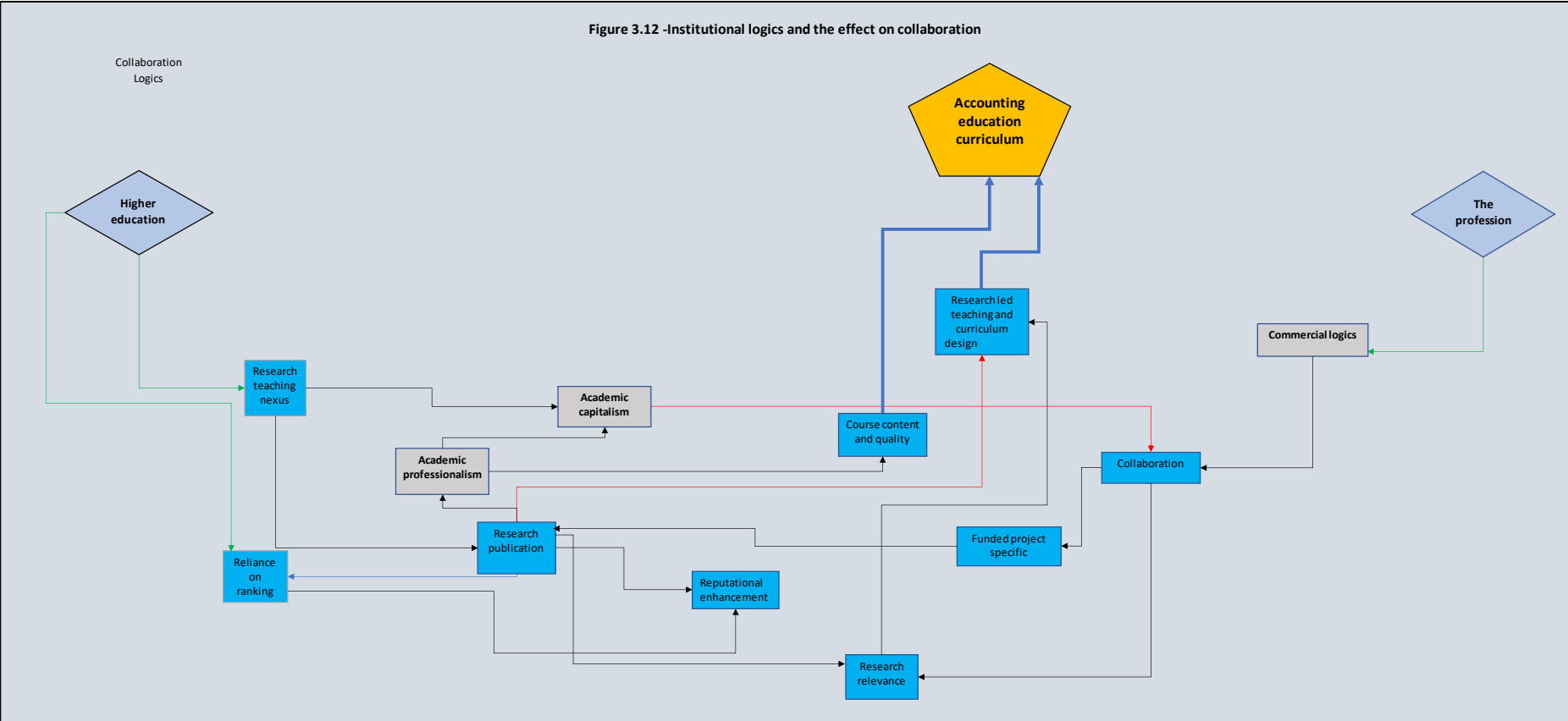
With the diminishing number of quality papers being published in mainstream academic journals, the opportunity to engage with, and influence, the PABs is reducing.

Finally, addressing the issue of stagnation, (Moser, 2012; Rebele & St. Pierre, 2015; Tharapos & Marriott, 2020) Rebele & St. Pierre (2015) asserted that stagnation in accounting research occurs for three reasons. Firstly, because accounting education research focusses on limited topics which are less relevant to the PABs; secondly, accounting education research is rarely empirically based; and thirdly, where research is empirical in nature, it often replicates previous studies in differing contexts making little new contribution. These findings are supported in ‘the Accounting Education Literature Review’ undertaken by Apostolou, Dorminey and Hassell (2022). Stagnation may also affect course accreditation (Moon & Wood, 2020), as the AACSB has linked its’ accreditation standards to research quality and impact (AACSB, 2018).

Conclusion, collaboration.

Collaboration has the potential to improve an accounting education by better preparing students for a career in accounting (Accounting Education, 2016; Dolce et al., 2020). Increasing the exchange of ideas between academics and the PABs could lead to greater innovation and rigour in the curriculum (Carvalho & Carlos, 2022; Duff et al., 2020; Tan & Fawzi, 2017). However, collaboration requires willing participation from both academics and accountants, and would be more likely if the research produced was relevant, timely, clearly presented, and based on ‘real-world’ experience. Addressing these issues could attract funding for curriculum development, increasing innovation in design, and improving curriculum content and relevance. Unfortunately, the PABs perceive current accounting education research as disconnected from reality and produced by individuals pursuing their own agenda without regard to relevance (Tucker & Scully, 2020). The PABs do collaborate with willing academics to fund research projects which are perceived to bring commercial benefit (Duff et al., 2020) but see little value in accountancy research in general. Collaboration is further hindered as academics research topics around their academic interests, with an eye to individual prestige. Seldom is the usefulness to the PABs considered. While the PABs primarily fund only research with commercial value and academics produce research primarily to enhance their own status, collaboration to bring forward meaningful curriculum change is unlikely. The effects that the conflicting logics hampering collaboration to effect curriculum change is illustrated in Figure 15.

Figure 15 The effect of logics on collaboration.



3.3.4.3 Higher Education - the institutional challenge.

Leaving aside the restrictive influence of the PABs on accounting curriculum and the challenges to collaboration, there are several HEI centric issues negatively impacting the ability of accounting educators to amend the accounting curriculum. At the macro level, these include the structure of HE, the need to generate income, the influence of rankings, the research-teaching relationship, and the impact of academic professionalism, each of which is discussed below.

Introduction.

Until recently, HE was viewed as having a singular, robust logic, based on academia and the sharing of knowledge (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Gonzales & Núñez, 2014; Mohrman & Lawler, 2010). Latterly, there has been growing scrutiny of HEIs, increasing pressure for greater productivity and efficiency. Government and employers are requiring evidence of the generation of human capital²⁸(Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019). HEIs are no longer the only contributors to knowledge production and the pressure for reform stems from forces inside and outside HE. This demand for reform results from the adoption of a more neoliberal, market-based approach to HE (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020). HE has been reshaped, inducing a culture shift which Steven Ward (2011, p. 1) has described as ‘one of the most sweeping and dramatic social experiments of the last few centuries’.

HE researchers now display raised awareness of the complex nature of the institutional environment. Reviewing research papers, Cai and Mountford (2021) found that over fifty logics were attributed to the sector, covering both societal level logics²⁹, as defined by Alford and Freidland (1991) and extended by Thornton et.al. (2012) and field level logics, as summarised in Table 5. Thornton et.al. (2012) argue that organisational analysis requires both societal and field-level logics: ‘Field-level logics are both embedded in societal-level logics and subject to field-level processes that generate distinct forms of instantiation³⁰, variation, and [a] combination of societal logics’ (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 148). Investigating the HEI centric obstacles above, the following explores the effect that the logics present have on accounting educators’ ability to make effective curriculum change.

²⁸ Human capital is the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population, viewed in terms of their value or cost to an organisation or country.

²⁹ The types of societal-level logics are the state, the market, the corporation, the profession, religion, the family, and the community (Thornton et al., 2012).

³⁰ Instantiation - something that represents or is an example of something else.

Table 5 Field level logics.

Field-level -Institutional logics			
Academic logics	Market logic	Managerial logic	State logic
Academic logic - universality,communality, not vested, skepticism	Market logic - consumerisation	Managerial logic	State logic (social) act in public interest
Professional logic - societal guardianship	Commercial logic - maximise stakeholder value	Business logic - organisational structures	Bureaucratic logic
Science logic	Academic capitalism search for truth and profit maximisation	Instrumental logic	
Academic autonomy self-governance by virtue of academic role and status	Higher education as an industry		
HE as a social institution - structure, function, culture, and sanctions.			

Adapted from ‘Institutional logics analysis in higher education research’ (Cai & Mountford, 2021).

Structure of the higher education sector.

Broadly, HE is divided into two groups, a traditional group comprising research led universities and a more recent grouping, the teaching led universities (Stoner & Sangster, 2013). Within these groups, two societal logics can be readily identified, state logics and market logics, often associated with NPM (L. Parker, 2011; Pollitt, 2013). State logics interprets the world from a public welfare perspective and holds to the ideal of the public good (Alexander et al., 2018; Bitektine & Song, 2022; Boltanski, Thévenor, & Jesse, 2007). Market logics views the world as transactional, based on value for money, holding to the ideal of legitimacy (Bitektine & Song, 2022). Under market logics, value is seen in profit maximisation (Lamont, 2012), financial controls, and efficiency (Ngoye, Sierra, & Ysa, 2019) , as well as the pursuit of self-interest and competition (Upton & Warshaw, 2017). Depending upon which logics, state or market, holds ascendancy, the actions of HEIs can differ widely (Alexander et al., 2018). At the macro level, the existence of these two competing logics makes HE more complex, creating disparate behaviours. Logics centred on financial management and managerial approaches to organisational behaviour; i.e., market logics, engender different actions in HEIs than those where logics centre on a more collegiate, de-centralised, and autonomous approach, i.e., state logics (Alexander et al., 2018).

The accounting faculties of each group have fostered differing relationships with the major PABs (ACCA, 2020b; CIMA, 2020a; ICAEW, 2020b; Stoner & Sangster, 2013). While, within each group, individual HEIs have built unique relationships with some, but not all, PABs. (Ellington, 2017; Ellington & Williams, 2015). The traditional group (based around the Russell Group) being dominated by state logics, appear to engage less with the PABs. This group places more emphasis on the theory of accounting, transferring knowledge as a public good, rather than viewing knowledge as a commodity (Alexander et al., 2018; Lynch, 2006). Conversely, HEIs predominately driven by market logics assume a managerial identity, focussing on efficiency, effectiveness, and outcomes

measurement (Alexander et al., 2018; L. Parker, 2011). This group tends to teach more towards the professional syllabi and places greater emphasis on accreditation and exemptions (Ellington & Williams, 2017), considered a key factor in curriculum development:

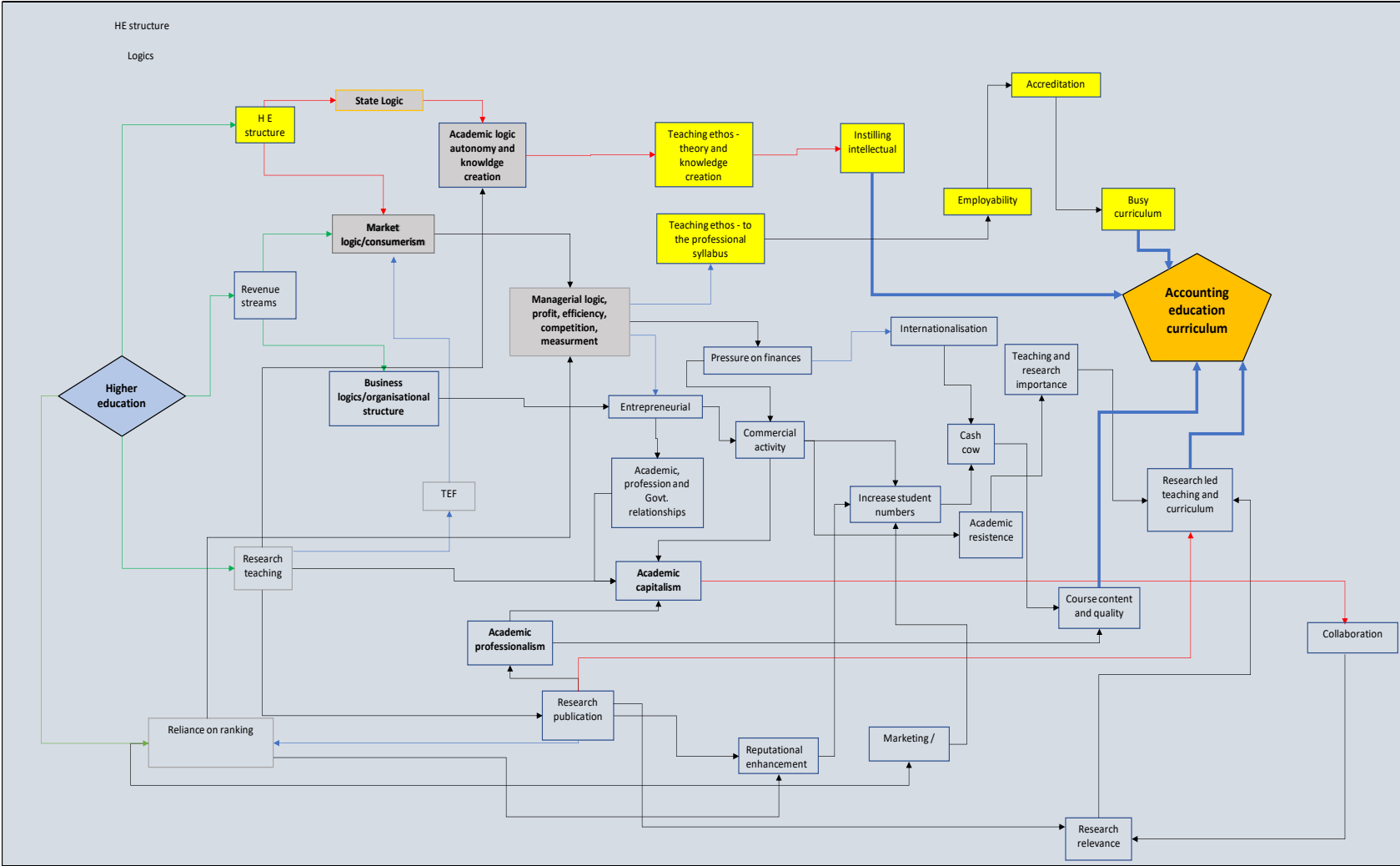
In the context of accounting, professional accreditation is often considered as one of the most important factors in the development of accounting curriculum.
(Pan & Perera, 2012, p. 95)

Accreditation and exemptions are also seen by many HEIs as a marketing tool to attract new undergraduates (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; Bayerlein & Timpson, 2017; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Ellington & Williams, 2017). However, accreditation can have a demotivating effect on accounting educators who, as Apostolou and Gammie (2014, p. 667) state:

[educators] have been highly critical of the influence that accreditation has on the content and assessment of modules in undergraduate accounting programmes, highlighting the constraints on academic freedom both in terms of curriculum content and patterns of assessment.

Accreditation has less impact on HEIs underpinned by state logics. These institutions tend to eschew accreditation from the PABs, focussing less on exemptions and more on the independence of intellectual thought and objectivity (Alexander et al., 2018). As illustrated by Figure 16, the primary logics (state logics or market logics) significantly determines the teaching ethos of the HEI. Where state logics has primacy, the primary goal of accounting education is the search for knowledge and the creation of intellectual capacity, underpinned by academic logics, autonomy, and academic rigour. This ethos creates some flexibility within the accounting curriculum. Conversely, in HEIs guided more by market logics, teaching revolves around the professional curriculum, aiming to maximise accreditations and exemptions available to undergraduates. This creates busy curricula with little room for amendment, except at the expense of perceived core content.

Figure 16 Logics and the structure of higher education.



However, all HEIs, irrespective of which logics has primacy, are facing strong financial headwinds. The 21st century has ushered in a new economic environment for HE. This environment has developed within the bounds of globalisation, with the backdrop of decrease in governmental support, and the arrival of innovative technologies (Ngoye et al., 2019; Pietilä & Pinheiro, 2020) . Traditional HEI funding models have struggled to satisfy the needs of this changed environment (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020; Grossi, Dobija, & Strzelczyk, 2020). The subsequent section investigates the need for HEIs to generate income and the impact that this has on curriculum development.

The need to generate supplementary income.

Neoliberalism has created the need for a different HE funding model in order to serve the emerging global economy, an economy significantly different from that of a few decades ago (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020). HEIs are developing into hybrid organisations³¹, increasingly affected by elements of business and market logics (Grossi et al., 2020; K.-M. Kallio et al., 2017), which are more managerial, and profit focussed. This means that HEIs are now challenged to accommodate socio-economic obligations while adopting entrepreneurial strategies (Cavaller, 2011; del Cerro Santamaría, 2020), *'there is a real need to develop and implement an entrepreneurship culture throughout HE'* (Aranha & Garcia, 2014, p. 63). Like other hybrid institutions, HEIs need to develop academic-industry-government relationships through a thorough transformation process. This process involves defining priorities, diversifying income streams, commercialising intellectual property arising from research, and driving innovation (Almeida et al., 2016; del Cerro Santamaría, 2020).

The need to generate income has underpinned many strategic decisions taken by HEIs, creating tension within institutions (P. Scott, 2014). Government initiatives, (e.g. removing the cap on student numbers (HEFCE, 2014), and opening the market to new providers³²(Hubble et al., 2016)), has created An environment which centres on students as consumers putting choice in their hands (Bunce et al., 2017; Jabbar et al., 2018; Komljenovic et al., 2018; Raaper, 2019). Controlling one's own needs is core to the neoliberal philosophy (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020). However, consumerisation in HE is polarising, with not all scholars agreeing that this is for the best (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020). Emery, Kramer, and Tian (2001) argued strongly that education is a sector where consumerisation should not exist as academic values risk being lost, a position supported by both Holbrook (2005) and Clayson & Haley (2005). However, while the on-going debate surrounding the

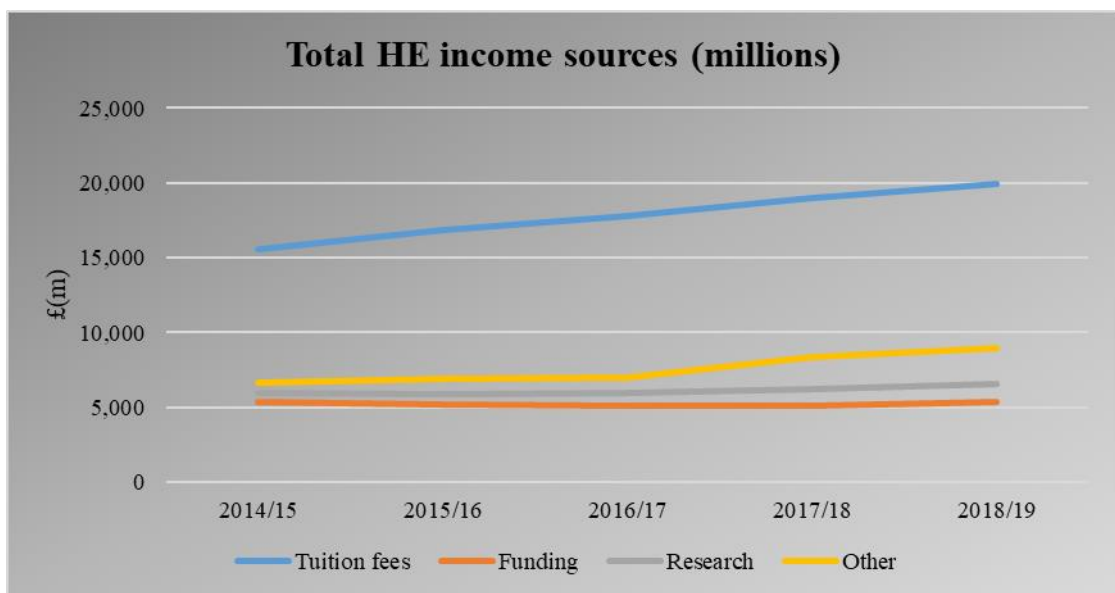
³¹ An organization that mixes elements, value systems and action logics (e.g., social impact and profit generation) of various sectors of society, i.e., the public sector, the private sector.

³² The Higher Education Act 2017 introduced reforms making it 'quicker and simpler for new providers to enter the market, with an expectation that greater competition may mean some providers will exit' (National Audit Office, 2017, p. 5).

quality of education delivery in this new market continues (Bendixen & Jacobsen, 2017; Committee Public Accounts, 2018; Kagan & Diamond, 2019; National Audit Office, 2017), little doubt remains that marketisation has increased the pressures on HE finances. As tuition fees represent over fifty percent of HEIs income (HESA, 2022), the financial health of HE is dependent on attracting increasing numbers of undergraduates. A problem made more acute as cost increases have outstripped revenue growth. Financial sustainability has become the biggest existential threat faced by HE.

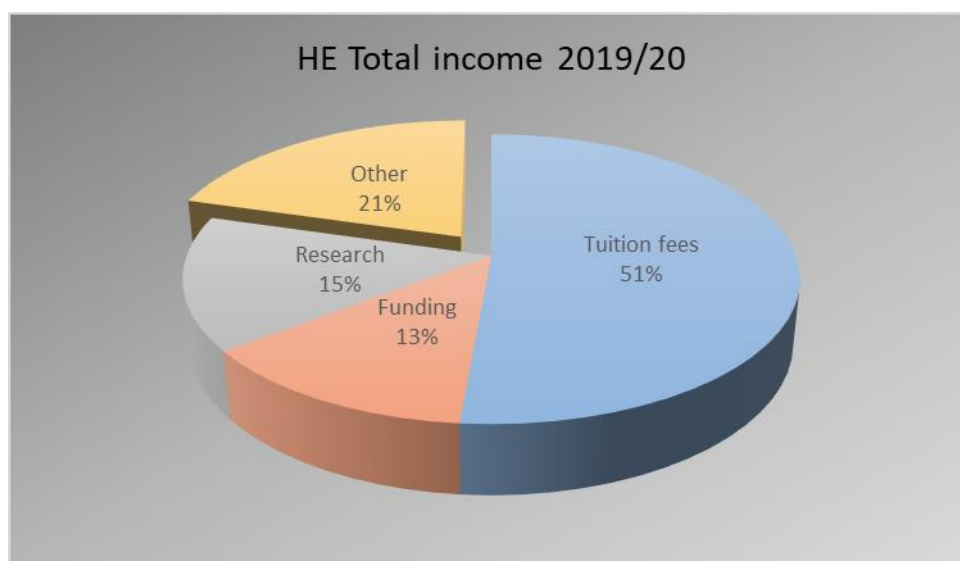
The unprecedented levels of uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 crisis have greatly exacerbated the scale of this challenge (Bolton & Hubble, 2021; Universities UK, 2020). The overall financial position of HEIs has deteriorated in recent years. In 2018 Universities UK (2018) revealed that current financial models for HE were struggling to generate the funding levels required, while Inman (2018) highlighted the plight of HEIs struggling to repay billions in private loans. To combat this, HEIs are successfully diversifying to maximise income generation (Bolton & Hubble, 2021; Paddick, 2017). Figure 17. (HESA, 2022) shows growth in both fee income, and other income sources, from commercial activity, while Figure 17 shows income from government funding and traditional research grants has flatlined.

Figure 17 HE income by source of funding.



Source – What is the income of HE providers? (HESA, 2022).

Figure 18 Total 2019/20 income of HEIs by source of funding.



Source – What is the income of HE providers? (HESA, 2022).

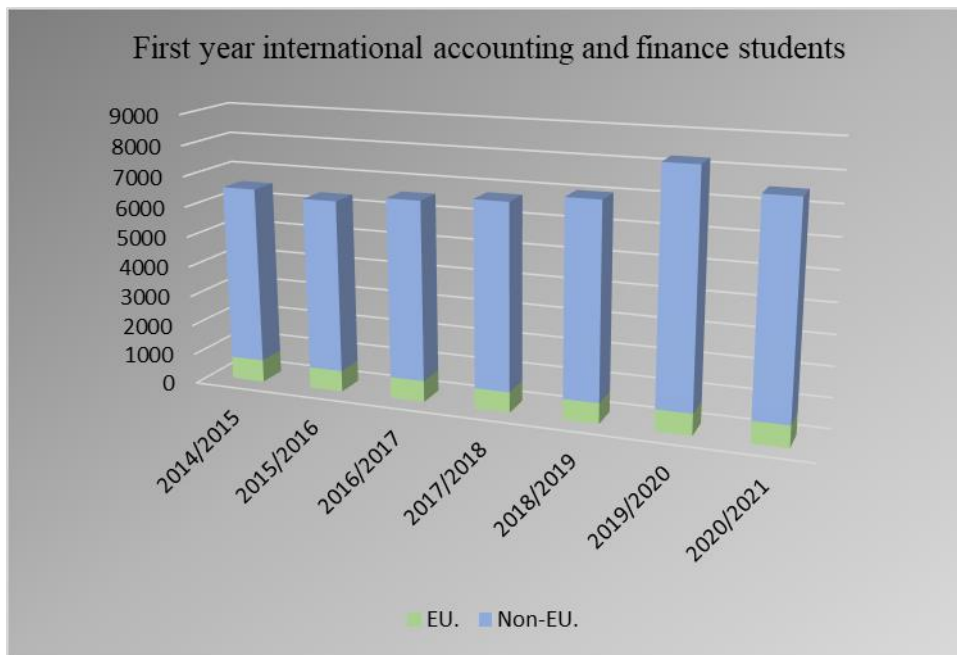
Despite revenues rising post the adoption of neoliberal principles, resistance to neoliberalism within academia remains strong and widespread (Brink & Stoel, 2019; de Villiers, 2019; Lucas, 2014). The tension between academic logics and business logics has increased (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020; Grossi et al., 2020; K.-M. Kallio et al., 2017; Lucas, 2014). Academic logics behave according to a set of criteria drawn from science (Merton, 1972) that are intended to support legitimate activities (research and teaching) (Fini & Toschi, 2016). Academic logics dictate that a significant amount of any intellectual capital generated is readily available, at no cost, to the broader community (Sauermann & Stephan, 2013). Applying academic logics result in rewards coming from peer recognition, status in the academic community, or the pleasure gained from working within one's own interests (Grossi et al., 2020; Guarini et al., 2020; Sutton & Brown, 2016). This is in stark contrast to business logics, seeking to maximise returns by diversifying income streams and actively commercialising the intellectual capital arising from research (Almeida et al., 2016; del Cerro Santamaría, 2020; Sauermann & Stephan, 2013).

Certain scholars have criticised marketisation in accounting education as it risks lowering academic performance (Bunce et al., 2017), engenders a tactical approach towards learning (Raaper, 2019), and is at odds with developing critical thinking and intellectual capability (Brink & Stoel, 2019; Chaffer & Webb, 2017; de Villiers, 2019; Freeman & Wells, 2015). Nonetheless, the marketisation of accounting education continues apace, to a point where accounting is increasingly viewed as a cash cow (Hogan, Charles, & Kortt, 2021; Howcroft, 2017; M. Parker, 2018). Accounting faculty have focussed on recruiting international students as a rich source of cash flow (Lomer, Papatsiba, & Naidoo, 2018), being able to charge international students substantial fee premiums (Bolton &

Hubble, 2021; Manning, 2018). In recent years, UK student numbers have remained static with growth driven by international students (Bolton & Hubble, 2021).

Accountancy departments, particularly, have leveraged international student fees, with a steadily increase in enrolments. However, due to Brexit and global diplomatic tensions these enrolments appear to be at risk. (HESA, 2022).

Figure 19 First year international accounting and finance students.

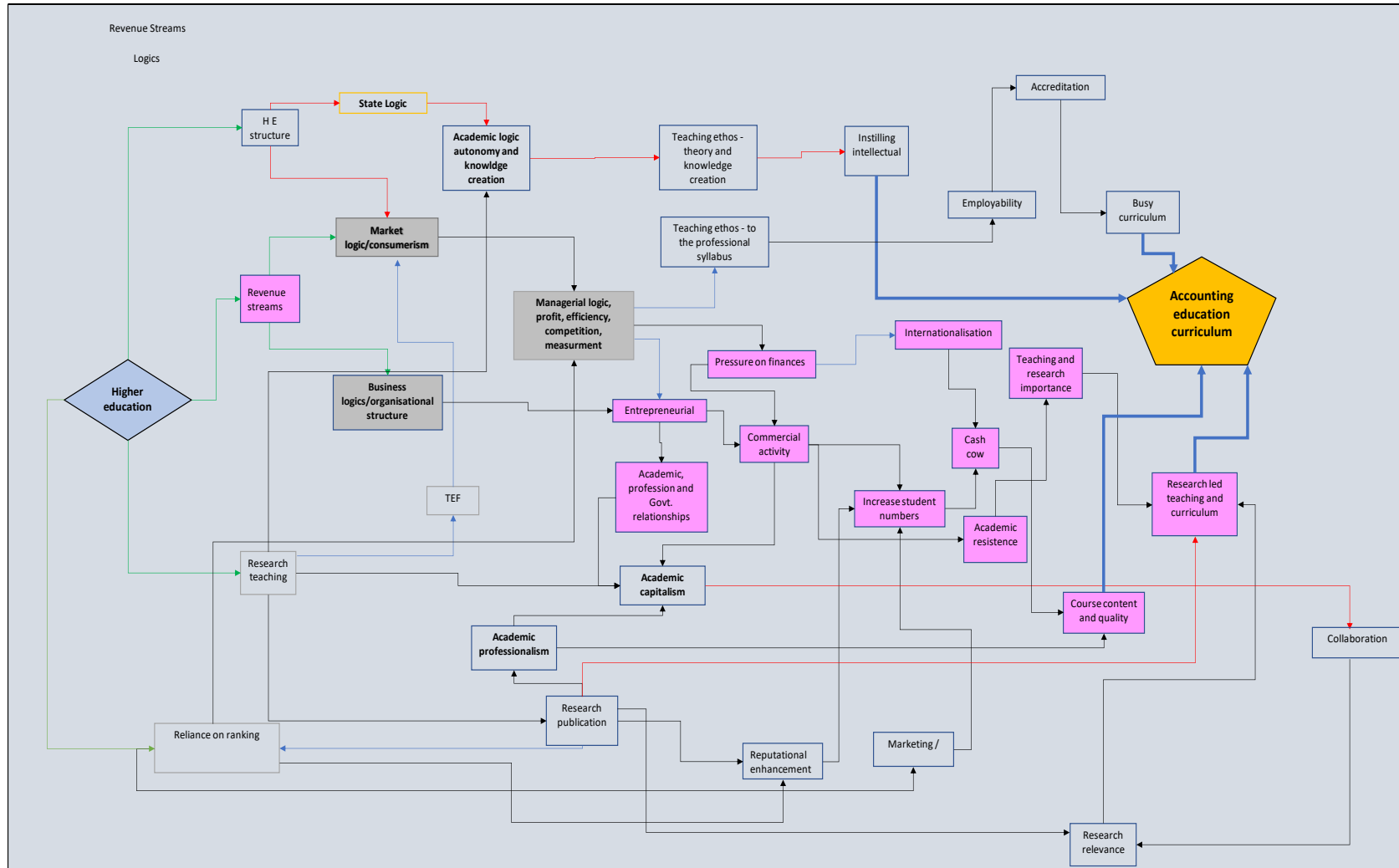


Source – What is the income of HE providers? (HESA, 2022)

While revenues have increased, several challenges have emerged. Many HEIs risk milking international students without investing in their success. Some academics (Cantwell, 2015; Duff & Marriott, 2012; Patel, Millanta, & Tweedie, 2016) question the pedagogic value of courses on offer. These academics believe that HEIs must innovate to balance recruitment with reinvestment in student experiences and outcomes. The demand from international students for accounting courses has created challenges for accounting faculty. Internationalisation adds a further dimension around language and culture which creates its own educational challenges (Tharapos, O'Connell, Dellaportas, & Basioudis, 2019), requiring an amended pedagogic approach. Teaching becomes less verbally challenging, utilising more quantitative approaches, and adopting more didactic methods (Haigh, 2018), lessening the academic discipline of the subject (Humphrey & Gendron, 2015). Finally, it has increased staff-student ratios, often only constrained by lecture theatre capacity (Hopper, 2013; Patel et al., 2016). But staff-student ratios influence student perceptions of the quality of teaching and learning, the lower the ratio, the higher the satisfaction (Lenton, 2015).

The need for diversified revenue streams and increased fee income has created intense competition amongst institutions and faculty, where some will win and some will lose (Cantwell & Taylor, 2013). The influence of neoliberal ideology and pressure on HEIs finances, is shifting HE towards a more commercial, market led approach. Driven by market and business logics, HE is becoming more managerial, competitive, and profit (revenue) focussed. Entrepreneurship, academic capitalism, and commercial activity are increasingly important to HEIs. Drives to increase fee income has led accounting faculty to aggressively target international students and resulted in accounting degrees becoming cash cows but creating issues around course quality (see Figure 20). Simultaneously, significant academic resistance to commercialisation remains. This intensifies the debate around research/teaching importance. In striving to maximise revenue, accounting faculty risk losing sight of the importance of quality teaching. The impact of the need to generate income on the accounting curriculum is illustrated in Figure 20.

Figure 20 Logics and revenue generation.



The research teaching nexus.

Research teaching relationship – the literature.

In academia, few beliefs are held more stridently than the idea that teaching and research are mutually beneficial bedfellows (Cadez et al., 2017; Galbraith & Merrill, 2012). Yet the positive synergies available through the research teaching nexus are often overlooked by HEIs and the PABs. The relationship between research and teaching is complex, based upon the interaction between academic beliefs around learning and teaching, alongside an understanding concerning the nature of knowledge (A. Douglas, 2013), and is subject to intense debate in the literature. While some studies find that accounting research is perceived to aid student learning (R. Baker & Wick, 2019; Tucker & Scully, 2020), a plethora of empirical evidence offers little support for the existence of such a positive relationship between research and teaching performance (Ancelin-Bourguignon, 2019; Cadez et al., 2017; Duff & Marriott, 2017; M. Hughes, 2005; Tight, 2016). Indeed, Duff and Marriot (2017) cite issues around the relevance of research to the curriculum, the differing attributes required by a teacher or researcher, the importance of developing professional rather than research skills, and the institutional focus on research at the expense of teaching, as evidence that this research teaching link is tenuous at best.

The distinction (and balance) between teaching and research in HE is often misrepresented and misunderstood. Prevailing neoliberal thinking means that HEIs are now required to be efficient organisations, subject to scrutiny through various forms of monitoring and control (Ngoye et al., 2019; Pietilä & Pinheiro, 2020). As hybrid organisations, modern universities need to accommodate external pressures and expectations (e.g., governmental, societal, commercial) creating difficult trade-offs for institutions and tensions within the organisations (Grossi et al., 2020; K.-M. Kallio et al., 2017). HEIs need to constantly balance their three core functions, academic work, defined as the operating values and norms applied in carrying out research, teaching, and third-mission activities (Guarini et al., 2020). This balance is difficult as each of these functions is underpinned by differing academic logics. Each function is seen as discrete, as opposed to unitary, and as competitive instead of complimentary (Guarini et al., 2020), creating several problems.

Firstly, financially, teaching is the core function of nearly all HEIs, including most research-intensive universities, as governmental support has remained flat and tuition fee income has continued to increase (Figure 17) (Bolton & Hubble, 2021; HESA, 2019; Universities UK, 2017). However, partly as a result of league tables, but principally in the belief that knowledge creation is their strategic mission (Cadez et al., 2017; Gonzales & Núñez, 2014; Rego, Pinho, Pedrosa, & Cunha, 2009), many HEIs use their research to position themselves strategically (R. Baker & Wick, 2019; Cadez et al.,

2017). HEIs view quality research as a hallmark of status and vital for achieving government funding, research grants, and improving rankings in league tables (Cadez et al., 2017; A. Douglas, 2013; L. Parker, 2012a; Safon, 2019). This pre-eminence of research diverts resources away from teaching, the core income generator (Gunn, 2018), viewed by some as an anomalous strategy.

Researchers accepting that teaching is the primary function, e.g., Hooper (2013), R. Baker and Wick (2019), Ancelin-Bourguignon (2019), and Berbegal-Mirabent, Mas-Machuca and Marimon (2018), argue that curriculum should incorporate real world research to allow students to make more proactive enquiry. This approach, they argue, produces more beneficial outcomes than passive, teacher-led, content-focused teaching (R. Baker & Wick, 2019; Brew & Mantai, 2017; Mathieson, 2019). However, integration of research into teaching is not straight-forward (Brew & Mantai, 2017) and progress is slow, with little consideration given to how research may be integrated into the curriculum (R. Baker & Wick, 2019).

Secondly, academic professionalism is often viewed through the lens of research publication, where career progression is determined by the amount of papers published in 'quality' journals (Cadez et al., 2017). However, as previously discussed, Sangster (2013) argues that this approach leads to research in niche fields, such as accounting education, being omitted from mainstream journals as it is deemed too specialised. Journals willing to publish this research are often valued less highly by influential editors and weighted less favourably by the Research Excellence Framework (REF) (Khosa, Burch, Ozdil, & Wilkin, 2020; Tharapos & Marriott, 2020). The growing expectation for research output is also often at the expense of creativity and innovation in teaching and curriculum development (Gunn, 2018; McCune, 2021).

Thirdly, anecdotal evidence suggests that teaching activities are being undervalued as HE, influenced by the concepts of NPM, prioritises research and income generation over innovative teaching (Arvaja, 2018; Cashmore, Cane, & Cane, 2013; McCune, 2021). This is slowly changing, with many HEIs recognising the need to better reward quality teaching (Cashmore et al., 2013; McCune, 2021). Notwithstanding, the pressure on faculty to prioritise research and knowledge creation over teaching is still significant (Arvaja, 2018; McCune, 2021; van Lankveld, Schoonenboom, Volman, Croiset, & Beishuizen, 2017), continuing to distract from quality teaching and curriculum development (Gunn, 2018; McCune, 2021).

The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF).

Recognising this risk to teaching quality, the UK Government felt compelled to intervene (Hubble et al., 2016) and published the TEF. TEF's aim is to assess excellence in teaching in HEIs, to discover how HEIs ensure the best possible outcomes for students in terms of graduate-level employment or further study. The TEF forms one part of a continuing and contentious series of reforms in HE that is defended as follows:

Well-informed students driving teaching excellence' and 'put[ting] excellent teaching back at the heart of every student's university experience.
(BIS, 2011, p. 25).

Although the teaching excellence concept is laudable, the concept has been left largely undefined (Charles, 2018). By nature, teaching excellence is context bound, meaning different things to different people, and creating multiple perspectives of what teaching excellence is (Wood & Su, 2017). The TEF is a blunt evaluation tool, designed to provide some objective measure of the 'market' to allow students to make informed choices (DfE, 2017). It is a truism that when something is measured it becomes important, e.g., the effects the TEF has on the behaviour of both HEIs and academics (Gunn, 2018). However, many academics remain sceptical that the TEF will meet its teaching quality objectives as fundamentally, the TEF does not directly evaluate quality teaching (Charles, 2018).

Academics cite further issues with the TEF, including metric driven evaluation methods, obstruction of pedagogical innovation and hindering initiatives aimed at enhancing teaching excellence (J. Cohen & Robinson, 2018; Frankham, 2017; Neary, 2016) while also being an unreliable measure of the quality of teaching and learning. Neary (2016) contends that the primary purpose of the TEF is not teaching quality but, to fashion a market differential to justify higher fees and open HE to new providers. Finally, others question the TEF focus on employability, claiming paradoxically, that on the evidence of their research, such a focus fails to produce graduates with the attributes most valued by employers (Frankham, 2017; Gunn, 2018).

Summarising, critics of TEF assert that, as it establishes no link between individual teaching accomplishment and institutional assessment, it cannot be a direct driver of teaching quality. Further, some have argued that being metric driven the TEF hinders pedagogic development and curriculum change. On the other hand, the TEF has stimulated public interest in how HEIs perform and fuelled the desire for performance information (Hazelkorn, 2015). Certainly, the TEF provides a focus on teaching and the student experience which offers HEIs the opportunity to invest in learning and

teaching. Such investment would lead to broadening beyond the dominant reach of research excellence, a criticism of the university approach discussed earlier.

The professional identity of an academic.

Investing in teaching and learning amid the rise of NPM with its' associate 'new managerialism' is challenging (McCune, 2021; Tomlinson, 2017; van Lankveld et al., 2017; Warren, 2017). Managerialism in HE, combined with the increased marketisation of delivery, has considerable influence on the professional identity of academics (Arvaja, 2018; Billot, 2010). NPM has corporatised, bureaucratised, and commercialised the sector, fractured the labour market, increased administration and competition, and reduced autonomy (Arvaja, 2018; Broucker, De Wit, & Verhoeven, 2018; Churchman & King, 2009; van Lankveld et al., 2017). Teaching is measured by quantitative metrics (Gunn, 2018). External measurements and rewards are valued more highly than the satisfaction of delivering quality teaching (McCune, 2021).

The focus on research over teaching leads academics to experience tensions between their professional (managerial) and personal (scholarly) roles (Billot, 2010; McCune, 2021; van Lankveld et al., 2017). Academics now work in more commercialised and managerial organisations, re-shaping academic professionalism (career pathways, reward systems, tenure) (Arvaja, 2018; Billot, 2010; Churchman & King, 2009; Clarke et al., 2013; McCune, 2021). Traditionally, subject based cultures were the primary source of academic identity, defining what was to be done, how success was evaluated, processes for publication, professional interaction, and status (Clarke et al., 2013). Latterly, neoliberal thinking and NPM has driven HE reforms, institutional innovations, and a revised focus, resulting in fundamental changes to academic roles (Broucker et al., 2018; McNaughton & Billot, 2016; Smith, 2017). NPM incentivises academics based on extrinsic rewards (e.g., tenure, promotion, merit pay, and special privileges) rather than the delivery of quality teaching and curriculum development (Korhonen & Törmä, 2016; McCune, 2021).

Curriculum development is often viewed as a teaching-related activity. This creates conflict for individual academics in managing their teaching and research responsibilities (Mathieson, 2019). Specifically, managing limited resources (time and energy) becomes critical, deciding how and where to allocate time in order to generate beneficial returns in the academic world (Annala et al., 2022). Applying Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of field³³ and capital (cultural, economic or social), researchers and teachers can be viewed as participants in a game, manoeuvring around one another to maximise their own academic freedom to make their work more valuable (publication, recognition, promotion, etc.) through the generation of capital (Annala et al., 2022; Wilkinson, 2010). Each

³³ field is a network of objective relations between positions occupied by agents or institutions.

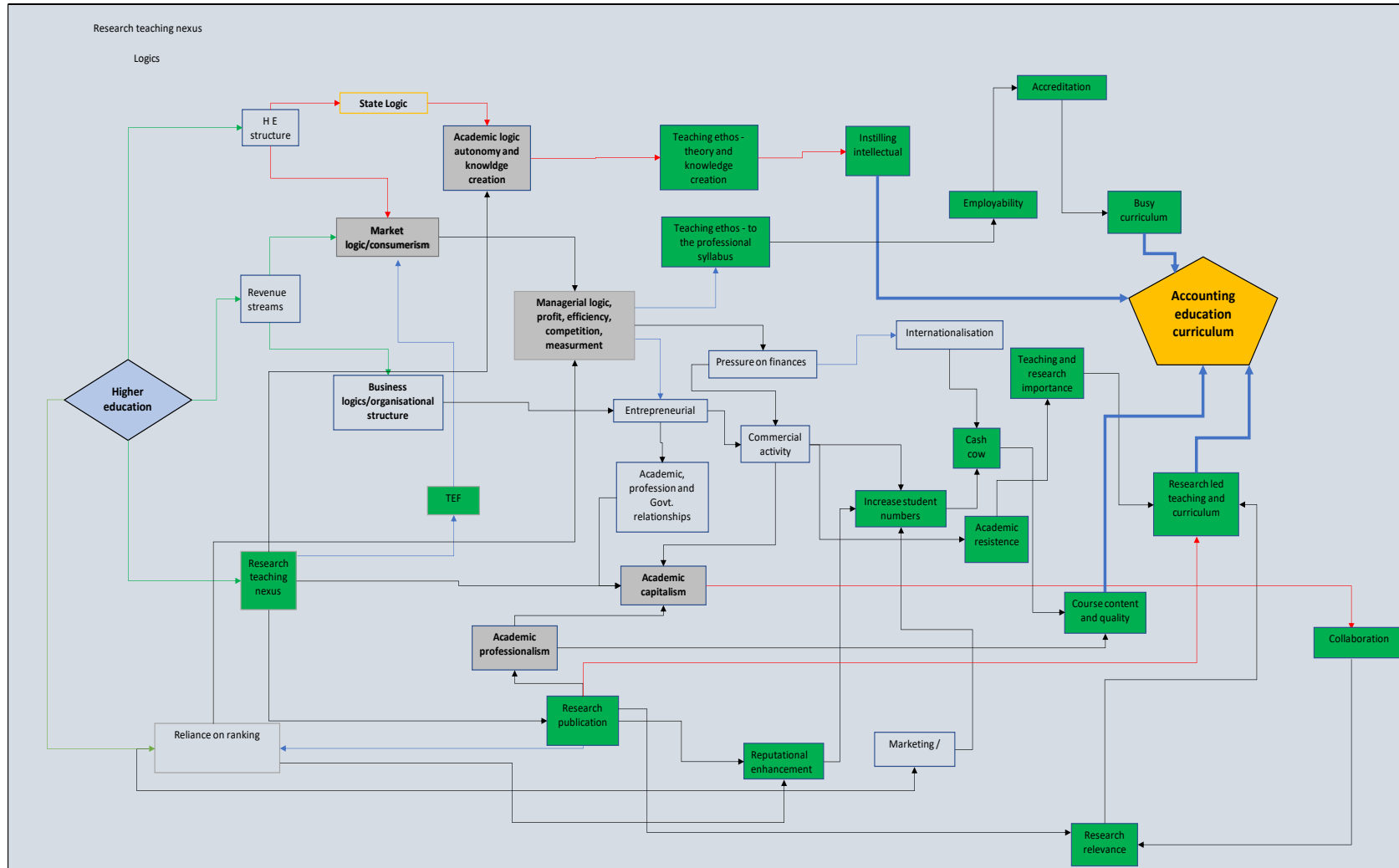
participant expects that such activity will be rewarded in, what Blackmore and Kandiko (2011) coined, the 'prestige economy' and which Bourdieu (2020) argued was the most important form of capital (prestige and renown). This raises the question of whether investment in curriculum development (time and effort) adds any form of valuable capital (Annala et al., 2022).

In their study, Annala et al. found academics focus less on curriculum development as it carries less prestige than research activities. To counter this, the research teaching nexus needs to be enriched, critical for creating the processes for, and engagement in, curriculum development (Annala et al., 2022; Brew, 2012; McCune, 2021). Institutions need to develop approaches to learning, teaching, and intellectual capital that utilise the synergies between research and teaching, not drive them apart (McCune, 2021). Curriculum development would benefit from a more holistic approach, encompassing not only teaching but also research related activity, and a defined and robust process of curriculum leadership (Arvaja, 2018).

Summarising, neoliberalism and NPM have changed the ethos of many HEIs, altered the professional identity of academics, and affected the motivation of teaching-focussed academics. As HE moves towards replicating the actions, values, and characteristics of the free market (Gonzales et al., 2014; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), implementing commercially based reward structures which encourage the pre-eminence of research (Annala et al., 2022; Lubbe, 2015; McCune, 2021; Tight, 2016), collaboration on curriculum development becomes less likely. Academics who identify as teaching focussed feel uneasy and less well supported, particularly in research intensive universities (McCune, 2021). Such teaching focussed academics, those most likely to lead on curriculum development, are increasingly pressured to prioritise research and knowledge exchange to the detriment of teaching and curriculum development (van Lankveld et al., 2017).

Curriculum development would benefit from a more holistic approach, but while the rewards from research activities (prestige) outweigh those from teaching, academics will focus on research and less on curriculum development. To address this, institutions need to use the synergies which exist between research and teaching, not drive them apart. Finally, the risks to teaching quality of the primacy of research led to the introduction of the TEF, creating an element of managerialism and measurement into HE. Under the TEF, value for money and the student experience are seen as paramount. For accounting faculty this means increased focus on employability and teaching to the professional syllabi, bringing with it problems surrounding accreditation, exemptions, and busy curriculum, refer to Figure 21.

Figure 21 The impact of logics on the research teaching nexus.



Drive for student numbers - Reliance on rankings and accreditation.

Within the neoliberal context, the logic of measuring, evaluating, and competing has become normalised and accepted. University rankings have become an integral part and powerful influence in the HE landscape and are viewed as a legitimate way of comparing the quality of HEIs (Hazelkorn, 2017; Safon, 2019). While originally viewed as victims of this process, universities now routinely apply neoliberal values, goals, and processes to their operations (H. Fraser, 2016; Maisuria & Cole, 2017). As early as 2014 Gonzales et al. (2014, p. 1098) wrote, universities engage ‘in market-like behaviours at unprecedented levels and from an offensive rather than defensive position.’ The result has been to increase competition amongst HEIs to attract undergraduates, firstly to their institution and secondly to specific courses (Kopljenovic et al., 2018; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Further, it has created a transactional market within HE where some institutions win, and some lose (Cantwell & Taylor, 2013) and created a ranking system to structure HE hierarchically (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014).

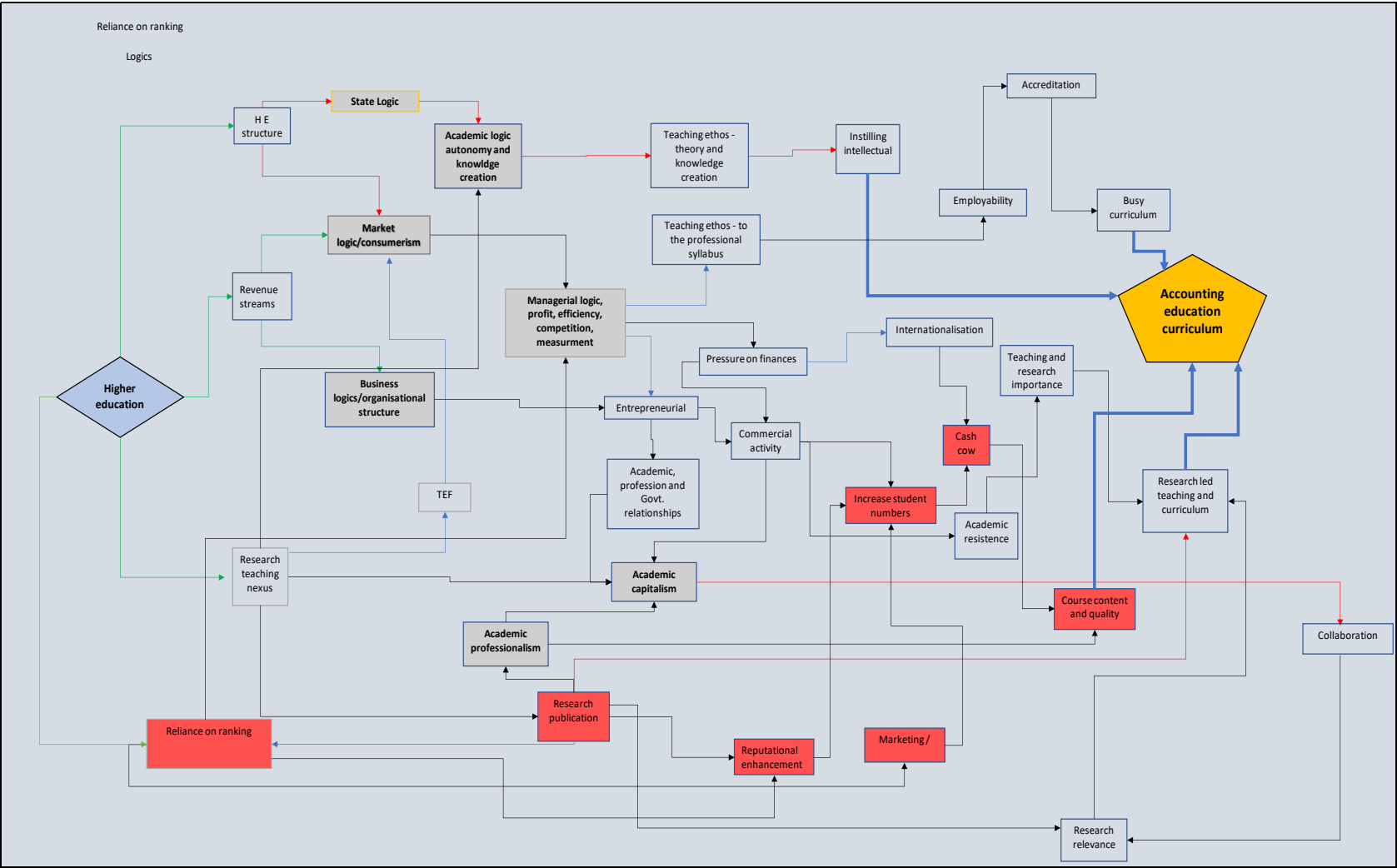
Although rankings fail to define educational quality clearly (Hazelkorn, 2015; Turnbull, 2018), they do assign an institution a position based on quantifiable measurements. Due to their methodological rigour, rankings have gained legitimacy, becoming fundamental to comparing the quality of HEIs. While adopting the ranking philosophy, HEIs assume contradictory positions on their value – publicly decrying such rankings while, in private, developing policies and practices to positively improve their position in these rankings (Hazelkorn, 2017). Activities include; actively branding and promoting themselves to prospective students, using information from the National Student Survey (NSS), introducing various add on services for students, and other similar initiatives (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). By so doing, HEIs attempt to gain higher ranking positions believing this will increase admissions, aid faculty recruitment, and enhance reputation. This has created a competitive environment where HEIs are progressively competing against one another for a limited pool of talent (Brankovic, 2018; Hazelkorn, 2017; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020; Zapp, Jungblut, & Ramirez, 2021).

Accounting faculties use university league table rankings as a key recruitment tool (Brown, 2014; Ellington & Williams, 2017; Hazelkorn, 2017). Yet both the government and several academics question the value of rankings, arguing that ranking leads to grade inflation, a dilution of academic rigour (Bloxham, 2019; Hopper, 2013; Office for students, 2018), offer little information on the quality of teaching (Turnbull, 2018), or are merely marketing tools for HEIs (Christie, 2017). Despite such criticisms, research shows that where faculty face intense competition to recruit students, such as accounting, rankings have a greater importance for recruitment strategies (Gibbons et al., 2015).

Overall, the ranking regime, underpinned by managerial logics, impacts academic decision-making as it promotes individualism, standardisation, commodification, and homogenisation (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014; Hazelkorn, 2017). Gonzales and Nunez (2014) argued ranking pits individuals and institutions against one another, particularly around publication volume and quality. When individual efforts are emphasised, competition and individualism increase, and the sense of community among faculty members is diminished. Accordingly, accounting academics wanting to make meaningful curriculum change are further hamstrung by the reliance on rankings, particularly the weighting applied to research quality.

In summary, although there is healthy scepticism concerning the value of rankings, they do influence institutional behaviour. Although publicly ambivalent to rankings, HEIs use them to gain reputational enhancement and as a marketing tool in student recruitment. For accounting faculty, rankings play a significant role in student recruitment within a competitive market. However, accounting is increasingly commoditised, viewed as a cash cow, which has impacted on the quality and content of the courses on offer. Cohort sizes and accreditation issues leave little time and flexibility to build additional needed content into the curriculum. The influence that rankings have on the ability to amend the curriculum is illustrated in Figure 22.

Figure 22 Logics and rankings.



3.3.4.4 Conclusion, curriculum change the obstacles.

Although many academics recognise the need for accounting curriculum change to improve the relevance of an accounting education, accounting faculty struggle to make the necessary changes. Academics raising issues surrounding accounting curriculum change appear to have little voice, yet the obstacles to change are significant. The influence the PABs exercise over the accounting curriculum, the issues pertaining to meaningful collaboration, and the challenges intrinsic to the HE environment have each been investigated, revealing a complex web of inter-connected issues, driven by multiple logics, hindering the ability of accounting educators to make successful curriculum change.

The PABs are duty bound to maintain their professional status and ensure that prospective student members have the necessary skills and attributes to succeed. Through imposing accreditation and exemption requirements on accounting faculty, a crowded curriculum is created. Simultaneously, the PABs have redesigned their syllabi and training programmes and broadened the pool of potential student members. Both developments are to the detriment of an undergraduate accounting education.

Many academics appeal to the PABs and HE collaborate to refocus an accounting education. However, the PABs are reluctant to engage seeing little benefit accruing from collaboration. If accounting education research was viewed as more relevant, timely, and understandable to accountants, collaboration may improve. However, accounting academics see research in terms of reputational enhancement, not usefulness to the accounting profession. These differing views makes collaboration around curriculum development less likely.

The 21st century has witnessed HEIs adopting neoliberal, more market-based approaches. The structure of HE creates difficulties for making accounting curriculum change. HE is broadly divided into two groups, the research led, and the teaching led universities. Generally, research led universities are underpinned by state logics and focus on knowledge creation. In contrast, the teaching led universities are underpinned by market logics. These institutions are more profit focussed and tend to teach to the professional curriculum, leading to busy curricula and inflexibility for change.

However, all HEIs face strong financial pressures with financial models struggling to cope. Individual HEIs seek to increase fee income, resulting in intense competition. The adoption of neoliberal principles has resulted in the adoption of a more business and market led approach. Strategies to increase fee income have commoditised accounting education, turning it into a cash cow impacting the quality and content of accounting degrees. While increasing cohort sizes and accreditation requirements leave little scope to add innovative content to the curriculum.

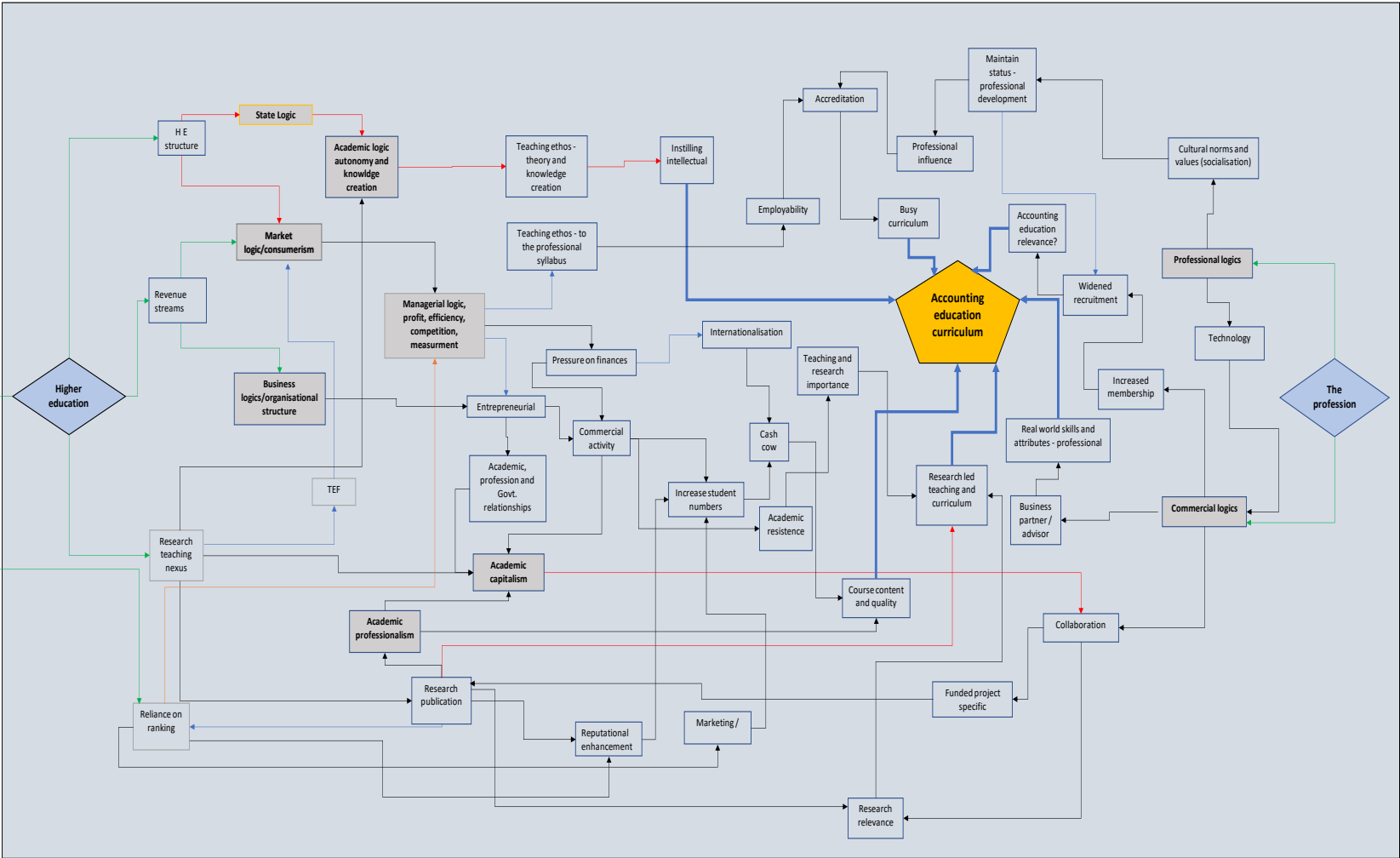
Quality teaching is the primary driver of increased income (Gunn, 2018). However, many HEIs place great emphasis on their research programmes. Incorporating this research into already busy curricula is difficult with few benefits to accounting curriculum design materialising. Further, the primacy of research causes academics identifying as teaching focussed to feel undervalued and unsupported. Curriculum development would benefit from a more holistic approach, but while the rewards from research activities (prestige) outweigh those from teaching, academics will concentrate their limited resources on research with less time for curriculum development.

This imbalance in the relationship between research and teaching poses a risk to teaching quality and led to the creation of the TEF with its associated measurement processes. Value for money and the student experience are now paramount. For accounting this has resulted in a renewed focus on student employability and a focus on teaching to the professional examinations.

Finally, university rankings have become an integral part and powerful influence within HE. In a competitive environment where HEIs vie with one another to attract undergraduates, rankings have significant influence (Komljenovic et al., 2018). Faculty, such as accounting, facing increasing competition to recruit undergraduates place greater reliance and importance on rankings as a key recruitment tool (Gibbons et al., 2015). Although healthy scepticism exists, ranking regimes serve to increase the importance of accreditation, leaving less flexibility to build added content into the accounting curriculum.

Figure 23 demonstrates the inter-connectivity between state, market, academic, business, managerial, professionalism, and academic capitalism logics. The potential that each logics has to hinder curriculum change is illustrated. This already complex picture is completed by adding the impact of the PABs professional and commercial logics on the academic accounting curriculum.

Figure 23 Logics map. The effects of the logics of both the PABs and HE on the accounting curriculum.



3.4 Student motivation.

The final section focusses on what motivates an individual to study a course at university. In implementing curriculum change, care needs to be taken to ensure that such change is beneficial (Lawson et al., 2017). The motivation of potential accounting undergraduates needs to be considered. The impact of sector marketisation and accompanying increase in competition on student choice is explored (Komljenovic et al., 2018). This includes discussion of motivational strategies, value for money, and employability issues.

3.4.1 Introduction.

This section begins with a brief examination of the motivational process, focussing on what motivates a student to study a particular course at university. This section explores the effect that active student engagement has on learning outcomes. It addresses the emerging significance of the concepts of value for money and employability as key student motivators. From an accounting education prospective, value for money is examined to understand how accounting faculty can demonstrate the worth of an accounting education. The significance of increased focus on employability outcomes as a key motivator is considered. The value of work-based learning to curriculum enhancement is discussed. Finally, challenges for an accounting education to enhance employability are explored.

3.4.2 Motivation.

At its most basic, motivation is an internal process, the essence of which is galvanised and determined goal seeking conduct (Reeve, 2018). Within the motivational process, environmental and social factors play a significant role in terms of extrinsic motivation. More germane to this study is the motivation that comes from individual goals, values, and desires to experience specific emotions associated with identified end states (intrinsic motivation) (Reeve, 2018). Students choosing to enter HE do so with a formulated set of objectives. These will vary from individual to individual. Where HE identifies those goals and aspirations they can use that identification to motivate students to become active in their own learning (Leal, Miranda, & Carmo, 2013). Enhanced student engagement energises the teaching and learning process and directly correlates to an individual's academic performance and achievements (Leal et al., 2013; Senior et al., 2018). Logically therefore, strategies aimed at improving student motivation should produce better learning outcomes (for the student) and lead to an enhanced reputation for the institution (e.g., ranking position) (Senior et al., 2018) .

Osborne and B. Jones (2011) proposed a number of strategies for increasing student motivation. These include increasing student autonomy, demonstrating the usefulness of academic knowledge, supporting student success, initiating, and supporting students' interests, and fostering a sense of belonging to the group. These authors claim that these strategies produce better academic

performance. However, application of these strategies in accounting education is not straight forward. Firstly, the profession, itself, has an image problem (Caglio & Cameran, 2017). Convincing an individual to study accounting is complicated by the stereotypical images conveyed by the media, television, and cinema of an accountant as dry and staid, the traditional ‘bean-counter’ (Caglio & Cameran, 2017). While such images fail to encapsulate the importance of accounting as a discipline, they make the task of ‘selling’ an accounting education more difficult. A ‘sell’ made even harder by technology use within the profession which has helped open student membership to a wider, more diverse cohort of potential recruits. As course choices are increased and entry routes expanded (Bunce et al., 2017; Hubble et al., 2016; Raaper, 2019), study options seen as offering greater value for money will gain in popularity (Chaffer & Webb, 2017; Pincus et al., 2017). Even when the study of accounting is chosen, accounting faculty need to ensure that curriculum content satisfies the individual goals and desired outcomes of the student (Reeve, 2018). For accounting faculty this is not straight-forward as many accounting students’ goal is professional qualification, not an accounting degree per se. Their course choice is simply a means to an end, an end that can easily be fulfilled by studying many other subjects or choosing other entry methods (e.g., apprenticeship).

3.4.3 The concept of value for money as a motivating factor.

A Government 2003 White Paper (Education and Skills Committee, 2003) stated ‘*Student choice will increasingly work to drive up quality*’ (p. 30), identifying student choice as the key driver for improving teaching quality. Subsequently, the introduction of further measures including the introduction of tuition fees, progressive increases to the fees cap, market information through ranking tables, the TEF, and the establishment of The OfS accelerated the marketisation process. The notion of the students as ‘consumers’ seeking value for money was formed (Bunce et al., 2017; Hubble et al., 2016; Raaper, 2019).

Although some studies found that students, themselves, disagree with the ‘consumer’ concept (Brooks, Byford, & Sela, 2016; Raaper, 2020), from the HE perspective, this ‘consumer’ concept, is an increasingly widely held belief (Bunce et al., 2017; Komljenovic et al., 2018; Raaper, 2019). Indeed, Jabbar et.al.(2018) found in interviews with business school academics:

The academics perceived the introduction of tuition fees to have been the catalyst for students increasing demonstration of customer-like behaviour: viewing the education process as transactional, with the higher education providing a ‘paid for’ service.

(Jabbar et al., 2018, p. 1).

HE viewed as a paid for service required to deliver value for money has increased competition (Komljenovic et al., 2018; Office for Students, 2019; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Individual HEIs vie with similar institutions to attract prospective undergraduates, while, within each HEI, faculties or courses compete for prospective candidates (Jabbar et al., 2018). Prospective student engagement is

therefore key (Groccia, 2018) and is critical to the success of an institution or faculty (Senior et al., 2018). Research reveals a strong correlation between student participation in educationally purposive activities and positive outcomes of success and development (Groccia, 2018). Therefore understanding the motivation driving a student to engage with a course of study is fundamental to the delivery of quality teaching (Leal et al., 2013). Knowing what motivates students allows HEIs and academics to engage with the student and retain student motivation by providing stimulating and innovative content to deliver value for money.

To enhance engagement, the first motivational strategy proposed by Osborne and B. Jones (2011), is student autonomy. Student autonomy is the empowering of students to have some meaningful and relevant choice in what is studied and to be able to exercise some control over their learning (Groccia, 2018; Osborne & Jones, 2011; Senior et al., 2018). These scholars argue that where student autonomy is promoted, positive impacts on learning outcomes accrue, including greater perceived academic and social competence, greater creativity, and self-esteem (M. Evans & Boucher, 2015). Yet, fostering autonomy on accounting courses is constrained by the accreditation process. Maintaining accreditation results in an accounting curriculum being both regimented and overcrowded, limiting the scope for student choice (S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Kotb, Abdel-Kader, Allam, Halabi, & Franklin, 2019). The importance placed on accreditation needs to be reviewed if the accounting curriculum is to be 'freed' up to allow some student choice. Failure to do this risks the student becoming aware of the expanding routes to professional qualification and then selecting one which the student feels is more appropriate. Traditional accounting courses may be seen as offering less value for money and lose their attraction.

3.4.4 Employability as a motivator.

Accounting educators could mitigate the above, and add value to their offering, by demonstrating to students that what they are being taught is valuable for their future career choices (Osborne & Jones, 2011; Reeve, 2018). Successfully demonstrating the relevance of academic learning has a positive effect on students' motivation (Kauffman & Husman, 2004; Osborne & Jones, 2011). Accounting curriculum designers must select content that provides students with the knowledge needed to function effectively in their chosen work environment (Bowles et al., 2020). For some time, accounting educators have been called upon to produce work ready, employable graduates (Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Employability is the combination of abilities, learning, experiences, and personal characteristics that make an individual desirable to an employer (Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021). Some of these variables lie outside the scope of the education process, personality traits for example (Tan & Fawzi, 2017), and it is impossible for accounting faculty to teach all the skills demanded by employers (Al-Nimer & Mustafa, 2022; Rebele & St. Pierre, 2019). Nevertheless, much research into what makes a graduate employable and how universities can help students

enhance their employability has been published (Bowles et al., 2020; Christie, 2017; Frankham, 2017; Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Sin et al., 2019; Tan & Fawzi, 2017). HEIs have responded by attempting to marry their curricula to the skills demanded by employers. However, HEIs face significant challenges and the expectation gap persists (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021).

The 2019 publication of the 'value for money strategy - 2019 to 2021' report, (Office for Students, 2019) made clear the link between employability and value for money and stated that 'value for money' is 'in the eye of the beholder', namely students. This report challenged HE to increase its focus on graduate employability (Coffey et al., 2021; Sin et al., 2019). Simultaneously, students faced with growing instability in the labour market (e.g., COVID-19, Brexit, automation, and technology advances) increasingly view employability as a fundamental measure of value for money, and a prime motivator in choosing a course of study (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Jackson & Wilton, 2017).

Creating value for money and enhancing employability are challenges faced by many academic disciplines, but accounting education faces specific obstacles when addressing employability. From the student perspective it has long been accepted that career prospects, earnings, and other opportunities associated with working in accountancy or finance are attractive. However, the percentage of accounting graduates enrolling for student member is declining (Figure 10 page 46). Students and employers alike, increasingly regard degrees in disciplines such as mathematics, science, the arts and humanities as a solid grounding for a career as an accountant (Eames et al., 2018; Elijido-Ten & Kloot, 2015; FRC, 2020; Gray & Collison, 2002; Howcroft, 2017). The increasing registration of student members from other disciplines highlights the risks posed to an accounting education in not meeting the employability goal.

To counter this, accounting faculty often emphasises the number and quality of exemptions and accreditations they hold, believing that this will motivate student to enrol (Makhoul, 2019; Zhao & Ferran, 2016). However, little research has been published focusing on the value of accreditation on academic performance or course selection by undergraduates (Kafaji, 2020). Anecdotal evidence suggests that undergraduates do value accredited courses which are viewed as relevant, up-to-date, and through exemptions, reduce the time and effort required to qualify (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; Kafaji, 2020; van Zanten et al., 2012). While accreditation may motivate students to select a particular course, the downside is that accreditation results in accounting programmes with a technical focus to the detriment of developing other skills (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Ellington & Williams, 2017). Educators teach and examine technical capabilities rather than establishing students understanding of an issue (Bayerlein & Timpson, 2017; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019). Students may be tempted to rote-learn facts rather

than to comprehend the application of the theory being taught. As technology accelerates, focussing undergraduate education on technical skills, which accreditation and exemptions encourage, becomes less relevant (Bhimani, 2021; Mazzei, 2018). Paradoxically, this technical focus may reduce employability. Though third parties, the PABs control the teaching of technical skills and recognise that other disciplines or entry routes may produce more rounded recruits (Chaffer & Webb, 2017; FRC, 2020; Gray & Collison, 2002; Howcroft, 2017). Yet, while students view exemptions as a short cut to qualification and HE sees accreditation and exemptions as a key recruitment tool, there is little motivation to alter the status quo.

3.4.5 Work based learning.

Lately, the debate around employability has highlighted the value of internships, work placements, and Work Integrated Learning (WIL). The use of technology in the workplace and the intense competition of the global market have generated much debate about the future of work (Benhamou, 2020; Howard, 2019). Increasing technology use has raised questions concerning the effectiveness of undergraduate programmes to produce work ready graduates (Kapareliotis, Voutsina, & Patsiotis, 2019). Employers increasingly seek graduates who not only possess a degree, but also possess relevant work experience and can demonstrate valuable extra-curriculum activity (Mistry, 2021), a combination of skills highly valued by employers.

The Wilson Review (2012) building on a Department for Business Innovation and Skills, Higher Education White Paper (2011), stated the need for stronger links between HEIs and employers. The Review stressed the value and significance of work placements to student learning but noted that work placements were in decline. Research by Jones, Green, and Higson (2017) uncovered a strong correlation between undertaking of work placements and increased employability. They further claimed that completion of a placement could enhance final year degree classification. This, and other research, has demonstrated that work placements allow the student to apply what they have been taught in an academic setting to a real world situation (Kapareliotis et al., 2019), gaining an understanding of the working environment. Placements have also been shown to bolster technical abilities and enhance analytical skills. More importantly, placements create an understanding of the need for adaptability, curiosity, and creativity for a career in an evolving business environment (Kapareliotis et al., 2019). Several Australian studies support these findings (Dean, Perkiss, Simic Mistic, & Luzia, 2020; Eljido-Ten & Kloot, 2015; Stanley & Xu, 2019). Finally, there is evidence that graduates undertaking internships have improved academic and employment outcomes (H. Hughes, 2020). Interns get more graduate job offers, higher graduate salaries, and gain more satisfaction from their first role. Despite these benefits, HEI attempts to incorporate work placed learning into the accounting curriculum are often thwarted as priority is given to short-term degree outcomes (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019).

Finding sponsors for work-placement programmes is a further challenge. Accounting academics acknowledge the necessity of greater professional engagement in accounting curricula (Bui & Porter, 2010; Evans, Burritt, & Guthrie, 2011; R. Jones, 2014, 2017; Seow, Pan, & Koh, 2019; C. Sin, Tavares, & Amaral, 2019). These academics also recognise the need for more authentic learning experiences and see value in extending beyond traditional classroom modes of delivery (Jackson & Meek, 2021; Kapareliotis et al., 2019; Stanley & Xu, 2019). They understand that greater professional engagement coupled with authentic and innovative learning experiences will produce work-ready graduates. However, the PABs are reluctant to offer such work experience opportunities (Highflyers, 2022). Reasons cited for this lack of engagement with work-place learning include the lack of knowledge of software packages, not enough technical knowledge, and concerns over confidentiality (Jackson & Meek, 2021). There is also a tendency, particularly amongst the professional firms, to select only the highest achieving undergraduates for their intern programmes.

Simultaneously, from the accounting academic perspective, there are difficulties in engaging staff in the design and delivery of work placed learning given the competing pressures for quality teaching, research, and publishing (Tharapos & Marriott, 2020). The growing expectations for research output have left many accounting faculties without sufficient resources (time and energy) to engage in extra-curriculum development (Gunn, 2018; McCune, 2021). Without academic involvement in designing work placements, such placements cannot be relied upon to engender work readiness (Wilkerson, 2010). Wilkerson argues that without academic staff support, placements lack the attention to preparing the students (for the placement), are absent of reflective activities, and do not have robust feedback processes. Successful placement schemes usually require the support of various departments within an HEI, which given the typically large cohort on accounting degrees, may prove impractical (Jackson & Meek, 2021).

3.4.6 Conclusion, student motivation.

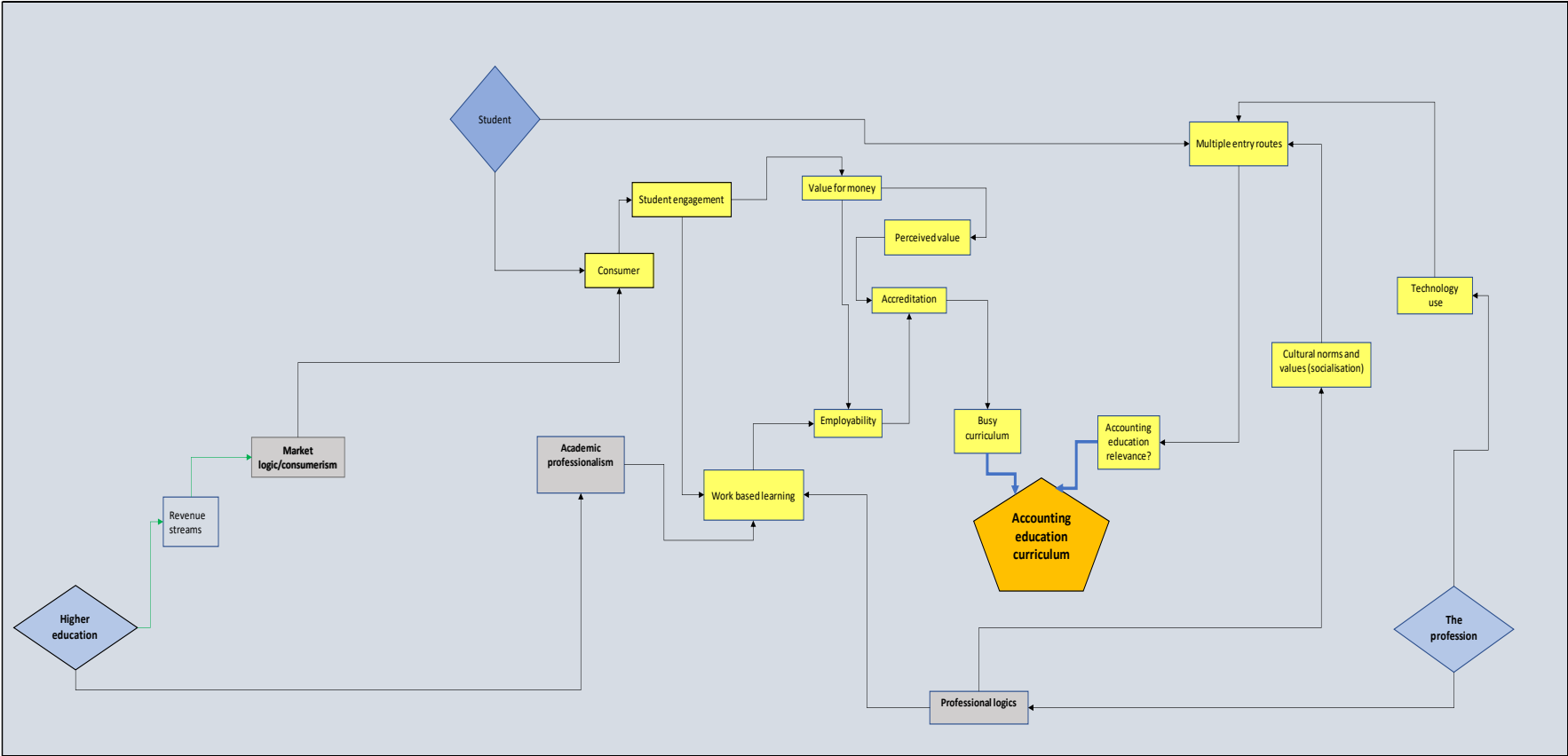
The continuing marketisation of HE has increased competition amongst HEIs to attract prospective students. For aspiring accountants, often the objective is to gain a professional qualification not a degree per se, the choice of course is simply a means to an end. This creates issues around student engagement, autonomy, value for money, and employability which accounting faculty must address.

Giving students autonomy to exercise some control over their learning improves learning outcomes, student engagement, and perceived value for money (Groccia, 2018). However, fostering student autonomy in accounting courses is difficult, busy curricula leave little scope to offer meaningful choice. Simultaneously, technology use within the profession continues to alter the skills and attributes required by future accountants. This has widened the range of subject disciplines considered by the profession and increased the importance of value for money.

Value for money is often viewed in terms of graduate employability with accounting faculty emphasising the number of exemptions they hold as a short cut to qualification. However, maintaining exemptions necessitates a technical focus on accounting courses, creates crowded curricula, and reduces the opportunity to introduce innovative content. As increasing technology use lessen the significance of technical skills, this approach may negatively impact accounting graduate employability.

Finally, accounting faculty acknowledge the importance of work-based learning to student motivation but face significant challenges in incorporating such learning into the current curriculum. Internal obstacles include workload, research responsibilities, crowded curricula and the complex administration often required by internship programmes. Faculty also face reluctance from the PABs to sponsor such placements offering only the highest achieving undergraduates.

Figure 24 The student as the 'consumer' and the accounting curriculum.



3.5 Conclusion.

This chapter examined the literature surrounding the changing role of the profession, focussing on the effect this has on the recruitment of student members. The chapter highlighted the growing gap between the PABs needs and the current accounting education on offer. The literature exploring the difficulties faced by HE in making curriculum change, in the context of logics (Suddaby, 2013; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) was reviewed. Finally, the motivation to study accounting at university was addressed and the difficulties of ‘selling’ an accounting education to prospective undergraduates discussed.

Recognising the threat posed by digital disruption to their core activities, the PABs have significantly refocussed their priorities and adopted more commercial strategies (Shore & Wright, 2018). Increasing technology use and machine learning capabilities inevitably impact the roles and functions of accountants. The PABs now seek to partner and advise business and management, a role requiring a less traditional skills set (Jordan & Samuels, 2020; Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021), skills which are difficult to find (Gould, 2021; Grant Thornton, 2021).

Future accountants need to understand, use, and communicate machine generated data. This has resulted in a redesigned professional accounting curriculum with the PABs leading on technology education (Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021). The increasing primacy of commercial logics has created a more client and advisory focus, requiring professional, rather than technical skills, opening student membership to more educational backgrounds.

The inherent risk of the above, has scholars arguing that accounting curriculum should become less technically reliant, focussing instead on developing intellectual capabilities, enabling proactive enquiry and fostering critique of accounting practice. Few research papers, however, dwell on the obstacles faced in initiating such reforms (Asonitou, 2021; Cooper, 2017; Pegg, 2013). Obstacles include the influence of the PABs over accounting education, the lack of engagement between the PABs and academia, and the institutional constraints of the HE environment.

The PABs influence over the academic curriculum stems from a duty to maintain their professional status. Therefore, the PABs impose certain requirements on accounting faculty creating a busy and crowded curriculum. Concurrently, the inclusion of digitalisation, work-based case study, and simulation in the professional curriculum has made the accreditation process even more fluid and onerous.

To lessen this influence accounting scholars appeal for collaboration, highlighting benefits as better-quality teaching, innovation, and rigour in curriculum design. However, the PABs see little reward in collaboration and fund only research offering commercial benefit. If accounting research focussed

on subjects of mutual interest, was timelier, and presented the research benefits clearly to a professional audience collaboration may improve.

Within HE, the adoption of a neoliberal, market-based approach, has made the sector more complex. Multiple logics now impact upon HE resulting in tensions that hinder accounting curriculum development. Firstly, conflicting logics, state or market logics, determine the teaching ethos of an institution and the importance the institution places on exemptions. State logics led institutions attach less significance to exemptions. In contrast, exemptions are critically important to market logics led institutions compelling such institutions to teach to the professional syllabi. Here, incorporating innovative content into an already busy curriculum is increasingly difficult.

However, all HEIs are under financial pressure, seeking to diversify their revenue streams and increase tuition fee income. Neoliberal ideology has resulted in a more commercial, business, and market led approach to HE, creating an environment which is 'win/lose.' For accounting faculty, increasing fee income has resulted in the commodification of an accounting education and 'cash cow' status. This risks accounting faculty losing sight of the importance of quality teaching and curriculum development.

Quality teaching is a primary driver of income (Gunn, 2018), yet HEIs devote increasing resources to research, valuing the prestige research can bring while simultaneously promoting academic professionalism, generating academic capital, and garnering reputational enhancement. However, the relationship between research and teaching is complex and often misunderstood. For accounting, incorporating research led teaching into the curriculum has proved difficult and the benefits to curriculum design have not materialised.

Curriculum development would benefit from a more holistic approach, but while the rewards from research activities (prestige) outweigh those from teaching, accounting academics will focus their limited resources on research. This research focus, in part, created the TEF as the quality of teaching was questioned. The TEF reinforces managerial logics and introduces both measurement and bureaucracy to HE. In prioritising student employability, the TEF inadvertently pushes accounting faculty to further teach to the professional curriculum.

Rankings have also become a powerful influence in HE. Faculty, such as accounting, facing greater competition to attract undergraduates, place great reliance on rankings as a key marketing strategy (Gibbons et al., 2015). Ranking as a marketing tool has served to internationalise accounting education, increasing income (fee premium) but posing risks to course content through language and cultural considerations.

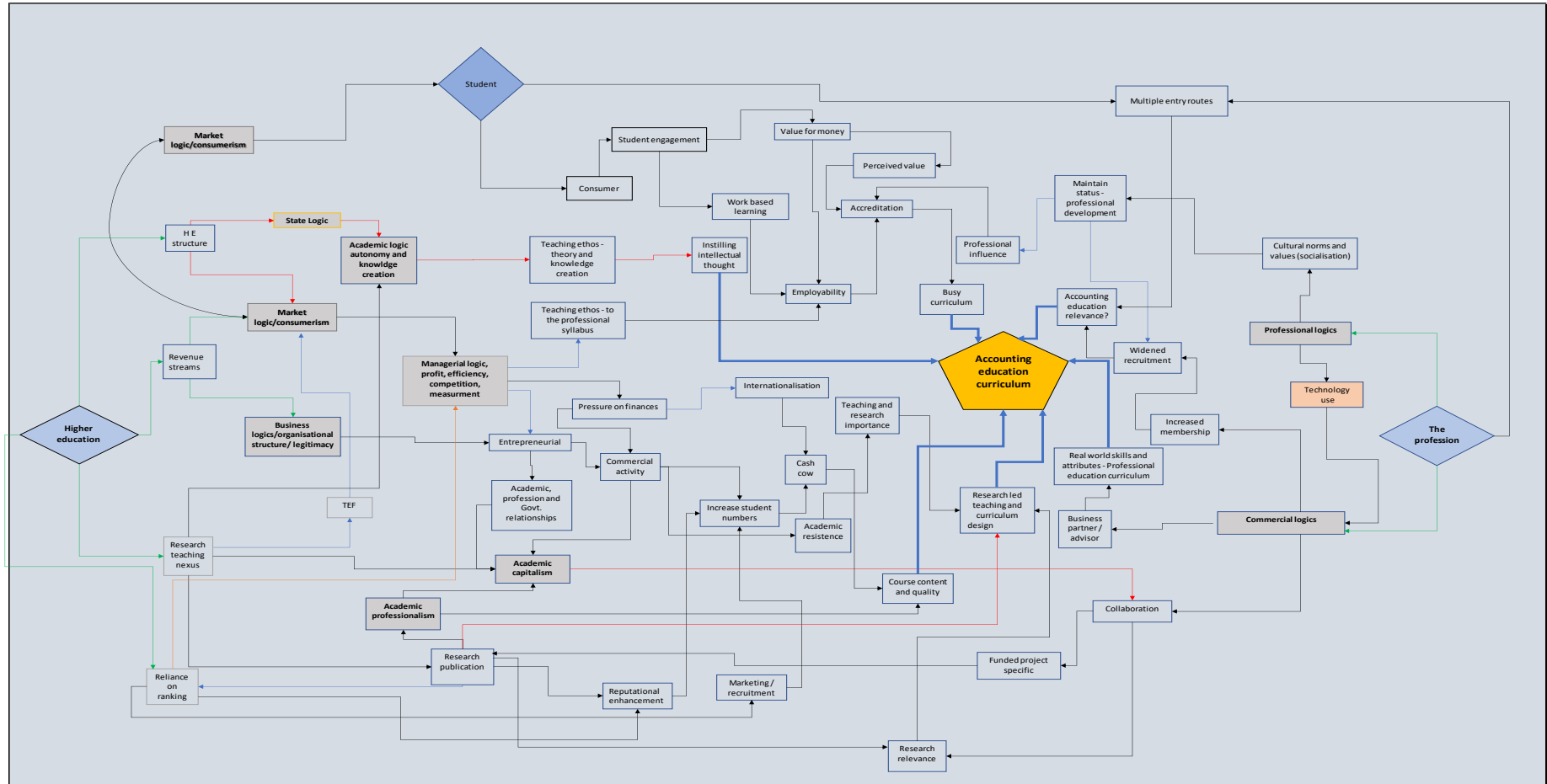
The continuing marketisation of HE results in value for money and employability emerging as key drivers for student choice. By offering an element of freedom of choice and demonstrating the value

of educational content, faculty can enhance student engagement and motivation. However, fostering autonomy in accounting courses is constrained by busy curriculum. As study options increase, failure to engage fully with students impacts the value for money of accounting courses and threatens the longer-term viability of accounting education.

Value is often viewed in terms of graduate employability with accounting faculty emphasising the short cut route to qualification (often a student's primary objective). However, employer's attach increasing significance to relevant work experience and demonstration of valuable extra-curriculum activities. Consequently, technical focussed accounting degrees may reduce, not increase, student employability. Likewise, students value internships and work placements as enhancing employability. However, while incorporating workplace learning into the curriculum would be beneficial, difficulties arise around workload, research responsibilities, crowded curricula, and the administration burden of offering internships present challenges in incorporating work-based learning in accounting courses. Finding sponsors is also an issue. Professional firms and commercial finance functions offer very few placements and then, only to the highest achieving undergraduates.

Finally, this chapter investigated the inter-connectivity of logics to understand the impact this may have on accounting curriculum change. Figure 25 is a pictorial representation of these inter-connected relationships.

Figure 25 Logics and accounting curriculum change.



Chapter 4: Research methodology and method.

4.1 Introduction.

The following chapter outlines and justifies the methodological choices for this research. A brief overview of the historical dominance of the quantitative positivist approach to accounting education research is followed by an analysis of the benefits of qualitative research to accounting education, the method chosen for this research. The chapter then clarifies the researcher's positionality in relation to the question of accounting education relevance as understanding positionality is critical for methodological decision (Broadbent & Unerman, 2011). The statement of researcher positionality is followed by a discussion of research paradigms available to the qualitative researcher, justifying the selection of the interpretivist paradigm. The benefits and potential drawbacks of this choice are detailed.

The chapter demonstrates that interpretivist enquiry is appropriate for this study, sitting comfortably with the theoretical perspective of logics. Institutional theorists believe that the world is mainly a product of subjective interpretation (Suddaby, 2015). Following which, the concepts of emergence and reflexivity, key to interpretivist enquiry are discussed. The chapter addresses evaluation in interpretivist research by using Angen's (2000) two broad methods, 'subtle realism' and 'complete reconfiguration' completing the justification for employing qualitative, interpretivist methodology in this research.

The method section explores the research design and implementation of this research in the context of a qualitative study. Firstly, it outlines and justifies the selection of Maxwell's 'Qualitative research design: an interactive approach' (2013) as a basis for this study. The interdependencies between the research goal and the research sub problems are illustrated. The section then addresses how these identified sub problems are aligned with the overarching research goal. The choice of research instruments used in the study; primarily semi-structured qualitative interviews is justified. There follows a brief discussion of the interview planning process including the creation of the data collection planning matrix.

Having addressed the design process, participant selection is explored. The sample pool is defined, an estimate of sample size determined, a purposive method of sample selection justified, and the participant selection process discussed. Finally, the chapter addresses data collection and the tools used to analyse the data for this study. The choice of QCA as the analysis tool is justified.

4.2 Why qualitative research?

The dominance of the positivist/normative approach to accounting research, its reliance on quantitative research methods and attendant limitations, has been widely discussed (C. Baker & Bettner, 1997; K. Fraser, 2014; Hoque, 2018; L. Parker, 2012b; Reiter & Williams, 2002; Tomkins & Groves, 1983). Yet, for many years academics have been calling for a more diverse approach to accounting education research. Tomkins and Groves (1983) argued that, ‘the academic accounting fraternity seems to be locked into a myopic view of what research is,’ (p. 361). Others (Ancelin-Bourguignon, 2019; C. Baker & Bettner, 1997; Jayasinghe, 2021) have advocated a move towards different research methods and paradigms to better investigate types of reality in accounting studies. As early as 1997, C. Baker and Bettner (1997, p. 203) argued that:

... the type of research prevalent in mainstream accounting journals, which is characterised by a positivist methodological perspective and an emphasis on quantitative methods, is incapable of addressing accounting’s complex social ramifications.

Yet quantitative methods approaches have retained their primacy for many accounting journals (Villiers, Dumay, & Maroun, 2019), and the benefits of quantitative research in the accountancy setting have been robustly defended (Deegan, 2013; Richardson, 2015; Zimmerman, 2001). These authors and other positivists/post positivists view qualitative research as ‘soft science,’ claiming qualitative research is unscientific, exploratory, and subjective. They argue that qualitative research is criticism not theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Through the experimental sciences (e.g., physics, chemistry, or economics) positivists contend that ‘truth can overcome opinion and personal bias (Carey, 2009). Further, they assert, disparagingly, that qualitative researchers write fiction, not science, as they have no way of verifying their ‘truth’ statements. Although most prominent the epistemology of positive accounting theory is not without criticism (Villiers et al., 2019). Even so, Everett et al. (2015) express concern that the apparent factual basis and rigour of quantitative research methods, two lauded benefits of the positivist approach, may, unjustly, reinforce its dominance in public discourse and policy debates.

In their research, Villiers et al. (2019) offer an opposing view of qualitative research. They espouse the benefits of qualitative research in the context of accounting research. The qualitative method, they argue, can explore intricate relationships and connections without condensing the intricacy simply to numbers, statistics, or variables. They, and others (Ahrens et al., 2008; Broadbent & Unerman, 2011), argue that by in depth analysis of surprising findings or exceptions within the data, qualitative research can make recommendations, extend the boundaries of research, and make significant and meaningful contributions to accounting theory and practice. By its nature, qualitative research is often described in terms of intangibility (Dai, Free, & Gendron, 2019), and often

expressed through the concept of flexibility (Patton, 1990) or intuition (Flick, 2018). Intuition is at the heart of making the qualitative research method work, but, by necessity, results in the creation of a level of ambiguity (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009). While some regard intuition as a benefit (Gendron, 2009; L. Parker, 2012b), as it may enable the formulation of new and novel ideas, others (Gephart & Rynes, 2004; Yin, 2014; Zimmerman, 2001) argue that the ambiguity created means that the qualitative research method is nebulous, calling for more sophisticated collection and analysis of the data to enable validation.

A further group of academics have endorsed a hybrid approach, promoting the adoption of a mixed methods³⁴ approach to accounting research (Almalki, 2016; Dewasiri, Weerakoon, & Azeez, 2018; K. Fraser, 2014; Grafton, Lillis, & Mahama, 2011; P. Morgan, 2000). They cite the potential of the mixed methods approach to provide a greater depth and breadth of information not possible utilising singular approaches alone. This approach, also, is not without critics (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Sandelowski, 2014) and is most appropriately employed within the pragmatist or critical realist paradigm, not an interpretivist one (Schoonenboom, 2019).

Notwithstanding the above, the choice of the methodological approach depends on the subject or the philosophical framework of the research. The researcher's own positionality, his philosophical assumption concerning beliefs, values, ontology, epistemology, and relationality are crucial to methodological decision-making (Broadbent & Unerman, 2011; Opie & Sikes, 2004). As such, the nature, context, and objectives of any study determine the research methodology to be adopted (McNeill, 2005). In this study an understanding of multiple perspectives ('realities') relating to accounting education curriculum change is required. The interaction between logics and the effect this has on the agents involved in the process of accounting education curriculum change, (the PABs, academia, and student) needs investigation. The researcher believes a clearer understanding of the issues surrounding accounting education curriculum change will emerge from employing a qualitative approach to the study. Qualitative research is primarily inductive and explorative; it is well suited to situations where the effect of interactions and relationships are to be investigated, and where the questions why and how are most common, as in this study. Also, a qualitative approach will preserve the complexity of the material being studied (Villiers et al., 2019) and allow meanings and themes to emerge as the data collection and analysis progresses.

³⁴ Mixed methods are a research approach whereby researchers collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study.

4.3 Research paradigms.

As stated above, having decided upon taking a qualitative approach in this research, it is crucial, when finalising the choice of methodology, to consider ‘researcher positionality’ (Opie & Sikes, 2004). Researcher positionality needs to be explicitly known within the study to enable a clearer understanding of the potential influences that such positionality may have on the outcomes of the research (Holmes, 2020). Researcher positionality is the perspectives and experiences the researcher brings to the study (Creswell, 2018). Positionality characterises qualitative research and affects the entire research project, from the phrasing of the question, the design and construction of the study, the way participants are selected, the analysis of the data, and the way results are communicated and published (Bourke, 2014). As Burrell and G. Morgan (1979, p. 1) stated: ‘All social scientists approach their subject via explicit or implicit assumptions about the nature of the social world and the way in which it may be investigated.’

These explicit or implicit assumptions, (e.g., the perspectives, beliefs and experience of the researcher), are often deep rooted having been introduced throughout the researcher’s own education (Creswell, 2018; Huff, 2009). By necessity, these assumptions will frame the research process and lead the choice of an appropriate research paradigm to best answer the research question. In the following section the researcher’s own positionality in the context of this research is outlined.

4.3.1 – Researcher Positionality Statement.

Positionality is integral to the process of qualitative research (Opie & Sikes, 2004). Positionality describes the stance that a researcher has adopted regarding the research study being undertaken (Holmes, 2020). Understanding research positionality is a critical reflexive process which influences how the research is carried out, data collected, and conclusions drawn. Without an element of ‘self-awareness, a researcher will act in an unconscious, potentially ego-centric, biased way, determined by their character, feelings, motives, beliefs, and desires (Holmes, 2020; Opie & Sikes, 2004). Being self-aware reduces the possibility of unconscious bias leading to more transparent research findings (Holmes, 2020; H. Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016; McGrath, Palmgren, & Liljedahl, 2019). In locating the researcher’s personal viewpoint, reflexivity is a process of analysing oneself iteratively and critically in relation to the object (amended accounting curriculum) and context (maintaining relevance in the face of an evolving profession) of the research, thereby expanding understanding through assessing how one’s personality and positionality affects the research process (Alvesson, 2009; Berger, 2015). By continually examining one’s cultural and theoretical models, questions will arise which, when addressed repeatedly, enable the researcher to place his research design more clearly within the wider body of thought (Markham, 2017). It is critical for a researcher

to understand their own positionality and explain the effects that this may have upon their research. Researcher positionality is normally formulated by the researcher reflecting upon the subject under investigation (accounting education curriculum), the research participants (representatives of the PABs, academics, students, and administrators), and the research context and process (Holmes, 2020).

In researching the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs, this researcher's positionality is significantly influenced by his personal experience gained throughout his own education and career. As a qualified accountant, a postgraduate, and a PhD candidate, the researcher has accumulated a wealth of experience which has led to the formulation of opinions, thoughts, and theories which he brings to the study. Having qualified as an accountant in the mid-1980s, the researcher held senior roles within industry and commerce for over thirty years. This allowed the researcher to witness first-hand the evolving nature of the profession. As a finance director for over twenty years, the researcher has seen how the job descriptions, recruitment profiles, and daily tasks performed by junior staff have altered significantly over time. Entry level accounting trainees are now expected not just to gather the data, but to analyse, understand, and explain that data from day one. Similarly, while sitting the professional examinations and undertaking postgraduate study, the researcher witnessed some of the issues presented in making curriculum change. As a recent graduate (MSc Forensic accounting 2018), the researcher was aware of attempts to introduce reflective and soft-skills modules into the course curriculum. However, he observed the scepticism which both students, and some lecturers, expressed regarding the value of these soft skills, reflective modules. This was evidenced by the low level of attendance of these modules and the almost exclusively negative feedback these modules received from participating students.

In combination, these first-hand experiences helped create the foundations for this study. It became apparent to the researcher that the gap between the more recent non-technical skills requirements of the PABs and those primarily technical skills taught to undergraduates undertaking an accounting degree was widening. Lately, the PABs have widened student recruitment to encompass many more degree subjects while simultaneously creating alternative entry routes to the PABs. These increased access routes have resulted in a broader cohort of new student members to the potential detriment of an accounting education. Throughout the past decade, the researcher has himself begun to question the value for money of an accounting degree. This was a major motivating factor in him wishing to research potential accounting curriculum enhancements. However, the researcher is acutely aware that his experience has created pre-conceived views of the issues involved surrounding amending the accounting curriculum. The researcher recognises that these opinions are based on a small and certainly unrepresentative sample of opinions and interactions. He is mindful that while undertaking this research, care must be exercised to avoid his prior experiences and associated pre-conceived ideas leading the research in a pre-determined direction.

Having reflected on the influence that the researcher's own experience, knowledge, and education has had on this study attention turned to the relationship that the researcher had with the study participants, as this relationship affects the research process (Hammersley, 1992; Holmes, 2020). There is continuing debate about researcher positionality as either an 'insider' or an 'outsider' to the topic being investigated. From an ontological perspective the two, 'insider' or 'outsider', come from distinct positions, relativism and realism, respectively. As the 'insider' view of reality (ontology) comes from a relativist position (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), the researcher sees himself firmly in the 'insider' camp. The researcher believed that by exploring the relevance of an accounting education with the participants, themes and theories emerge through these interactions (interviews). Acting as a 'participant observer' (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), the researcher elicited participants' views and opinions which helped answer the research question. The researcher recognised that the relationship established with each interviewee was crucial to a successful data collection process. The researcher understood that how each participant viewed him (peer, colleague, authority figure, subordinate etc.) influenced the data gathered in the interview. Successfully establishing positive relationships led to a rich set of data being collected, which enabled themes and theories to emerge as the interview process continued.

While viewing himself as an 'insider' from an ontological perspective, the researcher acknowledged that his experience and educational background also made him an 'insider', in the literal sense, as defined by Merton (1972). The researcher has prior knowledge of the subject being studied. While the researcher recognised that having an 'insider' positionality allowed him to better understand the perspective and experiences of individual participants, he was cognisant of the further potential for bias that an 'insider' position creates. He was also aware that his familiarity of the topic could lead to him taking too narrow a view of the subject under study, to participants assuming he knew more than he did, and to some participant reticence to fully share information. In designing the interview protocol, steps were taken to mitigate or significantly reduce these disadvantages.

Taken holistically, the above affirmed the researcher view of himself as an interpretivist. Through his prior education and experience he has developed a relativist ontology. Within this study, the researcher saw himself as an 'insider,' where the answer to the research question emerged from the multiple realities expressed by disparate participants. These realities ('truth') were created by individuals interacting socially within groups, with the realities being time, space, and context dependent (Charmayne & Jayne, 2012). The above also revealed that the researcher embraced a subjectivist epistemology for this study. Through his experience and educational background, the researcher was unable to separate himself from what was known, bringing subjectivity into the search for understanding. Consequently, the researcher believed that to best answer the research question, interpretivism, with its relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, fitted his own positionality and was the most appropriate methodology for this study. Following a brief discussion of alternative

paradigms, the following section justifies the choice of an interpretivist methodology for this research.

4.3.2 – Alternative inquiry paradigms.

In the literature, there exists a plethora of research models, each advocated by differing academics over many years. However, Candy (1989) simplifies this by arguing that all of these disparate models broadly fit into three main classifications, the positivist paradigm, the interpretivist paradigm, or the critical paradigm. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) proposed a fourth paradigm, the pragmatic paradigm. The pragmatic paradigm model borrows elements from each of Candy’s three. Table 6. ‘Basic beliefs of alternative inquiry paradigms’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Hatch, 2002) offers a summary of beliefs attributed to five common paradigms. Candy’s positivist paradigm having been split into pure positivism and post-positivism as these have nuanced differences. Importantly, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of each paradigm differ and the chosen paradigm must be consistent with the researcher’s positionality (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

Table 6 Basic beliefs of alternative inquiry paradigms.

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology	Method
Definition.	What is reality?	How do we know reality?	How do we find out?	What techniques do we use to find out?
Positivism.	There is one single truth.	Objectivist, reality can be measured.	Experimental, quasi experimental, surveys.	Statistics, measurement, hypothesis testing, chiefly quantitative.
Post-positivism.	Truth exists but is never fully understood, it is approximated.	Approximations of reality. Researcher is the data collector.	Modified experimental, falsification of hypothesis, may include rigorously defined qualitative methods.	Statistics, measurement, hypothesis testing. Some qualitative techniques but usually in a supporting role.
Interpretivism.	Relativism – no single truth.	Transactional, subjectivist, reality needs to be constructed through interpretation.	Hermeneutical, dialectical, naturalistic qualitative methods.	Interview, observation, case study, narrative, themed identification, reconstructions, mainly qualitative.
Critical.	Virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, ethnic, and gender over time.	Reality and knowledge socially constructed and influenced by power relationships.	Dialogue, action research, ethnography, critical discourse analysis, ideology, critique.	Value mediated critiques, focus groups, ideological review, open-ended interviews, or questionnaires.
Pragmatism.	Reality is constantly renegotiated.	Best method is one that solves the problem.	Mixed methods, design-based research, Action research.	Any technique which will aid answering the research question.

Source - Adapted from Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 110) and Hatch (2002, p. 13).

In attempting to identify the defining characteristics of qualitative research, academics, including Barbour (2008), Holloway (2010), Silverman (2017), and Denzin and Lincoln (2018), concluded that qualitative research may best be identified as an interpretative approach which sets out to evaluate the beliefs, attitudes, behaviour, and perspectives of individuals in situ. Put simply, qualitative

research studies things in their natural settings and attempts to interpret phenomena in the context of the meanings that people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This fits well with the objective of this present study, that by analysing interviews with appropriate stakeholders (the PABs, academics, administrators, and students) the researcher hopes to better understand the obstacles that logics creates when attempting to change the curriculum.

According to Creswell (2018), there are many paradigms, or ‘interpretive frameworks’, available to researchers in the field of qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 18) list the following examples: positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, interpretivism, hermeneutics, feminism, racialized discourses, critical theory, Marxist models, cultural study models, queer theory, post-colonialism, and post-materialist. This list is not exhaustive as interpretive frameworks are ever expanding (e.g., the realist, pragmatist perspective). The researcher must choose the paradigm best suited to the research project in the context of his/her own positionality. The positionality statement included earlier categorised the ontology and epistemology of this researcher as relativist and subjectivist. This implies that an interpretivist methodology is most appropriate for this study. The following section briefly explains why other paradigms were rejected and discusses the interpretivist methodology in more detail.

4.3.3 – Choosing an appropriate research paradigm.

In choosing a suitable paradigm, the researcher initially considered the following paradigms: positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, and constructivism.

The positivist framework was readily dismissed. Both its ontology, the existence of an objective reality, and its epistemology, the assumption that people can know this reality and use symbols to accurately describe and explain such objective reality (Descartes, 1975; Popper, 1972), are wholly inconsistent with the researcher’s own positionality. The post-positivist paradigm was considered briefly but quickly discarded. While post-positivists recognise that cause and effect is a probability which may or may not occur, and believe in multiple perspectives from participants rather than one objective reality (Creswell, 2018), qualitative research often only plays a supporting role to quantitative methods in post-positivist studies (Barbour, 2008). As the research method for this study is exclusively qualitative the post-positivist paradigm was deemed inappropriate.

When assessing the validity of interpretivism and constructivism as paradigms for this study, the researcher recognised that these two paradigms are closely related but have nuanced differences. Both research paradigms required the researcher to interpret the subjective world of human experience (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). However, the way each paradigm addresses and conceptualises basic philosophical questions such as ‘what is the purpose of human inquiry?’ or ‘how can we understand the world of human action?’ (Schwandt, 1998) is subtly different. Nevertheless,

in much of the literature the terms constructivist and interpretivist are used interchangeably; see Denzin and Lincoln (2018) or Mertens (2020). Both interpretive frameworks share the aim of understanding the phenomenological world from the viewpoint of those who experience it. Simply put, individuals look to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2018). The interpretivist or constructivist researcher believes that to understand this world one must interpret it (Schwandt, 1998), by developing subjective meanings from individual's experiences. The meanings which develop are disparate and numerous, leading the researcher to look for complexity and richness, not a narrow categorisation, of meaning. In both frameworks, the researcher relies heavily on the views expressed by participants in any given circumstance; weaving those views into a narrative formed through interaction with others (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002) to develop a theory inductively (Crotty, 1998). In practice, this means asking broad, general, and open ended questions to allow the participant to construct the meaning of an event or circumstance, often through the interaction with others, so that 'truth' is negotiated through dialogue (D. Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). As is readily apparent from the positionality statement, the interpretivist approach best fits with the researcher's own positionality and is the one adopted in this study.

4.3.4 – Interpretivist paradigm.

For the remainder of the discussion, the terms interpretivist and interpretivism are used unless circumstances dictate otherwise. The fundamental principle of interpretivist enquiry is the social construction of reality (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). In accepting the existence of multiple social realities, interpretivists share the following assumptions about reality (ontology), how that reality is known (epistemology), and what type of knowledge is needed to explain the reality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). As stated earlier, interpretivist research is ontologically relativist with a transactional and subjectivist epistemology (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 111 - Table 5.3; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Adopting a relativist ontology means there is no single truth or reality, reality ('truth') is created by individuals interacting socially within groups. The realities created are time, space, and context dependent (Charmayne & Jayne, 2012). As the investigator is unable to separate himself from what is known, interpretivists have a transactional and subjectivist epistemology, knowledge is viewed through language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). 'Truth' emerges through interaction and is the product of these interactions and the persons own thoughts ('constructed realities'). The task of the researcher is to construct a view of the world as they see it from an analysis of the data gathered. In interpretivist research, the conventional distinctions between ontology and epistemology are blurred (Crotty, 1998), due to the investigator and the object of investigation being inexorably linked. Findings ('truth') emerge as the process progresses (Charmayne & Jayne, 2012). This relationship, between

investigator and object, guides the research towards a methodology which is holistic and dialectical (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 111 - Table 5.3).

The benefits of adopting an interpretivist approach include permitting the inquirer to give meaning to the way things are, and uncovering causes which might be difficult to discover or explain using other methods, statistics, or measurements, for example (Charmayne & Jayne, 2012). In addition, interpretivist enquiry is not tied to, or constrained by, priori hypotheses, rather it aims to concentrate on the matters of significance to the participants. By taking an open-minded and adaptable approach to the study, the researcher can contribute a deeper understanding of the research topic (Charmayne & Jayne, 2012). Attempting to understand the impact that logics has on the relevance of an accounting education, the researcher interviewed interested parties. Analysing these interviews shed light on why the gap between the needs of the PABs and accounting academia continues to grow and uncovered hidden causes of both the widening gap and of the obstacles to successful curriculum change.

Interpretivist studies, like this one, often use inductive reasoning to interpret and structure the meanings arising out of data collection (Thomas, 2006). Inductive reasoning generates ideas from interpreting the data (hypothesis generation). The conceptual framework, the data collection methods, and the researcher's positionality in answering the research questions are closely linked (Flick, 2018). Using an inductive approach enables the researcher to; condense raw textual data into a summary format, establish links between the summary created and the research objectives, and create a schema of the underlying experiences or processes that are contained within the raw data (Thomas, 2006). For this study, using an inductive approach, the researcher concentrated on issues of most significance to the participants, enabling him to disregard non-relevant material and focus on the primary objectives of the research surrounding accounting education. The researcher gained a better understanding of the impact of the widening of entry routes to the PABs, fully comprehended problems faced by accounting educators in reacting to the PABs' changing needs and recognised the difficulties of maintaining engagement with prospective accounting undergraduates. This allowed the researcher to develop a detailed map of the issues the participants envisaged were most germane to maintaining the relevance of an accounting education. From the analysis of the suite of interviews, theories regarding potential change emerged.

However, as Creswell (2018) pointed out, an inductive approach might not be as robust as other analytical strategies aimed at theory development. Care needed to be taken to prevent the researcher become a 'prisoner' of induction, using only surface descriptions and general summaries (Graneheim, Lindgren, & Lundman, 2017) as this leads to superficial data analysis and the richness of the data is lost. However, in studies similar to this, where little priori research exists, scholars

suggest the use of inductive reasoning and content analysis is appropriate (Elo et al., 2014; Flick, 2018).

Consequently, given the relativist ontology and subjective epistemology of the study, coupled with the researcher’s choice of qualitative methods, an interpretivist methodology is chosen. Using inductive enquiry, themes and theories to answer the research question emerged throughout the data analysis process. These emerging theories were constantly redefined and honed to provide a potential solution to the research question. Table 7 below summarises the researcher’s understanding of the link between the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of this study. The method chosen has been added for completeness.

Table 7 Ontology, epistemology, methodology and method of this research.

	In this study	Application in this research
Ontology	Relativist.	Many issues affect curriculum change – no one curriculum will be perfect.
Epistemology	Transactional and subjective. People construct knowledge through their own experiences and emotions.	The PABs, academics, administrators, students will view curriculum change in the context of their own experience, needs and beliefs. They will have disparate ideas of what works.
Methodology	Qualitative and inductive.	Themes emerge through dialogue with stakeholders and are redefined throughout the research process.
Methods	Interview and content analysis.	Semi structured with representative of stakeholders, Qualitative content analysis (QCA).

To complete the justification of the methodology for this research, consideration needs to be given to the theoretical perspective adopted in the research. As discussed in chapter 2, the theoretical perspective is the *raison d’être* for any research project. It determines how the research problem is defined, the methodology of the investigation, and the meaning attached to the resulting data (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Crotty (1998, p. 3) defined the theoretical perspective of his design framework as ‘the philosophical stance informing the methodology’. For this study, the theoretical lens is provided by logics.

4.4 Philosophy and the theoretical perspective.

Institutional theorists believe that the world is mainly a product of subjective interpretation (Suddaby, 2015), a position sitting comfortably with the researcher’s own viewpoint. This study explores how the tensions created by multiple logics impact on the ability of accounting faculties to revise the accounting education curriculum. The literature review (Chapter 3) highlighted that the PABs and many scholars see curriculum change as imperative to maintaining the relevance of an undergraduate accounting qualification. However, as highlighted by R. Scott (2005), competing logics seem to make it increasingly difficult for HE to meet these demands. This study interviewed appropriate stakeholders, PABs, academics, administrators, and student representatives to gather data surrounding the impact of logics on accounting educators’ ability to make curriculum change. The

data collected was analysed using QCA to identify emerging themes. As the interview process progressed, emerging theories were continually refined. Consequently, the concept of emergence was key to this research process.

4.4.1 – Emergence.

Academics generally agree that emergence results in the creation of a phenomenon that is greater than the sum of its parts (De Haan, 2006). This phenomenon possesses attributes and features which its individual parts do not (Jost, Bertschinger, & Olbrich, 2010). De Haan (2006) argues that the notion of emergence is dependent on both the ‘conjugate concept’³⁵ and the positionality of the researcher. The ‘conjugate concept’ defines the relationship between the emerging property (amended accounting education curriculum) and its constituent parts (Stakeholders and the researcher). This relationship can be either directional (stakeholders influence the emerging curriculum, the curriculum influencing the behaviour of stakeholder) or unidirectional (not relevant for this study). The positionality of the researcher can be either internal or external. Is the researcher separate from the emerging property (amended accounting education curriculum) and its parts (external)? Or does a relationship exist between the researcher, the emerging property, and the constituent parts (internal)? Depending on which combination of variables exists, De Haan identifies the three possible types of emergences which he terms as discovery emergence, mechanistic emergence, and reflective emergence. (See Figure 26)

De Haan (2006) explained each as follows; discovery emergence requires an external positionality and an undirected conjugate. The researcher adopts an objective (external) positionality and emergence has no causal relationship with the process that created it. Discovery emergence fits the post positivist paradigm. Mechanistic emergence results from an external positionality but an acceptance of the interdependence between the emergent property and its parts, fitting the constructivism paradigm. Finally, reflective emergence requires a directional relationship between the constituent parts (interviewees in this study) and the emergent property (emerging accounting curriculum) and an internal (researchers own subjectivity) positionality. The observer (researcher) interprets the emerging meanings. In reflective emergence, the concept of emergence is related to the observer’s own experience. Reflective emergence sits squarely within the interpretivist paradigm (Levers, 2013) and fits well with Weber’s ‘*verstehen*’ concept, meaning ‘understanding something in context’ (Holloway, 1997, p. 2). This study aims to weave the data gathered from semi-structured interviews with stakeholders into an emerging template for an amended accounting curriculum. This

³⁵ De Haan (2006) created the conjugate concept to describe the relationship between the emergent property and its constituent parts.

emerging accounting curriculum necessitates altering the behaviours of the stakeholders to be delivered successfully.

Table 8 Types of emergences and associated paradigms.

		Researcher Positionality	
		Internal	External
Conjugate concept	Directional	<p>Reflective Emergence</p> <p>Researcher – Subjective positionality.</p> <p>Emerging property (curriculum) and constituent parts (stakeholders),</p> <p><u>Interpretivist</u></p>	<p>Mechanistic Emergence</p> <p>Researcher – Objective positionality.</p> <p>Emerging property and constituent parts Interdependent</p> <p><u>Constructivist</u></p>
	Unidirectional	<p>Unlikely to happen due to the subjective positionality of the researcher</p>	<p>Discovery Emergence</p> <p>Researcher – Objective positionality.</p> <p>Emerging property - no causal relationship with constituent parts</p> <p><u>Positivist</u></p>

Adapted from De-Haan (2006) - How emergence arises.

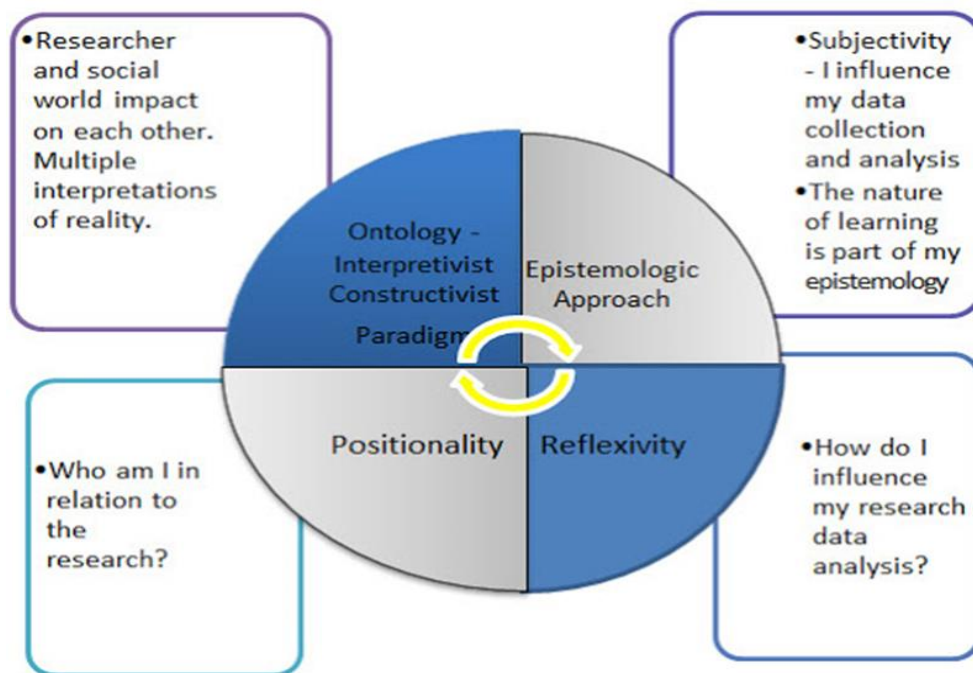
However, the interpretivist approach with the associated concept of reflective emergence is not without issues. Firstly, while the interpretivist researcher attempts to understand a phenomenon (a developing accounting curriculum) through amassing thoughts and views which individuals (interviewees) attach to it (Charmayne & Jayne, 2012), the researcher cannot replicate, only interpret, the experiences of the study participants (Charmaz, 2006). Likewise, the researcher cannot become wholly detached from the object of the study (Holloway, 1997). This researcher’s own experience as an accountant, a senior manager, and a postgraduate student, created an element of subjectivity throughout the research process, with the beliefs and views of both the researcher and the participants ever present. Consequently, research declaring itself interpretivist must address the issues of reflexivity and evaluation to counter the threat of inherent bias and to enhance validity.

4.4.2 – Reflexivity.

Within the research process, reflexivity performs several functions. Firstly, as previously described in the positionality statement, establishing the positionality of the researcher. As Jootun et al. state, ‘Reflexivity is one of the pillars of ‘critical’ qualitative research and relates to the degree of influence that the researcher exerts either intentionally or unintentionally on the findings.’ (Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009, p. 42).

It is the researcher’s responsibility to be clear and open about positionality and beliefs (Opie & Sikes, 2004). Placing positionality and beliefs overtly at the beginning of the study, as a list of assumptions or caveats, could serve as a valuable aid to the reader who might otherwise misinterpret the intended argument (Markham, 2017). Figure 26 adapted taken from ‘ A journey to the centre of self’ (Pitard, 2017), provides a simple, clear, illustration of how the researcher may influence the research process.

Figure 26 A journey to the centre of self.



(Pitard, 2017, p. 5) - A journey to the centre of self: Positioning the researcher in auto-ethnography.

Secondly, within interpretive qualitative research, where objectivity is questioned and issues of power between researcher and participant are recognised, reflexivity performs the important function of legitimising and authenticating the research (Hongping, 2019; Mortari, 2015; Pillow, 2003). How well we can ‘capture the essence’ of the participant and ‘let them speak for themselves’ (Trinh, 1991, p. 57) has become a measure of quality in interpretivist research. The researcher must give voice to the participant, allowing the participant to formulate and elucidate their understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Yet, as Alex and Hammarstrom (2008) point out, interviewers and

interviewees will act differently depending on their respective perceptions of the power of each. Such situations may make the participant (or the researcher) uncomfortable and ‘... practicing reflexivity can be one way to minimise such experiences in interview situations’. (Al  x & Hammarstr  m, 2008, p. 170).

A useful summary of how and when reflexivity should be undertaken is provided by Alvesson (2009). See Table 9 – Levels of reflexivity, an adaption of Alvesson’s model, to illustrate the reflexivity process of this study. Reflection takes place at the time of data collection (interviews) to explicitly identify the researcher’s viewpoints which may affect the interpretation of the data collected. The researcher also needs to reflect on the interpretations made and disclose what has been emphasised, downplayed, or omitted from the final thesis. By so doing the researcher enables the reader to understand more fully the reasoning behind the findings and the scope for misunderstanding is minimised.

Table 9 Levels of reflexivity.

Aspect/Level.	Focus.
Interaction.	Records of interviews with participants, video, transcription (intelligent verbatim).
Interpretation.	Identify the themes and underlying meanings regarding accounting curriculum.
Critical interpretation.	Relationships with the interviewees.
Reflection on text production and language use.	Own text claims of authority, selectivity of voices represented in the text.

Adapted from ‘Reflexive methodology: new vistas for qualitative research’, (Alvesson, 2000, p. 273)

Throughout this research I adopted a reflective approach. Examples include identifying my personal motives for undertaking this research (primarily a sense of injustice) and comprehending the sheer scale and complexity of the topic while addressing the resulting self-doubt. Reflexivity was also evidenced by identifying and stating my positionality. Later in the study I reflect on the impact of personal or self-selecting bias, the potential power relationships which may develop within the interview process, and my acceptance that my proposed solution to the research problem would, by necessity, be sub-optimal. The framework proposed improves the employability of accounting graduates, but it does not make accounting undergraduates indispensable to the PABs.

While the process of reflexivity is important in interpretivist research on its own it is insufficient to validate and authenticate the research findings. There also needs to be a process of evaluation appropriate to interpretivist research which reassures the reader of the authenticity and validity of the study.

4.4.3 – Evaluation.

In interpretivist research findings are context dependent and contingent, so the positivist evaluation criteria including internal validity, reliability, generalisation, and objectivity, mean different things and are less appropriate to interpretive research (D. Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). Qualitative research is broad and diverse with individual studies having their own unique theoretical positioning and approach. Consequently, differing evaluation criteria from that of positivism are needed. Addressing evaluation in interpretivist research, Angen (2000) proposed two broad methods of assessing the value of an interpretive piece of research which are termed, ‘subtle realism’ and ‘complete reconfiguration’. There follows a brief discussion of the merits and criticisms of each method, culminating in the researcher justifying his choice of evaluation method.

4.4.3.1 *Subtle realism.*

Subtle realism as a perspective on the philosophical foundations of research has been proposed by Kirk and Miller (1986), Hammersley (1992), and Angen (2000), amongst others. Subtle realism declares that all research includes subjective viewpoints and accepts that different approaches will produce differing data from the participants of the study (Pope & Mays, 2006). To evaluate their research, subtle realists have developed a parallel set of criteria to that used by the positivists or post-positivists. Hammersley (1992) and Murphy et.al (1998), do not speak in terms of internal validity, reliability, generalisation, and objectivity as positivist do. Rather they stress confidence, plausibility, relevance, and importance. Lincoln and Guba use the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Subtle realists accept there is no way of demonstrating unequivocal truth within their research, instead subtle realist focus their research on:

The search for knowledge about which we can be reasonably confident. Such confidence will be based upon judgements about the credibility and plausibility of knowledge claims. (Murphy et al., 1998, p. 69).

However, subtle realists claims of validity in interpretivist research are not without criticism. As Angen (2000) points out, subtle realism could be seen as taking interpretive research into the realm of positivism. Other criticisms include; member checking, often considered the ‘gold standard’ of qualitative research (Barbour, 2008; Madill & Sullivan, 2018), is problematic. Member checking, returning data and results to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences, is complicated and controversial (Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller, & Neumann, 2011). Member checking also does not enhance the trustworthiness of the whole data set as the researcher still needs to combine data sets (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Furthermore, reflexivity, regarded as critical to qualitative research, is sometimes criticised as creating the illusion of objectivity (Haynes, 2011). While triangulation, a method of examining variations or lessons learned

from different points of view, or in diverse ways, is not without problems. For instance, Hammersley (Bergman, 2008) refers to bias in the data sources, problems of integration, and states that triangulation can only provide complimentary information, not validation. Finally, peer review often takes the focus off the main researcher, is time consuming, and can build in bias (Mulligan, Hall, & Raphael, 2013).

Despite the criticisms levelled at subtle realism, Lincoln and Guba argue that with prolonged engagement, time spent in the field understanding the setting and developing close relationships, credibility will be established. However, they counsel against ‘going native’ and losing detachment. Finally, Charmaz (2006) points out that the more original the findings, the greater the resonance and usefulness of the research. She stresses that researchers should keep asking themselves four basic questions: has familiarity with both the setting and the topic been achieved? what is the social and theoretical significance of the research? has the research revealed anything new about previously accepted meanings? and can the research spark other research in substantive areas? Addressing these questions will validate the research project. Table 10 below maps the subtle realist terminology onto those used by positivists.

Table 10 Mapping interpretive methodology terminology onto positive terms.

Positivist terms.	Hammersley.	Lincoln and Guba.	Charmaz.	Charmaz questions.
Internal validity.	Confidence.	Credibility.	Credibility.	Has familiarity with both the setting and the topic been achieved?
Reliability.	Plausibility.	Dependability.	Usefulness.	Can the research spark other research in substantive areas?
Generalisation.	Relevance.	Transferability.	Resonance.	Has the research revealed anything new about previously accepted meanings?
Objectivity.		Confirmability.	Originality.	What is the social and theoretical significance of the research?
	Importance.			

Sources: Hammersley (1992) – What’s wrong with ethnography, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) – the Sage handbook of qualitative research, Charmaz (2006) - Constructing grounded theory : a practical guide through qualitative analysis.

4.4.4.2 Complete reconfiguration.

This approach ignores the positivist lexicon altogether. Complete reconfiguration views ‘interpretive knowledge claims and truth as negotiable features’ (Angen, 2000, p. 386). The focus of complete reconfiguration is on the process of inquiry, not on the outcomes (Schwandt, 1998). Angen (2000), categorises this approach under two headings; ethical validation and substantive validation. Note

Angen intentionally uses validation, not validity, to stress that assessing the credibility of interpretive research is a continuous process occurring among researchers, not an absolute truth.

Ethical validation.

Smith (1990) made the point that interpretive human enquiry is more an ethical issue than an epistemological one, as interpretive human inquiry seeks to better understand the meanings entangled within everyday life. In seeking to answer the question, ‘How do we become more fully who we are?’ as people, interpretive research should be rational, responsible, and compassionate (Van Manen, 2016). Further, ethical validation compels research to answer some of the so-what questions, (e.g., so-what are our motivations and intentions for investigating this social reality? so-what are the impacts of our interests, biases, preconceptions or intentions on this investigation? or so what are the impacts of our research for the social reality investigated and for similar social realities?), (Walther, Powley, & Sochacka, 2017). Also, interpretive researchers should know and respect that the ethical traditions of good qualitative research have practical value, generative promise, and the ability to transform our actions (Angen, 2000).

Substantive Evaluation.

Researchers have a duty to demonstrate that their research has been comprehensive in dealing with the complexity of the study topic (Angen, 2000). The researcher must consider all the disparate, present and historical, intersubjective understandings of the topic (Van Manen, 2016). Subjective preconceptions become the base from which further understanding emerges. As the researcher engages with the research topic, interpretive accounts are co-constructed with other historic accounts, and in some instances new accounts. Like ethical validation, substantive validation must be carefully considered through-out the inquiry process, from beginning to end (Angen, 2000). In order to successfully pursue a substantive approach to validation, the researcher must record his/her personal transformation through-out the process and include it in the final submission so that the reader can judge the veracity of the arguments made (Blaxter, 2010).

In evaluating this study, the researcher adopted a ‘subtle realism’ approach therefore basing the validity of the study around credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and answering the four questions posed by Chamaz. Her first question ‘has familiarity with both the setting and the topic been achieved?’ The researcher believes that this question has been answered and the credibility of the study established by a thorough and comprehensive literature review (refer chapter 3). In the literature review the topic, the relevance of an accounting education, has been extensively discussed from the perspectives of the PABs, academics in the field, and the student

body. The setting, the evolution of the profession and its impact on the recruitment of future student members to the PABs to the potential detriment of an accounting education, is similarly illustrated in the literature review. Also, the interplay between multiple logics in and between academia and the PABs has been extensively analysed in the context of curriculum change. This analysis has revealed several obstacles to amending the accounting curriculum which need to be tackled to fully satisfy the research objective. The need to maintain engagement with students and to sell curriculum change to potential new undergraduates is well understood. Taken in the round, this all gives credibility to research exploring the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs. The other questions posed by Chamaz: can the research spark other research in substantive areas? has the research revealed anything new about previously accepted meanings? and what is the social and theoretical significance of the research? are addressed through the analysis, discussion, and findings chapter of this study.

The subsequent section focusses on the plan of enquiry for this qualitative interpretive research. Qualitative research approaches the design, sampling, instrumentation, and data analysis of research in ways that are different to the approaches adopted by researchers performing more traditional 'rationalistic' research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.5 Method.

4.5.1. Introduction.

This section explores the research design and implementation of this research in the context of qualitative study. Firstly, the section outlines and justifies the selection of 'Maxwell's Qualitative research design: an interactive approach' (2013) as a basis for this study. The interdependencies between the over-arching research goal – maintaining the relevance of an accounting education given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant, and the research sub problems are illustrated and aligned. The section then discusses the research instruments used in the study, primarily semi-structured qualitative interviews and addresses the researcher's positionality in relation to data collection and potential for bias. There follows a brief discussion of the interview planning process and creation of the data collection planning matrix. The section ties together the chosen methodology with the interview question design, the interview guide, and planning matrix validation techniques. The participant selection process is outlined and explained. This includes defining the sample pool – stakeholders in an accounting education, estimating an appropriate sample size, justification of a purposive method of sample selection, and discussion of the participant selection process. Finally, the section addresses data collection and the tools used for the data analysis. The importance of both fidelity³⁶ and structure to data capture is explained and the role of

³⁶ data fidelity means that the data recorded are accurate and precise and that no data are missing.

inductive reasoning in qualitative research data analysis is discussed. The suitability of QCA as the data analysis tool is explained and justified.

4.5.2 Research design.

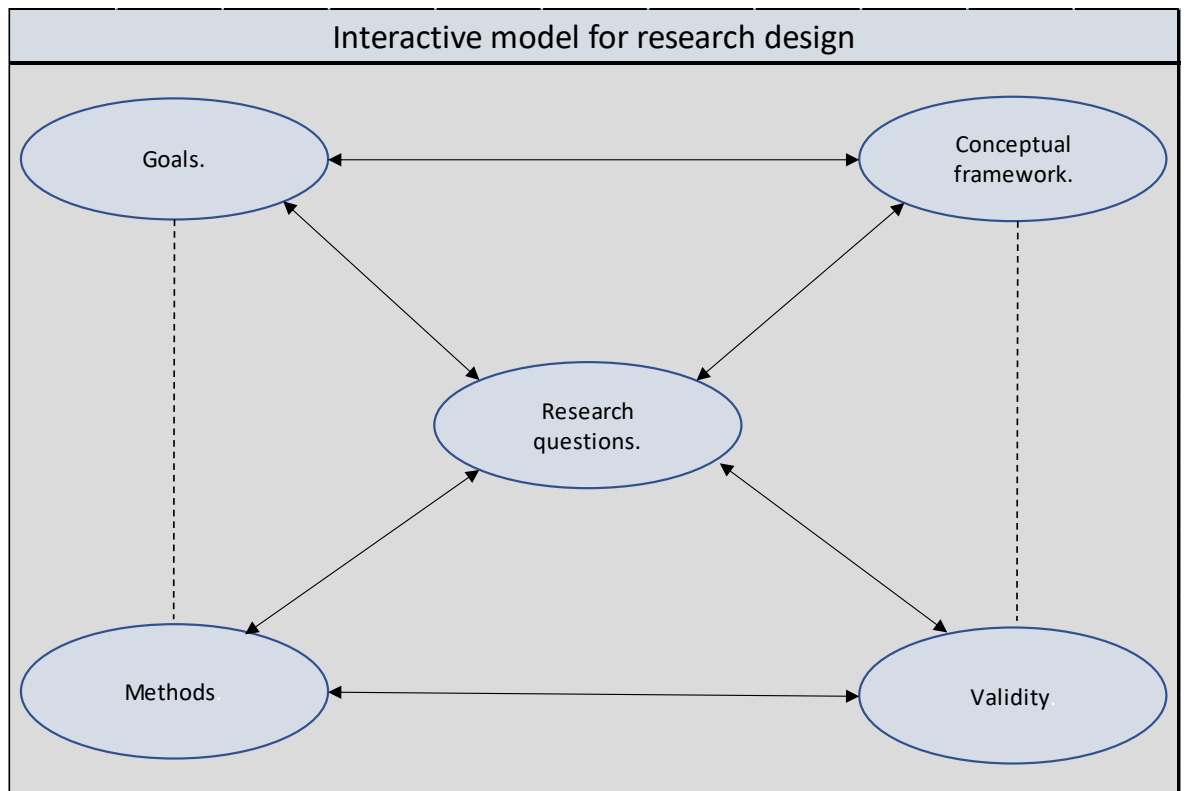
4.5.2.1 Research design – overview.

Yin (2014) argues that all empirical research, whether quantitative or qualitative, has either an explicit or implicit research design. As such, it is incumbent on any researcher to explore their research design so that its strengths, weaknesses, and ramifications for the research can be fully understood. As discussed in the methodology section, interpretivist research attempts to understand the phenomenological world from the viewpoint of those who experience it (Creswell, 2018). Put simply, individuals look to comprehend the ‘world’ in which they live and work. Through the development of subjective meaning from individual’s experiences, the interpretivist researcher seeks to understand this ‘world’ and increase knowledge (Schwandt, 1998). As themes and findings emerge through the research process, the researcher seeks to build a narrative. A narrative which relies heavily on both interaction with chosen participants and the views expressed by those participants (Fossey et al., 2002).

Unlike quantitative research design, which is frequently concerned with uncovering how numerous people think, act, or feel in a specific way, qualitative research design is focussed on discovering answers to the why? and how? of the issue in question, while understanding the importance of context (Florczak, 2017; Mason, 2018). Answering why or how questions often involves opinion, feelings or emotion. Consequently, qualitative research is often seen as being subjective (not objective), with findings gathered in a written format as opposed to a numerical or statistical one. In qualitative research a narrative unfolds in which the researcher gradually makes sense, not only of the data, but of the total phenomena of which the data are part. Qualitative research is an interactive process throughout which the researcher must attempt to untangle and make reflexive sense of their own role in the research (Holliday, 2016; Hongping, 2019; Jootun et al., 2009). Thus qualitative research design cannot be static but must be allowed to evolve, to be constructed and reconstructed as work progresses (Maxwell, 2013). Within the literature, broad consensus exists around the key elements of robust qualitative research design. Proponents (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 2015; Rudestam, 2015) identify the following key components; the goals of the research, the conceptual framework, research questions, methods chosen, and validity. Advocates argue that qualitative design cannot be a logical strategy chosen in advance and adhered to rigorously through following a fixed sequence of steps but rather an iterative process of continuous design refinement. Notwithstanding, most authors still link these design components in either a linear or

cyclical way. Maxwell (2013), however, contends that research design must be allowed to develop and evolve as the researcher moves between the different elements of the design, evaluating their interactions with one another. In his design model, which he refers to as interactive, (Figure 27) Maxwell argues that the different constituents of any research design form a unified and collaborating whole, with each element inexorably tied to certain others.

Figure 27 Interactive model of research design.



Source: *Qualitative research design: an interactive approach*, Maxwell (2013).

In this model the research questions are placed, not as the starting point of research design but at the very centre. The research questions are the fulcrum of the design, directly interacting with all other design elements and being the most directly affected by each of the other components. The upper triangle of the model illustrates that research questions have a demonstrable relationship to the goals of the study. They are framed by existing knowledge and are contextualised by the theoretical concepts which can be applied to the study.

4.5.2.2 Application of Maxwell's design model.

The overarching goal of this study is to identify how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant, a trend which is forecast to continue in the coming years. As discussed in the literature review, technology use is widening the expectation gap between the skill set that the PABs require from their student

membership and those skills possessed by graduating accounting students (Chaffer & Webb, 2017; Pincus et al., 2017). Yet in attempting to modify the accounting curriculum to address this issue, accounting faculties are faced with significant challenges (Amernic & Craig, 2004; Asonitou, 2021; Boyce, 2014; Gray & Collison, 2002; Hopper, 2013). Addressing these challenges appears vital if accounting education is to continue to attract high quality, motivated undergraduates in the future. Failure to act makes ‘selling’ accounting as a subject to undergraduates more difficult, given the wide choice of courses available, and could ultimately threaten the viability of accounting education itself (Pincus et al., 2017). To answer the remaining relevant question, three sub problems have been identified and discussed below.

Sub problem one. - To understand the impact that technology use by the profession is having on the recruitment of future student members.

The review of the literature confirms that disruptive digital technology is changing the function of accountants and is automating many lower-level tasks (Kruskopf et al., 2019). The PABs are redefining and repositioning themselves, exploiting technology, adopting new and emerging skills alongside continuous learning to continue to create value for clients and shape the future of business (ACCA, 2019b; AICPA, 2019; ICAEW, 2019d). The PABs recognise that future recruits need to be able to understand, use, and communicate machine generated data. Consequently, training programmes are being redesigned and exam syllabi revisited to make future accountants more business and technology ready. These changes have opened access to the PABs to a less traditional talent pool, one less reliant of having a technical accounting background (FRC, 2021). By answering the research sub question, *how is the way the profession is evolving due to technology use impacting the recruitment of new members?* the study aims to inform accounting faculty as to where curriculum change should focus.

Sub problem two. – exploring obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics.

Accounting education literature repeatedly calls for a move away from teaching predominantly focussed on technical skills, to one focussing on the development of generic skills linked to critical thinking and the promoting of values, attitudes, and attributes (Boyce et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2014). A sub-section of the literature appears to encourage a change in the relationship between PABs and HEIs, with PABs taking the lead in accounting education (Flood, 2014; Paisey & Paisey, 2010). Evidence suggests that the PABs are beginning to embrace this role, including around teaching the benefits of technology use. However, regarding the response of HE, few articles address the wider issue of what is the nature and purpose of an accounting education? or the question as to what should be taught and how? (Ellington, 2017; Paisey & Paisey, 2010). Overall, with a few notable exceptions,

Hooper (2013), Duff and Marriott (2017) and Ancelin-Bourguignon (2019), academics raising issues about an accounting education appear to have little voice (Ellington, 2017).

Many academic papers appeal to the PABs, HE, and academics to redirect university accounting education to focus on an education that develops student intellectual capabilities, enables pro-active enquiry, and fosters critique of accountancy practice (Brink & Stoel, 2019; de Villiers, 2019). While the PABs demand improved professional competence including a broad range of knowledge, skills, values, and attributes. Yet, few research papers dwell too long on the obstacles that universities face to initiating such reforms, despite significant barriers to successful curriculum change existing (Cooper, 2017; Pegg, 2013). Answering the following research question, *how can obstacles to curriculum change in the context of institutional logics be overcome?* directs HE towards the direction where change will be both possible and beneficial.

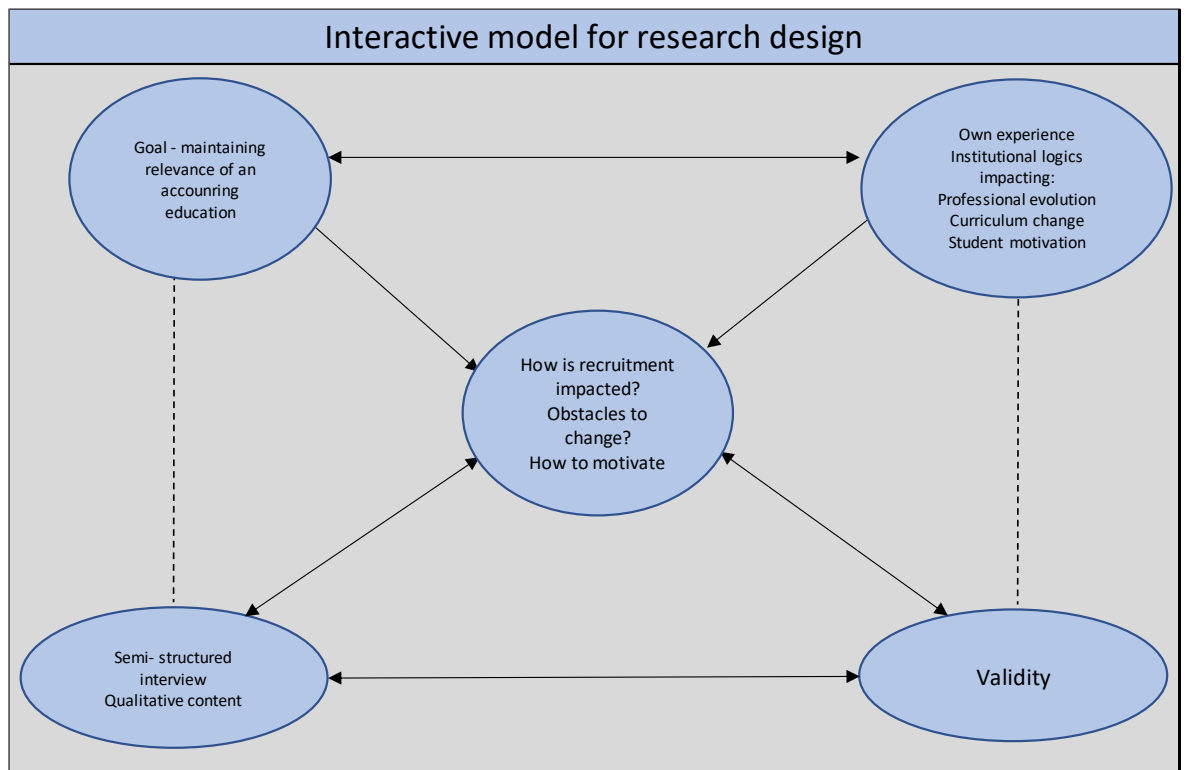
Sub problem three. – *Motivating and engaging with potential accounting students*

From the student perspective, it has long been accepted that career prospects, earnings, and other opportunities associated with working in accountancy or finance are attractive. A fact illustrated by the high numbers of graduates applying for student membership of the PABs (FRC, 2011-2022; Highflyers, 2022). However, the percentage of accounting graduates being accepted as student members of the PABs is declining. This trend is worrying to accounting faculties as future employability is seen as a key motivator in course selection by undergraduates.

Similarly, anecdotal evidence suggests that undergraduates value accredited courses, which are seen as relevant, up-to-date, and offering prized exemptions (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014). These anecdotal findings are supported by what little literature exists (Kafaji, 2020; van Zanten et al., 2012). Accreditation appears to be a prime motivator in undergraduate accounting course selection. However, as technology use within the profession accelerates, continuing to focus on technical skills, which the accreditation process encourages, becomes less relevant. But, while students view exemptions as a short cut to qualification and HE sees accreditation as a key recruitment tool, there is little motivation to change the status quo. Research question 3 *What will motivate students to study accounting in the future?* needs answering to ensure that any curriculum change undertaken will not have a negative impact on potential accounting undergraduate recruitment.

Adapted from Maxwell (2013), Figure 28 is a visual illustration of the interdependency of goals, context and research questions.

Figure 28 Interactive model, goals, context, and research questions in this study.



Adapted from the 'interactive model for research design (Maxwell, 2013).

4.5.2.3 Alignment of research goals and questions.

The primary aim of research design is to align the identified research problem (goal) with the research aims and research questions (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 2015; Rudestam, 2015). In well-designed research projects the researcher clearly understands what the goal is and the questions to be answered through research to resolve the issue (Klopper & Lubbe, 2011). By extracting an equal number of well aligned research sub-problems and associated sub-questions, the answer to each sub question provides a solution to its associated sub problem. In aggregate, the solving of each sub-problem should allow a solution to the overall research problem to emerge (see Figure 1 page 8). Figure 1 also identified the Qualitative Research Interview (QRI) as the primary research instrument for this research.

4.5.3 Research instrument - The Qualitative Research Interview (QRI).

4.5.3.1 Introduction.

In qualitative research a robust data collection method is the key factor influencing the quality, integrity, and the results of a study (H. Kallio et al., 2016). Although a number of data collection

techniques are discussed in the literature, including narratives, participant observations, and focus groups (Chadwick, Gill, Stewart, & Treasure, 2008; Flick, 2018), interviews are the most frequently used (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; H. Kallio et al., 2016; McGrath et al., 2019; Taylor, 2005) with the semi-structured interview format most used in qualitative research (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Klopper & Lubbe, 2011; McGrath et al., 2019).

In contrast to quantitative research interviews, with their more scientific and objective approach, QRIs are subjective interactions which enable the researcher to gather and interpret information (Guba, 1990; Van Manen, 2016). QRIs involve collecting information and facts (Targum, 2011; Weiss, 1996), obtaining narratives (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015), and learning about meanings, emotions, experiences, and relationships (Charmayne & Jayne, 2012; Gallagher, 2013; Weiss, 1996) that cannot easily be observed (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; D. Cohen & Crabtree, 2008; McGrath et al., 2019). QRIs centre on promoting an interactional style where success is linked to researcher behaviour. Therefore qualitative interviewers need to deploy active, supportive listening, involving re-phrasing and insight to develop empathy and encourage in-depth discussion (Knapik, 2006; Louw, Todd, & Jimakorn, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012) while being aware of the role they themselves play (researcher positionality).

4.5.3.2 Researcher positionality – reflexivity.

As McGrath et al. (2019) stated, the researcher is the prime instrument of data collection in qualitative studies. As illustrated in Figure 26 – ‘A journey to the centre of self’ (Pitard, 2017), the researcher’s epistemology impacts data collection while their positionality affects the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. Eliciting a data rich qualitative interview relies on building a strong partnership between the interviewer and the interviewee (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). By establishing a partnership of trust and rapport, qualitative researchers can help the participant share emotions, ideas, and narratives (McGrath et al., 2019; Weiss, 1996). This is only achieved when interviewers comprehend the social dimensions in play (Roulston, 2012) and are aware of how their role might impact the dialogue with the interviewee. Race, ethnicity, status, age, experience, nationality, education, gender, personal space, and power can influence the planning and administration of an interview and affect the quality of any data generated. Interpretive research encourages self-reflexivity, refer Figure 26, allowing scrutiny of preconceptions and reducing the potential to bring bias to the interview (Berger, 2015; Hongping, 2019; Jootun et al., 2009). Careful consideration of the interviewer’s own experience and abilities can result in more transparency in the research findings (H. Kallio et al., 2016; McGrath et al., 2019).

In the previous section, the researcher outlined their positionality in terms of ontology and epistemology when justifying the choice of qualitative interpretive enquiry for the research.

Positionality also affects the data collection process by impacting upon the dynamic of any qualitative interview. Without an element of self-awareness, a researcher may act in an unconscious, potentially ego-centric way determined by their character, feelings, motives, and desires. Being self-aware reduces the possibility of unconscious bias leading to more transparent research findings (H. Kallio et al., 2016; McGrath et al., 2019).

The fact that this researcher is both a qualified accountant, with over twenty years of experience in senior management positions, and a recent post graduate student, brings a wealth of experience and prior knowledge to the research process. However, it also creates a risk that the research may pre-judge the issue and consciously or unconsciously lead the interviews in a pre-determined direction. As a finance director, the researcher witnessed the transformation that technology use has had on the roles performed by junior staff members in both commerce and the profession. This experience, useful in framing the research question, must be carefully managed throughout the interview process. The data collection needs to be the views of the participants regarding accounting education relevance and not unduly influenced by the preconceptions of the interviewer.

Similarly, as a recent post-graduate (2018), the researcher witnessed attempts to introduce soft-skills modules into course curriculum. The results of those attempts again helped in the formation of the research objective but must not colour the researcher's interpretation of participants' responses. The researcher is aware that experiences have created pre-conceived ideas about the issue of accounting education which are based on a small and unrepresentative sample of opinion. As stated above, care is required to avoid such pre-conceived notions leading the research in a pre-determined direction. Careful planning and designing the interview protocol should provide some assurance that researcher preconceptions can be mitigated.

Finally, the researcher needs to be cognisant of how they are perceived by potential interviewees. How the researcher is perceived by an interviewee, (a colleague, friend, threat, authority figure, academic, interested party etc.) impacts on the quality of the data collected. Understanding the relationship dynamic within each interview is crucial to successful data collection. While not all social dimensions influence every interview, interview context determines which dimensions are present and the level of influence they may have (Roulston, 2012; Whiteley et al., 1998).

4.5.3.3 Interview planning.

Executing QRIs properly is not straightforward. Much QRI literature suggests that interviews often do not go as planned, and researchers are frequently confronted with challenges that emerge during the interview (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015; Roulston, 2011). In order to minimise the possibility of interview derailment, the researcher must first plan the interview meticulously (McGrath et al.,

2019). Careful planning also improves the rigour of the subsequent interviews (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015; Roulston, 2012).

The context – the focus and scope of the interview.

The significance of thorough interview planning should not be downplayed and includes understanding the theoretical and epistemological implications as well as practical preparations (Brinkmann, 2018; McGrath et al., 2019; Roulston, 2012). Successful interviews start with careful planning that considers the focus and scope of the research question, in the context of the existing literature (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015; Klopper & Lubbe, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). Prior even to formulating an initial interview question, the researcher should be aware of what the literature says about the issue being investigated (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015) as this helps to focus questions in order to generate meaningful data.

In this study, much of the literature focusses on how technology use is transforming the profession from ‘protector of the public interest’ to ‘business partner.’ However, there is little literature examining the impact that this evolution is having on the recruitment of student members. Similarly, within HE, there exists a plethora of literature highlighting the need for curricular change in accounting education. However, little addresses what curriculum change is necessary to enhance the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs, nor the significant challenges posed by logics on making such change. Lastly, the views of students surrounding future curriculum, relevance, value for money, and employability are significantly under-represented in the literature.

The interview – aligning to the methodological approach.

Successful interviews also consider the focus and scope of the research question in the context of the researchers chosen methodological approach (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Jacob & Furgerson, 2015; H. Kallio et al., 2016; Laksov, Dornan, & Teunissen, 2017). The focus and scope of the research question often determines the interview structure to be used. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured depending on the level of flexibility allowed throughout the interview process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). By definition, a ‘structured’, interview is the least flexible, often taking the form of a questionnaire (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi structured interviews allow more flexibility, while unstructured interviews provide the most flexible approach. However, as the interviewer often guides the initial discussion, a truly unstructured interview is hard to imagine. Consequently, most non-structured interviews are semi-structured to some degree (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The previous section justified adopting an interpretivist methodology for this study. In summary, interpretive research aims to understand the phenomenological world from the viewpoint of those who experience it. In other words, people attempt to understand the world in which they live and

work (Creswell, 2018). An interpretivist researcher accepts that to understand this world one must interpret it (Schwandt, 1998) by developing subjective meanings from individual's experiences. Consequently, the interpretivist researcher depends on the views expressed by participants to construct a narrative formed through interaction with others (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) to develop a theory inductively (Crotty, 1998). In practice, this means collecting data by asking broad, general, and open-ended questions which allow the participant to construct the meaning of an event or circumstance, so that 'truth' is negotiated through dialogue (D. Cohen & Crabtree, 2008).

Structured interviews are most often used in statistical (quantitative) investigations where a standardised order of questioning (questionnaire) is appropriate to gather relevant data around the research topic (Adams, 2015; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Such an approach is not appropriate for this study as it will not produce the depth or richness of data required to answer the research questions. In interpretive qualitative studies, such as this, where the purpose is to allow understanding to develop by exploring meaning and perceptions (Charmayne & Jayne, 2012), qualitative interviewing is more appropriate (Adams, 2015; H. Kallio et al., 2016). Qualitative interviewing allows the interviewee to share in depth descriptions of phenomena while leaving the interpretation or analysis to the researcher (Brinkmann, 2018; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Other benefits of the technique include; data collection methods that are both versatile and flexible (H. Kallio et al., 2016), an interview structure that can be altered to fit the project purpose and research questions (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019), enabling co-operation between the interviewer and interviewee (Galletta & Cross, 2013), and allowing follow up questions to be improvised from previous responses (McGrath et al., 2019).

Structurally, the semi-structured interview is well suited to this task (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; H. Kallio et al., 2016; Taylor, 2005) as it uses only a few predetermined questions and so allowing the researcher to explore issues raised by the respondent (McGrath et al., 2019).

4.6 Designing a semi-structured interview.

The semi-structured interview is often seen as an easy method of data collection (H. Kallio et al., 2016). However, much QRI literature suggests that interviews often do not go as planned, and researchers are frequently confronted with challenges that emerge during the interview (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015; Roulston, 2011). To minimise the potential of such challenges arising, an interview guide should be developed in advance. A meticulously developed interview guide adds weight to the objectivity and integrity of a study and makes the findings more plausible (H. Kallio et al., 2016; McGrath et al., 2019). It also lessens the probability of collecting data which is not necessary for the study by explicitly identifying the objectives of the interview (Whiteley et al., 1998). The interview guide covers the main topics of the study (McGrath et al., 2019; Taylor, 2005), offering focus for the interview, but should not be followed slavishly. Instead, through providing guidance on subject areas,

the aim is to explore the research topic by collecting similar types of information from each participant which can be used to better understand a number of research questions (Holloway, 2010; H. Kallio et al., 2016; McGrath et al., 2019).

4.6.1 Alignment between interview questions and research questions.

In any well-planned semi-structured interview the few predetermined interview questions align closely with the research questions, demonstrating necessity while giving the questions relevance and weight (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Alignment also eliminates unnecessary or inappropriate questions which may obfuscate the data or, worse, result in ethical issues surrounding the collection of irrelevant data and wasting participant's time (McGrath et al., 2019). Also, well aligned questions assist the aim to understand the experiences of the participants and the meaning they take from those experiences (Seidman, 2019).

However, aligning interview questions and research questions does not imply that interview questions can be drawn directly from the research questions without awareness of context and the interviewees' perspective. As Patton (2015) stated, 'you're hoping to elicit relevant answers that are meaningful and useful in understanding the interviewee's perspective. That's basically what interviewing is all about' (p. 471). The researcher needs to form an idea of the key questions to ask in a given interview, those most likely to answer the research question, but should be able and willing to adapt the questions when circumstances dictate (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Jacob & Furgerson, 2015; H. Kallio et al., 2016). Emergent design is a hallmark of the qualitative interview (Creswell, 2018).

One technique for ensuring that interview questions align with research questions is to create a data collection planning matrix. Recording information in a matrix helps ensure that there is a viable plan for collecting all the data necessary to answer each research question, that all collected data serves a specific, intended purpose, and potential gaps in data collection are identified (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

4.6.2 Interview guide and data collection planning matrix.

Table 11 contains the interview guide and data planning matrix developed for this study. It shows the over-arching research question 'how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?' broken down into three sub-questions, each aligned to, and addressing, a specific sub-problem (refer to Figure 1). Data pertaining to each of the research sub questions; how is the impact of technology use by the profession affecting the recruitment of future student members? how can the obstacles to curriculum

change in the context of logics be overcome? why will students remain motivated to study accounting in the future? will be gathered from appropriate stakeholders. Stake holders were drawn from three distinct interest groups: the PABs as custodians of the professional education curriculum, academia (academics and administrators) as interested parties in accounting education, and students. A limited number of key opening questions is contained within the data collection matrix, with 'X' denoting which sub question(s) may be assigned data from the interviewee's answers. The final column gives an indication of the potential areas for supplementary questioning depending on responses to key questions.

Table 11 Interview guide and data collection matrix.

Question - how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?					
Interview questions.	Target interviewees.	Research Question 1 How is the impact of technology use by the Profession affecting the recruitment of future student members?	Research Question 2 How can the obstacles to curriculum change in the context of institutional logics be overcome?	Research Question 3 Why will students be motivated to study accounting in the future?	Notes.
Introductory					
What is your role within the organisation?	Representatives of PABs and Academia (less relevant for students).				Context to why interviewee is an appropriate choice for the study.
What does your role involve?	Representatives of PABs and Academia (less relevant for students).				Stakeholder information, context for interest in study.
Transition					
Are you clear as to the purpose of the study, maintaining accounting education relevance to the PABs?	All interviewees including students.				Aimed to address any concerns or misunderstandings that the interviewee may have as to purpose of the study.
Before we start the main interview do you have any questions for me?	All interviewees including students.				To place interviewee at ease and to address any concerns the interviewee may have.
Are you still happy to continue?	All interviewees including students.				Confirmation of willingness to proceed.
Key					
How would you describe the future role of the accounting profession?	Representatives of the PABs Practicing accountants, Academic staff.	X			Technology, Business advisor, Competencies, data ownership, IFRS, Impact.
Potential follow up. Why do you believe that?		X			See above.
How is technology use within the profession influencing the future of accountancy?	Representatives of the PABs, Practicing accountants.	X	X		Integration, sophistication, strategy, commercial agility, partnering, interpretation rather than analysing, ethical issues.
How might the skills set required by a future accountant change?"	Representatives of the PABs, Practicing accountants, Academic staff, students.	X	X	X	Commercial agility, partnering, interpretation rather than analysing, communication.
How might this impact the professional education curriculum going forward?	Representatives of the PABs Practicing accountants.	X	X		New syllabus, apprenticeships, internship, work placements, ethics, technology knowledge.

Table 11. Interview guide and data collection matrix cont.

Question - how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?					
Interview questions.	Target interviewees	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3	Notes.
		How is the impact of technology use by the Profession affecting the recruitment of future student members?	How can the obstacles to curriculum change in the context of institutional logics be overcome?	Why will students be motivated to study accounting in the future?	
What are the perceived benefits of the above?	Representatives of the PABs practicing accountants.	X	X		Better job ready accountants, value to clients, benefit wider society.
What will be the impact on recruitment of trainee members?	Representatives of the PABs practicing accountants, academic staff.	X	X	X	Enlarged talent pool, accreditation, exemption, value for money.
How can accounting faculty in higher education meet the changing needs of the profession?	Representatives of the PABs, practicing accountants, academic staff.		X	X	Institutional logics, structure, commercialisation, Accreditation bodies, TEF, Research/ teaching relationship, collaboration, staff.
What issues do you identify in meeting these needs and how can these obstacles be overcome?	Representatives of the PABs, academic staff.		X		
How important are accreditations and exemptions?	Representatives of the PABs, academic staff, students.	X	X	X	Divergence of views? Professional influence, student motivation, control, marketing, busy curriculum.
How can collaboration between PABS and Academia be improved?	Representatives of the PABs, academic staff.		X	X	Student motivation, Individual institution, Across the sector, PABs firms academia triangle.
Why study accounting?	Students, academic staff, representatives of the PABs.		X	X	Future career, kudos, exemptions, respect, money, desire, package.
Which skills will improve chances of employability?	Representatives of the PABs, academic staff, students.	X		X	Diverging views, soft skills, technical/ soft skill balance, attitude, motivation, experience, work-based learning.
How does an accounting education rate in terms of value for money?	Academic staff, students.		X	X	Diverging views debt, experience, internship, value of qualification.
Concluding					
Have you any further thoughts on the future of an accounting education?	Representatives of the PABs practicing accountants, academic staff.				Open unstructured question – new information may be forthcoming.
As the interview draws to a close, do you have any questions or advice for me?	Representatives of the PABs, practicing accountants, academic staff and students.				Open unstructured question – new information may be forthcoming.

4.6.2.1 Interview question design.

As Maxwell (2013) explains, research questions frame what it is that you are trying to understand, while interview questions are the conduit used to gain that understanding. Therefore, interview question composition is different from research question composition. An interview question should encourage a conversation guided towards the research topic (Cridland, Jones, Caputi, & Magee, 2015; H. Kallio et al., 2016) in which the researcher talks less but listens attentively (McGrath et al., 2019). Developing good interview questions takes care, creativity, insight, and hard work (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and depends on the researcher understanding both the context of the research and how the interview will work in practice (Maxwell, 2013). Good interview questions are readily understandable and accessible to participants, avoiding theoretical language or jargon, and using laymen's terms where possible (Brinkmann, 2018; McGrath et al., 2019; Patton, 2015). Interviews should follow the social norms of everyday conversations, be varied in content, and loosely follow a script (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Jacob & Furgerson, 2015) prompting follow-up questions.

In the interview guide and data collection matrix, the skeleton interview has been broken down into four sections containing introductory, transition, key, and concluding questions. This sectional structure is advocated by many scholars including McGrath et al. (2019), Weiss (1996), Castillo-Montoya (2016), and H. Kallio et al. (2016) as, when used consistently, it enables quality interviews to take place. The introductory questions are easy to answer, put the interviewee at ease, and build crucial rapport which helps the participant share emotions, ideas, and narratives later in the interview. The transition questions, regarding the purpose of the study and the interviewees happiness to continue, introduce the research topic to the interview. The key questions surrounding the changing nature of the profession, the impact on new student recruitment, the problems faced by HE in adapting the curriculum to meet this change, and the motivation of undergraduates, are the cornerstone of the interview and are designed to illicit rich, holistic, meaningful data relating to the future relevance of an accounting education. Finally, the concluding questions asking if the interviewee has further thoughts to share neatly end the interview and allow the interviewee to reflect on the interview and raise issues not previously addressed. These final questions may also result in unanticipated responses and valuable information which guide further follow-up or amend a question for future interviews (McGrath et al., 2019). Overall, the organisation of the interview questions into these four sections (introductory, transitional, key, and concluding) moulds the interview into an inquiry-based conversation.

4.6.2.2 Validation of the interview guide – review and pilot testing.

Many authors claim that qualitative research is unscientific, exploratory, and subjective (Carey, 2009; Gephart & Rynes, 2004; Richardson, 2015; Yin, 2014; Zimmerman, 2001). As such,

qualitative researchers must constantly validate their methods. Obtaining feedback on the interview guide is one way to enhance reliability and validate the guide as a robust research instrument. Such feedback informs as to how well the interview questions were understood and if that understanding aligns with the researchers expectations (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Patton, 2015).

For this study, the researcher sent the interview guide to both a former colleague and a fellow PhD student at another university to get their thoughts on the length, structure, comprehension, and content to assess if the guide would encourage the participants to discuss and share their emotions and experiences. They were also asked to review whether the questions were clear, answerable, not too vague, or confusing, or need to be redefined. The interview guide, Table 11, incorporates the feedback received from the reviewers.

One further method of validation is to pilot the interview guide in conditions as close as possible to those of the actual study (Maxwell, 2013). However, it should be recognised that pilot studies have limitations. One is contamination which can arise either where the pilot study results are used in the final study or the pilot study participant is reinterviewed for the actual study and new data is collected from them (Van Teijlingen, Rennie, Hundley, & Graham, 2001). Contamination is regarded as less of an issue in qualitative research. Some argue that the iterative nature of qualitative research, insights gained in one interview leading to amendments in following interviews, negates the need for separate pilot studies (Holloway, 1997; Kim, 2011). Others cite not having the time, money, or access to participants as reasons for not performing a pilot study in qualitative research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Van Teijlingen et al., 2001).

While many authors extol the virtues of the pilot study (Adams, 2015; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Hurst et al., 2015; H. Kallio et al., 2016; Roulston, 2012; Seidman, 2019), deciding whether to perform a stand-alone pilot or incorporate those results in the final study needs careful consideration. In some instances, it is just not possible to exclude pilot-study participants from the main study as this would result in too small an available sample. However, for this study an initial interview, not used in this main study, was undertaken with a PAB representative to gauge how long the interview would take. This initial interview also gauged whether the questions were answerable and opened the conversation to a wider discussion. This pilot process indicated that the interview could be both conducted in an hour, the target length, and the key questions did open the conversation. As this interview was not used in the data collection process for the main study, and the interviewee was not a selected participant in actual data collection, contamination was not an issue. However, the interviewer needed to be mindful of time as the supplementary questions and further discussions occasionally went off on a tangent. The interviewer needed to moderate the discussion to avoid such pitfalls.

4.7 Participant selection.

Having decided on the initial data collection planning matrix and interview guide, documents which may evolve as the data collection process continues, attention turned to participant selection. Deciding the sample universe (Robinson, 2014), where and from whom to collect data is an important consideration to any research. In this study, interviews were carried out among groups of key stakeholders in the relevance of an accounting education. These stakeholders were the PABs as custodians of the professional education curriculum, accounting academia (accounting academics and faculty administrators) as interested parties in the delivery of an accounting education, and undergraduate students of accounting, the consumers of an accounting education.

Turning to sample size. The size of the sample in qualitative research needs careful consideration as analysing qualitative interviews can be time-consuming and onerous (a 60- minute interview generates 15-20 pages of transcription). The practical reality of analysing multiple interviews has a limiting effect on overall sample size. The literature contains no statement of optimum number only that, at the design stage specifying an absolute number is not necessary, flexibility can be enhanced by an approximate range of sample size (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Robinson, 2014). For this study, the researcher believes that between 18 to 25 interviews, spanning the range of interested stakeholders, should be sufficient to garner the required data. However, Silverman (2017) points out that the process of collecting in-depth data often leads to issues which are never altogether predictable at the beginning of the research. Therefore, given the iterative nature of this research, it is important to monitor and respond to practical issues which arise throughout the interview process as the research progresses.

Having defined the sample population (stakeholders in an accounting education) and decided on an initial approximation of sample size, the choice of participants for the study is explored. For this study, a purposive sampling strategy was deployed. Purposive sampling strategies ensure that specific categories of participants from within the defined sample universe are included in the data collection process, as they may bring differing perspectives to the issue (Robinson, 2014). To address the question; how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant? the views of the PABs, academics, administrators, and students each bring a unique perspective of the issue and should therefore be included in the sample.

Having identified the categories - interested stakeholders, the approximate number of participants in each category needs consideration. To cover the views of the profession, representatives from each PAB (ICAEW, ACCA, CIMA, CIPFA, ICAS) plus the IMA were targeted. For HE data collection, the target population included department heads, lecturers, and faculty administrators with a target

of between 12 to 15 interviews being completed. Finally, for the student body, 2 to 3 accounting student representatives were targeted. Each of the categories has a different interest in the future of accounting education and individual participants within each category brought their unique insight into the research question.

Having defined the sample pool, approximated the sample size, and decided on a sampling strategy, the final task remained sourcing participants. This involved making initial contact with potential participants through email. The email included a broad overview of the research and ask whether the recipient may be interested in partaking in the study. Where interest was expressed, a second email containing a more detailed outline of the research and, importantly, both a participant information sheet and an informed consent form was sent for the participant to review, sign, and return. Copies of both the participant information sheet and the informed consent sheet are included in appendices 1 and 2 respectively. The participant information sheet includes information regarding the study's aims, what participation entails, its voluntary nature, how anonymity is protected, how data is stored, any risks involved, and details of how to make a complaint. The informed consent form checks the participant has read and understood their involvement in the study. These two documents allowed the prospective interviewee to make an informed decision as to whether to take part and provide a record of their decision.

One last point of note. In studies such as this where any participants involvement is voluntary, the reasons for a given individual to participate may be different from those of an individual who chose not to get involved. These reasons may be separate from the sampling criteria of the study. This situation is referred to as self-selection bias (Robinson, 2014). Such self-selection bias is not possible to avoid in interview-based research, as voluntary participation is critical for ethical practice. Therefore, the researcher can only recognise the possibility of bias and make judgements about the impact of such bias on the findings of the research.

In summary, this section has identified the sample pool as stakeholders in an accounting education, defined as the PABs, academics and administrators in HE, and students. An approximation of sample, 18 to 25 interviews, has been decided upon, although there is a possibility that this may change as the research progresses. To enable the views of each category of stakeholders to be included in the data analysis, a stratified, purposive sampling strategy has been chosen. Finally, participants were selected from respondents who showed an interest in the research overview, making certain each participant was aware of the commitment involved, and that their participation was voluntary. The following section addresses the tools used to analyse the data collected from the interview process.

4.8 Data collection and analysis.

4.8.1 Data collection.

Although self-evident, collecting and recording data which enables the research question to be answered is a fundamental step in the research process. The recording of data is a two-dimensional process, consisting of fidelity and structure. When recorded properly, semi-structured interviews produce data high in fidelity and low in structure. To ensure proper recording of interviews, with the agreement of the individual participant, interviews took place over 'Zoom' and were contemporaneously recorded using Zoom's in-built facility. These recordings were professionally transcribed ready for analysis. For security and confidentiality, all paper data, including the typed-up transcripts of interviews and consent forms, together with all electronic data; including the recordings from interviews, were stored on the password protected University U drive. All data were stored in accordance with University's guidelines and the Data Protection Act (2018). Once the interviews had been transcribed, analysis of their content was undertaken using QCA.

4.8.2 – Introduction to data analysis.

Qualitative studies usually rely on inductive reasoning to interpret and structure the meanings arising out of data collection (Crotty, 1998; Thomas, 2006). Inductive reasoning generates ideas from interpreting the data (hypothesis generation). Because data collection and analysis processes tend to happen concurrently, with new analytic steps informing the process of additional data collection and new data informing the analytic processes, it is important to recognise that qualitative data analysis processes and the data collected are in some ways inseparable. The conceptual framework, the data collection methods, and the researcher's positionality in answering the research questions are all analytical processes which affect the data (Flick, 2018).

Using an inductive approach enables the researcher to; condense raw textual data into a summary format, establish links between the summary created and the research objectives, and create a schema of the underlying experiences or processes that are contained within the raw data (Thomas, 2006). Here, data gathered from the PABs, academics, administrators, and students was summarised and themes developed. These emerging themes were linked to each of the three sub problems identified previously. The problems are to understand the impact that technology use by the profession is having on the recruitment of future student members to the PABs, to explore obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics, and how to motivate and engage with potential accounting students in the future.

A major benefit of an inductive approach is that it affords a simply used and methodical set of steps for analysing qualitative data that results in reliable and valid findings. However, the approach has

identifiable weaknesses. Its robustness might not be as strong as other analytical strategies (Creswell, 2018). Also, care needs to be taken so that the researcher does not become a 'prisoner of induction', which leads to a shallow form of analysis using only surface descriptions and general summaries (Graneheim et al., 2017). Notwithstanding such issues, in studies where there are few previous studies addressing the central issue, (such as maintaining the relevance of an accounting education given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant), the use of inductive QCA is recommended (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

4.8.3 Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA).

The early versions of content analysis were designed solely for quantitative research methods and related to a positivistic paradigm (Berelson, 1952). More recent versions show that content analysis has undergone significant changes, moving from 'a counting game' (Graneheim et al., 2017) to a more interpretative approach within the qualitative methodology (Mayring, 2010; Schreier, 2012). Described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), this method is a value-based process featuring multiple realities, the mutual creation of data, and the development of individual and varied understanding of phenomena. By featuring multiple realities and mutually created data, methods of this nature are well suited to this study with its goal of understanding the relevance of an accounting education to multiple stakeholders, with disparate opinions and understanding of the issue.

QCA is one method used to analyse qualitative data. Since it was first developed by Mayring in 1983, QCA has been widely discussed in German qualitative literature as a method of analysing qualitative text, and used in numerous qualitative text-books (Schreier, Stamann, Janssen, Dahl, & Whittal, 2019a). It is, however, relatively recently that this method has attracted the attention of qualitative researchers in the international community, particularly in the fields of nursing research and education studies (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; O'Brien, Relyea, & Lidstone, 1997; Söderberg & Lundman, 2001).

It is noteworthy that QCA has created tension between practitioners of content analysis. In reviewing the literature, diverse opinions surfaced and unresolved issues emerged surrounding QCA. Critics of QCA argue that the technique cannot do more than describe the material to which the technique is applied (Schreier et al., 2019), overemphasises the creators and audiences of messages rather than focus on the messages themselves, and is often viewed as, at best, a hybrid (mixed) approach to analysing content (Burzan, 2016). As a direct result of such hybrid traits, the method has been soundly criticised by some qualitative researchers (Gibbs, 2007; Krippendorff, 2004; Mason, 2018). Indeed, Strübing (2017, p.92) goes as far as to exclude QCA from what he defines as qualitative research.

Others, (Baxter, 2009; Elo et al., 2014; Graneheim et al., 2017; Schreier, Stamann, Janssen, Dahl, & Whittal, 2019b), consider QCA as a genuine qualitative method. These diverging opinions are important in discussing the appropriateness of QCA as a content analysis tool. Scholars, like Strübing, argue that QCA falls outside the qualitative research arena and that quality criteria from quantitative research, such as objectivity and reliability, should be applied. Conversely, Elo et al.(2014), and others posit that the appropriate quality criteria to apply to QCA are those from within the qualitative field and include trustworthiness and credibility, which Lindgren, Lundman, and Graneheim (2020) argue is strengthened by focussing on abstraction and interpretation during the analytical process.

Notwithstanding the above, QCA has characteristics which define the method and its appropriateness for certain studies. Schreier (2012) identified the following characteristic as significant; a focus on latent³⁷ content in context, variable handling of reliability and validity checks as being as important as reliability checks. She also claimed that QCA being partly data driven, focussing on the context and the actors in the process, and the variability in carrying out the steps of the analysis as enhancing the appropriateness of QCA for qualitative study. Baxter (2009) identified similar ‘strengths’ to the QCA method. Particularly noting the focus on people, as message creators, as a major strength, allowing the research to explore the power relations involved in the topic.

Briefly, as a method, QCA centres on both subject and context of the text³⁸ to emphasis diversity, e.g. similarities within, and differences between, parts of the text, allowing the researcher the opportunity to analyse literal, descriptive, latent, and interpretive content (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). QCA performs this analysis in a systematic way (Bengtsson, 2016; Krippendorff, 2004; Mayring, 2010; Schreier, 2012). QCA allows the research questions to be the angle from which you examine the data (specific). This specificity allows the researcher to analyse a lot of data, not to attain the complete meaning (which is almost impossible) but to tease out the relevant aspects of the data (Schreier, 2012).

As a result of the characteristics described above, coupled with the increasing use of QCA in the field of education and its’ focus on subject and context, QCA was selected as the data analytic tool for this study. Data from interviews with individual representatives of each of the stakeholder groups were analysed to understand the disparate opinions, preconceptions, and understandings surrounding the research topic. The interview texts were analysed to identify themes and findings which emerged through the analysis process, aiming to build a coherent narrative. This narrative relies heavily on both interaction with the chosen participants and the views expressed by those participants (Fossey

³⁷ the hidden or disguised meanings, wishes, and ideas beneath the overtly expressed content of a communication.

³⁸ In this context the word text refers not just the written but also the spoken word.

et al., 2002). With its stated focus on exploring latent content in the context it was created, QCA is well suited to help develop this narrative.

Secondly, as in most qualitative research, the data for this study were co-produced between the participants and the researcher (me). It was an interactive process, and care needed to be taken to untangle and make reflexive sense of the researchers' (my) role within the process, as my background and assumptions influence any emerging act of understanding (Holliday, 2016; Hongping, 2019; Jootun et al., 2009). This reflexive process is part of the rationale underlying QCA (Schreier, 2012). In building the coding frame, the views and opinions of others regarding the suitability of the frame was sought limiting the impact of potential inherent bias arising from my background and assumptions. When undertaking the coding, itself, the goal of QCA is to arrive at a 'socially shared, consensual understanding of your material' (Schreier, 2012, p. 32). Such mutually shared understanding should further mitigate any bias which I may bring to the study. However, the researcher was ever cognisant of the criticisms of QCA which were discussed earlier.

4.9 Conclusion.

As this research involved engaging with numerous stakeholders and eliciting multiple perspectives surrounding the dynamics of accounting curriculum change a qualitative, interpretive approach was chosen. The researcher believed that the relativist ontology and subjective epistemology of this approach best suited both answering the research question and his own positionality. The chapter then outlined the methods for data collection (QRI) and analysis (QCA).

Using inductive enquiry allowed the researcher to understand the motives behind the PABs control of the accounting curriculum, comprehend the issues accounting educators face in adapting to the profession's changing needs, and explore the motivation of potential accounting undergraduates in an increasingly market driven environment.

The process of data gathering, and analysis was explained and the adoption of an iterative process for data gathering as justified. This concept of emergence was discussed in detail, with De Hann's (2006) 'reflective emergence' considered the most appropriate. Several methods of evaluation were discussed with the criteria proposed by Chamaz, (credibility, usefulness, resonance, and originality), selected.

The chapter then reviewed the method of inquiry. The choice of research design, based on Maxwell's 'interactive model for research design', was justified, and the linkage between the research problem and associated sub problems discussed. The selection of the semi-structured interview as the research instrument was explained. The context, scope, and alignment of interview questions to research

questions was discussed. Finally, the interview guide and data planning matrix were outlined and the mitigation of potential problems or weaknesses in the research design detailed.

Following, participant selection was addressed, the sample pool defined - interested stakeholders in an accounting education, and an approximate sample size determined. A purposive sampling strategy was chosen to ensure all stakeholder groups were represented. The method of interviewee selection was described, and potential ethical concerns examined. The issue of self-selective bias was considered.

Finally, QCA was selected as the data analysis tool. The strengths of QCA were highlighted and the fit with the research explained. QCA, with its focus on exploring latent content in context, aids the development of a meaningful narrative. The reflective process inherent in QCA also reduces the possibility of bias caused by the researcher's experience and background.

The next chapter focusses on the analysis of the data gathered to answer the research sub questions. Those questions being, how is the impact of technology use by the profession affecting the recruitment of future student members? how can obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics be overcome? and why will students be motivated to study accounting in the future? Answering these questions leads to a solution for the over-arching research question of how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?

Chapter 5 Data collection and analysis.

5.1 Introduction.

In this chapter the rationale for the data collection process is explained. The purpose of, and reason for, the choice of questions in each of the four interview phases being, introductory, transitional, key, and concluding is outlined. Following which the sampling pool, sample size, and the sampling strategy for this study are discussed. The stakeholder groups within the sample pool, PABs, academics, administrators, and students are detailed. As this pool is large, the rationale for the interview sample size is explained, and the sample strategy, purposive, is outlined. Brief, generalised details (no names or institutions are identified) of the interviewees for this study are included in Table 12.

The methods of data collection are outlined. The concepts of data fidelity and data structure are explained and the method of maintaining data fidelity, recording, is stated. Following which is a discussion of the method of data analysis, QCA. The chapter details the process of conducting data analysis using QCA. The design of a robust coding frame is discussed. Key terms used in the design are explained. The importance of precisely defining the categories of the coding frame is explored and issues which might affect the quality of the frame are discussed.

5.2 Data collection – the questions.

Data collected for this study was primarily generated using semi-structured interviews. The initial interviews guide and data collection matrix were designed. The guide and data collection matrix provide a loose structure for the interview. The opening, introductory questions ‘What is your role within the organisation?’ and ‘What does your role involve?’ aim to put the interviewee at ease and confirm that the interviewee may hold opinions, views, and thoughts germane to an accounting education. These questions are followed by transitional questions aimed at introducing the topic of the research. ‘Are you clear as to the purpose of the study, maintaining accounting education relevance to the PABs?’ ‘Before we start the main interview do you have any questions for me?’ and ‘Are you still happy to continue?’ introduce the topic of accounting education relevance. These questions also address any concerns and misunderstandings that the interviewee may have and offer the interviewee the chance to withdraw participation.

Having established a connection with the interviewee and created a conversational atmosphere, the questioning turns to the key data required for the study. Questions ‘How would you categorise the future role of the profession?’ ‘How is technology use within the profession influencing the future of accountancy?’ ‘How might the skills set required by a future accountant change?’ ‘How might this

impact the professional education curriculum going forward?’ are designed to facilitate a wider discussion around the changing nature of the profession and the impact that this may have on the recruitment of new student members to the PABs. Similarly, the questions ‘How can accounting faculty in HE meet the changing needs of the profession?’ ‘What issues do you identify in meeting these needs and how can these obstacles be overcome?’ ‘How important are accreditations and exemptions?’ and ‘How can collaboration between PABs and academia be improved?’ enable the issues facing accounting faculty in making curriculum change to be explored. The questions ‘Why study accounting?’ ‘Which skills will improve chances of employability?’ and ‘How does an accounting education rate in terms of value for money?’ focus on the motivation to study accounting at university and allow an exploration of the process of motivating and engaging with students. The interview concludes with the interviewee asked if there is anything that they want to add or any questions that they would like answered.

However, the interview guide is just that, a guide, not a rigid framework to be followed religiously. An interviewee’s answer to a key question leads to potential themes or issues emerging which are further explored using unspecified supplementary questions. This has the potential to draw out multiple themes, views, and opinions relating to one or more of the sub problems in the study. Pulling these disparate answers together enables the researcher to address, understand, and explain the impact that each sub theme has on the three sub problems of the study, summarised as new student membership recruitment, obstacles to curriculum change, and engaging and motivating accounting students. Understanding and explaining this impact allows the researcher to answer the overarching research question of, ‘how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?’

5.3 Participant selection for this study.

The preceding section explained the selection and purpose of the questions included in this study’s interview guide. This section details the sampling pool, sample size, and sampling strategy adopted for this study to ensure that all interested stakeholder groups have a voice. As identified previously, the principle interested stake holders in this research are, the PABs as custodians of the professional education curriculum, accounting academia (accounting academics and faculty administrators) as interested parties in the delivery of an accounting education, and undergraduate students of accounting, the consumers of an accounting education. These groups, therefore, form the sample pool from which participants for the study need to be drawn.

By their nature, these groups are large, and careful consideration needs to be given to sample sizing, particularly in qualitative studies. Interviewing generates large volumes of data, (a one-hour interview can produce fifteen to twenty pages of potential data). Therefore, the practical reality of

analysing the data produced by qualitative interviews limits the sample size. For this study, a total of twenty-five interviews were conducted with representatives of the stakeholder groupings. The number of interviews conducted with specific group of stakeholders was determined by using a purposive³⁹ sampling strategy. Using a purposive sampling strategy should aid in developing a representative sample from large sample pools as selection is on non-random criteria based on a relevant interest in the study topic. However, as discussed earlier, the strategy is prone to an element of self-selection bias, which needs to be acknowledged and considered throughout the data analysis process.

The stakeholder groups identified in this study have various levels of interest in the findings. Accounting academics and faculty administrators have the greatest interest as their livelihoods may be directly affected. The PABs and the students have a lesser direct interest, but the findings are still relevant to each grouping. Recognising this, the twenty-five individuals interviewed consisted of sixteen participants from academia, six from the PABs, and three student representatives. Each of these participants brought their unique insight to the research sub problems affecting the overarching research question.

5.3.1 Participants chosen.

The sample pool for this study is large. Of the three stakeholder groups identified, the PABs consist of six UK and Ireland based bodies, ICAEW, ACCA, CIMA, ICAS, CIPFA, and the Chartered Accountants of Ireland (CAI). Each body was contacted with the aim of securing an interview with a relevant representative. Four responded positively and provided representation, one body providing two representatives, covering distinct aspects of the professional accounting curriculum. To get a global perspective both the AICPA and the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA) were also approached, with one responding positively. Each interviewee had significant involvement in the professional accounting education offered by the body, performing functions related directly to syllabus, curriculum, and content. In aggregate, the views, opinions, and experience of this group of interviewees should prove a representative sample of the overall position of the PABs regarding the relevance of both a professional and an undergraduate accounting education. In Table 12. 'Interviewee details', the section titled 'The PABs' provides more information concerning these individuals (Interviewees 1-6)

The second group of stakeholders, accounting academia, is the most important to this study as they have the greatest personal interest in the research goal. Maintaining the relevance of an accounting education has a direct effect on this group. Reflecting this increased significance, a larger group of

³⁹ Purposive sampling strategies ensure that specific categories of participants from within the defined sample universe are included in the data collection process.

interviewees was sought. Universities which teach some form of accounting at undergraduate level in the UK number 104. (Complete university guide, 2022). It is completely unrealistic to attempt to contact, and interview, a representative from each of these institutions. This would produce an infeasibly large volume of data which would be impossible to analyse. Therefore, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted for the selection of interviewees from this group.

It is recognised that to get as representative a sample as possible, both academia and administration within accounting faculty would need representation. Similarly, both the research and the teaching fraternity would need a voice. Following desk research to identify potential interviewee candidates, targeted emails were sent to interested parties (based on their research or teaching interests, or their administration and accreditation responsibilities etc.) seeking approximately fifteen respondents. This group of interviewees are referred to as 'academia' in Table 12 Interviewee details. As can be seen, a wide range of functions and broad job descriptions is covered. The sample includes Professors (6), Associate Professors (2), Lecturers (5), Researchers (2), and Administrative Department Heads (1). There is a mix of those with PhDs (12), and those without (4). Likewise, there are representatives of faculty management (4), research (3), teacher/researchers (5), teachers (3) and solely administration (1). The group contains seven professionally qualified accountants, four of whom studied humanities at undergraduate level. The group also contains people with experience of the accreditation process, programme design, and work-based learning. Of the group, six are at Russell Group universities and nine at 1992 Group universities, while thirteen are at English institutions with one each from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.

The final group of interviewees is that of students and student representatives. There are only three interviewees in this category. Each is a final year accounting undergraduate, two at Russell Group universities and one at a 1992 university. One interviewee is also a student representative so some of their answers reflect the views of the wider student population in their institution. This group has lesser representation as they have the least direct influence on maintaining the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs. This is not to say that their overall relevance to the sustainability of an accounting education in general is being understated.

Table 12 Interviewee details.

Summary biographies of the interviewees												
Stakeholder Group	Stakeholder group	Function	PhD	Faculty	School	Qualified Accountant	Broad job description	Primary Role	Accounting graduate	Degree studied if a qualified accountant	University group	Region
The PABs												
Interviewee 1	PAB	Director				Yes	Syllabus development		No	Humanities		Global
Interviewee 2	PAB	Syllabus lead				Yes	Curriculum content		Yes	Accounting		Global
Interviewee 3	PAB	Head of Syllabus				Yes	Syllabus		No	Philosophy		Scotland
Interviewee 4	PAB	Programme developer				Yes	Content		No	Science		Scotland
Interviewee 5	PAB	Head of Syllabus				Yes	Syllabus		No	Business		UK
Interviewee 6	PAB	Consultant				Yes	Consultant		Yes	Accounting		International
Academia												
Interviewee 7	Academia	Professor	Yes	Accounting and Economics	Management	Yes	Director of Education Graduate outcomes.	Management	No	Humanities	Russell	England
Interviewee 8	Academia	Principal lecturer	No	Accounting, Economics and Finance	Business	Yes		Teaching	No	Humanities	1992	England
Interviewee 9	Academia	Deputy Head Administrator	No	Accounting	Business	No	Director of Accreditation	Management Admin	N/A	N/A	1992	England
Interviewee 10	Academia		No	Accounting	Business	No	Accreditation Academic Lead for Internships.		N/A	N/A	1992	Scotland
Interviewee 11	Academia	Associate Professor	Yes	Business Accounting and Finance	Business and Law	No		Research	N/A	N/A	Russell	England
Interviewee 12	Academia	Professor	Yes	Accounting and Finance	Business	No	Researcher Programme lead	Research	N/A	N/A	1992	England
Interviewee 13	Academia	principal Lecturer	Yes	Accounting and Finance	Business	No	Programme lead	Teaching	N/A	N/A	1992	England
Interviewee 14	Academia	Lecturer	Yes	Accounting	Business	No	Programme lead	Teaching/ Research	Yes	N/A	1992	England
Interviewee 15	Academia	Associate Professor	No	Accounting	Business	Yes	Programme lead	Teaching/ Research	No	Business	1992	England
Interviewee 16	Academia	Professor	Yes	Accounting Economics and Finance	Business	Yes	Programme lead	Teaching/ Research	Yes	Accounting	Russell	Scotland
Interviewee 17	Academia	Senior lecturer	Yes	Accounting and Finance	Business	Yes	Programme lead	Teaching	No	Humanities	1992	England
Interviewee 18	Academia	Professor	Yes	Accounting and Finance	Business	No	Head of Dept.	Management	N/A	N/A	Russell	Wales
Interviewee 19	Academia	Senior lecturer	Yes	Accounting & Business Systems Finance	Business	Yes	Programme lead	Teaching/ Research	Yes	Accounting	1992	England
Interviewee 20	Academia	Researcher	Yes	Accounting & Business Systems	Business	No	Head of Department	Management	N/A	N/A	1992	England
Interviewee 21	Academia	Professor	Yes	Accounting	Management	Yes	Chair of accounting	Research	No	Humanities	Russell	Ireland
Interviewee 22	Academia	Professor	Yes	Accounting	Business	Yes	Researcher	Research	N/A	Accounting	Russell	England
Students												
Interviewee 23	Student	Undergraduate		Accounting	Business and Law	Aspiring	Final year Student			N/A	Russell	England
Interviewee 24	Student	Undergraduate		Accounting	Business	Aspiring	representative			N/A	1992	England
Interviewee 25	Student	Undergraduate		Accounting	Business	Aspiring	Final year			N/A	Russell	England

5.4 Data Collection.

5.4.1 Relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

As previously discussed, the relationship the researcher has with the participants selected for the study affects the research process (Hammersley, 1992; Holmes, 2020). How well we can ‘capture the essence’ of the participant and ‘let them speak for themselves’ (Trinh, 1991, p. 57) has become a measure of quality in interpretivist research. The researcher must give voice to the participant, allowing the participant to formulate and elucidate their understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Yet, as Alex and Hammarström (2008) point out, interviewers and interviewees act differently depending on their respective perceptions of the power of each. Such situations may make the participant (or the researcher) uncomfortable and ‘... practicing reflexivity can be one way to minimise such experiences in interview situations’. (Aléx & Hammarström, 2008, p. 170)

Therefore, prior to conducting each interview, I considered the types of relationships that may form with participants throughout the interview process. As I previously stated (page 102), I view myself firmly in the ‘insider’ camp, as a participant observer, and understand the impact that interviewee perception of my positioning may have on the research. Consequently, I spent time contemplating how my experience and background may impact the dynamic of an interview and my relationship with the interviewees.

Regarding representatives of the PABs, I concluded that my background and experience would have limited effect. In actual interviews it became apparent that, like me, these individuals were all experienced accountants who had witnessed first-hand the evolving nature of the profession resulting from technology use. They readily understood my research objective and had the benefit of extensive experience in professional accounting curriculum development. This I viewed as an asset, key to my research. Because of our shared experience of the evolution of the profession, relationships based on trust formed readily, leading to frank and open discussion.

With accounting academics and administrators, I considered whether my research topic, accounting education relevance, and my background as a non-accounting graduate qualified accountant would pose a threat or cause discomfort to some interviewees. However, as these interviewees, having read the research overview, all voluntarily agreed to participate I considered the potential of interviewee discomfort unlikely. Conversely, it was their motivation for participation which caused me pause for thought. Some of the more forthright statements interviewees made led me to become increasingly aware of the possibility of self-selection bias influencing the research. I recognised that such bias was unavoidable but being aware of its potential effect was an important consideration.

When interviewing students my approach was different. In these interviews, my experience, age, background, and appearance could potentially intimidate the interviewees. Also, their loyalty to their institution, the institution awarding them their degree, may affect the answers given. To mitigate this, I determined to emphasize the anonymity and confidentiality of the process, believing that this would relax the participants and elicit valuable data. This worked and, just like the PABs, or the academics, these interviewees were open and, I believe, honest in their answers.

5.4.2 Data collection – the process.

As previously discussed, data collection is a two-dimensional process which consists of both fidelity and structure. To maintain the fidelity of data contained in the interviews conducted with participants, each interview was recorded using ‘Zoom’ software⁴⁰. Before any recording was undertaken the participants permission was explicitly sought at the beginning of the interview. Permission was granted in all cases.

Although self-evident, collecting and recording data which enables the research question to be answered is a fundamental step in any research process. The recording of data is a two-dimensional process, consisting of fidelity and structure. When recorded properly semi-structured interviews produce data that are high in fidelity and low in structure. To ensure the proper recording of interviews, with the consent of individual participant, interviews were conducted using the in-built recording facility of ‘Zoom’. These recordings were professionally transcribed prior to analysis as the written text is easier to analyse. When interviews are transcribed consideration needs to be given to precisely which content needs transcribing. Should all answers be transcribed or just those to the key questions, should transcription be verbatim or summary, should pauses, sounds, and other audible behaviours be included or not? Having considered these issues, I decided to have the interviews transcribed in full using Intelligent Verbatim Transcription. Intelligent Verbatim Transcription aims to communicate the meaning of the speech in the most natural way. This process involved removing repeated words, repeated phrases, and as appropriate, grammatical restructuring. For security and confidentiality, all paper data, including the typed-up transcripts of interviews and consent forms, together with all electronic data; including the recordings from interviews, was stored on the password protected University system. All data was stored in accordance with the University guidelines and the Data Protection Act (2018). Once the interviews had been transcribed, analysis of their content was undertaken using QCA.

⁴⁰ Due to technical difficulties on the university IT systems, two interviews were not recorded properly so the closed captioning facility available within the software was used as a back-up. This was a less satisfactory solution.

5.5 Data analysis.

Chapter 4 explained the benefits and risks of, and critiqued, the method of QCA regarding its appropriateness for undertaking the data analysis in this study. This section outlines the process of conducting data analysis using QCA. It explains the purpose and importance of the coding frame design to the analysis. The key terms, unit of analysis and unit of coding are defined. The importance of naming and describing the dimensions (main categories) and the sub-categories of the frame are discussed and the main categories decided. Following which, the issues affecting the quality of frame design, reliability, validity, one-dimensionality, exhaustiveness, and saturation are detailed. Finally, the process used to analyse the data is explained in depth, enabling an understanding of the evolving nature of the analysis.

5.5.1 Coding frame ('frame') design.

5.5.1.1 Introduction.

Chapter 4 identified a number of characteristics which differentiates QCA from other methods of content analysis (Schreier, 2012), including QCA's focus on latent content, its ability to handle reliability and validity, its data driven nature, and its interest in the data in context. These characteristics have led to increasing recognition of the ability of QCA to help answer questions involving experience and motivation. A number of guides to aid frame development have been published (e.g., D. Morgan (1993), Schreier (2012), and Lindgren, Lundman, & Graneheim (2020)). Each of these guides assists in designing a frame but none offer a comprehensive solution due to the subjective nature of frame design. Nevertheless, a practical strength of QCA is helping to avoid being overwhelmed by the data as the method forces the researcher to look at only certain key aspects of the data. This study involved twenty-five hour-long interviews, generating approximately four hundred pages of transcription. QCA helped to reduce large volumes of data to a manageable size, as it allowed irrelevant material to be readily excluded. By focussing on certain key aspects of an interview, these four hundred pages were significantly distilled down. This was achieved by designing and implementing a frame for the research.

5.5.1.2 Method of design.

There are two basic ways to create coding for content analysis. One, often called a deductive approach, uses existing literature and theory to create a frame prior to the start of coding. The second, often referred to as an inductive approach, uses the data itself as a basis for creating the frame (Selvi, 2019). Schreier et al. (2019a) argue the importance of developing inductive data driven categories for the frame and examining emergence of relationships between categories within the frame. The

frame for this study was built using an inductive approach. As data collection progressed, the frame was iteratively redefined. A frame is simply a way of structuring your material to differentiate distinct meanings from the data collected to answer the research question. Which, in this case, means answering ‘how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?’ The frame acts as a filter for the data, material not relevant to the main categories does not appear in the final research. Likewise, distinctions not covered by sub-categories to the main categories are discarded.

Definition of unit of analysis, unit of coding, and context units (Schreier, 2012).

Prior to starting to design a frame, the unit of analysis must be decided. The unit of analysis refers to a segment of content which forms the basis for decisions made during code creation (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). QCA often uses themes as the unit of analysis. An instance of a theme might be expressed in a single word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire document. In this study, the unit of analysis is any transcribed semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with a respondent (the ‘interview’). The unit of coding is the parts of the unit of analysis, interview, which can be interpreted in a meaningful way with respect to the categories in the frame and that fit into one sub-category of a main category. N.B. a unit of coding may appear in more than one main category but must only appear in one sub- category of any given main category. Finally, context units are the passages in the interview that are required to understand the meaning given to a unit of coding. In interviews this may be the complete answer to the question from which the unit of coding was extracted, the question itself, or a previous answer or statement given by the interviewee.

Developing main categories and associated sub-categories.

Having decided on the unit of analysis - the interview, the next step was to define the main categories of analysis and relevant sub-categories. The main categories form the dimensions of the frame and are often integral to the research question (Schreier, 2012). In this study the main categories were decided at the beginning and were defined as ‘Accounting education relevance – current situation’, ‘As technology use increases, the influence of the PABs on an accounting education,’ ‘Obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics,’ and ‘The motivation of students to study accounting.’ Primarily the main categories were chosen to gather certain information (opinions, views, understanding etc.) from the respondents relating to the sub problems of the research. Each of these main categories have sub-categories assigned to them. This was achieved using a process of subsumption (Mayring, 2010). This process involved examining relevant sections of the interview for pertinent concepts. If the concept was new, it became a sub-category. If the concept was not new, no action was taken, and the analysis moved on to the next section of the interview. Building the frame inductively meant sub-categories were neither fixed nor pre-defined,

they could be added to, removed, consolidated, or discarded as appropriate as other data were analysed.

In defining categories and sub-categories the names and definitions of each needs to be clear. The definitions of main categories are usually quite general. Below are the definitions for the four main categories in this study.

‘Current relevance of an accounting education to the PABs.’ This category will include any expressed opinions or views on the current relevance of an accounting education. These could be either positive or negative. They will include references to the threat posed by technology use in the profession, the relationship and dynamic of the professional accounting market in the UK, opinions on the current value of an accounting education, and comments or views on the current accounting education curriculum.

‘As technology use increases, the influence of the profession on an accounting education.’ This category will include any references by an interviewee to any action or behaviour by the profession which impacts directly or indirectly on the recruitment of new student members of the PABs. This will include the changing roles and responsibilities of accountants as technology use accelerates, the changing skills and attributes required to perform these new roles, changes to the professional accounting curriculum and professional competency frameworks, and the widening of entry routes to the PABs.

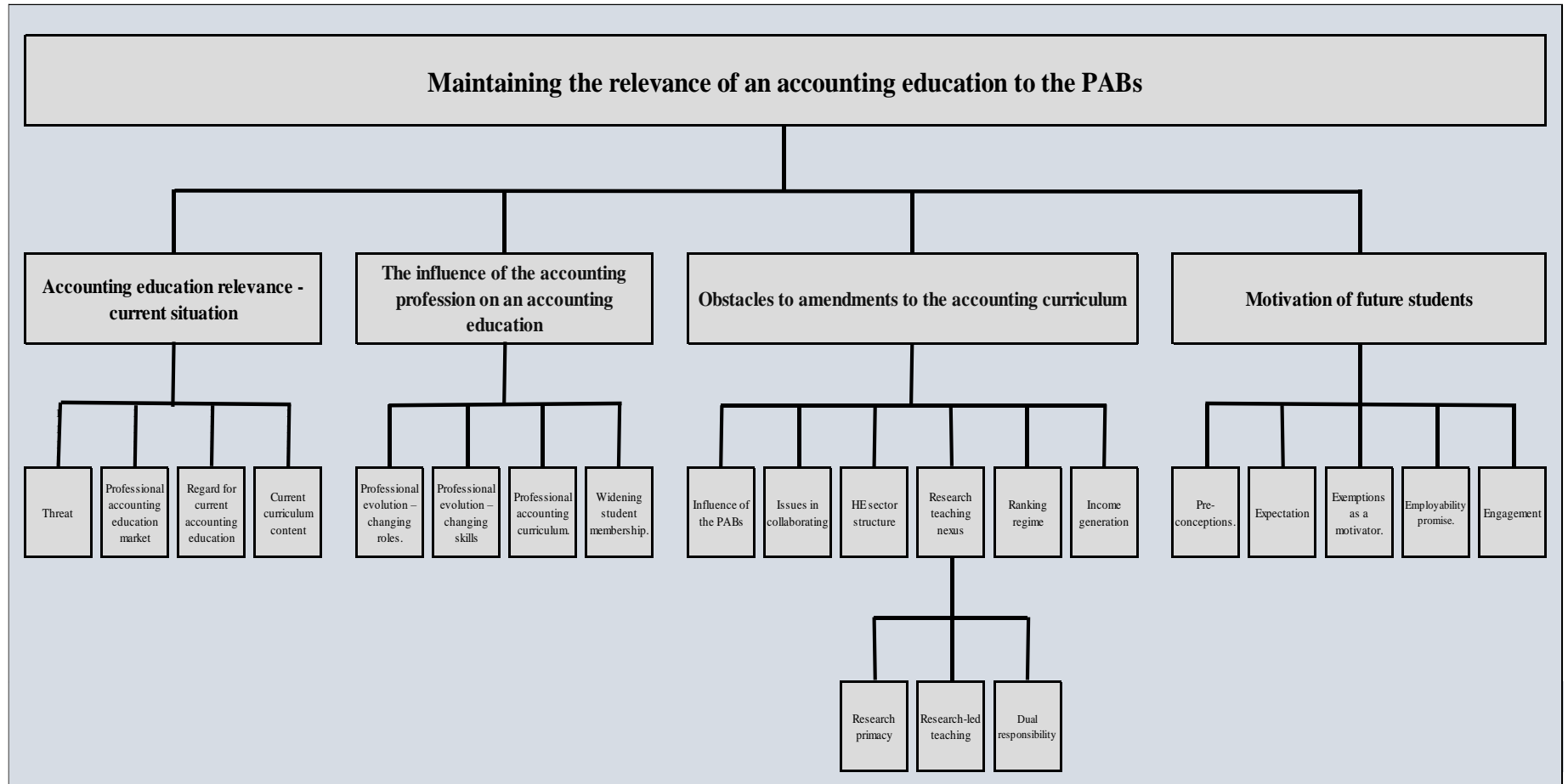
‘Obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics,’ This category will include any references by an interviewee to any action or circumstance which affects HEIs ability to make curriculum change resulting from the impact of logics. This will include references to the mindset of teaching staff, the institutional structure, HE structure, commercial considerations, the research teaching nexus, accreditation and exemptions, or the curriculum development process.

‘The motivation of students to study accounting.’ This category will include any references by an interviewee to a reason why a student or potential student might study accounting at university. This will include views on the motivation of potential undergraduates to choose accounting. It will also include views on student engagement, the value of experiential learning in its various forms, employability, and perceived value for money.

Defining the sub-categories for a frame is a more crucial element of the design. Sub-categories of a main category are the categories which are used to allocate units of coding to the frame. The names, definitions, and examples of each of the sub-categories for the frame are too numerous to list here. They are contained in the coding manual and attached as appendix 3. The definitions of sub-categories are more detailed than those of main categories and should be as precise as possible

(Schreier, 2012). Failure to provide names that are clear may lead to confusion over the appropriateness of a sub-category for a particular unit of coding which impacts the reliability of the study (Schreier, 2012). While the name of a sub-category should suggest the suitability of a unit of coding to that category, it is the description of the sub-category and examples of appropriate units of coding which make this explicit. Consequently, sub-category names, descriptions, and examples of appropriate units of coding are critical to the frame. Nevertheless, there may be occasions where a unit of coding could realistically fall into two-subcategories of one main classification. To mitigate this, the descriptions of the sub-categories involved should include 'decision rules' clarifying which category is most relevant (Schreier, 2012). The coding frame used for this research is represent in Figure 29.

Figure 29 Coding frame for maintaining the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs.



5.5.1.3 Other considerations.

The preceding section defined the bricks of the frame, the unit of analysis, the unit of coding, the main categories, and the process of defining sub-categories. The following explores other necessary considerations to create a reliable and valid frame, given the subjective nature of frame design. Considerations of one-dimensionality, exhaustivity, and saturation are briefly discussed.

Reliability.

If a deductive approach had been chosen, testing frame reliability could be done through the mechanism of inter-coder agreement (D. Morgan, 2022). However, creating a frame inductively, i.e., working through the data, is a much more subjective process, and is often accepted as such. Therefore, reliability is enhanced by ensuring mutual exclusivity of categories, and, within categories, their corresponding sub-categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When selecting main categories, making sure that there is no overlap of purpose for these categories. Information pertaining to the influence of the PABs on an accounting education is mutually exclusive to information regarding the obstacles faced by HE in making curriculum change or information regarding the motivation of students. The obstacles faced by HE are similarly exclusive from student motivation. This principle of mutual exclusivity needs to be preserved during the creation of sub-categories. However, having stressed the importance of exclusivity, a key point to emphasise is that a specific text (unit of coding) may be assigned to more than one main category, but only to one sub-category of the main category chosen.

Validity.

A second requirement of any frame is validity. A frame is regarded as valid when the categories selected adequately represent the concepts in the research question (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). In this frame three main categories, ‘as technology use increases, the influence of the PABs on an accounting education’, ‘obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics,’ and ‘the motivation of students to study accounting’ identify the purpose for the coding and align with the research sub problems (Figure 1 Alignment of research goals to research sub problems, page 8). Therefore, portions of text (units of coding), coded to a relevant sub-category in the frame, should lead to a valid narrative emerging which answers the over-arching research question, ‘how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?’ The development of a coding manual (Appendix 3) also aids reader understanding and enhances frame validity. Other considerations are one- dimensionality, exhaustiveness, and saturation. The importance of these considerations is briefly discussed below.

One-dimensionality (Schreier, 2012).

On the surface this is counter intuitive, the frame in this study has three main categories and therefore three dimensions. However, one-dimensionality does not refer to the whole frame but to each main category in the frame. Each main category should capture only one aspect of the data. For example, one aspect of the data is the influence of the PABs on the recruitment of new student members (main category). The sub-categories for this aspect are the evolution of the professional accountant, the changing skills and attributes required of new entrants, the professional accounting education curriculum, and the diversification of entry to the PABs. To meet the one-dimensional criterion, each of the sub-categories needs to be an instance (example) of the main category. Taking each in turn, the evolution of the profession is requiring future accountants to possess a different set of soft skills, therefore changing the nature of who can become an accountant. Secondly, the PABs are looking for these softer skills, before considering technical skills, in applicants for graduate positions, changing the recruitment process. The PABs are also amending the professional curriculum, adding a level of digital and technology-based modules, and amending their competency frameworks. Finally, and most overtly, the PABs are widening the entry routes to professional membership, opening professional student membership to a larger cohort. As such, each sub-category is a discrete example of the PABs influence on the recruitment of new student members.

Exhaustiveness.

A coding frame is considered exhaustive if each unit of coding has been assigned a sub-category. All relevant material must be captured by at least one sub-category. Most frames, including this one, contain a residual category (catch-all) so the concept of exhaustiveness is moot. However, the relationship between exhaustiveness and validity is a close one (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017) so exhaustiveness becomes meaningful in considering validity.

Saturation.

Saturation means that each sub-category in the frame is used at least once during the analysis. No sub-category is left empty. However, creating a frame inductively, i.e., working through the data, and developing sub-categories as the process continues means that saturation is not an issue. If no appropriate material is found to create the sub-category, then no sub-category is created. Sub-categories are only created when relevant material is found for which no sub-category already exists.

5.5.2 Data analysis, the process.

5.5.2.1 Introduction.

As discussed earlier, QCA specifically allows the researcher to analyse voluminous data, not to attain the complete meaning (which is almost impossible) but to tease out the relevant aspects of the data (Schreier, 2012), ignoring data that are irrelevant to answering the research question. Conducting twenty-five, hour long, semi structured interviews generated roughly four hundred pages of transcript for this research. Faced with such volume of data, deciding on the most appropriate coding tool was critical. Initially, the use of coding software (e.g., NVivo or QDA Miner) was considered. However, preparing the data to input into the software appeared time consuming, while the potential of systematic bias⁴¹ from using automated coding was deemed a significant risk. Manual coding avoids systematic bias as humans can make distinctions between the meaning of words in differing contexts, which automated coding cannot.

However, deciding to manually code was a daunting prospect, and I had several false starts. This initially gave rise to further self-doubt, which, coupled with an ongoing medical condition, led me to consider abandoning my research project. Fortunately, towards the end of my convalescence, I re-listened to the audio of several interviews. These interviews contained dismissive remarks regarding accounting education and inferred a complacent attitude towards developing a more appropriate curriculum from some academic staff. Together these reinforced my feeling of injustice surrounding student expectations, and I determined to see the project through.

Manual coding requires patience and a systematic approach taking many hours. Yet, by reading and re-reading the data, manual coding allows for a deeper understanding of the data to emerge as one becomes immersed in the context and meanings of the interviewees, creating a rich data set. Performed well, manual coding quickly omits irrelevant data, thereby streamlining the analysis process.

5.5.2.2 The manual process developed for this project.

Figure 30 illustrates the coding process flow adopted in this research. The flowchart appears to show that this process is sequential with stages following on from one another, i.e., the coding frame is developed, then interviews are coded, then the data are used to inform the discussion and findings. However, this is misleading and a result of the two-dimensional nature of the diagram. In truth, frame development, interview coding, and data aggregation occurred simultaneously and constantly

⁴¹ Systematic bias arises in automated systems as all computer-assisted methods of coding assume that words have the same meaning regardless of context, intonation or nuance (De Graaf & van der Vossen, 2013).

evolved as the process progressed. Interviews were coded one by one. After completing each interview, the new subcategories to emerge were added to the coding frame and a worksheet created for each emergent subcategory in the appropriate data aggregation workbook, explained later. Coding the next interview then began, and the updating process for emerging subcategories repeated as appropriate. This cycle of coding and updating continued until all interviews had been fully coded. This was not a static process but an iterative, evolving one. The coding frame was continually amended as subcategories for new themes emerged. Likewise, as coding progressed, existing subcategories and associated descriptions were often amended to accommodate nuances of the original theme. Such amendments resulted in interviews, already coded, being revisited to see if the original interview units of coding were still appropriate for the subcategory.

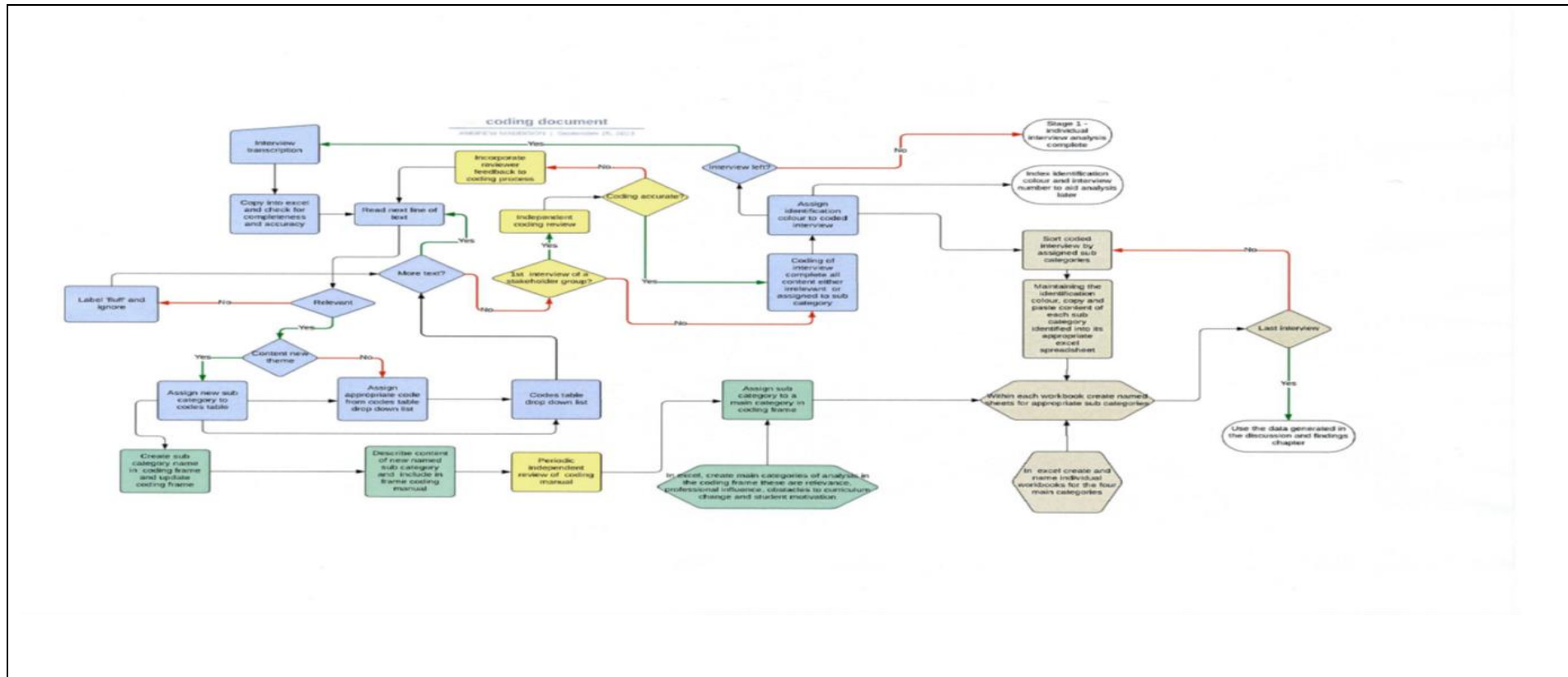
To aid the manual coding process Excel workbooks were used as de facto electronic Post-it® notes. The coding process consisted of several steps and multiple iterations. These steps covered the preparation of the transcript for coding, the coding of the individual interviews, the addition of new subcategories to both the coding frame and coding manual, and the aggregation of the results of the interview coding into appropriate subcategories. At key points throughout the process an independent third-party review was conducted, yellow boxes in Figure 30. These reviews covered subcategory descriptions, the developing coding manual, and the coding of the first interview with representatives of each stakeholder group (three interviews in total). Feedback from the reviews was incorporated into the coding process and appropriate amendments made.

5.5.2.3 Preparation for interview coding.

At this stage the coding frame, (Figure 29 page 151), contained only the research question and the four main categories, relevance, influence of the PABs, obstacles to change, and motivation. No subcategories had yet been added as these would emerge as the coding process unfolded.

The first interview transcript (word document) was copied into a dedicated (for that interview) Excel workbook and checked for accuracy and completeness. Once the accuracy and completeness were confirmed, the transcript was copied a second time into a separate worksheet, the 'analysis worksheet', in the workbook, allowing for the retention of the original transcript. Sequential line numbering was added to the analysis worksheet to enable the transcript to be sorted and resorted as appropriate throughout the coding process. A third worksheet in the workbook was used to record the emerging subcategories. These subcategories were listed in a developing subcategory names table. This names table was expanded as the interviews were analysed and new subcategories emerged. Using the data validation function within Excel, this subcategory names table was the data source for coding subcategories on the analysis worksheet in the workbook. Utilising the data validation function and creating a drop-down list of subcategory names ensured consistency of

Figure 30 Data analysis process.



Colour	Phase of coding process
Blue	Coding of an individual interview – this process is cyclical.
Peppermint	Create and evolve the coding frame and manual as new subcategories emerge throughout the process.
Yellow	Periodic independent review.
brown	Data aggregation phase – this process is cyclical.

subcategory coding throughout the analysis process. This consistency was critical for the aggregation of the data necessary for phase two of the analysis (discussed later).

5.5.2.4 Stage 1 Coding the individual interviews, blue in Figure 30.

Selecting the initial interview, the first unit of coding⁴² of the transcript was read and the content deemed either relevant or not relevant, a subjective decision. If not relevant, this unit of coding would be assigned the label ‘fluff’ and ignored. On the first finding of irrelevant data the label ‘fluff’ was added to the subcategory names table in the workbook. If this unit of coding was deemed relevant it would be assigned an appropriate subcategory name. If a new subcategory name was required, this name was added to the subcategory names table and the subcategory described. This new subcategory was linked to a main category in the coding frame, with the subcategory name and description added to the coding manual, green in Figure 30. The next unit of coding was then analysed, and these data assigned an appropriate label. If this unit of coding contained unique content a new subcategory was created and added to the coding table, a main category of the coding frame and the coding manual. If the unit of coding covered content of an existing subcategory, then the appropriate subcategory name was selected from the names table drop down list. The process continued until all potential units of coding for this interview were read and had been assigned to an appropriate subcategory. Following which the next transcript was selected and the preparation and coding steps repeated. This process was repeated until all interviews had been analysed. Figure 31, extracted from an actual interview provides an illustration of the results of this analytical process.

⁴² Unit of coding can be with a single line of data, a whole paragraph of data or a section of a paragraph if the paragraph contained more than one opinion or view.

Figure 31 Example of data coding by subcategory – actual interview extract.

Sequential numbering	Text from interview	subcategory
37	OK, thanks. Thank you very much. So in your opinion and based on your experience, I'm asking you personally I'm not asking you for the [Organisations] view. Where do you think the future role of an accountant is heading?	Question
39	Personally, I think of the accountant as an individual. I am one, I did qualify and I did a semi accounting degree. It's heading to where it always was. It's about a professional communicator. Listen, it is taking this huge amount of complex systems and information and being able to explain it to a client. In laypersons terms that's what they've got to do. So whether it's technology or sustainability, the accountants job is to make the lay person understand what it is telling them They (the recipient) need to know what they need to do to the business or situation. So I guess the key thing is communicating in a manner that the client knows what they've got to do going forward.	Professional evolution - changing roles
41	OK, and in doing that and in sort of incorporating the various technology advances, data analytics primarily in big data and AI and blockchain and the list is getting longer and longer. How do you think that is going to impact on the way accountants communicate and the skills that we need to communicate effectively?	Question
47	And that's where the professional communicator comes in. So you have got all that stuff (data) suspended up in the machine. Not everybody's got access to their data, but you've really got to have somebody who really understands how to communicate that data in in in manageable chunks. It's pointless telling your story to the person, if it's (the data) not been authenticated, if it's not being moderated, all these professional terms, you've got to have somebody in the middle there that uses the data.	Professional evolution - changing skills
48	The input is that of technology, but outcome is still the same. You've still got to tell the person with the garage in Carlisle that it looks like the price of petrol is going to go up over the next six months. All that analysis needs care about is that the client wants to know what's going to happen to their business. The last two years has been the good example of being overwhelmed by statistics to the point where we have no idea what to do anymore.	Professional evolution - changing skills
49	My personal point of view, by 2025 something's going to say stop, we've (humans) got to catch up with this technology and make sure that they're in front of it, rather than technology being in front of them. I love technology. I love gadgets, but you can see some people just drowning in them currently, they have no idea what they're doing, why they're doing it, and that's why scams results and people lose lots of money. The personal touch has got to come back big time in the next five years so.	Professional evolution - changing skills
57	It should be phrases like ethics, ethics in everything they do it. The Student should think of all these new modern ideas throughout the whole syllabus	Professional evolution - changing skills
101	Yeah, I think that that's the big hidden thing in the UK. An internship means a lot. But its often, it's old school ties and that. They're gold dust because it's like try before you buy from both the student and employer's point of view. If you get somebody in for a couple of weeks or even longer over the summer, employability rate is huge because the tried and tested that they're already in. So, internships and that ability to mix and match your learning, something you put into practice. As I say, it's got to be the way forward.	Employability

Line number of original interview

Extract of actual transcript text from an actual interview filtered by the subcategories Professional evolution - changing roles, Professional evolution - changing skills and employability (for accounting graduates)

Subcategories chosen from drop down list contained on separate sheet

5.5.2.5 Stage 2 Aggregation of coded data, brown in Figure 30.

Stage 1 resulted in twenty-five coded workbooks, one for each interview conducted. Stage 2 of the analysis process required that data contained in these individual workbooks be aggregated by subcategory to provide the skeleton for the research findings chapter. This was a two-stage process, comprising preparation for aggregation and the actual process of aggregating the data.

Preparation for aggregation of data.

An Excel workbook was created for each of the four main categories. Individual worksheets within each workbook were created, representing the subcategories of a respective main category, see Figure 29 on page 151. For example, the workbook for the main category ‘Accounting education relevance-current situation’ contained four individual worksheets titled ‘threat’, ‘professional accounting education market’, ‘regard for current accounting education’, and ‘current curriculum content’. Also, in preparation for aggregating the data, each fully coded interview was assigned a unique background colour, used to enable the identification of the source of a particular unit of coding in an aggregated workbook. Figure 32 Aggregation of interview data provides an example aggregation. N.B. a list of assigned background colours was kept for reference.

Aggregating the data.

Aggregation occurred concomitantly with the coding process. Each of the four main category workbooks, accounting education relevance, the influence of the profession on accounting education, obstacles to curriculum change, and student motivation were continuously updated during the coding process. The steps were as follows; each ‘analysis worksheet’ was sorted by coded subcategory and the resulting data copied to the appropriate subcategory worksheet in a main category workbook, maintaining the assigned background colour. Having copied all relevant data from the first interview into respective subcategory worksheets, the process was repeated for subsequent interviews. As each interview was added, the expanding content of subcategory worksheets was reviewed to check for consistency of coding. Once all twenty-five interviews had undergone this process, the main category workbooks were complete and ready to inform the discussions and findings chapter. Figure 32 illustrates this process and is extracted from the actual interviews conducted for this research.

Figure 32 Aggregation of interview data.

A	B	C	D	E	F
179	I would never advise my children to study Accounting at university, and I used to be an Accounting lecturer back in the day. Unless they can turn round and have some added value, and I don't think that added value comes from a university degree.	Regard for current accounting education - dismissive			
139	I think it's a difficult question because, for us, the higher education you talking about, undergraduates level, is just a stepping stone and it's almost indifferent to us as to whether people come through the university route or do our exams for the foundations of the early level.	Regard for current accounting education - dismissive			
65	Yeah, in all honesty for [organisation], they've never cared that much about whether it's relevant or not relevant. They don't. They don't recruit on that basis. They are looking for something from the degree. They are just looking for a good degree from a good university. If they (the student) had accounting, fine. If it's fine art, fine.	Regard for current accounting education - dismissive			
70	I think that the content, a relevant degree has, is neither here nor there for the for the profession. It's the fact that it's just a good degree.	Regard for current accounting education - dismissive			
92	Whether we'd be that bothered, I really think that. The only time we'd be bothered is if I think the professional bodies came back and say you need to teach this. If you want to get an accredited degree you need to know teach this.	Regard for current accounting education - dismissive			
18	Okay, in that sense I'm not sure I have any idea, I think there will actually be more of it, that's about the only thing I'd say, as Universities love money. And they will be trying to you know, devise as many different courses to attract as many different people as they can.	Regard for current accounting education - dismissive			
31	There just seems to be lots of different people who are putting input and you just get this kind of mismatch, compromise. These people could tick a box, these other people could tick a box, you know but no concern about the quality of the end product if you like.	Regard for current accounting education - dismissive			

Line in original transcript of that particular interview

A sample of units of coding from various interviews. In this extract these are opinions which contain content which is dismissive of aspects of the value of an accounting education Each different colour represents a different interview . In this extract data has been aggregated from five individual interviews

Filtered on dismissive regard for a current accounting education

5.6 Conclusion.

This chapter has detailed the data collection process for the study. Building on chapter 4 – Research methodology and method, the specific rationale and purpose of each key question was explained. The likely emergence of disparate follow up questions was acknowledged. The practical issues of data collection in qualitative studies with large sample pools was reviewed. The choice of sample pool, key stakeholders in accounting education, the calculation of the sample size, the sampling strategy (purposive), and the process of participant recruitment were addressed. The participants chosen, and the possibility of self-selection bias were reviewed to ensure all stakeholder groups were represented. Brief details of each participant (anonymised) were included in Table 12 (page 144).

Having explained the choice and process of sampling, the method of data collection was outlined, and a brief discussion of the method by which data fidelity would be maintained was included. The selected data analysis tool, QCA was described, and its main benefits outlined. Key terms of the QCA process, unit of analysis, unit of coding, main, and sub-categories were explained and their relationship to one another illustrated. Issues relating to the reliability of QCA, validity, one-dimensionality, exhaustiveness, and saturation, applicable to this study were reviewed to ensure the robustness and quality of the coding frame design. Finally, the manual nature of the actual analysis process was described and illustrated in a process flow diagram and with examples. These figures capture the essence of the process and convey the time-consuming nature of the data coding for this research. The following chapter discusses the findings arising from this analysis.

Chapter 6 Discussion and findings.

6.1 Introduction.

This chapter marries content from the literature review with data gathered from interviews and desk research to build a complete picture of how accounting faculty could improve the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs, the overarching aim of this research.

In this chapter, a brief outline of the idiosyncrasies of the UK accounting market is followed by a discussion of maintaining accounting education relevance to the PABs. This discussion takes place against the backdrop of a substantial number of academic studies alluding to an expectations gap between the PABs and accounting educators. To contextualise the issue relevance in accounting education, interviewee's opinions of 'why study accounting?' are sought and examined. Focussing on opinions expressed by the PABs representatives, the scale of the challenge faced by accounting faculty to maintain accounting education relevance is outlined.

The chapter then addresses the sub-questions of the research, the answers to which form the foundations of the solution to maintaining the relevance of accounting education to the PABs. Addressing the first question 'how is the impact of technology use by the profession affecting the recruitment of future student members?' the chapter explores the impact that the profession's evolution is having on the recruitment of new student members. The part played by technology use in this evolution is examined and the drivers of the profession's repositioning discussed. The new skills and attributes that the modern accountant must possess to be successful in this changing environment are outlined. Following which, amendments to the professional education curriculum necessary to allow future accountants to attain these skills and attributes is detailed. Finally, the impact of these curriculum changes on the profile of future student members is analysed, graphically illustrating the current relevance of an accounting education to the PABs.

The second sub-question 'how can the obstacles to curriculum change in the context of institutional logics be overcome?' is then analysed. Throughout the section, the logics which are driving the behaviour of either the PABs or HEIs are identified. Firstly, the influence that the PABs exert on the HE accounting curriculum through exemptions is investigated. This is followed by an exploration and explanation of the difficulties encountered in collaborating between the PABs and HEIs. Having addressed the PABs' involvement in creating obstacles to curriculum change, obstacles inherent within HE are reviewed. The groupings of institutions within HE, in terms of teaching ethos, bureaucracy, and management structure are discussed. The impact of the introduction of market forces is explained and the effect on accounting faculty outlined. The effect of the relatively recent introduction of managerial measurement systems (TEF, rankings, and league tables) on accounting

departments is explored. Finally, the dynamic within the research teaching nexus is examined. The effects of the primacy of research over teaching, the student as the consumer, and the recruitment and retention of appropriately qualified staff in relation to curriculum development is described.

Finally, the third sub-question ‘why will students be motivated to study accounting in the future?’

The section begins with a brief discussion of the motivation to study accounting despite the prevailing stereotypical image of an accountant. Referencing the literature and using (reinforcing) data from interviews, the current motivation of accounting students is explored. A statistical analysis of relevantly qualified student membership of the PABs is undertaken and the expectations of students pre graduation examined. These expectations are compared to post graduation outcomes and the gap between the two reviewed. Strategies to enhance student motivation and engagement are discussed. Finally, an outline of ideas and actions to improve future accounting student motivation is detailed and the potential benefits to the relevance of an accounting education reviewed.

6.2 Accounting education relevance.

6.2.1 Introduction.

In the literature there is much discussion as to the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs, with many scholars alluding to a gap between the requirements of the PABs and the product supplied by the HEIs (Amernic & Craig, 2004; Asonitou, 2021; Bunney et al., 2015; Dolce et al., 2020; Flood, 2014; Kokina & Davenport, 2017; Pincus et al., 2017; Rebele, 2002; Sledgianowski et al., 2017; Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021; Webb & Chaffer, 2016; R. Wilson, 2014). As the profession increasingly uses technology to do much of the data gathering and early-stage analysis, removing or reducing significantly a number of entry level roles, (Dancey, 2019; Kokina & Davenport, 2017; Marrone & Hazelton, 2019), that gap is increasing. This challenges accounting faculty to adapt to the changing skills required and make their accounting degrees more future proof (Carvalho & Carlos, 2022; Tan & Fawzi, 2017). Accounting faculty are aware of the threat posed by the accelerated digitalisation in the profession, as illustrated below:

It’s that fundamental challenge of any subject really but maybe particularly accounting which is so implicated by the change in digital capabilities. How [can] we keep that absolutely relevant and attractive and current when the world is moving faster than academia? (I9 – Deputy Head of Department).

To better understand the relevance of an accounting degree to the PABs it is important to understand the entry mechanism to the professional accounting market. From a global perspective, the UK market is unique. In most other countries to train for professional membership you need to hold a HE accounting qualification. Countries like the United States, Germany, or the Netherlands, each highlighted in interviews, insist on a minimum number of accountancy modules or hours of study.

(USA minimum 150 hours, Netherlands an accounting degree, Germany often a masters in accounting). In the UK there is no such pre-requisite and entry to the PABs is open to a wide array of applicants. The professional accounting education market relies heavily on third party training providers, e.g., Kaplan, BPP. This is also unique to the UK. In the UK, the professional accounting syllabus is designed by the PABs and delivered by third party providers. Though some accounting academics participated in the design of professional accounting syllabi, control of professional accounting education remains with the professional PABs:

The learning eco system of professions is a lot more mature in the UK than anywhere else in the world, the likes of Kaplan, BPP, they don't exist in the same way in other places. (I1 – PAB representative).

In the UK, even amongst organisations termed professional, the PABs are an outlier, allowing non relevantly qualified individuals access to membership. This does not happen in other professions such as medicine, dentistry, psychology, or engineering for example. Because entry to the PABs is not restricted to holders of an accounting degree, the market for training contracts or graduate schemes is extremely competitive. Thus, the advantages of studying for an accounting degree are already blurred. Indeed, in certain circumstances, possession of an accounting degree may be a disadvantage as some employers like to 'mould' their recruits, which is easier if these recruits have no prior accounting background:

... [the firms and large graduate schemes] they almost want to institutionalise you from day one ... and that's why they don't take the exemptions or don't recognise the exemptions... would they even actively discourage an accounting qualification because they want you to do it their way, they want you to think like them? (I15 – Associate Professor).

The task facing accounting HE is how to react to the challenge of digitalisation within the profession. Academically, an accounting degree requires students to understand how accounting systems design, performance, and validity are impacted by accounting theory, individual or organisational behaviour, technology, the economy, wider society, and the environment (QAA, 2019). The study of accounting involves analysis of information for numerous decision-making purposes, regulatory (e.g., tax), managerial (e.g., resourcing decisions, make or buy), and accountability (e.g., audit) and requires that this analysis can be readily explained to the intended audience (Bhimani, 2021; Hudson, 2021). However, the delivery of these objectives is different from institution to institution, as curriculum content differs depending on the relationship an individual HEI has with the various PABs, particularly in the area of accreditation and exemptions (Ellington & Williams, 2017; Fogerty & Lowensohn, 2017; Lansdell et al., 2020).

The quote, (I9 above), captures the focus of this study into 'how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?' This is an important issue given that statistics regarding the percentage of students

entering the PABs having obtained an accountancy and finance degree has fallen steadily for at least eleven years (FRC, 2011-2022). In the discussion around the current relevance of an accountancy education, the starting point is to explore the question of ‘why should somebody want to study accounting?’ This key question elicited wide-ranging responses from study participants which are discussed below.

6.2.2 Why study accounting?

Although this question was put to all participants, the following gives primacy to the responses of the representatives of the PABs and to their opinions regarding the relevance of an accounting education. Responses from other participants have been included where appropriate. Summarising, the responses included ‘it’s an irrelevance’, ‘it opens doors to opportunities’, and ‘it provides a solid foundation for a future career’.

6.2.2.1 *Dismissive (irrelevant).*

Among the PABs, the dominant theme (English based PABs) was that of indifference to an accounting education. As illustrated below, the choice of degree discipline is regarded as almost irrelevant:

I think that the content, a relevant degree has, is neither here nor there for the profession ... They are just looking for a good degree from a good university. If they [the student] had accounting, fine. If it's fine art, fine. (I5 – PAB representative).

Any degree that has a framework and an ability to create an argument, look at either side of an argument and create a good solid conclusion, things like this. History, English, Theology do this. That's a skill set we're looking for and they [students] do perform well. (I5 – PAB representative).

...it's almost indifferent to us as to whether people come through the university route or do our exams for the foundations of the early level (I2 – PAB representative).

While another claimed:

I would never advise my children to study accounting at university, and I used to be an accounting lecturer back in the day. (I1 – PAB representative).

The representatives of the Scottish PAB expressed no specific view as to the value of an accounting education. Research indicates that the professional accounting environment in Scotland is different from the rest of the UK, a point discussed in more detail later. In follow up questions the PABs cite other considerations such as a ‘good degree from a “good” university’ (I5) or a ‘balanced, holistic education’ (I2) as more important. Phrases such as ‘neither here nor there’, ‘indifferent to’, and ‘I would never’ underline that the (non-Scottish) PABs do not see an accounting qualification as a pre-requisite for a career in accounting.

Interviews with academics revealed a grudging recognition that this was the case: ‘I went to an accounting education conference a few years ago and I think it was Head of PwC at the time stood up and said no we don’t take anyone from accounting, we take geographers’ (I19 – Senior Lecturer). Academics often cited exemptions as an advantage of an accounting education (speed of qualification, cheaper for the employers) but this is often stated half-heartedly or without conviction:

I think that does help [exemptions to speed qualification], but beyond that I’m not sure that there is a huge amount of difference if that English graduate has also had their graduate skills developed in the same way. (I19 – Deputy Head of Department).

Even the stated benefit of holding exemptions was undermined as it emerged that the ‘Big-four’ often made their trainees sit the examinations anyway, and larger commercial organisations offer day release and study packages, without regard to exemptions. However, interviewees did note that smaller professional firms and mid-size enterprises did value the cost savings created by exemptions. Given the opinions expressed above, it is difficult to see how the current accounting curriculum can arrest the decline of the number of accounting graduates being accepted to train by the PABs. It is against this background, and for this reason, that this study seeks to propose appropriate curriculum amendments so that accounting graduates are better placed to succeed in their chosen careers. A view shared by academics:

So, I see that [curriculum change] as the biggest challenge that we’ve got to wrestle with and making sure that an accounting student is the first on the list rather than the historian or the English language [graduate]. All those kinds of linguistic related subjects tend to be much more attractive to the accountancy firms. (I20 – Head of Department).

I was somewhat disheartened by the above as I had not realised just how little relevance the PABs place on an accounting degree. Maintaining the value of an accounting education to organisations with little interest in the subject is difficult. I concluded that it is only possible to push accounting graduates further up the employment queue and I determined to design a framework that would achieve this.

6.2.2.2 Door opener, wider opportunities.

More positively, among academics, an accounting education is viewed as a door opener to many different opportunities, even when a student is, themselves, unaware of what they might want to do as a career. It keeps options open:

Because it does allow you all those different options... So, you can develop the finance side of things, you can develop the sustainability, the entrepreneurial, the strategic, the digital. There’re so many aspects to that just that word accounting. (I19 – Deputy Head of Department).

Business is one of those, I think you do business because you want to get a job at the end of it, you don’t know what you want to do but business will get you a job. (I12 – Professor).

Interestingly, this second interviewee referred to ‘business’ rather than ‘accounting’ when discussing wider graduate opportunities. The accounting curriculum often focusses on preparing undergraduates for careers with the ‘Big-four’, so that the wider opportunities are often undersold:

They [faculty] don’t recognise that accounting is much more than public accounting and if you don’t get that exposure that you can work in IT, you can work in data, you can work in supply chain, if you’ve got that strong basis of accounting. (I6 – PAB representative).

By focussing on preparing undergraduates for careers in the large professional firms, the fact that there are numerous, fulfilling roles for accounting graduates in commerce or industry is often overlooked. This is a disservice to both the student and the institution. The flexibility afforded by an accounting degree, lauded above, is usually only available if selecting optional modules. Rarely is this flexibility offered as part of the core curriculum, with its financial accounting, audit, and tax focus. This ‘Big-four’ focus was recognised in many interviews:

We ask some of the Professors well how do you educate your students on what their career possibilities are and almost everyone [said] the answer is well we tell them to go to a ‘Big-four’. (I6 – PAB representative).

Is an accounting education, university education valuable? I mean a lot of people look at the ‘Big-four’, but they are not the be all and end all of the accounting world. (I15- Associate Professor).

That’s the original function of accounting isn’t it, audit, and insurance. (I12 – Professor).

Focussing the curriculum on areas such as audit and tax narrows down student choice unnecessarily and discriminates against students favouring a career in industry or commerce. These organisations place less emphasis on audit and tax and more on strategic management and business development. Most commercial organisations sub-contract out their tax advice and engage a professional firm for audit purposes, so their accounting trainees have little requirement of exposure to the disciplines of tax and audit. Also, tax legislation changes rapidly so any tax knowledge gained in a degree is out of date almost immediately. Changing the core curriculum, to enhance the door-opening opportunities. may be one way of improving the relevance of an accounting education.

6.2.2.3 Technical skills as a foundation.

Technical skills are open to instruction (they are taught) and are often acquired through work experience, education, or training. It is recognised that some level of technical skill is critically important to success in the business world of today (Alshare & Sewailem, 2018; Mistry, 2021). For an accountant, these technical skills include understanding debits and credits, knowledge of accounting practices, the ability to prepare and present financial statements or other management

reports, use accounting software, and data analysis. Such technical skills are the foundations upon which a professional accounting career is built. However, who should have responsibility to teach these skills is an open debate. The PABs recognise that, through their relationships with professional educators (BPP, Kaplan etc.), they are well placed to deliver this training and that such training is not necessary in degree study (Hopper, 2013).

For years scholars have claimed that accounting education is too technically focussed, almost replicating the professional accounting curriculum, in the quest for exemptions (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Ellington & Williams, 2017). In interviews the PABs concur:

The profession's syllabus was never intended to be taught at university. It was initially something you did while you were working (I1 – PAB representative).

'When we make changes to our syllabus, they're keen and they're happy to kind of incorporate those changes within their syllabus's as well.' (I4 – PAB representative).

The scholars above, and others (Howcroft, 2017; Kruskopf et al., 2019; Ramachandran Rackliffe & Ragland, 2016), argue that accounting faculty should be instilling in their students the focus, attitudes, attributes, and competencies that the PABs need. Once again, the PABs agree, underlining that it is these skills and attributes that employers require:

You know, I do remember, even in my days at [named institution] [soft skills training] was definitely not relevant at all. It was kind of, here's what I need to do for my exams. We had to do a bit of a presentation and a bit of this in a bit of a team. I don't think that attitudes changed much over the years, but the importance of those [softer] skills have. (I2 – PAB representative).

There was definitely a demand from the students to even have those skills. Because otherwise they would come to an interview and they wouldn't be able to talk to someone, you know effectively. (I3 – PAB representative).

Stop selling a degree on credits sell it on the skills are actually needed, the skills in the workplace that employers are looking for... Employers are looking for; can they [the candidate] analyse, can they think for themselves, can they demonstrate interpretation and make a recommendation, those kinds of things (I5 – PAB representative).

The PABs also counselled against slavishly chasing exemptions:

I hate the word 'soft skills,' but there are other skills that are required. Those further analytical skills, that further thinking skills, that critical thinking skills... Stop chasing the exemptions. (I1 – PAB representative).

Stop selling a degree on credits sell it on the skills are actually needed. Employers are not looking for credits. If you did that employers are more likely to chase after your students from that degree rather than. 'Oh, they've got a credit in accounting'. (I5 – PAB representative).

In interviewing academics there was also an understanding that the skills required to secure employment revolved around more than being technically capable:

You would expect them [students] to have some base knowledge of things like debits and credits, you know accounting mechanisms, management accounting. You would expect them to have that broad base of knowledge. However, from talking to employers that's not their primary concern. (I8 – Principal Lecturer).

It's not the hard skills of you know can you prepare trial balance ... It's that more kind of personal skills or even down to personality type sometimes. You know that sort of ability, questioning attitude things like this. (I15 – Associate Professor).

And a recognition that many of the technical skills could be taught and tested on-line successfully:

The threshold technical stuff can be done by sort of online testing you know, do the test, and reach a threshold in terms of technical understanding. (I9 – Deputy Head of Department).

You know, it just shows that, the technical side of it could be taught online rather than face to face. (I23 - Student).

However, there is a theme running through the academic interviews regarding the belief that you need to teach the 'fundamentals.' In such instances interviewees referred to the fact that students would be able to understand accounting and have a secure foundation for their learning. However, as stated in the quote below, much of the importance of teaching the technical skills is inexorably linked to the need to gain exemptions:

If we didn't live in that competitive world, what should the position [be]. I think my views there are actually I still think Universities should be covering a lot of that technical material that forms the basis of the exemptions. (I16 - Professor).

...but there's obviously, you need to teach the fundamentals. You know you really need to teach; they [students] need to understand accountancy. (I13 - Professor).

While teaching technical content is obviously of value, a balance must be struck between technical skills and other attributes. The PABs are less interested in this notion of technical capability knowing they can facilitate teaching those skills. The PABs are looking for HE to bring in complimentary content, not just follow the professional curriculum:

Now, what that complementary thing is, it would be things like communication skills, more of the softer skills perhaps, more of a hands-on technical skill in the technology world. So, it wouldn't be sitting in the classroom being lectured at about what the rules of accounting are. (I1 – PAB representative).

And so, if your [accounting] role is turning more interpretive you actually need to know where things come from [technical ability], to an extent, but I think the balance will change. (I2 – PAB representative).

Obviously, any accounting degree must contain the fundamental elements of accounting but subjects like tax, a subject where content changes very rapidly, does that need to be core curriculum? It is recognised that there needs to be room in the core curriculum for more professional skills development. Currently these modules are on the periphery of accounting courses, often extra-curricular, and voluntary. Attendance is often extremely low, but the importance of these skills is rapidly increasing. To get professional skills modules into the core curriculum involves significant course restructuring as the current courses are too busy. Exploring course restructuring offers another opportunity to address the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs.

6.2.3 Conclusion, accounting education relevance.

For many years academics have argued that accounting faculty are increasingly failing to meet the needs of the PABs to the detriment of an accounting degree. In exploring the opinions of the importance of an accounting qualification for securing trainee membership, the English based PABs were universally dismissive, believing it to be almost irrelevant. The Scottish PABs not so. Interestingly, academics were aware of this ambivalence and recognised the threat that such views posed.

The PABs questioned the HE focus on teaching technical skills, highlighting that employers sought less technical and more professional skills. This technical focus narrows the curriculum to the detriment of employability and opens membership opportunities to a wider cohort. Focussing the curriculum on preparation for a career in a professional firm was also questioned. Many students of accounting will not follow that route, but the current curriculum does not meaningfully inform undergraduates of the alternatives. The analysis of the interviews demonstrated that the PABs believe that the technical teaching is something they can facilitate, and they would like the institutions to add value by complimentary teaching. The challenge issued to HE is to design a new curriculum which understands what is on offer and why is it offered. A point succinctly made by the interviewee below:

You know, so I think that's the challenge of the Universities and College system to really define what are we offering to the students and why are we offering it. And are we willing to gamble that we're going to focus on just one or two areas instead of 20. (I6 – PAB representative).

The current accounting curriculum will not influence the PABs to take on more accounting graduates on its own. There are numerous graduates from multiple disciplines applying for limited training places. Students graduating from accounting faculty need to be work ready and able to stand out from the crowd, making themselves more employable to the PABs. In interviews with academics, they appear to be aware of this need:

... but there will be hundreds of students with that degree, so what else have you got. What else can you do and the attributes and the skills that I'm talking about more widely are what I think students sometimes forget to focus on. (I11 – Associate Professor).

So, I see that as the biggest challenge that we've got to wrestle with and making sure that an accounting student is the first on the list rather than the historian or the history graduate, English language graduate. All those kinds of linguistic related subjects tend to be much more attractive to the accountancy firm[s]. (I20 - Head of Department).

To achieve this, accounting graduates need to navigate complex recruitment processes better than graduates from any other discipline. Technical skills and a host of exemptions are not sufficient. Professional skills are much in demand. However, there is little room to develop these in a curriculum slavishly searching for accreditation and exemptions.

6.3 Research question 1 - How is the way the profession is evolving due to technology use impacting the recruitment of new members?

6.3.1 Introduction.

Using extracts from the literature review, views and opinions gathered from interviewees, and desk research to understand the data surrounding student membership, this section explores the impact that the profession's evolution is having on the recruitment of new student members. Opening with a brief discussion of why and how the profession is evolving. As technology use increases, some traditional activities are less financially viable and alternative services need to be provided. These strategic commercial considerations alter what is expected of the profession, potentially threatening its professional status. To mitigate this threat, the new skills and attributes required by a modern accountant to be successful in these evolving roles is outlined. Following which, the amendments to the professional education curriculum to enable the PABs to retain control over a professional accounting education is examined. This focusses on the inclusion of both digital and professional skills into the curriculum opening student membership to a wider cohort. Finally, statistics relating to new student membership across the PABs is analysed to illustrate the impact that this professional evolution is having on the recruitment of accounting graduates.

6.3.2 Context.

The profession and professionals are increasingly pulled by two differing logics, professional logics, and commercial logics (Duff et al., 2020; Raynard et al., 2011). Professional logics, a drive to serve the public interest, is what underpins many of the traditional activities of accountants, e.g., audit and accountancy services, financial reporting, or providers of management information. In putting forward their 'professionalising' claim, the PABs stress that members have a high level of both practical and theoretical education, behave ethically, and serve the public interest (Paisey & Paisey,

2020). The PABs have long recognised that technology poses a threat to their professional status by redefining societal expectations of accounting and altering the scope and nature of the profession's role (Andreassen, 2020; Islam, 2017; Melnyk et al., 2020). Automation and innovative technology have reduced the profitability of the profession's core products and replaced a number of traditional roles (Lander et al., 2013; Nielsen et al., 2019), creating professional tension, and changing the way the PABs view their value to society (Bowles et al., 2020; Ojanperä et al., 2018). The PABs recognise that this transformation is not without risks which could negatively impact their professional status:

That's the risk [being viewed as number crunchers] especially as technology drives ahead, generating more output to analyse. If you look at America ... it's the lawyers that have the front seat. In the UK it is the accountant that has the lead, the lawyers are the backroom people. So, we've got to make sure we maintain our position. (I5 – PAB Representative).

To mitigate any threat to their professional status, the PABs constantly reinforce their cultural norms and values (professional logics) through a process of socialisation. Socialisation is defined in terms of behaviours, attitudes, and dispositions (e.g., ethics, integrity, professional scepticism, cross cultural working, independence, and reliability) that are valued by society and are expected of members and new entrants to the PABs (R. Jones, 2017).

However, professional logics, the notion of public benefit, is at odds with the other driving force of current accounting behaviour, commercial logics (Killian & O'Regan, 2020). Commercial logics, recognises the need to generate profit and is entrepreneurial in nature (Duff et al., 2020). This necessitates the profession to focus on the client, the management team, or the board and to offer strategic management or advisory services. Accountants are becoming business partners or senior members of the management team within their organisations. Accountants, auditors, financial officers, and finance teams are moving from accounting for the balance sheet to accounting for the business and value creation (Dancey, 2019; Richins et al., 2017; Vasarhelyi et al., 2015). The modern accountant adds value by understanding the client's or organisation's needs and proposing solutions to challenges that the business faces (Dancey, 2019; Spence & Carter, 2014). Recently, the primacy of commercial logics is driving this shift towards strategic partner or management advisor, as is recognised by representatives of the PABs, academia, and students in interviews:

I'd say that your new accountant, kind of qualified accountant, the emphasis of the role is going to be on that of a trusted business advisor. So, it's much more not necessarily preparing the data but being able to interpret the data and then give advice on the back of that. (I3 – PAB Representative).

It [shift in the profession] means that the accountant now has to be quite a different animal in terms of how they service their clients. And it's much more about strategic thinking, consultancy, future planning, client relationships, building long term financial trust etc. (I9 – Deputy Head of Department).

So, the more senior accountants are going to have to be able to do more liaison with customers or you know, I don't know, liaising with directors. Looking forward, making more strategically typed (*sic*) plans, where the company is going to go. (I23 – Student).

Consequently, change in the profession is being driven by both professional and commercial logics, leading to an evolution of the roles and functions performed by accountants. These evolving roles are significantly impacted by digitalisation. As the pace of digitalisation increases, traditional roles will continue to disappear and the need for new skill sets will emerge. The importance of IT skills, data-analytic expertise, and 'soft skills' (e.g., communication, inter-personal, and flexibility) increases as technology performs significantly more data analytic roles (IFAC, 2019; Kruskopf et al., 2019; Robert Half, 2019a; World Economic Forum, 2020). Many of these analytical roles were previously performed by new student entrants. New entrants need to demonstrate their ability, not just gather data, but to interpret and communicate the data to interested parties:

...and I think the future of accounting is going to be moving much more towards using systems, using that kind of thing, rather than sitting doing stuff manually which used to take so much time. (I4 – PAB Representative).

6.3.3 Future skills, attributes, and behaviours.

The adoption of new technologies is creating new opportunities (Bowles et al., 2020; Jarrahi, 2018; Ojanperä et al., 2018). The computational and analytical power of AI coupled with big data has created mechanisms to analyse complex data sets and better inform human decision makers (Jarrahi, 2018). Technology has widened market access, helped improve governance, increased efficiency, and opened channels for collaboration and learning (Bowles et al., 2020; Ojanperä et al., 2018). Nowhere is this better illustrated than within the field of accounting. Digital technology (data analytics, AI, and machine learning) is shaping both new job descriptions and skills requirements (Kruskopf et al., 2019; World Economic Forum, 2020). Accounting tasks are rapidly being automated with automation predicted to accelerate (Thomson, 2018). Machines will increasingly perform the grunt work while accountants will remain the decision makers.

Accepting many junior (entry level) roles and tasks will disappear (Marrone & Hazelton, 2019), the PABs recognise that other tasks will emerge, requiring future recruits to be able to interpret machine generated data quickly and have the ability to communicate and explain data meanings to numerous stakeholders effectively (ICAEW, 2018). Insight and effective communication are critical skills for modern accountants (Tan & Fawzi, 2017) and are seen as critical to a successful career (ACCA, 2019b), a view supported by interviewees:

Correct, correct. So, we set about encouraging growing up (*sic*) those other softer skills. Collaboration, negotiating, thinking outside the box and providing insight to business. I see all of those becoming more integral. (I2 – PAB Representative).

And that's where the professional communicator comes in. So, you have got all that stuff [data] suspended up in the machine. Not everybody's got access to their data, but you've really got to have somebody who really understands how to communicate that data in manageable chunks. (I5 – PAB Representative).

The adoption of emerging skills has become an integral part of the PABs Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes (ACCA, 2019a, 2020; AICPA, 2019; CIMA, 2019c; ICAEW, 2019c, 2019d). The PABs have carried out extensive research to identify the skills which employers most value and to use this data to re-model competency frameworks across the profession, e.g., ACCA 'Career navigator' (2021b) or CIMA competency framework (2019c):

What are the skills needed in the workplace and we've talked personally to hundreds and hundreds of accountants. We've surveyed thousands of our members to come up with the content for this [competency framework]. (I2 – PAB Representative).

These revised models incorporate more business (professional) and digital skills, placing less emphasis on technical knowledge. The PABs are conscious of their importance and are actively supporting the development of these professional skills. The PABs believe that the development of these skills is lacking from a university education:

It will be freely available on our website; it launches at the end of September this research has careers tools right from early membership from students through to long-term members. (I2 – PAB Representative).

So, a lot of the professional organisations, they've recognised people aren't getting it [professional skills] in the universities and that's why they've structured their organisations not only for certification but also continuing education. (I6 – PAB Representative).

In the UK, the PABs understand that future recruits need to be able to interpret machine generated data and be able to communicate and explain data meanings to numerous stakeholders (ICAEW, 2018). Consequently, to make future accountants more business and technology ready, the PABs are redesigning their training programmes and revising examination syllabi.

6.3.4 The professional accounting curriculum.

As described by one interviewee, the PABs are 'the custodians of the qualification.' (I5 – PAB Representative), responsible for ensuring that professional accounting education remains relevant. A responsibility the PABs well understand, 'but essentially, it is looking at our syllabus and trying to keep that syllabus as relevant and as current for existing and future members of the profession.' (I3

– PAB Representative). The inclusion of digitalisation in the professional curriculum is key to maintaining its relevance, as recognised in the forward to CIMA 2019 syllabus:

Digitalisation is transforming all industries. This is why digital skills should be conveyed at all levels and in all forms of education. (CIMA, 2019b).

In an increasingly digital environment, it is crucial that accountants understand how digitalisation and rapid changes in technology are creating challenges, and opportunities, for organisations. Accountants see themselves as well placed to add value to an organisation, being tasked with responding to the challenges created by the digital environment and helping extract value from new opportunities which arise:

I think it's that as an accountant, really the value add is they understand the business much better because all of the financial bodies nowadays have such a strong focus on strategy, on risk and governance and so on that you're actually understanding best practices across the business. (I2 – PAB representative).

To better equip accountants to perform their role of business partner or advisor to management, the PABs have redesigned the professional education curriculum, overtly increasing the focus on digital topics:

I have focused on creating our two new courses, management information and technology, and also risk and technology. (I4 – PAB Representative).

We spent like tonnes to develop there because we will be putting all these new technologies and new innovations including sustainability into it [the curriculum]. (I5 – PAB Representative).

These revised syllabi (ACCA, 2020; CIMA, 2019b; ICAEW, 2020a), focus increasing attention on cultivating skills which enable trainee accountants to work with outputs generated by automated processes and become comfortable in virtual, multi-disciplinary teams (ACCA, 2020; CIMA, 2019a; ICAEW, 2018). Skills which are perceived lacking from a university education:

I think a big one for me and this is maybe because my subjects are the ones with technology. Students are coming out of uni (*sic*) potentially with not really an awareness or an ability with some of the technology stuff. (I4 – PAB Representative).

By incorporating 'digitalisation' into professional syllabi, the PABs are taking a leading role in developing and implementing technology education for student accountants (Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021). Being practice led, the PABs are implementing syllabi which focus on digitalisation and cover an increasingly wide range of skills, values, and attributes deemed necessary to a career in accounting (ACCA, 2020; CIMA, 2019b; ICAEW, 2020a). Although this professional examination syllabus is primarily designed by the PABs, delivery is handed to third party providers e.g., Kaplan, BPP, Premier Training. Organisations and professional firms rely on these third parties to prepare their employees to pass their professional examinations. In accounting education, such reliance on third party providers for content delivery is unique to the UK:

The learning eco system of professions is a lot more mature in the UK than anywhere else in the world, the likes of Kaplan, BPP, they don't exist in the same way in other places. (I1 – PAB Representative)

Consequently, the teaching rationale and methodology of these professional education providers is hugely different from those at an HEI. In the professional education market, the students are older, they are often post-graduates having finished their degrees and have work experience. These students' needs are quite different from those of an undergraduate. There is no duty to offer pastoral care to professional education students as they receive that from their employer. These students are there only for delivery. The PABs design the content, supply the materials, and set the examinations; the providers solely teach the content:

The way you teach [at third party provides] is very different, it is exam training, it is presenting, you have to do the same thing in the same place as anywhere else... because they [students] all have to have the same experience. (I8 – Principal Lecturer).

Through this relationship with third party providers, control of professional accounting education remains firmly with the PABs. The PABs actively promote their own accounting pedagogy to support accountants' changing roles, in turn increasing their control over the accounting curriculum (Al Mahameed et al., 2022; Flood, 2014). This control is deepened as UK universities seek accreditation for their degrees. The exemption and accreditation process enables the PABs to shape the content of accounting degrees, forcing accounting faculty to imitate professional qualifications. Paradoxically, an outcome which reduces the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs:

The profession's syllabus was never intended to be taught at university. It was initially something you did while you were working. (I1 – PAB representative).

As Duff, Hancock, and Marriot stated (2020, p. 1):

The primary stakeholders in the professional accounting curriculum development model are the [PABs] and employers, whilst the accounting academy is relatively absent... Academic research and technical activity have little influence on professional education.

As a by-product of this curriculum re-design, the PABs are developing their own on-line tools, enabling qualification for membership without a traditional university education. With traditional face to face tuition and examination methods being challenged by the digital acceleration (an acceleration which only increased because of the pandemic), e-learning and assessment platforms provide immediate on-line access to learn the finance skills and competencies needed for success in the rapidly changing business environment. These on-line resources provide remote access and flexible self-paced learning, opening qualification to a wider cohort. Examples of such tools include

‘The Finance Leadership Program’ (CIMA 2022), or ACCA-X: on-line (ACCA). The PABs believe that they have a professional responsibility to enable the widest possible access to the profession:

Absolutely, because we believe in equality, diversity, inclusivity, but most importantly we believe that everybody should have the opportunity to become a member of the profession, and that’s not just held by me, the other institutes say the same thing ... I would say that this is increasing. (I1 – PAB Representative).

6.3.5 Other entry routes.

The implementation of revised syllabi focussing on digitalisation, coupled with the development of sophisticated on-line resources, demonstrates the PABs commitment to addressing the future market needs of employers. As pressure mounts on the profitability of traditional services (audit, bookkeeping, and accountancy services) (Lander et al., 2013), the PABs have assumed the more commercial role of partner and advisor to employers. The need to successfully communicate with a variety of stakeholders and analyse, interpret, and explain complex data sets in a user-friendly way, has altered the profile of the professional accountant. Many more individuals possess the skills and attributes that fit this new profile than was the case with the ‘bean-counter’ image of yesteryear.

Responding to these changing requirements, the PABs have created multiple tiers of entry to the profession. In accountancy practice, many individual firms have been particularly proactive when it comes to organising apprenticeships, school leaver programmes, running their own university courses, and having training contracts with industry. These initiatives are actively encouraged by the professional body, ‘You do not have to go to university to become an ICAEW Chartered Accountant in the UK. You can start your ACA training straight from school ...’ (ICAEW, 2020b), and are often promoted as alternative qualification routes:

...or we could always qualify with [named companies]. You can qualify and that is beginning to grow with us. We are seeing more and more traineeship or training contracts outside accounting firms. (PAB Representative)⁴³.

While the commercial sector, valuing candidates who possess attributes such as creativity, technology experience, communication, analytic, and critical thinking, often offer successful applicants sponsorship to attain their professional qualification and membership of appropriate accounting bodies (ACCA, 2021a; CIMA, 2020a). Employer sponsorship, day release to attend classes with professional education providers, coupled with flexible entry routes offered by both CIMA and ACCA, create opportunities to study for an accounting qualification to a widening pool of talent, not limited to graduates of an accounting discipline.

These changes, new training programmes, on-line courses, new syllabi, and employer sponsorship have broadened access to the PABs for a wider talent pool, one less reliant on having a technical

⁴³ Interviewee number deliberately omitted as inclusion could identify the interviewee.

accounting education background. Driven by more dominant commercial logics and technology use, the strategic shift of direction within the profession is directly impacting on the relevance of an accounting education.

This more commercial focus, business partner and strategy advisor, has increased competition for student membership, to the detriment of an accounting education. Table 13 compares the number of new student members with a relevant degree to the total of new student members by PAB. This data shows graduate new entrants possessing a relevant degree⁴⁴ to any of the PABs has declined from 13,937 registrations (2010) to 9,273 registrations (2021), a decrease of 33.5% (2010-2021). While accepting that total student registrations have fallen 17.2% (41,251 and 34,140 respectively), the decrease in relevantly qualified registrations is stark. Were an accounting qualification highly valued by the PABs, the number of relevantly qualified graduates as a percentage of the entire population should increase as overall registrations fall. Evidence shows that this is not the case, relevantly qualified registrations now account for only 27% of total registrations, a fall of 7% since 2010.

Table 13 First year student membership with a relevant degree.

Total number of students in first year of student membership with a relevant degree.																		
Year	ACCA			CIMA			ICAEW			ICAS			CIPFA			Total		
	Total	Relevant degree	%	Total	Relevant degree	%	Total	Relevant degree	%	Total	Relevant degree	%	Total	Relevant degree	%	Total	Relevant degree	%
2010	22,954	10,329	45%	12,581	2,390	19%	4,563	867	19%	802	305	38%	351	46	13%	41,251	13,937	34%
2011	17,287	7,606	44%	12,869	2,831	22%	4,581	687	15%	982	324	33%	344	83	24%	36,064	11,531	32%
2012	15,971	6,708	42%	12,962	2,852	22%	4,443	800	18%	810	259	32%	381	53	14%	34,568	10,672	31%
2013	18,346	8,256	45%	14,427	5,915	41%	4,168	792	19%	782	352	45%	655	33	5%	38,378	15,347	40%
2014	16,435	4,273	26%	14,281	6,426	45%	5,203	1,041	20%	890	374	42%	777	70	9%	37,585	12,184	32%
2015	17,038	4,260	25%	12,337	5,675	46%	5,884	1,353	23%	982	344	35%	442	93	21%	36,683	11,724	32%
2016	17,981	4,315	24%	13,275	5,841	44%	5,985	1,377	23%	1,219	390	32%	328	69	21%	38,789	11,992	31%
2017	18,865	4,339	23%	11,765	4,235	36%	5,970	1,433	24%	999	390	39%	252	45	18%	37,851	10,442	28%
2018	18,240	3,830	21%	9,733	3,504	36%	6,261	1,628	26%	833	333	40%	250	23	9%	35,317	9,318	26%
2019	17,586	3,341	19%	10,189	3,974	39%	6,396	1,535	24%	772	247	32%	246	25	10%	35,189	9,122	26%
2020	14,370	2,730	19%	9,321	3,542	38%	6,514	1,824	28%	914	311	34%	273	33	12%	31,391	8,439	27%
2021	15,914	3,024	19%	9,050	3,620	40%	7,760	2,095	27%	1,199	503	42%	217	30	14%	34,140	9,273	27%

(FRC, 2011-2022) - Key facts and trends in the profession.

In part, the decline illustrated above results from a focus within HE to concentrate their employability efforts on students securing a position with the ‘Big-four’:

We ask some of the professors well how do you educate your students on what their career possibilities are and almost everyone the answer is well we tell them to go to a Big-four. It’s not like well there’s a programme here at this company or you can do this if you like the HR side, they’re not conveying how accounting can be a door opener. (I6 – PAB Representative).

I mean a lot of people look at the Big-four, but they are not the be all and end all of the accounting world. There’s lots of regional and local accounting offices, there’s lots of businesses like every business I’ve ever worked for who employ accountants who aren’t the Big-four. (I15 – Associate Professor)

⁴⁴ Graduate new entrants are defined as student members with both a relevant degree and less than one year of membership of any of the following ICAEW, CIMA, ACCA, CIPFA, ICAS.

To an extent this approach has been successful with relevantly qualified graduates securing a higher percentage of available positions with professional firms, 29.0% in 2021, (21.8%, 2010). However, the total number of positions secured in 2021 was only 2,599, a relatively small number given there were approximately 18,000 accounting and finance graduates that year (HESA, 2023b). As demonstrated clearly by Table 14, student membership of either ACCA or CIMA offer greater volumes of employment opportunities for accounting graduates. Unlike ICAEW or ICAS, these PABs represent accountants in commercial as well as practice environments, and registered 24,964 new students in 2021, 74% of all registrations. Also, ACCA and CIMA lead the way in on-line materials development and on-line qualification. As shown in Table 14, these PABs attract significant numbers of non-graduate students. Numbers which are increasing steadily in percentage terms. In 2021 non graduates accounted for 59% of total membership registrations, compared to 27% for relevantly qualified applicants. In 2014 the comparable percentages were 48% and 35% respectively. As ACCA is the most dominant PAB in terms of both student members and in granting exemptions to accounting degree modules, these statistics are concerning for accounting educators.

Table 14 Percentage of non-graduates gaining student membership of ACCA and CIMA.

Total number of UK students.									
Year	ACCA			CIMA			Total		
	Total	Non-graduates	%	Total	Non-graduates	%	Total	Relevant degree	%
2014	16,435	8,053	49%	14,281	6,569	46%	30,715	14,622	48%
2015	17,038	8,349	49%	12,337	5,798	47%	29,375	14,147	48%
2016	17,981	8,991	50%	13,275	6,372	48%	31,256	15,362	49%
2017	18,865	10,564	56%	11,765	6,353	54%	30,630	16,918	55%
2018	18,240	11,309	62%	9,733	4,964	51%	27,973	16,273	58%
2019	17,586	10,903	62%	10,189	5,298	52%	27,775	16,202	58%
2020	14,370	9,340	65%	9,321	5,033	54%	23,690	14,373	61%
2021	15,914	10,185	64%	9,050	4,525	50%	24,964	14,710	59%

(FRC, 2011-2022) - Key facts and trends in the profession.

6.3.6 Conclusion, how is the way the profession is evolving due to technology use impacting the recruitment of new members?

Technology is changing society's expectations quickly and altering the scope and nature of what is expected of accounting (Andreassen, 2020; Islam, 2017; Melnyk et al., 2020), threatening its professional identity. Searching for more resilient and sustainable business models, the PABs are adapting to new technological and commercial environments (CIMA, 2015; ICAEW, 2019d). The aim is to create value for the benefit of both business and the wider society (Melnyk et al., 2020) by

using their skills and experience to help organisations build robust ethics and accountability frameworks.

To achieve this the PABs, realise that a separate set of skills is required. In an increasingly digital environment, it is crucial that accountants understand how digitalisation and rapid changes in technology are creating challenges, and opportunities, for organisations. To better equip accountants to perform their role of business partner, management team member, advisor to the Board etc., the PABs have redesigned the professional education curriculum, overtly increasing the focus on digital topics and professional skills. The PABs design the curriculum content, supply the materials, and set the examinations; while delivery is sub-contracted out to third party providers. The PABs are actively promoting their own accounting pedagogy, supporting accountants' changing roles, and retaining control over the accounting curriculum. This control is reinforced by the accreditation process which enables the PABs to shape the undergraduate curriculum.

The PABs are developing their own on-line tools, opening qualification to students without a traditional university education. These programmes focus on teaching to the professional examination syllabus and offer practical work experience to accelerate qualification. E-learning and assessment platforms provide remote access and flexible self-paced learning, together with immediate access to the developing curriculum content, to a widening cohort of students. This has created multiple tiers of entry embracing school leavers, apprenticeships, and individuals qualified by experience, alongside graduates. Accountancy firms are very proactive in organising apprenticeships, school leaver programmes, running their own university courses, and having training contracts with industry. While the commercial sector often offers successful job applicants' sponsorship, day release, or paid study leave to aid qualification. As Table 14 (page 178) illustrates, this has opened the PABs to many more non graduates. Non graduates account for half of all student membership, but, significantly, 64% of ACCA new student members.

As the speed of digitalisation and technology led change accelerates (World Economic Forum, 2020), the functions of accountants will continue to evolve. The necessity for technical knowledge will remain, the fundamentals are important, but the emphasis on digital and soft skills will increase further. It is highly likely that the PABs will continue to amend the professional curriculum, viewing it as their duty to maintain the relevance of a professional education: 'But so in a nutshell, my role is to try and make sure we stay relevant as far as possible'. (I2 – PAB Representative). This will lead to the development of more on-line resources and other initiatives, increasing the competition for student membership, and further marginalising an academic accounting education.

For some time, authors (Caulfield, 2015; Lansdell et al., 2020; Lawson et al., 2017) have argued that accounting educators need to adapt the curricula to include life-long learning skills which meet the

evolving requirements of the PABs and business community or risk an accounting education becoming irrelevant. The PABs are unlikely to suddenly embrace the value of accounting education. It is, therefore, incumbent on accounting faculty to design courses which maximise the chances of undergraduates securing the employment they desire. As one interviewee expressed: ‘So how do we address that, how do we put the accountant at the front of the queue rather than, not at the front of the queue?’ (I20 – Head of Department).

6.4 Research question 2 - How can obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics be overcome?

6.4.1 Introduction.

As academics have outlined, there are significant barriers to achieving successful curriculum change in accounting education (Amernic & Craig, 2004; Asonitou, 2021; Boyce, 2014; Gray & Collison, 2002; Hopper, 2013). Broadly categorised, these include, the influence of the PABs over accounting education (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Paisey & Paisey, 2010), the lack of engagement between the PABs and academia (Bui & Porter, 2010; R. Jones, 2014, 2017), the institutional constraints that universities must operate under (Behn et al., 2012; Bui & Porter, 2010; R. Jones, 2014; Pop-Vasileva et al., 2014), and the professional identity of an academic (Clarke et al., 2013; L. Evans, 2015; Moore, 2003). Each of these obstacles make effective curriculum change more difficult.

Starting with the relationship between academia and the PABs, the influence that the PABs exercise over the accounting curriculum is reviewed. The importance attached to exemptions is discussed and the emerging conflict between the recognition that curriculum change is desirable and the need to maintain exemptions is explored. The issues surrounding meaningful collaboration between the two groups, academia and the PABs, are analysed, followed by a discussion of the views that each party holds as to the purpose of an accounting education.

Having understood how the logics of the PABs potentially restrict accounting faculty’s ability to make curriculum change, attention focusses on issues inherent within the HE environment. The structure of HE is examined. The effect of state and market logics on the teaching ethos, the management structure, and bureaucracy of institutions are explored and the impact that these have on the curriculum change process investigated. As HE has become more commercial with the introduction of a more neoliberal perspective, the need to maximise income generation is discussed. The nature and role of accounting faculty within the financial models of the institution are examined and resulting behaviours analysed. The impact of the ranking regime on institutional behaviour is assessed. The tensions between the competitive logics of ranking tables and the logics of academic freedom and autonomy are addressed.

Following which is an exploration of the dynamic within the research teaching nexus, a discussion of the primacy of research in many HEIs, and an assessment of the impact that this relationship has on academics attempting to amend the accounting curriculum and on their professional status. The section concludes with a table of the issues and the interplay of logics which hinder curriculum change.

6.4.2 The influence of the PABs.

As previously discussed, the PABs recognise that automation and innovative technology poses a threat which, without action, could negatively impact their professional status. To mitigate this, the PABs constantly reinforce their cultural norms and values, defining the attributes and behaviours expected of their members. Simultaneously, the PABs are reengineering the professional education curriculum as appropriate to actively promote their own accounting pedagogy, supporting their members' changing roles.

As early as 1994, Becher (1994) argued that such professional logics drives the PABs to also exercise significant control over their relationship with universities. This control is evidenced by changes in the approaches to, and methods of, teaching, assessment, and accreditation in undergraduate accounting courses (Kafaji, 2020; Zarzycka et al., 2018). Control which is readily acknowledged and referred to in interviews:

When we make changes to our syllabus, they're keen and they're [HEIs] happy to kind of incorporate those changes within their syllabus's as well. (I3 – PAB Representative).

So we are, from the accounting degree, we really are prescribed. So, the management accounting and analytics module ... there are certain subjects that have to be in there and I don't really get much choice. I think the way we teach on that as well is almost prescribed to us. (I15 – Associate Professor).

The professional bodies [specified body] is most rigorous to get accreditations. So, we don't have [specified body] accreditation down here and they look for a fairly high percentage match between their technical knowledge and what's delivered. (I22 – Professor).

This control is most visibly exerted through the exemption process (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014; Ellington & Williams, 2017) which acts to 'to maintain its (the PABs) own privileged and powerful position as a controlling body' (Harvey, 2004, p. 212). Undoubtedly, this process (accreditation) serves to stifle curriculum innovation and hamper the development of more generic skills required by employers (Apostolou & Gammie, 2014). Similar sentiments are espoused by academics who acknowledge that, due to the accreditation requirements, there is limited time and space within a busy curriculum for substantive change:

Well, we've got obviously professional accreditation which limits, we're always going to go for maximum exemptions ... So, to be honest there's not much space in the curriculum to do much more. (I18 – Professor).

I don't think it [accreditation] are (*sic*) overly equitable as an experience and it limits some of those employability related activities that applied learning curriculum we've just been talking about. (I20 – Head of Department).

But then to test [student's abilities] is quite constrained technically based exam, where you must do a question on consolidation, you must do a question on this other thing. And actually, that can be quite frustrating because it's not how you would particularly want to examine students. (I8 – Principal Lecturer).

But academics describe the 'catch 22' they face, stating that exemptions play a key role in undergraduate recruitment and are therefore crucial for an institutions' finances:

So, for the students and for the revenue it's [accreditation] good, like for the revenue for the business school sorry and the university it's good and it attracts the students. (I14 – Lecturer).

Making sure that the accounting and finance programmes have the right level of accreditation to be attractive in the market and provide the appropriate pathways for students. (I9 – Deputy Head of Department).

Fundamentally, the financial health of HE is reliant on student recruitment, tuition fees represent over 50% of UK university income (HESA, 2022). Marketisation of HE is accelerating, education is becoming a paid for service with students as consumers, strengthening the control the PABs can exert through exemptions. However, as the profession's use of technology quickens, courses continuing to focus on technical skills, which the accreditation process encourages, become less relevant. Yet, while HE sees accreditation as a key recruitment tool, there is little motivation to change the status quo, despite the PABs calling for less focus on exemptions and the development of a broader curriculum:

I think that we [PABs and universities] should recognise what each can bring in bringing that student to their initial professional development. So, different skills are taught in different locations, through the profession or through the university, that's the long-term vision. (I1 – PAB Representative).

Could we [PABs and universities] not just pool certain resources, so we free up the resource to focus on that, the professional skills that other skills are more important? (I5 – PAB Representative).

An acceptance emerges from interviews with faculty staff that the value of exemptions might be overstated: 'We think they [students] value exemptions. I'm not convinced that they really care that much. And I'm certainly not convinced that the employers care that much'. (I9 – Deputy Head of Department). However, those same staff recognise the 'catch 22' they face in attempting substantive curriculum change which does not impact on the exemptions an institution holds:

I think if there was a challenge towards losing, to teaching them something differently and then losing an exemption that would be quite tricky... the only thing I would say, which would probably raise eyebrows, is if we went and said right, we're going to throw something in there that would lose us an exemption. (I19 – Senior Lecturer).

It would be a brave, if not a cavalier decision for an HE institution to dismiss the value of every exemption but the current process allows the PABs too much influence. Accounting faculty should target the exemptions which provide the most value to students, e.g., financial accounting or management accounting. However, exemptions for other modules, audit and tax for example, are less valuable as the module content is time sensitive and, as a result, the employers often make the student sit the professional examination anyway as recognised here: ‘They (employers) don’t recognise exemptions from things like audit and tax, but they’ll do (for) things like financial management.’ (I18 – Professor)

6.4.3 Collaboration.

As signalled by the changing nature of the profession, future accounting graduates need to garner the skills necessary to succeed in a modern workplace (Dolce et al., 2020). The importance of accounting faculty instilling real world skills is imperative to a future accounting career (Accounting Education, 2016; Brink & Stoel, 2019). To successfully teach these skills, accounting educators need to fully understand the needs of the PABs (Rebele & St. Pierre, 2019). Therefore, the PABs have to update accounting educators as to the skills they most value (Carvalho & Carlos, 2022), so that these can be given priority in course content. It is widely accepted that it is impossible for accounting educators to teach all the skills that are demanded by employers (Al-Nimer & Mustafa, 2022). Consequently, the PABs, employers, and educators need to work together to develop a framework where an accounting education provides strong foundations for professional development, upon which employers can build. Closer collaboration would enrich academia’s understanding of the PABs’ world, enabling academia to focus on the skills required for success in that world (R. Jones, 2017). Interviews with representatives of the PABs displayed sympathy for this more collaborative approach:

And given the fact that you've got ACCA, CIPFA, CIMA ICAEW, ICAS, the Irish body and all these universities, could these come together in a way that actually shares all their resource to actually create the best? So, if you have got the professional degrees, create the best syllabus. (I5 - PAB Representative).

However, in practice the collaboration that does take place is all very vague. While the PABs, employers, and academics claim to collaborate, it is informal, based on personal contacts, often focussed on the professional firms, and ad-hoc:

We don’t really, I mean we do it in little bits here and there, so I get CIMA in to come and talk about CIMA. I get the ICAEW in usually come and do a workshop on my professional skills module. (I18 – Professor).

And in addition to that then many of us are associated with the profession through various committees or activities locally or nationally. (I22 – Professor).

ICAEW exists (*sic*) with us as much as anything else because we've got quite a few ICAEW qualified staff. (I20 – Head of Department).

Formal collaboration does happen, with several universities having advisory panels or professional firm advisors, while others have set up employer forums. However, most formal collaboration involves the PABs taking the lead and controlling the agenda. All the PABs organise conferences to discuss substantive issues, inviting both employers and academics to attend. These issues are often selected by the PABs from research they have commissioned with the findings published in a report. Rarely, if ever, do these discussions lead to curriculum enhancement. As Ellington (2017) pointed out, unlike the United States (e.g. the Bedford Committee Report (1986), Pathways Commission (2012)), there has been little attempt to create a formal agenda for the improvement of the accounting curricula the UK. Six years on and still no formal agenda exists:

The agenda usually circulated. It revolves around recent research. [This PAB] there's a whole financial insights department, so we've released quite a lot of research and what we usually do is take something that we think will be of interest to see how it's impacting on our colleagues, mostly in universities ... (PAB Representative)⁴⁵.

To achieve more strategic level co-operation requires two willing participants which will occur only if both parties can readily see the benefits which would accrue (R. Jones, 2017). Academics need to see a contribution to curriculum design, while the PABs, seeking to increase employer engagement (Duff et al., 2020), need to be convinced that tangible benefits will emerge from the collaborative process. Unfortunately, the PABs and academics have conflicting expectations of an accounting education. The PABs call for universities to produce work ready graduates and perceive that accounting faculty are failing in this duty, driving the professional education curriculum change discussed previously. Conversely, HEIs and accounting faculty see their responsibility in terms of developing students' intellectual capacity (S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019) through research led curricula. These differing views of educational purpose create a tension in collaboration and obfuscate any potential benefits that collaboration may bring to curriculum design.

While noting that professionals do collaborate with willing academics to fund research projects which are perceived to bring commercial value (Duff et al., 2020), the PABs see little value in accountancy research in general. This is often viewed as irrelevant, unintelligible, and without benefit to the new commercial realities faced by the profession:

Yeah, but I suppose it's looking at how relevant all that research is and how much of an impact is actually having on the profession. And you see, at the moment, they [PABs and educators] are diverging, so you've got all this research being done but for what benefits? (I5 – PAB Representative).

⁴⁵ Interviewee number deliberately omitted as inclusion could identify the interviewee.

Collaboration is further hindered by the academic and professional logics in play. Academics tend to research their own specialisms and areas of interest, with only cursory regard to the value of the research to the profession. Academic articles are aimed at the academic community with the goal of publication in ranking journals. The objective being to enhance the reputation of the author and the institution they represent (Bourdieu, 2020). However, as Sangster (2013) argued, certain publications (e.g., *Accounting Review*) are less likely to publish accounting education papers as these papers are viewed as too specialised, reducing the reach of accounting education papers. Reducing the opportunities to publish limits accounting faculty's ability to engage with, and influence, the PABs. Also identified as an issue in accounting education research affecting the engagement with the PABs is the risk of stagnation (Tharapos & Marriott, 2020). Stagnation affects accounting education research in three ways, a focus on a limited number of topics with limited relevance to the profession, much of the research is not empirically based, and often the research replicates previous studies in differing contexts so adding little to the existing body of knowledge.

Consequently, while the PABs only fund research with a tangible commercial value and academics produce research primarily for an academic audience while seeking personal prestige, there is little common interest in collaborating to enhance accounting education. It is difficult to visualise a time when universities, PABs, and employer representatives come together to design a new accounting curriculum. However, an individual accounting faculty and an individual PAB could develop a formal relationship for mutual benefit, an opinion voiced by some PAB representatives:

I'm saying universities could create better partnership relationships with [PAB]. I mean we haven't done this, this is my vision, is to work together. It's about creating relationships where we are teaching and assessing different elements. (I1 – PAB Representative).

There are examples where individual institutions have developed strong relationships with employers e.g., PWC Flying Start Programme (five universities), but these have limited places, are sponsored by the 'Big-four', and limit future employment opportunities to a role with the sponsor. An accounting faculty engaging with a PAB (as opposed to a firm or company) would gain access to the volume of research that the PAB has undertaken in identifying the skills and attributes that the market requires. All PABs constantly undertake such research and use it to inform their professional curriculum:

What are the skills needed in the workplace and we've talked personally to hundreds and hundreds of accountants. We've surveyed thousands of our members to come up with the content for this [competency framework] (I2 – PAB Representative).

The suggestion here is that accounting faculty design a course, but that course is vetted by the PAB to ensure that the course meets the needs of the employers as discovered in the research. A course so designed would produce work ready graduates, fulfilling what the PABs see as the purpose of an accounting education. It would also fulfil the main driver of students who study for an accounting degree, that of enhanced employability. From an institution's perspective it would give access to

current and future topics that the PAB was attempting to address, allowing the institution to deliver meaningful and relevant research, enhancing the institutions reputation with the business community. Colluding with a PAB representing a significant membership in commerce or industry would have the added benefit of broadening an accounting graduates appeal to a widening pool of employers, not just the professional firms.

Aside from the restrictive influence of the PABs and the issues surrounding collaboration between the PABs and the universities, there are several HE centric issues impacting accounting faculty's ability to change the curriculum successfully. At the macro level these include the structure of HE, the need to generate and maintain income, the influence of league tables and other rankings, the research teaching nexus, and what being a professional academic entails. These are discussed in turn.

6.4.4 Higher Education - the institutional challenge.

6.4.4.1 Introduction.

Until relatively recently, the driving institutional logics of HE was academic excellence, the search for, and sharing of, knowledge (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019). However, recent changes in financing arrangements, and growing scrutiny of the value of HE, has introduced more commercial logics into the sector. HE has embraced a more neoliberal, market based approach to delivering a degree education (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020). In what Steve Ward (2011, p. 1) described as 'one of the most sweeping and dramatic social experiments of the last few centuries', HE has been reshaped and undergone a significant culture shift. The institutional environment of HE is now much more complex, as attested by Cai and Mountford (2021) who identified over fifty logics at play from a review of research papers. To simplify, they placed each individual logics identified into one of four groupings, academic, market, managerial, and state logics. The impact of these logics, either individually or in combination, on the process of curriculum change is explored below.

6.4.4.2 HE structure.

At the macro level, HE institutions are underpinned by two 'ideal' logics, 'state logics' (Thornton et al., 2012) and 'market logics' (L. Parker, 2011). State logics takes a public welfare perspective and holds to the notion of public good (Alexander et al., 2018). Broadly the 'Russell Group,' twenty-four established, traditional, research led institutions base their philosophy around state logics. Market logics views the world as transactional, founded on the ideal of legitimacy (Bitektine & Song, 2022). The '1992 Group' of aspiring, teaching led universities, many borne of former polytechnics, anchor their philosophy on market logics. (N.B. these groupings, and associated logics, are not inflexible and may change over time.) Nevertheless, these two logics engender different institutional

behaviours. Institutions where market logics is in ascendance tend to have centralised decision makers and adopt a managerial approach. Conversely, institutions where state logics has primacy tend to have de-centralised management structures and operate more autonomously (Alexander et al., 2018). These disparate behaviours add to the complexity of HE with each group adopting a different teaching ethos.

The teaching ethos of institutions underpinned by state logics is founded on academic logics, stressing the search for fundamental knowledge, research freedom (autonomy), peer recognition (professional), and the sharing of research results (Fini & Toschi, 2016). Interviewees from Russell Group institutions strongly identified with this teaching ethos:

...I think, there's more, I suppose by implication, there's less emphasis on the technical bits and more emphasis on understanding the social, broadly economic role of accounting. (I21 – Professor).

So, we will teach more from an academic research perspective. So, we'll teach the technical stuff where we must, but then we'll always bring in you know academic literature. (I18 – Professor).

As a result of their teaching ethos, these institutions more readily eschew professional exemptions, trusting that the reputation of their institution and the quality of teaching will guarantee a continuing flow of undergraduates to their courses and underpin their graduates' employment prospects:

They see [Institution], I just got a feeling provided the quality was maintained, I've just got a feeling, we wouldn't have to struggle for students if you know what I mean. (I7 – Professor).

But the other thing is when you're teaching at [Institution] because again it comes back to having that, that name on the CV ... and that CV would at least open some doors for you. (I15 – Associate Professor).

With less reliance on professional exemptions, accounting faculty at these institutions are less constrained in curriculum content. The reputation of these institutions attracts the best students to their faculty, the average entry requirement at a Russell Group institution is 163 UCAS⁴⁶ points, (accountancy course average 128). Therefore, if accounting faculty maintain their teaching quality, they will continue to supply graduates who employers value. This is supported by statistics taken from rankings published in the Complete University Guide 2023 (2022). As Table 15 shows, the Russell Group universities, those underpinned by state logics, have a higher overall rating (95.0%) than the average for all universities (85.0%). They also have significantly higher graduate outcomes (74.5%), average (60.0%), and even higher than those for students of any discipline (68.5%). However, interestingly the student satisfaction rating (3.85) is marginally lower than the average (3.90), potentially reflecting the demands of these courses.

⁴⁶ UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

Table 15 Russell Group accountancy course ranking statistics.

Accountancy and Finance League table 2023						
	Overall	Entry standards	Student satisfaction	Research quality	Graduate prospects - outcomes	Graduate prospects on track
Russell Group	95.0	163	3.85	3.30	74.5	83.7
All universities	85.0	128	3.91	2.87	60.0	77.0

Extracted from the Complete University Guide (2022)

Conversely, institutions predominately driven by market logics assume a managerial identity, focussing on efficiency, effectiveness, and outcomes measurement (Alexander et al., 2018; L. Parker, 2011). Accounting faculties of these institutions focus teaching more towards the professional syllabi with a greater emphasis on exemptions. Indeed, Pan and Perera (2012) recognised that:

In the context of accounting, professional accreditation is often considered as one of the most important factors in the development of accounting curriculum.

(Pan & Perera, 2012, p. 95).

Exemptions are used as a marketing tool to attract students and maximise fee income. However, focussing teaching on the professional syllabi constrains the ability of accounting educators to introduce more professional skills content into the accounting curriculum. Undergraduate accounting courses are filled with content required to secure exemptions as expressed below:

So, there's obviously like the classic textbook examples over the fact that we should have accredited courses and therefore a large part of an undergraduate programme is going to be filled with the required courses that are needed by ICAS, ICAEW, ACCA and so on. (I16 – Professor).

This is despite the PABs calling for less chasing of exemptions, believing that exemptions are being cited as an excuse to why accounting curricula cannot incorporate wider professional skills:

Yes, because [Institution] is slavishly constrained in its straitjacket, thinking there's cause and effect between the greater the amount (*sic*) of exemptions, the more students you're going to get, but what [Institution] is not thinking about is what [Institution] is producing at the end of the day. (I1 – PAB Representative).

Driven by market logics, these institutions focus more energy on commercial considerations than do their state logics counterpart. To many of these institutions the importance of professional accreditation as a revenue generator appears sacrosanct. However, an unwanted side effect of this is the seeming demotivation of accounting educators. The busy curriculum that accreditation creates causes frustration and resentment in educators who recognise the need to do this differently. The accreditation process also constrains academic freedom and autonomy and fails in meeting student

expectations. Table 16 illustrates that professional accreditation helps in attracting undergraduates with reasonably high expectations (75.4%) of success but indicates that the reality post-graduation is noticeably different, with graduate outcomes a lowly (56.7%). This could be indicative of the low regard that the PABs hold for accounting degrees.

Table 16 Non-Russell Group accountancy course ranking statistics.

Accountancy and Finance League table 2023						
	Overall	Entry standards	Student satisfaction	Research quality	Graduate prospects - outcomes	Graduate prospects on track
Non Russell Group universities	82.7	115	3.87	2.73	56.7	75.4
All universities	85.0	128	3.91	2.87	60.0	77.0

Extracted from the Complete University Guide (2022).

Finally, in discussing the structure of HEIs, interviewees often alluded to the bureaucratic change processes that exist and a perceived lack of support for change from central management. This was a concern raised regardless of which group the interviewee represented. Interviewees expressed frustration that attempts to change curriculum were hindered unnecessarily by overly bureaucratic processes and a lack of time:

Just the university bureaucracy is just unbelievable as well, around changing programmes and modules and so on and everything takes so, it takes enormously long periods of time to put through. (I21 – Professor).

But then trying to get support to change that, as I say apart from the lack of time I was having. It wasn't obviously in the university how you could change anything and again it was obvious that if I was trying to change something I'd have to do it all in my spare time and I wouldn't be given any allowance for it. (I13 – Principal Lecturer).

Such bureaucracy is fundamentally at odds with market logics. Market logics are associated with commercialisation and marketisation. In this environment time and value are seen as key resources, decisions are made promptly, and change implemented swiftly, as recognised by this interviewee who contrasts the commercial and academic decision-making processes:

If you were in industry you'd go to your boss, it's in the budget, sign it off, order it, it would be done in 20 minutes ... It's [academia] just a completely different world, you cannot make a decision. Trying to spend money at the university is impossible. (I15 – Associate Professor).

Using data gathered from interviews to examine the impact that institutional structure has on curriculum change has revealed the following. Firstly, that the teaching ethos of an institution is dependent on whether state or market logics has primacy. Where state logic is in the ascendancy

interviewees describe a teaching methodology which is underpinned by academic logics, autonomy, and academic rigour. These institutions are less focussed on exemptions and have more flexibility to develop their accounting curriculum. Statistics reveal that undergraduates from these institutions better fulfil their expectations than their counterparts at other universities. However, as interviewees have suggested, this may result from the reputation of these institutions and the quality of applicants for places they attract more than the quality of accounting education they receive. The outline of courses offered by these universities exhibit substantial similarities to courses offered elsewhere.

In contrast, institutions guided more by market logics focus their teaching on the professional syllabi to maximise exemptions and to increase the employability of undergraduates. While this approach can successfully generate revenue by attracting undergraduates, it creates busy curriculum offering little opportunity to broaden the content. The accreditation process can also demotivate staff as it constrains academic freedom and autonomy. There is also scant evidence that this approach meets the desired employability goal, indeed the reverse is true.

Finally, regardless of grouping, the bureaucratic nature of these institutions is not conducive to curriculum change. Change processes are over elaborate, requiring too many committees for approval, the pace of change is glacial, there is a perceived lack of support for the change process, and exemptions (even at Russell Group institutions) are sacrosanct. Yet, bureaucracy is at odds with the commercial nature of market logics, where change is actioned quickly.

These structural issues are difficult to mitigate completely. HEIs are monoliths with centralised management structures and the accreditation process is seen as integral to the financial health of the institutions. However, by proposing subtle changes to which modules are core, introducing professional skills as a core element for example, and which modules are optional, this researcher believes that a curriculum can be developed which can mitigate the obstacles discussed above.

Notwithstanding the above, all HEIs are currently facing strong financial headwinds. The Twenty-first century has seen global economic development, decreasing government and state support, and the arrival of innovative technologies (Pietilä & Pinheiro, 2020). Traditional university financial models have struggled to meet these new economic challenges (Grossi et al., 2020). Entrepreneurship, academic capitalism, and commercial activity are increasingly important to HEIs. However, in harnessing the benefits of these to increase their revenue, universities have inadvertently erected further obstacles to accounting curriculum change.

6.4.4.3 Income generation.

Neoliberal perspectives have forced HE to reassess its business model. Institutions are developing into hybrid organisations, significantly affected by elements of business and market logics (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020; Grossi et al., 2020). HEIs are being obliged to adopt new entrepreneurial strategies and develop academic-industry-government relationships (the triple helix) (Aranha & Garcia, 2014). A process of transformation is underway involving diversifying income streams, commercialising research, and driving innovation (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020). Students have become consumers of educational output, compelling HEIs to increase their focus on student needs to improve the overall education experience (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020). Simultaneously, cost increases have outstripped revenue growth making financial sustainability the biggest existential threat faced by HE, a threat exacerbated by the uncertainty caused in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bolton & Hubble, 2021; Universities UK, 2020). While the financial health of an institution is primarily a concern for senior management, accounting departments and staff well understand the commercial pressures they face:

I think the commercial pressures are hugely telling ... the fees, the money, we need more money, we probably need more funding, everything is getting more expensive and therefore it creates pressure on the universities to do more. (I14 – Lecturer).

The introduction of business and market logics into accounting education has intensified the conflicts with academic logics. For example, the monetisation of research (business logics) rests uneasily with the academic notion that intellectual capital generated should be readily available, at no cost, to the broader community, where the author ‘reward’ is prestige, not profit. Despite this conflict, universities increasingly recognise research as a means of income generation: ‘So research has become more important because I think the Universities have viewed it as additional money that we weren’t really expecting’. (I13 – Senior Lecturer), albeit a small contributor to the total income of HEIs.

However, within accounting the most significant impact of business logics is the view that accounting education is an established cash cow for many institutions:

But business and management schools they are the cash cows of the universities and accounting courses, accounting and finance courses are usually the cash cows of the business schools, the management schools. So, we make too much money for them to close us down. (I21 – Professor).

The idea of accounting as a cash cow is a commonly held view amongst interviewees and is seen as a demonstration that the supposed threat to accounting departments is overblown. Accounting is seen as safe because it makes too much money: ‘I think in my lifetime it will be, we will be alright. It’s too much of a cash cow for people just to drop it.’ (I18 – Professor). However, in the next sentence

the same interviewee stated: 'I went to an accounting education conference a few years ago and I think it was [professional firm] at the time stood up and said no we don't take anyone from accounting, we take geographers.' These two quotes, only seconds apart, capture the essence of this research. Accounting faculty believe they are safe because they make a persuasive offer to potential undergraduates yet accept that the key promise of that offer (employability) may not be fulfilled. This creates an ethical dilemma which is readily recognised but where little action is taken because of the drive for revenue. In part, accounting faculty rely on the lack of knowledge that undergraduates have surrounding the changing requirements of the PABs:

I don't think, if I'm truthful, I don't think when people are looking at university, I don't think they're really necessarily think that through (graduate outcomes). (I12 Professor).

The thing is they don't know much, the students they really don't know much about the profession... the vast majority of ACCA, CIMA and ICAEW students are non-relevant degrees ... and that's a shock to them ... I say an accounting degree is not going to help you get a job and they think it will. (I18 – Professor).

That academics were prepared to admit that they were aware the accounting degrees on offer may not meet student expectations but were willing to exploit the potential students' lack of knowledge struck me as unethical. However, I rationalised this as the result of individual academics not being able to exert significant influence on their institutions' business models and the role that accountancy courses play in such models. Nevertheless, this was a surprise to me.

Obviously, when designing a curriculum that is more relevant to the PABs the financial model of the institution needs to be considered. The need to increase revenue has created intense competition amongst institutions and faculty, where some win and some lose (Cantwell & Taylor, 2013). Driven by market and business logics, HE is becoming a more managerial, competitive, and profit (revenue) focussed environment, with accounting education assuming the role of cash cow. This development impacts negatively on both relevant course content and graduate outcomes. The challenge faced by accounting faculty is summed up by the following: 'So I see that as the biggest challenge that we've got to wrestle with and making sure that an accounting student is the first on the list rather than the historian or the history'. (I20 – Head of Department).

Therefore, when designing a framework for a new accounting course, consideration of the monetary impact that any revised design has on an HEI is paramount. Firstly, the attractiveness of the course to potential undergraduates needs to be assessed. A course which demonstrates more relevance to the PABs is more motivational as it increases the employability of its graduates. Secondly, cohort size needs to be considered. If the course is a replacement for an existing course, decreasing undergraduate numbers impacts fee income. Could unsuccessful applicants be offered places on other courses, finance or business and management for instance? If it is a new course, then the benefit to

revenue is incremental. Finally, it needs to address the ethical dilemma and ensure that the enrolled undergraduates fully understand the potential graduate outcomes so can make informed choices.

6.4.4.4 Rankings.

Within the neoliberal context, the logic of measuring, evaluating, and competing has become normalised and accepted. While originally viewed as victims of this process, universities now routinely apply neoliberal values, goals, and processes to their operations, engaging in ‘market-like behaviours at unprecedented levels and from an offensive rather than defensive position.’ (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014, p. 1098). From this behaviour the ranking regime emerged, further increasing competition amongst HEIs to attract undergraduates, firstly to their institution and secondly to specific courses (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). This regime has led to the creation of a transactional market within HE, a market that is structured hierarchically (Cantwell & Taylor, 2013). Although rankings are now an integral part of the HE environment and have gained legitimacy for their methodological rigour, they struggle to define educational quality. A flaw recognised in the following quotation:

Look, it’s the metrification of everything right and of course what happens is all of these metrics are only as good as the information that goes into them, [and] only as good as the methods that’s used to create them [metrics] in the first place. (I21 – Professor).

HEIs have adopted the philosophy of rankings while assuming contradictory positions on their value, publicly decrying or distancing themselves from rankings while, in private, developing policies and practices that can positively affect their position in ranking tables (Hazelkorn, 2017). As with accreditation and exemptions, rankings are heavily used as a marketing tool, a differentiating factor in choosing a place of study, the reason; ‘why you should come to us over someone else’. (I10 – Administrator). Where departments face greater competition to recruit students, such as accounting, ranking tables have a greater importance for student recruitment (Gibbons et al., 2015). For better or worse, rankings assign an institution to a position in a table which potential students can use to easily compare various faculty and courses. For institutions, the marketing aspect of ranking tables outweighs the weaknesses inherent in these tables, leading to frustration from staff surrounding the quality of teaching and a perceived obsession with income generation:

So, this is where we are, I know the layer of management that are just focused on what we’re doing on league tables, none of this of course is getting us anywhere near actually better teaching, better relationships with the students. (I21 – Professor).

All the universities I’ve been in seem to be obsessed by, as I say, money, which I kind of understand it, you’ve got to keep yourself going and league tables, the two are seen as kind of linked, there’s an idea that if you go up the league table, that’s a good thing... they’re [management] not interested in courses now, just any income generation’ (I13 – Principal Lecturer).

Notwithstanding, the need to maintain or improve ranking impacts on the academic decision making of an institution. Ranking pits individuals and institutions against one another in a zero-sum game creating winners and losers. A key component of ranking tables is research quality which Sangster (2013) argues limits academic freedom and impacts the quality of delivery, supported by the quote above. Yet universities, particularly the 1992 grouping, strive to become 'research intensive' institutions, directing significant resources to this quest:

Yes, I mean the research, our research capacity has been being increased recently, it's a real focus area for the university to increase the number of staff with PhDs etc., and publishing. (I8 – Principal Lecturer).

Accordingly, accounting academics wanting to make meaningful curriculum change are further hamstrung by their institutions reliance on ranking systems, with their focus on research not teaching quality. Issues surrounding the drive to improve an institution's ranking leave little time and flexibility to build additional, relevant content into the curriculum.

6.4.4.5 Research teaching nexus.

The preceding passage highlighted the incorporation of research quality into the ranking tables increasing the significance of an institutions research agenda, potentially altering the dynamic of the research teaching nexus. The relationship between research and teaching is complex, shaped by the interaction between academic beliefs around learning and teaching alongside an understanding concerning the nature of knowledge (A. Douglas, 2013). This relationship is also the subject of intense debate. No consensus exists as to whether accounting research aids student learning or improves the quality of teaching. However, Duff and Marriot (2017) argued that issues around research relevance, skills required of a teacher or researcher, developing professional rather than research skills, and the primacy of research over teaching as evidence that research excellence and teaching quality may be uneasy bedfellows.

The balance within the research teaching nexus is further complicated as each function, research and teaching, is often viewed as discrete (silos) and the two are viewed as competitors rather than collaborators (Guarini et al., 2020). Further tension is created as universities view quality research as a hallmark of status which they use to position themselves strategically (R. Baker & Wick, 2019). When exploring this relationship with interviewees, interesting opinions emerged regarding the impact that the research teaching nexus had on staff behaviour and curriculum development.

Firstly, addressing the value that research has to an institution or individual academic. Quality research, research published in selected journals, is key to HEIs for its reputational enhancement capabilities. For individual academics, publication brings reward in terms of prestige, promotion, and status amongst peers. However, interviewees appeared to agree with Sangster (2013) that quality

research in accounting education is more difficult to get published in REF-able journals and is therefore, less valued:

...it's just that I don't think pedagogical research is perhaps valued in quite the same way. And I don't think it's valued predominantly because we're in the business school so fixated on the ABS list. (I11 – Associate professor).

This leads to frustration within the accounting academic fraternity and to talented people choosing alternative career paths where they perceive their work will be better valued:

So, I think it's really tough actually, accounting research, I think it's a really tough environment and people therefore make choices based on their opportunity for career progression. (I9 – Deputy Head of Department).

This raises the question of whether investment in curriculum development (time and effort) is of value and does this work add any form of valuable capital to either the institution or the academic?

In interviews the answer was often that it does not:

We're not measured on any of this [teaching], it doesn't really matter, if I'm being very blunt. Publications matter, grant income matters, impact case studies that are REF-able matter. (I21 – Professor).

As a result, academics tend to focus less on curriculum development as it does not have the same, or similar, value or prestige as research activities. Obviously, this creates a risk to teaching quality, a risk that the TEF was designed to mitigate. However, while the concept of teaching excellence is laudable, as a concept it remains largely undefined. It is viewed by many as just another measurement: 'TEF it's around, but ... there's little evidence that it's driving anything significant other than another set of bloody league tables'. (I21 – Professor). The TEF is also seen as subservient to the REF by both the institutions that interviewees work for and to them personally in terms of personal reward:

But TEF doesn't yet for us, as an institution, carry quite the same weight as REF I don't think. It does in some levels; some people will say it does. Certainly, for promotion, I haven't heard of anyone whose got promoted on the basis of a TEF case study. (I11 – Associate Professor).

Therefore, while the TEF was created to be a driver of teaching quality, academics appear sceptical of its ability to deliver. TEF appears not to threaten the primacy of research. Indeed, some argue that by being yet another measurement system the TEF hinders pedagogic development and curriculum change.

Both the primacy of research and the introduction of the TEF to counter the threat to quality teaching appear to negatively affect the dynamic of the research teaching nexus. For accounting education, like other disciplines, curriculum change becomes problematic as the rewards for quality research outweigh those for pedagogic enhancement. However, many scholars posit that accounting research would produce positive benefits if used to develop research led curriculum (R. Baker & Wick, 2019).

This is viewed as vital if institutions are to develop curriculum which allows students to make more pro-active enquiry, leading to a rounded, knowledge based education (Ancelin-Bourguignon, 2019). Interviewees alluded to the benefits inherent in research led curriculum but claimed that market forces necessitate a focus on student wants. This is reflected in the deference shown NSS scores: ‘we have all teaching is measured through the NSS every year’ and the weight given to student feedback. This causes difficulties in integrating research into the curriculum:

Because I think we don’t really talk about research led curriculum, we talk about a student led curriculum. And I think that’s a bit of a problem. (I11 – Associate Professor).

In the opinion of some interviewees, focussing on student wants, rather than student needs, is causing a deterioration in the quality of course content, there is a view that content is being sacrificed for better student satisfaction:

The lecturers face that the management don’t want them to do things traditionally. And they want the students to be almost entertained or at least happy, no, actually entertained. (I13 – Principal Lecturer).

The research led curriculum remains a noble goal, occasionally delivered where the research interests of a lecturer correlate strongly with the content they are required to teach: ‘then their ability to bring in research papers would depend to which their own PhD also touched upon those research areas, those research papers’. (I16 – Professor). However, the increasing student focus means that many accounting faculty ‘talk the talk,’ but very few ‘walk the walk,’ as student satisfaction has ascendancy:

And I think sometimes, the approach to research led, I don’t think we do research led, evidence led curriculum. I think very often we are so worried about like NSS scores and the backdrop (*sic*) that we’re in, which is all about how students rate us. (I11 – Associate Professor).

Finally, as touched on earlier, despite the dual nature of academic work, research and teaching, academic professionalism is often viewed through the lens of research paper publication where career progression is often determined by the number of papers published in ‘quality’ journals. Teaching is measured by quantitative metrics (Gunn, 2018). External measurements and rewards are weighted more highly than the satisfaction of delivering quality teaching (McCune, 2021), undermining traditional academic values such as academic freedom or the pursuit of knowledge (Arvaja, 2018), serving to widen the gap between research and teaching (Korhonen & Törmä, 2016). For many interviewees, the dual responsibility of teaching and researching has created tensions. Specifically, the issue of resources (time and energy) becomes critical in deciding how and where to allocate limited time: ‘You don’t, I mean it’s absolutely, it’s a joke ... you don’t strike a balance, you pick one or the other’. (I14 – Lecturer). The frustration is palpable. The variety of contracts on offer, research, teaching, research and teaching, should avoid such frustrations and give clarity for what to

prioritise but too often the boundaries blur: ‘So, it’s not just some staff doing research and some staff doing teaching. Everybody is able to deliver everything’. (I12 – Professor).

This creates a delivery issue. Situations arise where the individual tasked with the delivery of a course may possess the theoretical knowledge but have little practical experience, or conversely have the experience but not have any research knowledge to enrich the content. Most interviewees highlighted this as problematic:

But you then have these individuals that are coming in on potentially research and teaching contracts that are then responsible for delivering accredited courses. ... these individuals have obviously a very, very good knowledge of the subject of their PhD ... [but ask to] teach that audit class or that IFRS. It would be very, very surface level at best. (I16 – Professor).

One further issue arising from the need to split resources between research and teaching is that there may not always be resources on hand to teach. Timetabling demands of research, administrative duties, and pastoral care commitments all impinge on availability. Faculty may identify a need for a new module or a curriculum enhancement, but this can only happen if there are resources to deliver the content:

Then you also need someone to teach things you know. You need someone to come up with an idea to teach a module and you just hope, so yes you need [teachers]. I couldn’t just say we want a module on sustainability in accounting because someone will say well who’s going to teach that? (I18 – professor).

Overall, the above raises obstacles to successful curriculum change. While the rewards from research activities outweigh those from teaching, naturally academics will focus more resources on research and less on curriculum development. To counter this, institutions need to develop approaches to learning, teaching, and intellectual capital that use the synergies between research and teaching, not drive them apart. Taking a more holistic approach to curriculum development involving not just teachers but also researchers would be beneficial. However, as HE continues to replicate the characteristics of the free market by implementing commercially based reward structures favouring research, collaboration on curriculum development is less likely. Teaching academics feel undervalued, as illustrated by the frustration in the quotes above. Yet it is teaching academics that are most likely to lead curriculum development. Pressuring these individuals to prioritise research will only be to the detriment of teaching quality and curriculum development.

6.4.5 Conclusion, how can obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics be overcome?

The PABs, in their role as custodians of the profession, are duty bound to maintain the status of professional accounting. For future members this is achieved by retaining control over student membership through the professional education curriculum. By designing the content, mandating the

delivery, and creating and marking the examinations, the PABs retain total control over entry. This control is reinforced as HEIs seek accreditation for their degrees, enabling the PABs to also shape the content of accounting undergraduate degrees. Curriculum amendment is made difficult as there is little flexibility once the exemption criteria are met. The PABs have also created multiple tiers of entry, embracing school leavers, apprenticeships, and individuals qualified by experience, alongside graduates, which have widened membership opportunities, reducing the importance of an accounting education.

To improve the relevance of an accounting education the PABs and accounting faculty should better collaborate. Representatives of the PABs appear to be open to the idea but there is little evidence of this happening in practice. In part this is due to diverging views of the purpose of an accounting education. Collaboration is further hindered by the PABs viewing most academic accounting research as irrelevant and without significant commercial benefit. Accounting research is often produced solely for the purpose of publication in REF-able journals and aimed at an academic audience.

The structure of an individual HEI also creates obstacles to curriculum change. An institution's teaching ethos depends on whether state or market logics has primacy. HEIs founded on state logics are underpinned by academic logics, autonomy, and academic rigour. In contrast, institutions guided more by market logics focus their teaching on the professional syllabi, maximising exemptions on offer. Therefore, institutions underpinned by market logics have less flexibility to amend curriculum. Finally, the HE environment is very bureaucratic and not conducive to curriculum change. Processes are too complex, the pace too slow, management support is often lacking, and exemptions must be retained.

Further, all HEIs are facing strong financial headwinds. Entrepreneurship, academic capitalism, and commercial activity are increasingly important. Increasing revenue through these approaches has erected further obstacles to accounting curriculum change. The need to increase revenue has created intense competition amongst institutions and faculty, where some win, and some lose. Driven by market and business logics, HE is becoming more managerial, competitive, and profit (revenue) focussed, with accounting education assuming the role of cash cow. While many interviewees see this designation as the potential saviour of accounting as a discipline, such a view does a disservice to potential undergraduates.

Arising from the increasing competition between institutions has been the creation of rankings and league tables. Rankings have created a transactional, hierarchical market within HE. Rankings are an integral part of the HE environment, but they struggle to define educational quality. However, by

constantly seeking to improve their ranking, accounting faculty are cautious of making radical changes which may lose exemptions. Ranking tables also include a focus on research quality which has impacted on the dynamic of the research teaching nexus, tilting the balance towards research rather than innovative teaching.

Unfortunately, the positive synergies available through the research teaching nexus are often overlooked when shaping the accounting curriculum. Some studies have found that accounting research aids student learning but there is little empirical evidence to support this. Through-out the interviews, problems concerning this research teaching dynamic frequently arose, revolving around the primacy of research and a feeling of being undervalued as a teaching focussed academic. Frustration was expressed concerning the weighting of rewards (promotion, prestige, and status) focussed on research, creating confusion as to which to prioritise, research or teaching. While rewards are viewed as research based, more time and effort will be devoted to research to the detriment of curriculum enhancement.

6.5 Research question 3 - What will motivate students to study accounting in the future?

6.5.1 Introduction.

To answer this question there needs to be an understanding of what motivates students to study accounting currently and why this may have to change. Despite the image of an accountant, often portrayed as a 'bean-counter' individuals still choose to study accounting at university. Referencing the literature and using (reinforcing) data from interviews, the current motivation of accounting students is explored. Statistics surrounding student membership of the PABs is reviewed to understand whether a current accounting education adequately prepares undergraduates to obtain student membership, a key step to qualifying as an accountant. The supply of undergraduate places at UK universities is explored, and the relationship between students expected and actual outcomes achieved in terms of employability is examined. Improved student engagement to enhance motivation is discussed. Finally, an outline of ideas and actions to improve future accounting student motivation is detailed and the benefits discussed.

6.5.2 Student motivation, the current situation.

The motivation of students deciding to study accountancy at university is not properly understood. On the one hand, convincing a person to study accounting at university seems complicated by the stereotypical images often conveyed by the media, television, and cinema of an accountant as dry

and staid, the traditional ‘bean-counter’ role (Caglio & Cameran, 2017; M. Jones & Stanton, 2021; Stevenson-Smith, 2015; Tucker & Scully, 2020). In all categories of interviews, these stereotypes were referred to by interviewees (PAB representatives, academics, and students). Superficially, presenting this unappealing image of the profession should make the task of ‘selling’ an accounting education more difficult:

Yeah, very much so it's given as not attractive. You do a whole load of numbers. You do, number crunching, you give it to someone else who does all the sexy stuff. (I2 - PAB representative).

You can look at accounting students and go you're different from a business student. You [accounting students] prefer to do the numbers, ..., you tend to be a little bit more introverted. (I15 – Associate Professor).

... but I think if you want this to continue as a degree you've got to sort out your image problem. (I19 - Senior Lecturer).

... I think in world where you know the accountant is viewed as the very boring person that sits in the corner of the dinner party. (I24 – Student).

One interviewee was more positive, encapsulating the importance of accounting as a discipline, yet even these first referenced the negative imagery:

And I would say despite its' [accounting] image and despite the best efforts of the professional and potentially previous generations of academics to turn it into a grey, boring, bean counter discipline. Actually, it's at the core of a lot of what we do as human beings and we're at a potentially exciting stage now. (I21 – Professor).

Despite this negative image of accounting, school leavers still choose to study accounting at university, motivated for varied reasons. At its most basic, individual motivation is an internal process, the essence of which is galvanised and determined goal seeking behaviour (Reeve, 2018). Intrinsic motivation comes from individual goals, values, and desires to experience specific rewards associated with identified objectives (Reeve, 2018). When entering HE, students do so with a formulated set of expectations (Leal et al., 2013). For aspiring accountants, their motivation is often to gain a professional qualification not a degree per se, the choice of discipline is simply a means to an end (Reeve, 2018). As discussed previously, student membership of the PABs can be achieved through multiple routes (e.g., other degree disciplines, apprenticeships, employer sponsorship), therefore motivating high calibre students to choose accounting necessitates demonstrating the value of the course in meeting an individual's expectations. For undergraduates, the prospect of securing a well-paid, rewarding position is often a key motivator when choosing a course of study. Attaining a well-paid, rewarding role is regularly cited as a key reason for choosing to study accounting:

I mean if I'm being brutally honest, the initial money idea was fantastic when I was 17 because I was thinking, you know, they always earn good money and stuff... That's the main reason, it was initially the financial side of things that intrigued me. (I24 - Student).

There are other initial motivations for choosing an accounting education, including the views of family members (the status of the profession), being good at mathematics (maths), lower UCAS points required, not necessarily knowing what to do and the social side of university:

As we know, a lot of the Asian countries still see accountancy and anything numerical is the thing to do. (I2 – PAB representative).

If you ask them [students] they just say well, I'm quite good at maths and it apparently pays well. That is what attracts them to accounting. (I18 - Professor).

... is that the careers advisors say to a kid whose got like an A-level in maths and possibly isn't going to get like the AA* needed to do economics or whatever. It's like 'oh have you thought about doing accounting, which needs maths.' And it drives me crazy... (I19 – Senior Lecturer).

Do they really know what you need to become an accountant and just trust the providers to include all the right stuff in there? (I13 – Principal lecture).

[Why] I came to university was the sort of social side of life because obviously with accounting there's lots of professional bodies (*sic*), especially the Big-four, that are offering apprenticeship schemes. (I24 – student).

Whatever the reason for choosing an accounting education, passion for the subject is rarely, if ever, mentioned. Despite the diverse reasons given, a common, identified thread was often that an accounting degree would increase the chances of a well-paid, rewarding job by enhancing employability:

An awful lot of the motivation that people seem to go into studying accounting for, not just accounting, but certain other degrees as well is to gain employability skills. (I23 – Student).

From the student perspective it has long been accepted that career prospects, earnings, and other opportunities associated with working in accountancy or finance are attractive. This is illustrated by the high numbers of graduates applying for student membership of the PABs (FRC, 2011-2022; Highflyers, 2022). Faced with growing instability in the labour market (e.g., COVID-19, Brexit, automation, and technology advances) students increasingly view employability as a fundamental measure of value for money. Employability has become a prime motivator when choosing a course of study (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Jackson & Wilton, 2017). Students, themselves, have become consumers, regarding HE as a paid for service (Bunce et al., 2017; Jabbar et al., 2018; Komljenovic et al., 2018; Raaper, 2019). This is forcing HEIs to become more student focussed, giving students what they want, not necessarily what they need:

And they want the students to be almost entertained or at least happy, no actually entertained. And I think that encourages or leads to a situation where actually the students are being taught less and less, I suspect. (I13 – Principal Lecturer).

For accounting faculty, the belief is that what accounting students want most is exemptions. Therefore, to attract undergraduates accounting faculty often emphasise the number of accreditations and exemptions they hold, claiming that these offer a short cut to professional qualification (Makhoul, 2019; Zhao & Ferran, 2016). Accounting faculty contend that this acceleration of qualification is a tangible demonstration of enhanced employability:

...we talk about the exemptions because you know that's part of the argument for them [students]. That it will allow them to, you know, to enter industry with a certain advantage possibly over somebody who had studied history. (I9 – Deputy Head of Department).

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that students do value both exemptions and accreditation:

Graduating from a recognized business school will not only give me the necessary background to succeed in my field but will also be valuable for my future employers. (I25 – Student).

But little empirical research has been published focusing on the motivational impact of accreditation or exemptions on course selection by undergraduates (Kafaji, 2020). Indeed, the view that exemptions and accreditation improve employability by accelerating qualification is a view not shared by the PABs. The PABs recognise the value of exemptions to the HEIs marketing campaigns but are forthright in their opinions that exemptions have negligible impact on their recruitment and employment processes. University prospectuses place great store in the fact that programmes are accredited and have been awarded exemption. For their part, the representatives of the PABs downplay this value, contending that employers are at best ambivalent to the exemption process:

University prospectuses:

The course (BA accounting and finance) is designed in consultation with the main professional accounting bodies, and successful completion will gain you exemption from a significant number of the ACCA, CIMA and ICAEW accounting examinations. (1992 Group university prospectus).

Success in this degree (BA accountancy) can afford significant exemptions for an accredited degree from ICAS, ICAEW, ACCA, CIMA and CIPFA. (Russell Group university prospectus).

PABs:

I think the universities put a lot more credence in the values of their exemptions to what students do. (I1 – PAB Representative).

Universities place a great store by exemptions as you say, but one of the things we find that a number of the big accountancy firms [do], even though students may have a relevant degree, they still actually have to sit our initial level [exams]. (I4 – PAB Representative).

The employers don't see that. The argument is that, if you get credits, you're more likely to qualify, but the fact is you need to get training contracts with three years' experience to qualify, having credits doesn't really help that if you're never going to get a job in the first place. (I5 – PAB Representative).

6.5.3 Statistics on student membership of the PABs.

It is demonstrable that employability is a key driver of course selection. Becoming a student member of one of the PABs demonstrates that the employability goal has been met. Student members of the PABs have received training contracts, entered graduate programmes, or secured accounting-based roles in commerce or industry i.e., they are employed. Examining the data for new student membership of the PABs indicates that the relevance of an accounting education has steadily declined (FRC, 2011-2022). Earlier, Figure 10 (page 46) compared the percentage of new student members with a relevant degree to new members with degrees in other disciplines. When all forms of entry to the PABs are considered (school leaver, apprenticeship, employer sponsorship etc.) this decline is significantly more pronounced. As revealed by Table 17, in 2021 new student members without an HE education represented almost fifty percent of the total new student members, and almost two thirds of the ACCA student intake. ACCA has the largest student membership and traditionally grants the most exemptions, so this statistic is particularly worrying. It is indicative of the falling value of employability, a key motivator of study choice, generated by an accounting degree.

Table 17 New student membership by educational background.

2021 Student membership						
	ACCA	CIMA	CIPFA	ICAEW	ICAS	Total
Relevant degree subjects	Accounting and finance	Accounting and finance, business studies	Accounting	Accounting and finance	Accounting	
Relevant degree	3,024	3,620	30	2,095	503	9,273
Non- relevant degree	2,705	905	28	3,725	539	7,903
Other qualification	10,185	4,525	158	1,940	156	16,965
Total	15,914	9,050	217	7,760	1,199	34,140

(FRC, 2022).

6.5.4 Accounting undergraduate expectation.

A cursory look through the internet reveals the sheer volume of universities looking to attract students to their accounting faculties. The recent ‘Complete University Guide’ 2023 (2022) lists 104 UK universities offering accounting and finance courses. Accounting only courses have an aggregate undergraduate population of 35,600, of which 13,925 are in the first year of study. The comparative figures for finance degrees are 26,535 (10,195), (HESA, 2023b). Most accounting courses are of three-year duration (Scotland four years), implying that there is a significant amount

of attrition between first year and graduating with a degree. As only aggregate information is available for ‘further years’ only an approximate attrition rate can be calculated, Table 18.

Table 18 Calculation of approximate attrition rate for accountancy courses between year 1 and graduation.

Approximate attrition rate: Accountancy courses.				
	HESA data.	Scottish Universities.	Other universities.	Total.
Total students enrolled.	35,600	3,700	31,900	35,600
First year enrolments.	13,925	1,447	12,478	13,925
Other years enrolments.	21,675	2,253	19,422	21,675
% of students in first year.	39.1%			
Length of course (years).		4	3	
Average of further years.		751	9,711	10,462
Approximate attrition (total).				24.9%

Source – HESA (2023b)

The ‘total students enrolled’ is taken from HESA⁴⁷ (2023b), The split of first year student numbers has been deduced by applying the total percentage of first year students (39.1) to the total number of students in Scotland and elsewhere, giving 1,447 and 12,478 respectively. It has been assumed that all Scottish courses are four-year and all other are three-year. This is not strictly accurate, but accepting these assumptions, a total attrition rate of 24.9% is calculated. This figure is only a guide but is indicative of the actual rate. The causes of this attrition (dropout rate between first and other years) are unclear and may occur for many reasons. Reasons include people dropping out of university (course suitability?), failing examinations (disengagement?), and changing disciplines (stepping-stone), each of which indicates a form of demotivation. Regardless, what is clear is that a sizeable number of students who enrol on accounting courses fail to complete their studies of the discipline.

Approximately 10,000 students will graduate, alongside approximately 8,000 finance graduates⁴⁸ (HESA, 2023b). While accepting that not all graduates will seek roles in accounting, some may elect banking, insurance, entrepreneurial roles, further study etc, a substantial number will apply for membership of the PABs. To be successful, applicants need to demonstrate the skills and attributes required by the professional firms and commercial employers. As already demonstrated, technology

⁴⁷ Table 49 - HE student enrolments by HE provider and subject of study 2019/20 to 2021/22.

⁴⁸ Finance is regarded as a relevant degree by the PABs.

use in the profession has shifted the strategic focus away from traditional functions (audit, tax, bookkeeping, numbers generation) to more consultancy, partnering, and strategic management, and decision making (Bhimani, 2021; Lander et al., 2013; Shore & Wright, 2018). This more commercially driven approach has created a need for differing skill and attributes, opening the PABs to a wider cohort of applicants (Eames et al., 2018; FRC, 2020). In turn, increasing the competition for traineeships⁴⁹, potentially diminishing the value of an accounting education.

Throughout this discussion, the belief that an accounting degree leads to rewarding and well-paid employment has been shown as a key driver of student study choice. However, for accounting and finance undergraduates there is a significant disconnection between expected student outcomes and actual outcomes achieved. Using data sourced from the Complete University Guide 2023 (2022), Table 19 compares an accounting or finance degree, a business degree, a history⁵⁰ degree, and all degree disciplines across four given criteria. The chosen metrics are, entry requirements (UCAS points), student satisfaction, students' expectations (of employment) and actual employment outcomes.

From Table 19, the average entry requirements for accounting and finance courses (128 UCAS points⁵¹), business, or history are similar and just below the average for all degree subjects (128 compared to 135 UCAS points). The average for institutions in this study's sample is 137 UCAS points, a reasonable representation of the general population for accounting and finance courses.

⁴⁹ Graduate applications (all degree disciplines) increased 23% in 2021.

⁵⁰ Chosen as several interviewees referred to history graduates in discussing non-relevant degrees.

⁵¹ 128 UCAS points is equivalent to ABB at A level.

Table 19 Expected and actual employment outcomes by degree discipline.

Subject	UCAS points	UCAS points	Student satisfaction	Student satisfaction	Employment expectation	Employment Expectation	Employment outcomes	Employment outcomes
All subjects		135		3.86		73.3		68.5
Accountancy		128		3.9		76.8		60
Scotland	180		3.97		79.8		63.5	
Rest – UK	121		3.9		76.5		59.5	
My sample	137		3.86		79.1		64.8	
Business		129		3.83		69.4		62
History		129		3.98		63.6		59.5

(Complete university guide, 2022).

Accounting degrees in Scotland are obviously outliers, requiring 180 points, a figure not dissimilar to medicine (184). In terms of student satisfaction there was no significant variation between subjects, with all just above the overall average (3.86). However, when comparing student expectations to actual outcomes significant differences emerged. While student expectations were higher than the actual outcomes achieved across all disciplines, the gap was significantly wider for accountancy and finance students. For accountancy and finance the gap was 16.8% (76.8 – 60.0). This compares to business 7.4%, History 4.1% and all degree disciplines 4.8%.

Student expectation (76.8%) was highest in accountancy and finance, potentially reflecting the overly optimistic belief that an accounting education would indeed, lead to well paid, rewarding employment: ‘You know move to London, work for a “Big-four” accounting firm is what is currently shouting out to me’. (I24 – Student). Yet, actual outcomes (60.0%) were second lowest, just above history (59.5%) indicative of the potential lack of relevance of an accounting degree to the PABs, and the potential over supply of accounting and finance graduates.

6.5.5 Accounting degree - perceived employability value.

Unlike medicine or dentistry, accounting and finance degrees have no governmentally imposed cap on student numbers. Student numbers are often only constrained by the capacity of lecture theatres (Hopper, 2013; Patel et al., 2016). This marketisation of accounting education continues to

accelerate, reaching a point where accounting, as a subject in universities, is increasingly viewed solely as a cash cow (Hogan et al., 2021; Howcroft, 2017; M. Parker, 2018). Interviewees claim that the survival of accounting as a degree discipline is assured because of its ability to generate cash: ‘It’s too much of a cash cow for people just to drop it’. (I19 – Senior Lecturer). While this may be true, should accounting undergraduates realise that their belief in the employment enhancing capabilities of an accounting degree is misplaced, they may choose a different course of study, offering them better value (Chaffer & Webb, 2017; Pincus et al., 2017). While this threat is recognised by academics in interviews:

And it feels unethical not to tell them that the majority of people who I know in the profession didn’t study accountancy. (I14 – Lecturer).

You know I think we really play on the fact that students are just largely misinformed when they make their choices...It will be problematic won’t it when they do get wind of the fact that it doesn’t matter what you study to be (*sic*) if you want to become an accountant. (I13 – Principal Lecturer).

‘Maybe their degree [accountancy] that they’ve opted for initially maybe they see the employment opportunities in the future may not be as huge and vast and possibly financially rewarding as they thought they were going to be originally. You know they will change tact for that reason’ (I7 – Professor).

there appears to be some complacency as to the probability of this student realisation crystalising. When asked directly what may happen were the students to realise that the link between an accounting degree and employability was tenuous, typical answers were:

I don’t think they will [realise], I still think there will be somebody there who will say I’m not (*sic*) quite good at maths I’ll do accounting. (I18 – Professor).

I don’t think they’re really necessarily think that through. I don’t think that they ask about how many students graduate from X programme end up working for one of the big accounting firms or mid-tier firms, I don’t think they even think about that. (I12 – Professor).

Accounting academics appear to realise that the accounting degree, employability link is more perceived than real. However, they understand that emphasising that link, either directly, through exemptions and accreditation, or indirectly, through inference, is a powerful marketing tool for student recruitment (S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019). A tool which appears to work given the high percentage of accounting students who expect to achieve their graduate outcomes (76.8%).

6.5.6 Student engagement as a motivator and improver of employability.

Accounting faculty are right to use employability as a motivator of course selection, but this creates a duty to ensure that course content delivers on that employability promise. Knowing that employability is a key motivator, accounting faculty and academics should provide stimulating and innovative content (procedural knowledge), alongside technical capabilities (declarative knowledge)

within the core accounting curriculum. The procedural knowledge delivery should centre around the skills and attributes that accounting students need to succeed in their future careers. If designed and implemented well, this should improve student engagement and involvement (Leal et al., 2013). Student engagement is key and is pivotal to teaching and learning enhancement (Groccia, 2018). Through improved engagement comes retained motivation, improved learning outcomes, and an increase in employability.

Several motivational strategies for improving student engagement are discussed in the literature (Groccia, 2018; Osborne & Jones, 2011; Senior et al., 2018). Firstly, student autonomy. Empowering students to have some meaningful and relevant choice in what is studied and the ability to exercise some control over their learning is an important motivator. These authors argue that autonomy positively impacts on learning outcomes, leading to greater academic and social competence, greater creativity, and improved self-esteem (M. Evans & Boucher, 2015). Unfortunately, fostering autonomy in accounting courses is constrained by the accreditation and exemptions process, deemed essential by accounting faculty to recruit new students. Yet interview responses from academics cast doubt on the impact of exemptions and accreditation on student course selection:

We think they value exemptions. I'm not convinced that they really care that much. And I'm certainly not convinced that the employers care that much ... do the students think the exemptions are really important, not, UK students, I'm not convinced they do? (I9 – Head of Department).

I mean I think exemptions is an interesting topic and it's something that I'm interested in our university to explore further going forward, because I'm not sure how important they actually are. We use them as a marketing tool, as do most universities. I actually think ACCA exemptions count against you because you're very constrained. (I8 – Principal Lecturer).

When I joined the department all of my accounting staff said to me the best thing about our programmes is that we've got the maximum number of exemptions and that's why students come to us. And, without being totally brutal, my 3 years of experience in the department and speaking to the students that I speak to, I think that's absolute nonsense. (I18 – Professor).

Maintaining accreditation results in accounting education curriculum that is both regimented and overcrowded, reducing the scope for students to make meaningful choice (S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Kotb et al., 2019). Accounting faculty need to review the importance of exemptions if the accounting education curriculum is to be 'freed' up to allow some form of student involvement in their learning journey.

A second motivational strategy for improving student engagement is demonstrating the usefulness of academic knowledge (Osborne & Jones, 2011), showing students the link between what they are being taught and their future career goals. Curriculum designers need to create curriculum that provides students with the knowledge needed to function effectively in the world in which they will

live (Bowles et al., 2020). HE is increasingly called upon to produce work-ready graduates, accounting faculties are no exception (Succi & Canovi, 2020). However, accounting education faces unique obstacles when addressing work-readiness and employability. Students and employers alike increasingly regard degrees in disciplines such as mathematics, science, the arts, and information technology as a solid grounding for a career in the profession (Eames et al., 2018; Elijido-Ten & Kloot, 2015; FRC, 2020; Gray & Collison, 2002; Howcroft, 2017). This shift appears indicative of accounting educators' over-reliance on technical skills and reflects accounting education's weak development of other professional capabilities. Professional capabilities (interpretation, critical thinking, communication, team-working, decision making etc.,) need to be placed front and centre of the accounting curriculum. However, from personal experience, accounting students often undervalue professional skills modules as students often fail to recognise the link between these modules and their future careers. This is evidenced by the low level of attendance and the almost exclusive negative feedback these modules receive from participating students:

Whereas a lot of people on the course [people management] obviously didn't like that and they found it was quite an airy-fairy type of subject because it wasn't just straight numbers. You know they weren't just looking at numbers, they weren't just doing calculations. (I23 – Student).

Well, we've done things like that over the past, over time, career workshops, we used to do voluntary presentation skill workshops. But you know students didn't turn up or they'd sign up and then not show up. (I18 – Professor).

And I just couldn't believe that we couldn't get students to do it [skills workshop]. I think that's, when you speak to students, certainly at [institution] and places like [institution], I think they are so fixated on the degree. (I11 – Associate Professor).

Still, developing such professional skills is critical if a student is to be successful in their future career, as recognised by the PABs, academics, and with hindsight, the students:

Part of the [project name] is how do we get the students to see that there they need to polish these [professional] skills?' (I2 – PAB Representative).

But yes, I completely agree these modules are, the most important to them [skills development], it's good having that knowledge of forensic accountancy and how, you know, deal with the fraud triangle but that's not going to get you the job. (I14 – Lecturer).

I hated it, in the way that I'm terrible at writing essays, but it was very, it was very good to thinking back to oh yes, no, we figured that out that way. It was good from a learning perspective, but I didn't like doing it. (I24 – Student).

Given this recognised importance, students need to be better motivated to attend and engage with professional skills modules. Unfortunately, while maximising exemptions has primacy over other forms of curriculum development and students remain exam focussed, there is little motivation to alter the status quo. While this situation persists, the accounting education curriculum will continue

to fail to meet the changing needs of both the PABs and employers, resulting in disservice to accounting students.

6.5.7 Motivating future accounting students.

To attract students to accountancy courses, demonstrating value through employability is key, as perceived employability is, and will remain, an important initial motivator of study choice. Having sold the notion of employability to their new undergraduates, accounting faculty have an obligation to deliver on that promise. As indicated in Table 19 (page 206), this promise is often unfulfilled. Encouraged by the revenue potential of filling an accounting course, accounting faculties often offer too many undergraduate places. For some of these undergraduates, accountancy may be the wrong choice. A view supported by both the indicative attrition rate calculated, Table 18 (page 204) and the gap in expected and actual graduate outcomes. As a recruitment tool, institutions often highlight the number of exemptions and accreditations they possess, a strategy only half-heartedly supported by interview participants, which constrain the curriculum. While accepting that some exemptions are valuable, the intensity of this focus on exemptions should be diluted, while the focus on the professional (soft) skills and attributes should be intensified.

Individual motivation is goal driven (Reeve, 2018), so courses developed to meet an individual's goals are most attractive. For many aspiring accountants, the goal is not an accounting degree, but qualification and membership of the PABs. Increasingly, this goal is not met due to the decline in the relevance of an accounting education to both the PABs and many employers. To arrest this decline, accounting graduates need to possess the balance of skills and attributes required to become a modern accountant. By understanding student motivation, accounting faculty should start by re-engineering their recruitment processes.

The current recruitment net is thrown too widely, capturing too many undergraduates without any passion for the subject. Being a failed mathematician, the sibling or child of an accountant, or at a loss as to what to do are inappropriate motivations for studying accounting. The PABs are guided by professional logics, members (of the PABs) share a sense of kindred spirit, and a devotion to serving the public interest, (Dellaportas & Davenport, 2008; Duff et al., 2020), creating a sense of vocation within accountancy. Therefore, individuals exhibiting a desire for, or interest in, accountancy would make more suitable undergraduates. Accounting faculty should consider reducing the number of places available on the first year of accounting courses and require that candidates applying for these places possess a good grade (institutions to decide) in accountancy or business studies at A-level. Currently, where A-level stipulations are made, there is a requirement for maths A-level, yet as the interviews have shown; 'accountancy is not maths', and the mathematical content of an accountants' workload is negligible. Business studies A-level would equally demonstrate numeracy capability and

signify more focussed and motivated applicants, individuals who already have a proven interest in the discipline.

Having a cohort of undergraduates possessing a similar level of prior knowledge (A-level grades) would enable the acceleration of teaching the technical modules of the degree. Having reviewed the syllabi of several accountancy courses, the objective of teaching in year 1, e.g., Financial Accounting 1, Management Accounting 1, Introduction to Financial Management, is to ensure that, at the end of the year, all undergraduates have achieved a similar level of understanding of the core concepts in accounting. The second year usually revisited these subjects, building more advanced knowledge. For students who had studied business related courses at school, this approach is both repetitive and de-motivating:

I think you know first year I was very lethargic in the way I worked; you know, I think it was because I could easily rely on my A-level knowledge... So, through my first-year exams I almost, I could get away with attending almost nothing and still, you know, be able to pass and get through the next year. (I24 – Student).

So basically, the first year of my degree I felt like I was repeating almost what I'd already done (I23 – Student).

By having undergraduates each with A-level business studies or accounting would enable accounting faculty to explore whether certain base level courses could be removed entirely, or at least combined with more advanced content. The combined course content would be sufficiently challenging to engage the students while also being of sufficient depth to gain valued exemptions.

As with current undergraduates, for potential future undergraduates, perceived employability will remain an important initial motivator of study choice. Therefore, it is important that the link between employability, procedural knowledge, and vocational skills possession is made explicit in year 1. This could be achieved by creating a module which not only defines which skills are valued but also highlights the importance of such skills to the PABs and employers. Using contemporary examples from existing academic literature e.g., Al-Htaybat et al. (2018), Bowles et al. (2020), Coffey, Farivar, & Cameron (2021), Gebreiter (2020), Rebele & St. Pierre (2019), Asonitou (2021), and from the PABs themselves (Competency frameworks, CPD documentation, and discussion papers), the importance of possessing these vocational skills to navigate the recruitment process and secure employment could be readily demonstrated. In turn, this would inculcate in students a mindset to acquire these skills and to motivate students to attend modules which require them to demonstrate that they are in possession of these skills. Currently many institutions offer professional skills modules but the link between these modules and career prospects is opaque. By offering the module as outlined above, the important link between the two, skills and employability, is made clearly visible. Finally, as it is a truism that when something is measured it becomes important (Gunn, 2018), this module should be compulsory, assessed, and awarded similar amounts of credit to its technical

counterparts. Without such status, students may continue to disregard or undervalue modules of this nature:

If you make, from my experience, if you make anything voluntary you might get five percent of the students engaging. They're really not interested in anything unless it contributes to their marks, sadly. I just don't think they see the relevance at this stage. (I18 – Professor).

6.5.8 Workplace learning.

The debate around employability has highlighted the value of internships, work placements, and WIL. As technology is seen to be radically changing the future of work, there is an increasing interest amongst scholars to include some form of work based learning into the curriculum. (Benhamou, 2020; Howard, 2019). For students, there is evidence that graduates undertaking internships have improved academic and employment outcomes (H. Hughes, 2020), receive more graduate job offers, attain higher graduate salaries, and gain more satisfaction from their first post-graduation role. The successful completion of a work placement or internship is highly motivating, often leading to an offer of employment: 'Because you know a lot of them will then get, if they do well on the placement will then get a graduate scheme after it'. (I23 – Student).

A placement also allows the student to put what they have been taught into practice in a real-world situation. This enables them to practice and develop their professional skills in real time and in a way that could not be taught in a classroom. So that when they return to their course, they have increased motivation to succeed:

It's when they come back from placement, and they've been in the workplace. And they're like ah I get it; they've seen it in real life, and I think that's when the value starts to come through. (I15 – Associate Professor).

And I think experiential learning gives them that confidence and gives them that independence and helps them develop. (I14 – Lecturer).

But if you look at some of them, they radically change what they think is important to them in their career and their future from going out to coming back [from placement] (I11 – Associate Professor).

Building in an element of experiential learning to the curriculum, not necessarily a full year out, would benefit the students. The proposed cut in course headcount should alleviate some of the practical issues around finding and monitoring placement students.

6.5.8 Conclusion, what will motivate students to study accounting in the future?

Answering research question 3 - What will motivate students to study accounting in the future? has not produced any earth-shattering insight. There is no magic wand for making individuals engage with a subject. All that faculty can do is design a course which delivers on its promises. For an accounting degree that means arming the student with the right balance of technical and

professional skills. What faculty cannot do is force a student to engage. A point succinctly made below:

My view is that in education you can lead a horse to water, so we take the student to a particular lecture room, we can't force them to drink that water, but we absolutely must ensure that water is of the highest quality. (I20 – Head of Department).

Future students, like their current counterparts, will choose accounting largely because of the career prospects offered, recognised in many university prospectuses:

Accounting and Finance offers some of the most stimulating and highly paid career opportunities in business. Our courses aim to ensure that you are fully equipped to succeed in these exciting areas. Russell Group prospectus 2023.

It is incumbent on accounting faculty to deliver the balance of technical and professional skills which best equip undergraduates for success. Unfortunately, the current curriculum is too technically focussed. Students enter HE with a pre-formulated goal and a motivation to succeed. Maintaining that motivation should be a key consideration for course design. Reducing the places available on the first year of an accounting course, coupled with requiring a relevant A-level, not maths, would result in attracting focussed, committed undergraduates. Due to the prior knowledge of these undergraduates, the most basic technical modules could be discontinued, alleviating the risk of demotivation through lethargy. Replacing these basic modules with more advanced content would preserve the technical exemptions, anecdotally important to undergraduates. The existing basic modules should be replaced by a compulsory, assessed module aimed at engendering in the students an understanding of why professional skills modules are necessary. Developing such understanding will make delivery of future professional skills modules more rewarding as students will be motivated to attend and engage.

Alongside professional skills modules, an element of experiential learning should be built into the course as early as possible. Reduced student numbers make it easier to support students in finding suitable placements and employers to sponsor them. Experiential learning is a proven motivator and valued by those students who participate in such schemes.

When enacting these changes, accounting faculty may encounter difficulties and resistance from their institutions. Issues include reduction in tuition income, potential loss of exemptions, qualified staff to teach new modules, increases in workload through having to supervise placements, the research, teaching balance, and academic content.

6.6 Conclusion.

Merging content from the literature review, data gathered from interviews, and desk research, this section built a complete picture of the issues surrounding the relevancy of accounting education.

Firstly, opinions surrounding the relevance of current accounting education were outlined followed by answers to the research sub-questions.

Interviews with representatives of the PABs confirmed that the PABs were dismissive of an accounting education, believing it to be almost irrelevant. The Scottish PABs not so. The PABs questioned the HE focus on teaching technical skills, highlighting that employers sought less technical and more professional skills. The PABs could easily facilitate the technical teaching and wanted the HEIs to add value by teaching complimentary content. The PABs require work ready graduates and professional skills are in much demand. Technical skills and a host of exemptions are not sufficient to become an accountant. Accounting academics appeared aware of these opinions and recognised the threat that these posed.

Answering ‘how is the way the profession is evolving due to technology use impacting the recruitment of new members?’ led to the identification of the skills required to be successful in the future. Skills such as creativity, technology experience, communication, analytic skills, and critical thinking were identified as valuable to employers. Recognising that the current accounting undergraduate education is lacking in these areas, the PABs have proactively amended the professional education curriculum to compensate. The PABs are actively promoting their own pedagogy, designing the content, supplying the materials, and setting the examinations, while sub-contracting out the delivery. The accounting education curriculum is firmly in their control, a control strengthened further by universities seeking accreditation for their degrees.

Simultaneously, the PABs are developing their own on-line tools enabling qualification from multiple educational backgrounds, including school leavers, apprenticeships, individuals qualified by experience, alongside graduates. As digitalisation and technology led change accelerates, accounting roles will further evolve. Technical knowledge will remain necessary, the fundamentals are important, but the emphasis on digital and soft skills will increase, further reducing the value of an accounting education. Therefore, accounting faculty must design courses which maximise the employability of accounting students. Certainly, one avenue to explore is focussing the content of an accounting course more towards securing employment in commerce, rather than practice, where many more roles exist.

The obstacles faced in making curriculum change were then examined. The influence that the PABs exert over the curriculum through exemptions, creating busy curricula, was explored. The difficulties of engaging in meaningful collaboration were outlined, focussing on the divergent views surrounding the purpose of an accounting education and the value of accounting research. Other obstacles to curriculum change were identified, including the structure of HE, the need to generate income, the emergence of the ranking regime, and the dynamic within the research teaching nexus.

For each of these obstacles the tensions created by conflicting logics were investigated. At the macro level the logics underpinning the structure of an institution, state logics or market logics were discussed and the different impacts on the teaching ethos of a given institution explained. The increasing influence of managerial logics and associated bureaucracy on accounting faculty's ability to make curriculum change was outlined. The neoliberal approach to HE has increased competition between institutions and faculty to generate increasing revenue. Traditional financial models are no longer appropriate. For accounting education this has resulted in commodification, resulting in accounting degrees being viewed as cash cows.

Also emerging from the neoliberal approach are rankings and league tables. The HE market is now more transactional and hierarchical, resulting in a zero-sum game in which some win, and some lose. Consequently, accounting faculty striving to improve their ranking have become more focussed on maintaining exemptions to enhance student satisfaction and have become more research focussed, further complicating the process of curriculum change.

The research teaching nexus is complex. However, the increasing primacy of research is causing teaching focussed academics to feel undervalued and unsupported. Interviewees expressed frustration that reward systems are weighted towards research output and confusion as to what to prioritise. Often this has led to accounting academics focussing more time and effort on research, to the detriment of curriculum enhancement.

Finally, student motivation was addressed. The primary motivation to study accounting was identified as the promised employability inherent in these courses. While it is incumbent that accounting faculty deliver on employability, current accounting courses often over promise. Students enter HE, drawn by the promises made, as highly motivated individuals, maintaining that motivation should be a key consideration for accounting course design. However too often accounting faculty 'sell' courses on the promise of employability knowing that this promise will be unfulfilled.

Drawing on the above, the next section details a framework for an accounting course which is more relevant to the PABs, maintains the key elements that an HEI requires, and which delivers on the employability promise. As stated previously, in adopting this framework, accounting faculty may encounter difficulties and resistance from their institutions. Mitigating strategies to counter this resistance are discussed.

6.7 Framework for a relevant accounting degree (BA or BSc).

6.7.1 Introduction.

This section begins with a brief reflection of my research journey. Before commencing this research, I enrolled on several courses designed for PhD candidates. On one course the facilitator requested that I describe my research goal. I explained that my aim was to investigate maintaining the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs in a technology driven world. The facilitator responded as follows: ‘Accounting education is irrelevant (to the PABs) and will remain so’. Through interviews with representatives of the PABs, my research has broadly verified that current accounting education is of little relevance when gaining student membership. However, the veracity of the statement that ‘it will remain so,’ is less evident.

I accept that it is highly unlikely that the PABs will suddenly view accounting graduates as the *crème de la crème* for student membership. The PABs have invested significantly in curriculum change, redesigned processes, and launched too many initiatives for there to be a wholesale reversal of their recruitment strategy. However, that is not to assume that accounting faculty cannot improve the accounting curriculum to benefit future accounting graduates. As argued earlier, the primary purpose of accounting education is to maximise the employability of accounting graduates, to place an accounting graduate at the front of the recruitment queue. However, recent data relating to both PAB student recruitment (Table 17 page 203) and to graduate outcomes (Table 19 page 206) demonstrates that accounting curricula is currently performing sub-optimally.

The initial goal of this research was to identify ways to maintain the relevance of an accounting education given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant. When analysing the interview data, it emerged that the relevance of an accounting education to the PABs was already questionable. The following details the design of a curriculum framework ‘the framework’ of more relevance to the PABs, increasing accounting graduates’ employability prospects. The framework focusses on broad categories of modules, not specific content design, learning methods, or the imposition of a given pedagogy. These are areas outside the expertise of this researcher.

6.7.2 Research underpinning the framework design.

The literature review discussed how ‘Industry 4.0’ is transforming the profession, altering traditional roles, and requiring accountants to acquire new skills and attributes. This has resulted in what Thomson (2017) termed the ‘talent dilemma’; finding individuals with the necessary skills to perform these emerging roles. Contemporaneously, Education 4.0 seeks to develop highly competitive professionals with the cognitive, social, interpersonal, technical, and digital skills necessary to solve this ‘talent dilemma’ and provide solutions to future challenges (Miranda et al., 2021). This

framework aims to incorporate the competencies most desirable to the PABs and employers while safeguarding the features that accounting faculty and institutions most value.

The literature review included a significant body of academic articles calling for substantive accounting curriculum change. This work, both academic and professional, clearly stated that, without change, the threat to an accounting education would increase, a supposition supported by the data gathered from interviews. The framework is designed to counter this growing threat.

The effect that logics have on curriculum change process has been discussed at length, affecting not only the behaviour of the academics involved in curriculum change, but also the behaviour of the PABs and, through marketisation, undergraduates. Table 20 summarises these effects on stakeholder behaviour and highlights issues that this behaviour creates for accounting curriculum. Table 20 also includes actions which could be taken to mitigate these issues and links these actions to the framework design.

Table 20 Summary of the impact logics have on stakeholder behaviour and the challenges posed to accounting curriculum change.

Research sub question issues.	Logic conflict or impact	Behaviour	Issues for accounting education curriculum	Opportunities to amend accounting education curriculum	Comments
<i>Sub problem 1 - To understand the impact that technology use by the profession is having on the recruitment of future student members.</i>					
Evolution of profession.	Commercial logics, Professional logics.	Accountants' roles are changing as commercial logics is driving the evolution of the profession from guardians of the public interest to strategic commercial partners and management advisors.	The professional curriculum is being redesigned and innovative tools introduced allowing qualification by non-traditional routes to the detriment of an accounting education.	Embrace these identified new skills and incorporate them into the CORE curriculum (mandated and assessed not optional). Professional skills benefits will be easier to sell to undergraduates.	The framework includes a module on the importance of professional skills. This is based on research into the PABs and employers' requirements.
Professional status.	Professional logics, HE market logics.	To aid maintaining professional status the PABs retain a firm control over the professional accounting curriculum and routes to student membership.	As accounting faculty value professional exemptions as a key marketing tool in a competitive market, the need to maintain these exemptions makes the accounting curriculum very prescribed.	Stop chasing all exemptions, be selective and target the ones which the undergraduates most value. This will create space to build in other content.	The framework builds in technical modules which will attract exemptions.
Student recruitment.	Commercial logics, Professional logics.	There are now multiple routes to enter the accountancy profession widening the recruitment pool to increase membership and ultimately fee revenue.	More competition for training contracts or graduate programmes resulting in diminishing employability of accounting graduates.	Embed employability throughout the accounting curriculum. Change the focus away from a career in chartered accountancy. ACCA and CIMA enrol more students than the ICAEW.	Core modules of the framework aim for less specialism. Specialist modules are included as options.
<i>Sub problem 2. – Exploring obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics,</i>					
Professional influence.	Professional logics, Market logics, Academic logics.	As with maintaining status above, the PABs retain excessive influence because of exemptions. HE reliance on exemptions creates tension between recruiting undergraduates and offering a quality education.	Educators wanting to make curriculum change to include more professional skills face resistance if such change would result in a loss of exemptions. Exemptions become a strait jacket.	Limit the exemptions sought. The PABs are changing the way they apply exemptions anyway.	The framework builds in technical modules which will attract exemptions. Space is created to allow the teaching of professional skills.
Collaboration.	Commercial logics Academic capitalism, Academic professionalism.	The two groups of stakeholders, the PABs and the HEIs, view the purpose of an accounting education differently.	The failure to collaborate and the disinterest shown in most accounting education research means there is little professional input into curriculum design.	Publishing in five-star journals enhances an academic status but fails to engage the PABs or meet the revenue earning potential of research. Ref-able research is difficult in accounting education, seen as too niche.	Ref-ability drives an institution from the reputation perspective but is of little value to the PABs. The framework allows for research led teaching to take place.
HE sector structure.	State logics, Market logics, Management logics, Academic autonomy.	Differing types of institution are governed by different logics which impact heavily on the teaching ethos.	State logics institutions in theory have more flexibility to make curriculum change but bureaucracy and the importance that management attach to exemptions often undermines this flexibility.	Make the curriculum change process less bureaucratic, give staff more autonomy to amend the curriculum	The framework is targeted at non-Russell group universities where there is traditionally more emphasis on teaching to the professional curriculum.

Table 20. cont.

Research sub question issues.	Logic conflict or impact	Behaviour	Issues for accounting education curriculum	Opportunities to amend accounting education curriculum	Comments
<i>Sub problem 2. – Exploring obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics, (cont.)</i>					
Income generation.	Market logics, Academic logics, Academic capitalism.	Recruiting undergraduates is paramount, creating the employment promise. Research is monetised and accounting reduced to a cash cow.	In the drive to attract undergraduates the curriculum has become very busy, reducing its attractiveness to employers. Academics are aware of this but rarely communicate this to potential undergraduates which creates ethical issues.	Develop a curriculum which has demonstrable value to employers by balancing technical and professional skills and communicating this to students.	The framework systematically embeds the employability promise through-out.
Ranking regime.	Market logics, Management logics, Academic professionalism.	Creates competition between institutions and faculty in a zero-sum game. The need to improve ranking has placed more emphasis on quality research (REF-ABLE).	Curriculum change difficult as potential negative feedback would affect the rankings. Producing ref-able research in accounting education is difficult and focussing on this may be detrimental to teaching quality and content.	Ranking won't go away, new courses will struggle at first but, in delivering a more relevant course, ranking will improve.	Over time the framework proposed should produce more employable graduates, increasing outcome scores, a key ranking metric.
Research teaching nexus.	Academic autonomy, Academic professionalism, Managerial logics, Market logics.	The primacy of research over teaching has led to skewed reward systems, feelings of less value in teaching staff and recruitment and retention issues. The introduction of the TEF has added a further complication.	Finding suitable teaching staff, contract confusion, research led teaching difficult as many researchers find putting theory into practice in accounting courses difficult.	The technical aspects of this course need to be taught by people with a professional background. Research content should only be included if it adds value to the learning experience.	Primarily this framework proposes a teaching rather than research led degree, reflecting the vocational nature of the accounting discipline.
<i>Sub problem 3. – Motivating and engaging with potential accounting students.</i>					
Student motivation.	Market logics, Professional logics, Academic professionalism.	The student is seen as the consumer of education, reinforcing the importance of exemptions. The promise of employment is attractive to potential undergraduates but there is a tendency for these undergrads to be misinformed. Often by omission. Professional logics impacts the student's decision-making processes as the accounting profession is held in high regard.	The continuing focus on exemptions creates busy curriculum, the content of which often focusses on the big 4 career choice. Not the route most will take. There is little room for soft skills teaching or convincing the students of the value of these professional skills.	Deliver on the employability promise. Engage with students so that they see the value of professional skills to their future career paths. Introduce experiential learning more widely.	The framework is designed to focus on content for a broad range of accounting careers. Specialisms (practice or commerce) are delivered through options.

6.7.3 Target of framework.

Table 21 Expected and actual outcomes of accounting graduates by institution type.

Universities offering accounting as a discipline						
	Number of universities	Average number of undergraduates first year	Average Number of undergraduates all years	Average Graduate expectation %	Average actual outcome %	Difference
All universities	104	122	311	76.79%	60.02%	16.8%
Top 20 universities	20	139	354	83.56%	79.13%	4.4%
Russell Group universities	18	162	413	81.19%	76.19%	5.0%
Non- Russell Group Universiti	85	115	293	75.73%	56.14%	19.6%
Scottish Uuniversities	13	111	285	79.77%	63.45%	16.3%
Non Scottish Universities	91	120	308	81.39%	63.42%	18.0%

Derived from the Complete University Guide (2022).

In the UK over one hundred HEIs offer accounting as a degree discipline, including eighteen members of the Russell Group and thirteen Scottish institutions. Scottish students pay no tuition fees and Scottish universities have a close relationship with the Scottish PAB who assume a more collaborative role in curriculum design, making the Scottish accounting HE environment uniquely different. The eighteen⁵² Russell Group institutions are adequately meeting their graduate outcomes, scoring 76.19% for actual outcomes (expectation 81.19%). This is significantly above the accounting subject average (60.02%). However, this may be driven more by these institutions' reputation attracting the brightest students, than any specific quality of their accounting course content. In contrast, non-Russell Group universities graduate outcomes are just 56.14% (expectation 75.73%). Accordingly, this framework is targeted at non-Scottish non-Russell Group universities, seeking to significantly increase graduate outcomes through increased undergraduate engagement and employability.

6.7.4 Undergraduate cohort.

When discussing student motivation, interviewees detailed several drivers for studying accounting at university, however a passion for the subject was rarely mentioned. Unlike the study of medicine or dentistry, few universities specify any specific A-level requirements to study accountancy. Where

⁵² Of the 24 universities in the Russell Group 6 do not offer accounting as an undergraduate degree.

subject requirements are specified, it is usually maths A-level. However, as interviewees attest, accountancy is not maths, failed mathematicians rarely make good accountants.

Attracting undergraduates who have some prior knowledge of the discipline would be beneficial. Requiring an A-level in business studies rather than maths would be more appropriate. This framework assumes an A-level in business studies is mandatory. Recruiting undergraduates possessing A-level business studies should not be problematic, 38,980 students registered to sit A-level business studies in summer 2022 (OFQUAL, 2022). By possessing A-level business studies, enrolling students should be more invested in accountancy as a discipline, having shown an interest at school. These students will also have a similar level of prior knowledge.

Initially this framework caps the places on the course at thirty students. Limiting the cohort size to a small but targeted population will simplify the process of curriculum change. HEIs may be resistant to such a small cohort as often accounting courses are seen as a cash cow, therefore the more students the better. However, resistance will be overcome if this is an additional course within the accounting faculty as tuition fee income would be incremental. If this course is to replace an existing one with more students, unsuccessful applicants could potentially be offered places on non-specific accountancy courses, e.g., business, finance, or management courses.

6.7.5 Course design – the *raison d'être*.

According to HESA (2023c) there are 423 combined accounting courses, 64 of which are exclusively accounting courses. Often these accounting courses target undergraduates seeking a career in professional practice:

If it is the chartered accountant route that appeals, you'll need to satisfy the requirements of professional accounting bodies. So, we've designed our accounting course with this in mind. (Non-Russell Group University prospectus)

While recognising that many small to medium size accountancy firms do recruit from the local graduate pool, 'the Big-four' focus their recruitment on graduates from 'prestigious' universities (the Russell Group or the 'Top 20'). As Table 17 (page 203) illustrates, there are more opportunities to qualify through commerce or industry roles than through practice. Designing accounting curricula around professional firms' requirements means non-Russell Group graduates are entering an extremely competitive market where the odds of success are lower. A suggestion supported by the large gap (19.6%) between expected and actual graduate outcomes.

This framework does not preclude an individual from applying to a professional firm, but its proposed core content focusses more on the commercial route to qualification. The core modules are

designed to deliver both the technical competencies required by the PABs and the professional skills and attributes valued by employers. Equipping graduates with skills appealing to a wider employer population enables the framework to meet the students' principal motivational driver, employability.

6.7.6 PABs competency requirements.

This framework is predicated on the belief that future student members of the PABs will require a different set of skills. This is supported by the literature review, the analysis of interviews with stakeholders, governmental and regulatory statistics, and desk research. The framework delivers a more relevant accounting degree curriculum. To ensure relevance, the first step was confirming which skills and attributes (competencies) are required by the PABs. Created from a review of the extensively researched PABs competency frameworks⁵³, Table 22 summarises the key competency requirements. In all frameworks ethics and professionalism were at the core. Ethics are developed through personal experience and augment an individual's conscience and moral behaviour; they cannot be taught in a lecture hall. However, accounting undergraduates must fully understand the importance of both ethical behaviour and professional approach.

All PABs require their members and students to possess accounting competencies, comprising technical skills and business skills. Technical skills encompass the knowledge needed to perform traditional accounting tasks founded on financial and management accounting education. Business skills enhance the understanding of the modern business environment focus on business strategy, planning, management, and control. Business skills are fundamental to fulfilling the role of business or management partner.

Through their competency frameworks the PABs identify valuable professional competencies, people competency, digital competency, and leadership competency. People competency is the ability to build and maintain strong relationships through effective communication and a willingness to collaborate. As the significance of business partnering increases, accountants must become professional communicators, managing, organising, analysing, and explaining, information in a clear and coherent way to disparate stakeholders. As technology use accelerates, the importance of digital competency increases. The PABs include a range of digital and technology skills in their frameworks. For accountants to be effective, in the modern business environment, they need to be able to gather, analyse, interpret, report, and communicate data. Big Data and data analytics skills are now a pre-

⁵³ ACCA consulted 2,000 employers through surveys and focus groups (ACCA, 2021b). CIMA received 5,000 survey responses and conducted 120 face-to-face interviews with organisation (CIMA, 2019c).

requisite for many accounting roles. Also, many organisations now operate accounting information systems (AIS) to store, manage, and control their data to ensure the integrity of their records.

Table 22 PABs competency requirements.

Competencies required by the PABs (extracted from competency frameworks)	
Competency	
Core	Skills and attributes
Ethics and professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrity Objectivity Competence Respect for others Confidentiality Responsibility
Accounting competency	
Technical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical competence Corporate business reporting Financial management Management accounting Taxation Audit and assurance Financial accounting and reporting Business planning Risk management and internal control
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commerciality Strategic innovation Advisory and consulting Governance and risk control Business models Marketing Process management Business relations Business ecosystems Project management Macro analysis
Professional competency	
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Stakeholder relationship management Influence Negotiation and decision-making Collaboration and partnering
Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data evaluation Problem solving Data digital and technology Data strategy and planning Digital content creation Information and digital literacy Accounting information systems (AIS)
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership and management Team building Coaching and mentoring Driving performance Motivating and inspiring Change management

Source (ACCA, 2021b), (CIMA, 2019c), (ICAEW, 2022)

Accountants are working ever closer with AIS to maintain the integrity of financial transactions and record-keeping while maintaining the data intact and securely stored. The competency frameworks recognise that a working knowledge of such systems is increasing in importance. Finally, the PABs include leadership competence in their frameworks. These are skills which will develop over time as experience is gained and more senior roles accepted. Relating to student members, the PABs include elements of leadership competency in their strategic case study examination in the final year.

These professional competencies (people, digital, and leadership) receive only cursory attention in the current core curriculum of most accounting degrees. Granted, several HEIs include professional skills in their curriculum but this is either as an extra-curricular activity or the skills taught revolve around the recruitment process (e.g., CV writing). Rarely are these modules mandated or assessed resulting in students seeing them as of less value. Attendance at these sessions is low and the feedback primarily negative. As the PABs and employers value these competencies highly, this is to the detriment of accounting undergraduates.

6.7.7 Course design the content – introduction.

The preceding sections identified the target institutions for this research - accounting faculty at non-Scottish non-Russell Group institutions, defined the undergraduate profile, established the number of places on the course, and investigated the competencies valued by the PABs. The following sections outline the broad content for this framework. This involves looking at the competencies valued by the PABs and creating a framework where the modules of the degree, core and optional, address each of these competencies. The primary objective of this framework is to increase employability of accounting graduates in their chosen careers. A balance is struck between the fundamental technical requirements and the professional skills and attributes necessary for a rounded, work-ready graduate. The framework is mindful of the needs of the institution in being able to attract future accounting undergraduates so aims to retain several exemptions and accreditations. The framework addresses issues which may arise as the result of conflicting logics and results in a robust, PAB relevant, accounting degree course.

6.7.7.1 Framework content – Year 1.

Reviewing a sample of university prospectuses,⁵⁴ it emerged that the content of ‘year 1’ accounting courses was broadly similar. All courses included an introduction to financial accounting and to management accounting as core. Most include a generic introduction to management, a basic maths

⁵⁴ 8 Russell Group and 12 non-Russell Group prospectuses.

and statistics module, economics of some description, and a rudimentary law module. As an aside, I am a history graduate and although I possess a maths A-level, throughout my accounting career (thirty plus years) I often demonstrated numeric capability, never mathematical knowledge, and at no time felt my lack of a legal or economics education a drawback. Finally, most courses offered modules themed on a career in accounting, but few specifically addressed the professional competencies required for success.

Examining several A-level business studies syllabi, (e.g., Edexcel (Pearson, 2017), AQA), revealed a significant crossover in content between the A-level syllabi and the year 1 content of an accounting degree. As undergraduate interviewees attested, for people who have successfully passed A-level business studies much of the year 1 content is repetitive, non-stimulating and adds little value in terms of knowledge creation:

So basically, the first year of my degree I felt like I was repeating almost what I'd already done. (I23 – Student).

I think first year I was very lethargic in the way I worked; you know I think it was because I could easily rely on my A-level knowledge... So, through my first-year exams I almost, I could get away with attending almost nothing and still be able to pass and get through the next year. (I24 – Student).

The introductory nature of year 1 content in many accounting degrees is to ensure that all undergraduates have attained the same level of knowledge when transitioning into year 2. Mandating the need for business studies A-level makes much of this content redundant, freeing space in the curriculum for additional content.

Proposed framework - Year 1 – Semester 1

(Modules in grey are deemed to satisfy the criteria for exemptions.)

Figure 33 Accounting degree framework, Year 1, Semester 1.

Introduce employability.			
Semester 1	Fundamental Technical Skills (20 credits).	Business planning skills (20 credits).	The importance of professional skills to the PABs (20 credits).

Fundamental technical skills – addressing PABs technical competencies.

Many accounting courses have modules relating to financial accounting in both year 1 and year 2. In this framework those two modules are combined into one. Successful applicants for this proposed course will possess prior knowledge of much of the introductory content from their A-level studies. Therefore, this module only briefly recaps the introductory elements of financial accounting; double-entry bookkeeping, the preparation of simple financial statements, and the consideration of basic financial controls. Most of the module explores the preparation of more complex financial statements

to increase the undergraduates' understanding and evaluation of such statements, and the application of regulatory requirements.

Employability - The ability to prepare and interpret financial statements is key if an individual wishes to pursue a career in practice. However, many commercial organisations need to produce financial information in preparation for their audit for example, so the content of this module is equally appropriate for an accounting career in industry, commerce, or the public sector.

This module also addresses several issues raised in the discussion of the data. Most importantly, having only one more advanced financial accounting module rather than two has created space to add additional content to the curriculum. Other benefits also accrue. Firstly, the module avoids the repetitive introductory content that student interviewees found demotivating. Secondly, as the content addresses more advanced financial accounting issues, this module should satisfy the exemption criteria of the PABs. Thirdly, the students are taught financial accounting skills which one interviewee described as 'the fundamentals' (I13) of accounting. Finally, it addresses, in part, the requirement for technical competencies identified by the PABs and required by the AACSB accounting accreditation document.

Business planning skills - addressing PABs business and people competencies.

Accountants in commerce account for more than fifty percent of all accountants (FRC, 2022). Recognising this fact, core modules of this framework focus on preparing undergraduates for pursuing a career in commerce or industry. Through optional modules, discussed later, the avenue for a career in practice is kept open.

Although this framework is a template for content of an accounting degree not a business or management degree, aspiring accountants need a knowledge and appreciation of various business skills. The PABs recognise this in their competency frameworks. Accountants increasingly play a key role in developing and implementing business strategy. The purpose of, and the relationship between, the strategic plan (vision), the business plan (steps), and the operating plan (delivery) needs to be understood. Accounting undergraduates need to demonstrate an ability to prepare, present, and clearly explain robust business plans to management and other stakeholders. Accountants in practice are regularly consulted on mergers and acquisitions where business and strategic plans will need thorough reviewing and testing.

Employability - Addressing the issue of current accounting degrees tending to focus on a career with the 'Big-four', this module equips the undergraduates with knowledge of the business planning process in commercial organisations. Learning how to develop, create, present, and communicate a business plan affords undergraduates the opportunity to understand the business environment. This

process also enables students to practice analytical, interpretive, and communication skills, skills identified as highly valuable by employers.

The importance of professional skills.

Being in possession of professional skills and attributes is important for success in an accounting career. Employers are placing greater emphasis on interpretive abilities, effective communication, data-related skills, and ethical understanding. Drawing on the wealth of academic studies, professional publications, and the competency frameworks developed by the PABs, this module will clearly illustrate to undergraduates the importance of these skills to both the PABs and prospective employers. Reviewing the evolving business environment and the changing role of the accountant, undergraduates will realise their need to acquire these professional competencies alongside fundamental technical skills. Students should be encouraged to engage in self-reflection, debate the value of these skills, and exchange opinions and views to cement their understanding of the significance of professional skills.

Currently professional skills modules are on the periphery of many accounting courses, often extra-curricular, and voluntary. Attendance is often extremely low, yet the importance of these skills to employers is rapidly increasing. Through their evolving competency frameworks, the PABs (ACCA, 2021b; CIMA, 2019c) have signposted the importance of such professional skills. Accounting academics recognise that developing these skills increases the employability of students. Unfortunately, often it is only after graduation that the students, themselves, realise this. Undergraduates concentrate on the examinations, if a module has no demonstrable link to the examination, it is deemed of little value: ‘But there wasn’t that sort of learning exam link if you will, ... you don’t realise what it’s for. So, you don’t take it in properly’. (I24 – Student)

As evidenced above, ‘selling the value’ of modules around professional skills to accounting undergraduates is a major challenge to accounting faculty. This is addressed by making this module core, attributing twenty credits, and assessing undergraduate output.

Proposed framework - Year 1 – Semester 2

(Modules in grey are deemed to satisfy the criteria for exemptions.)

Figure 34 Accounting degree framework, Year 1, Semester 2.

Introduce employability			
Semester 2	Fundamental Technical skills (20 credits).	Introduction to digital skills (20 credits).	Developing personal professional skills (20 credits).

Fundamental technical skills – addressing PABs technical competencies.

As with financial accounting, many accounting courses have modules relating to management accounting in both year 1 and year 2. Business studies A-level covers much of the introductory material, so this framework combines those two modules into one. Following a brief recap of the key terms of management accounting, the module will introduce more complex concepts and applications.

Employability - Management accounting is integral to a business or organisation. Its aim is to provide support for the decision-making processes associated with all facets of the organisation. Management accounting is involved in the planning, monitoring, directing, analysing, and reporting of the activities of a business. Undergraduates with a firm grasp of management accounting principles have a solid foundation on which to plan career choices.

As with the financial accounting module, this module avoids repetition of prior learning, contains sufficient content to maintain exemptions, and focusses on the fundamentals required by the PABs and the AACSB. It also allows the students to demonstrate skills around presentation, communication, insight, and analytics through demonstrating the ability to prepare, present and explain management information in an accurate, concise, and timely manner. While management accounting is of less significance to a career in practice, the learned professional skills will be invaluable in any environment.

Introduction to digital skills – addressing PABs digital competencies.

Throughout the interview process several interviewees commented on the challenges faced by faculty when attempting to incorporate technology teaching into the accounting curriculum. Issues included the speed at which technology changes: ‘I think the IT technology is changing so fast now how can you build all that into a curriculum’. (I6 – PAB representative), the volume of software tools used in the profession: ‘You know they need to know what software is out there and what’s being used in businesses.’ (I9 – Deputy Head of Department), and cost: ‘there’s a competing market out there of software. All that costs money, so universities are reluctant to spend money...’ (I13 – Senior Lecturer). These comments miss the point. HEIs are not expected to teach students to use all available accounting packages, which is impossible. Accounting faculty need to teach students the techniques of manipulating data to produce meaningful information in a readily digestible format. While many professional firms use propriety (expensive) software, most commercial organisations use a combination of ‘off the shelf’ software packages (e.g., SAP, Sage, QuickBooks, or Zero) and Microsoft Excel. As one interviewee pointed out, Excel is much maligned and under-utilised in the teaching of data modelling:

Something that we don't, in my opinion put enough emphasis on at university particularly in accounting is the use of Excel, it's a basic programme. And it tends to get a bit laughed at because it's been around for ages, it's quite a simple, it can be quite complex. (I15 – Associate professor).

Likewise, students recognise the importance of a working knowledge of these more basic packages, a knowledge that they often only acquire outside of their university environment on placement or internship:

So obviously my Excel skills were very poor at the start, and it was actually only through the internship I did over the summer that I actually picked up any skills at all... (I24 – Student).

Introducing accounting undergraduates to simple forms of Business Intelligence⁵⁵ (BI) early in the degree will address any underlying lack of capability the students may have while allowing them to develop data manipulation and presentation skills. A BI module will build students' confidence when handling more complex data-analytic software later. Data analysis, interpretation, and presentation are key competencies for the PABs and form part of the AACSB accreditation process. It is accepted that universities will have differing software packages at their disposal, so no specific software packages are specified. Excel is assumed widely available. Utilising software packages already owned by an institution neutralises the cost issue and renders speed of technological change irrelevant. An institution can teach the important BI skills without any burdensome financial outlay.

Employability - BI is more than data analysis; it encompasses developing business strategies and solving business problems using data. The purpose of BI is to find innovative solutions to real world business challenges helped by data analysis. This course is designed to take students beyond the numbers to provide undergraduates with data modelling, data analytic skills, and data interpretation know-how. Skills much in demand by employers as discussed in the literature review. Employers find it difficult to recruit people with the digital skills necessary for the modern business environment. An added benefit may accrue should the course contain an appropriate amount of Excel training as the students could be offered the chance to sit (one exam) for the Microsoft Office Specialist: Excel Associate (Office 2019) certificate⁵⁶.

Developing personal professional skills – addressing PABs people competencies.

Students having understood the importance of possessing professional skills, this mandated module is designed to enable the students to develop their personal professional skills. Being able to exhibit a range of professional skills through the interview process will significantly increase an individual's employability. The framework proposes that this module is assessed and attributed credits to

⁵⁵ Business Intelligence (BI) is a technology-led process for analysing data and producing meaningful information to aid the business decision process.

⁵⁶ An individual earning this certification has proven competency at an industry associate-level and is ready to enter the job market. They can demonstrate the correct application of the principal features of Excel and can complete tasks independently.

encourage attendance and engagement. It is envisaged to be a cross business school module, allowing the creation of multi-disciplinary teams to enhance the learning experience and better represent the bona fide business environment.

Employability - Accountants no longer work in isolation producing and analysing spreadsheets on a screen. The modern accountant is a strategic partner, providing clear, concise, information to many stakeholders (e.g., client, customer, board, management, staff, investors). To gather, analyse, and communicate information, accountants must closely collaborate with other departments and individuals (e.g., marketing, procurement, treasury, IT). The ability to build relationships, trust, empathy, and understanding with other stakeholders is critical to success.

6.7.7.2 Framework content – Year 2.

The year 2 curriculum is designed to build on the learning outcomes from Year 1 to enhance the undergraduates’ employability. The Year 2 framework consists of four core modules and four optional modules from which undergraduates select one per semester. As stated earlier, the core modules of this framework centre on equipping accounting graduates with the skills necessary for a career in commerce or industry. However, it would do some undergraduates a disservice if the framework was designed to preclude a career in professional practice. The purpose of the optional modules is to allow students, should they wish, to tailor their studies towards either a career in commerce and industry or one in professional practice.

Proposed framework - Year 2 – Semester 1.

(Modules in grey are deemed to satisfy the criteria for exemptions.)

Figure 35 Accounting degree framework, Year 2, Semester 1.

Enhance employability			
Semester 1	Specialist Technical skills (20 credits).	Ethical understanding (20 credits).	Select one option (20 credits).
	Option choices. Choose 1	Business and technology risk. (commercial route)	Taxation. (practice route)

Specialist technical skills – addressing PABs technical competencies.

Audit and assurance.

No accounting degree would be complete without an audit and assurance module. Despite several high-profile scandals, auditing remains critical to maintaining confidence in the financial well-being of organisations. While assurance services provide stakeholders with confidence that there are no

financial irregularities occurring within the financial reports of an organisation. This module introduces the principles of professional auditing and assurance services. Audit services often refer to an objective examination of a company's financial statements by external parties, but audits are also carried out by organisations internally. Assurance services check the accuracy of financial reports. Audit and assurance are key functions that accountants perform. Being equipped to understand why audit and assurance is necessary and to carry out related tasks efficiently are skills required by all accountants.

Employability - Those students choosing professional practice by necessity have a significant requirement for audit and assurance skills, however graduates working in finance functions, internal audit teams, and treasury for example will perform better by understanding the audit and assurance process.

As the audit and assurance environment is changing rapidly, the module affords accounting faculty an opportunity to incorporate current research into the curriculum, particularly around sustainability and non-financial disclosure.

Ethical understanding – addressing PABs core competency.

Ethics is the set of moral principles and values that guide behaviour. Each of the PABs place ethics at the core of their competency frameworks. Integrity, objectivity, competence, respect, confidentiality, and responsibility are attributes which members must possess. These attributes cannot be taught from a textbook, they are acquired through culture, background, and experience and are important for upholding moral decision-making. Ethical behaviour helps organisations to maintain their reputation and professional integrity. Behaving ethically precludes companies or individuals from misusing financial information or disclosing financial information in an unintended or malicious way. Accountants behaving ethically enable organisations or society at large to have confidence in the information that the accountant presents. The reputation of the profession rests on that trust.

Employability - Accounting undergraduates need to fully understand the importance of ethical behaviour and the need to act in a professional manner to succeed in their chosen career. By understanding the ethical principles that underpin the profession and applying these to the decision-making process, the students will demonstrate ethical awareness. By being ethically aware the students will be able to analyse accounting and business issues from an ethical perspective, ensure that they uphold their own personal ethical behaviour, and contribute knowledgeably to ethical challenges faced by organisations. The subject of professional ethics is broad, allowing many opportunities to introduce research into the module to keep it contemporary.

Year 2 - Semester 1 - Options

Business and technology risk – addressing PABs business and digital competencies.

While the accelerated use of technology by businesses has undoubtedly improved business processes, simultaneously there is significant potential for technology to disrupt organisations. Technology risk is defined as the potential for any technology failure to interrupt business processes. Organisations are confronted by many types of technology risks such as information security incidents, cyber-attacks, password theft, and service disruption. Increasingly, partnerships and SMEs⁵⁷ face constant threats from an array of phishing and cyber-attacks because they are assumed to have fewer security measures in place. Accountants, whether in commerce or practice, are in the vanguard of organisation risk assessment, advising management or directors as to the likelihood of technology risk and actively devising plans to mitigate such threats. This module provides the students with knowledge to evaluate business and technology risks and suggests strategies for risk mitigation.

Employability- Technology use will continue to accelerate in the business environment. Equipping students with the tools to analyse business risk, understand the concept of risk tolerance, and attitude to risk will grow in significance. Being able to demonstrate an awareness of risk and a knowledge of risk mitigation strategies will be beneficial for accounting undergraduates.

Taxation – addressing PABs technical competencies.

This module is most relevant to students wanting to pursue a career in practice. For those more commercially minded undergraduates the necessity for detailed tax knowledge is less relevant. Larger commercial organisations often employ tax and treasury experts while smaller organisations tend to outsource their tax advice requirements to professional accountancy firms. Although exemptions are available for taxation modules, this framework does not intend to seek these exemptions. Tax regulations are constantly changing and most of the larger professional firms insist that their students sit the taxation examinations anyway.

Employability – The impact of the taxation module on the employability of an accounting undergraduate is unclear. Apart from the possibility of certain employers recognising the exemption there appears little advantage to possessing undergraduate taxation knowledge, save the demonstration of numerical skill. Nonetheless, undergraduates wishing to pursue a career in practice

⁵⁷ SME – Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

would expect a taxation module in their degree course, hence the inclusion of a taxation module as an option in this framework.

Proposed framework - Year 2 – Semester 2.

(Modules in grey are deemed to satisfy the criteria for exemptions.)

Figure 36 Accounting degree framework, Year 2, Semester 2.

Enhance employability			
Semester 2	Specialist business skills (20 credits).	Accounting Information Systems (AIS) (20 credits)	Select one option (20 credits).
	Option choices. Choose 1	Business resilience. (commercial route)	Business Law. (practice route)

Specialist business skills – addressing PABs business competencies.

Corporate Governance.

UK Corporate governance refers to the mechanisms used to ensure that problems do not arise out of the principle - agent relationship in UK listed companies. A principal is defined as the owner of an asset or organisation. An agent is the person whom the principle has chosen to act on their behalf e.g., shareholders (principal) and management of the business (agent). Corporate governance control mechanisms include the board of directors, remuneration committees, audit committees, shareholder activism, and corporate governance codes of practice. Corporate governance is critical in monitoring the behaviour of key decision makers and holding them accountable for their actions.

Employability - Corporate governance and accounting are inexorably linked as the accounting function has significant responsibility for an organisation’s governance, often being blamed when governance failures occur. But good governance should also impact non-listed organisations as its’ purpose is improved transparency and accountability within business processes. Accounting graduates need to display a thorough understanding of governance issues and the significance of governance failures for organisations.

Accounting information systems (AIS) – addressing PABs digital competencies.

An AIS is the process that an organisation uses to control its financial data in a way that makes the data accessible to legitimate users. Accountants are working ever closer with AIS to maintain the integrity of financial transactions and record-keeping while maintaining the data intact and securely stored. The main users of AIS are accountants, consultants, and business analysts alongside managers, CFOs, and auditors. This module provides an overview of the design and key features of AIS. It examines the mechanisms used by business to satisfy the need for financial information from management or external stakeholders. The module will explore systems used for collecting, recording, and storing data, internal control procedures, and effective AIS design.

Employability – Being able to speak knowledgeably about the basic features of an AIS and exhibiting an awareness of the design and processes involved in an AIS will be of interest to potential employers. Displaying an understanding of the value of information technology to the finance function and how the design of an AIS facilitates the accurate and appropriate recording of accounting transactions will also be attractive.

Year 2 - Semester 2 - Options

Business resilience – addressing PABs business competencies.

Creating resilience in organisations involves understanding and responding to various challenges that are often grouped together under the heading sustainability (IFAC, 2015). Stakeholders recognise that the continuing environmental deterioration significantly threatens the financial resilience of organisations, while understanding that business opportunities may emerge from tackling the cause of the degradation. Stakeholders increasingly look to accountants to play a leading role in the management of these threats and to develop innovative tools to aid business resilience. Accountants are required to think creatively and develop innovative solutions. This module aims to advance undergraduate knowledge of these sustainability challenges and build an understanding of the creation of business resilience.

Employability – Sustainability is increasingly important to organisations striving to demonstrate their ethical credentials and enhance their reputation. Being able to identify threats and opportunities arising from global challenges will positively position accounting graduates in the employment market. Sustainability is increasingly key in decision-making processes, therefore an ability to apply accounting techniques to aid the decision-making process, around sustainability issues, will be of significant value.

Business law

Although open to all students, this module is of more relevance to those choosing to pursue a career in practice, linking directly to the audit and assurance module. The aim of this module is to

understand the general legal framework in England and Wales but, specifically, gain knowledge and skills of the law relating to the business environment. The English law focus results from the target institutions for this framework being non-Scottish based.

6.7.7.3 Framework content – Year 3.

The year 3 curriculum is designed to build on the learning outcomes from Year 2 to allow the undergraduates to demonstrate their employability. The Year 3 framework consists of three core modules taken in semester 1, a capstone project, and one further option (a choice of two) taken in semester 2.

Proposed framework - Year 3 – Semester 1.

Figure 37 Accounting degree framework, Year 3, Semester 1.

Demonstrate employability			
Semester 1	Applied professional skills (20 credits)	Decision-making (20 credits)	Corporate reporting

Applied professional skills – addressing PABs people competencies.

Modern accountants need to be able to operate outside the confines of the accounting function or audit team. Accountants need to develop a comprehensive understanding of business and management issues to enable them to partake in solving complex problems facing modern organisations. These problems have no right or wrong answer, the optimal solution is formulated by making a series of rationale choices and decisions. This module builds on both the BI skills and the developing professional skills modules (Year 1), applying these skills to real-world scenarios. The module is important for accounting undergraduates as research has highlighted an overconfidence in accounting students regarding their perception of their own professional skills abilities (Arquero, Fernandez-Polvillo, & Hassall, 2022). The purpose of the module is to enable students to think outside the confines of the accounting subject discipline. The module aims to equip students with a more rounded understanding of management issues which confront organisations, enabling students to make real world decisions in complex business environments.

Employability – Individuals who have critically examined their own abilities and reflected upon their personal strengths and weaknesses within a multi- disciplinary team environment will be better prepared for the bona fide business environment. Having faced and overcome challenges, learnt from any mistakes made, and drawn on multiple skills sets to analyse and solve problems, students will

have developed critical thinking skills, sound judgement, and demonstrated insight. Presenting their solutions in a clear and concise format will have also demonstrated a high level of communication skill. Because as succinctly stated by one interviewee:

It is still one of the biggest challenges that an accountant tends to have, you know [they] could be technically brilliant but unable to communicate that information in a way that a non-specialist audience would be able to understand it. (I20 – Head of Department).

Management accounting for decision-making – addressing PABs business competencies.

Decision making is the focal point in the practice of management accounting. Put simply decision-making is selecting a course of action from several alternatives. The function of management accounting is to ensure that the course of action chosen is the most appropriate choice available, this is rarely a straightforward process. Using a range of techniques, management accountants are expected to plan, analyse, interpret, synthesise, and communicate relevant information to inform the decision-making process. Building on management accounting (Year 1), this module aims to enhance the students' competencies surrounding analysis, interpretation, planning, and control to effectively aid the process of short-term and long-term strategic decision making and management of an organisation.

Employability - The ability to select and apply appropriate management accounting techniques, to provide solutions for management of an organisation, coupled with the skills necessary to analyse, plan, and manage financial information in line with an organisations short and long-term strategic plan, are key assets for commercial accountants. Understanding the significance of variances in the financial data, explaining the reasons for those variances, and implementing corrective action allows an accountant to add considerable value to an organisation.

Corporate reporting – addresses PABs technical competencies.

International financial accounting.

International financial accounting aims to strengthen the integrity and codify the outputs of accounting practice, regardless of country or organisation. The aim is to create more globally transparent financial information through the application of one set of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). Since January 2021, UK-registered listed companies must use the UK-adopted international accounting standards (IFRS) in the preparation of their consolidated financial statements (UK Endorsement Board, 2021). IFRS were introduced to standardise the financial reporting language around the world, making financial statements more consistent and aiding comparison across different organisations. Students need to understand that different financial

reporting methodologies are practiced globally, the reasons for this, and the impact that these practices may have on the production of consolidated financial statements for UK-registered listed entities. The aim of this module is to develop an understanding that the purpose of IFRS adoption is to improve the clarity and consistency of consolidated financial reporting and to be able to compile financial information applying IFRS standards.

Employability – For students choosing a career in practice it is essential that they have a comprehensive understanding of the nature and role of IFRS. Organisations must produce their financial statements utilising IFRS. Trainee auditors, therefore, require an understanding of these standards, how these standards are applied, and what effect these may have on stakeholders reading of these statements. Students considering the commercial route to qualification may be involved in the preparation of their organisation’s financial statements where an understanding of the application of IFRS would be helpful.

Proposed framework - Year 3 – Semester 2.

Figure 38 Accounting degree framework, Year 3, Semester 2.

Demonstrate employability			
Semester 2	Capstone project (40 credits).		Select one option (20 credits).
	Option choices. Choose 1	Project management (commercial route)	Corporate finance. (practice route)

Capstone project – addressing all PABs competencies.

The traditional undergraduate dissertation is designed to enable a student to gain and demonstrate their research skills. However, very few accounting undergraduates cite a career as an academic researcher as a driving reason to study accounting as a discipline. As previously discussed, employability and earnings potential are the most stated motivations. A Capstone project, focussing on student personal and professional development, is a suitable vehicle for demonstrating employability. Capstone projects benefit the student by facilitating the demonstration of skills and attributes developed through-out their studies in tackling a real-world issue (Centre for Innovation in Education, 2019). These projects are also of proven benefit to potential employers. From the accounting faculty perspective, Capstone projects allow an opportunity to provide inspiring educational experience while addressing the employability goal.

Allowing students to own, and be responsible for, their learning and development enhances engagement with chosen projects as the student can select a project best suited to their individual

development needs. As previously stated, student involvement in the learning process is a key driver of student engagement and motivation. However, to fully benefit from the transformative and work-readiness capabilities of a Capstone project, the design of the project is critical. Replicating the business environment, these projects need to be interdisciplinary, team and task based, involve external personnel as appropriate, and revolve around a client. Doing so will ensure that the project is authentic and robust enough for the student to be able to demonstrate their skills while working with real clients.

Of fundamental importance to Capstone projects is the academic support given throughout the project duration. These projects are a key component of this framework and are therefore high-risk ventures for students in completing their degrees (Lewis, 2020). Support and guidance are crucial to allow the students the best opportunity to highlight their skills. Students need to be confident that early mistakes are a learning experience, not a defining factor of success.

Year 3 – Semester 2 - Options.

Project management – addressing PABs business competencies.

Project management is identified by each of the PABs as a valuable tool in an accountant's armoury. Indeed, the ICAEW describes project management 'as a rite of passage for more senior management roles.' Project management is an activity that achieves a given objective in an agreed timescale within stated financial and other parameters, balancing essential short-term tasks with the completion of a longer-term project. For finance professionals this is a key challenge. This module will equip the students with the tools and techniques to plan and complete a project successfully within the timeframe while meeting the objectives. It will develop a student's ability to work effectively in a team, building their self-confidence to effectively interact and influence other team members.

Employability – Possessing an ability to be actively involved in the planning and execution of a project, in time and within budget, demonstrates several key employability skills. These include time-management, cost-benefit analysis, resource planning, customer understanding, procurement, communication, and risk mitigation.

Corporate finance – addressing PABs technical and business competencies.

Corporate finance relates to the financial activities fundamental to running a business and is primarily concerned with maximising shareholder value. Corporate finance encompasses how an organisation invests in value creation, growth, acquisitions, and disposals of businesses. Accountants are key to many elements of these activities so an understanding of the principle of corporate finance may enhance employability and inform career choices. The module addresses project appraisal and financing, dividend policy, mergers and acquisitions, the means of raising capital, risk management,

and regulation. It provides an understanding of the basics of corporate finance and a foundation for students wishing to pursue the study further.

Employability – Capital projects are often the most significant, single, financial transaction an organisation undertakes. Demonstrating an understanding of techniques to assess the value and payback of such projects is a valuable skill. Similarly, a knowledge of the different finance streams available to finance a business allows the graduate accountant to further demonstrate their ability and value to an organisation.

6.8 Conclusion.

Figure 39 Accounting degree framework, complete.

Framework BA/BSc Accounting			
<i>Cohort - 30 Students</i> <i>Entry Requirement - UCAS points - institution to decide</i> <i>Subject requirement - A-level Business studies - institution to decide grade.</i> Exemption			
Year 1 - All modules core			
Introduce employability.			
Semester 1	Fundamental Technical Skills (20 credits).	Business planning skills (20 credits).	The importance of professional skills to the PABs (20 credits).
Semester 2	Fundamental Technical skills (20 credits).	Introduction to digital skills (20 credits).	Developing personal professional skills (20 credits).
Year 2 modules			
Enhance employability			
Semester 1	Specialist Technical skills (20 credits).	Ethical understanding (20 credits).	Select one option (20 credits).
	Option choices. Choose 1	Business and technology risk. (commercial route)	Taxation. (practice route)
Semester 2	Specialist business skills (20 credits).	Accounting Information Systems (AIS) (20 credits)	Select one option (20 credits).
	Option choices. Choose 1	Business resilience. (commercial route)	Business Law. (practice route)
Year 3 modules			
Demonstrate employability			
Semester 1	Applied professional skills (20 credits)	Decision-making (20 credits)	Corporate reporting
Semester 2	Capstone project (40 credits).		Select one option (20 credits).
	Option choices. Choose 1	Project management (commercial route)	Corporate finance. (practice route)

The proposed framework above presents an integrated programme of teaching and learning based on the developing roles of accountants within the rapidly changing business environment. The framework incorporates both the technical and professional skills that accounting undergraduates

require to be sought after by employers. The foundations of this framework are the competencies highlighted by the PABs and included in their individual competency frameworks. These competencies are grouped into ethics and professional, technical, business, people, digital, and leadership. The framework content addresses each group of competencies specifically, except leadership. Leadership competencies develop with experience and seniority so are difficult to incorporate into the undergraduate accounting curriculum. However, some of the suggested activity-based modules should introduce some elements of leadership skills.

By including professional skills development and digital learning into the core curriculum, the framework addresses competency gaps in the current accounting education curriculum. The framework content strikes a balance between the fundamental technical ability that graduate accountants need to possess and the skills and attributes they must exhibit to achieve success in their chosen career. Incorporating ethical understanding into the framework allows the undergraduates to recognise the responsibility accountants have in ensuring the integrity of financial and other data.

The framework focusses on teaching undergraduates to identify business challenges and, through analysis, interpretation, and communication, present solutions. Alongside analytical and interpretive skills, the framework is designed to enhance an undergraduates critical thinking ability and encourage professional scepticism. The inclusion of optional modules in the framework facilitates some flexibility for the undergraduates to pursue studies better suiting their career choices. Finally, the framework recognises the opportunities and threats posed by technology to organisations and includes modules addressing issues of data creation and storage, manipulation, management and security, the importance of data analytics, and technology use.

6.8.1 Potential benefits of this framework to the stakeholder groups.

The students.

The students will improve their employability value to professional firms and commercial employers by being able to demonstrate a mix of technical aptitude and professional skills development. The content of the technical modules should be of sufficient quality to meet the exemption criteria of the PABs so retaining the opportunity to accelerate qualification. The business competency modules will expose the students to business and strategic planning, business control issues, and equip them with the tools to operate comfortably in a commercial organisation. The digital competency modules will enhance their data analytical skills and increase their awareness of the key role that accountants play in maintaining information and data integrity. Through the professional skills development modules, the student will develop skills that complement their technical prowess to create more rounded employable individuals. The completeness of learning and all-round skills development will be

evidenced by the successful completion of the Capstone project and the awarding of their accounting degree.

The HEIs.

The framework allows the institution to offer a tailored degree programme to a focussed and motivated cohort of undergraduates, designed to fulfil the employability promise. Subject to course content meeting the eligibility criteria for the PABs exemptions, the technical modules within the framework allow the institution to use these exemptions to market the programme to potential undergraduates. The digital competency modules offer the institution the opportunity to instil valuable digital skills without excessive financial outlay.

As previously stated, this framework focusses on the core modules required for a career in industry or commerce where more employment opportunities are available, rather than practice. Therefore, the inclusion of several business competency-based modules serves to enhance employability in this area. Also, by including a module introducing the importance of professional skills to accountants in Year 1, selling the benefits of acquiring professional skills is simplified and employability improved. Finally, the content developed in this framework should be sufficient to meet the accreditation criteria of the AACSB standard 4 – ‘curriculum is appropriate to professional expectations and requirements’, and standard 5 – ‘accounting degree programs include learning experiences that develop skills and knowledge related to the integration of information technology in accounting and business’ (AACSB, 2018).

The PABs.

Each of the PABs have a requirement for competencies which can be categorised as: technical, business (entrepreneurial), people, digital, and leadership. While leadership competency comes with substantial experience, the others can all be addressed in an undergraduate curriculum. The modules in this framework address these competency requirements as follows: Technical competency is underpinned by the financial, corporate, and management accounting modules. Business competency is acquired in the business skills modules. Digital competencies are addressed through the data analytics, the AIS, and the business and technology risk modules. People competencies are addressed by the tailored professional skills modules aimed at building emotional intelligence and self-awareness. These people competencies are reinforced throughout the programme through activity-based learning analysis and interpretation, and the Capstone project.

Chapter 7 Conclusion.

7.1 Overview of the research.

When embarking on this study it was unclear what effect technology would have on the evolution of the profession. However, there was broad consensus that the effects would be significant (World Economic Forum, 2020). This research sought to understand what this evolution of the profession might mean for accounting graduates in terms of their employability prospects within the profession, be that in practice or commerce. From the beginning, the literature alluded to a disconnect between what the profession, as voiced by the PABs, required, and what accounting educators were offering. Many authors claimed that, if left unchecked, this disconnect would grow, bringing the very viability of accounting education into question. Yet few scholars offered practical solutions as to how accounting curriculum could respond to this need given the significant obstacles which hinder accounting curriculum development.

Through the lens of institutional logics this research sought to understand the driving forces behind the behaviour of the three, connected, stakeholder groups, the PABs, accounting academia and administration, and the students. In understanding how each stakeholder group behaved, the research firstly clarified the skills most valued by employers as accountants become business partners and members of organisation's strategic management teams. The PABs, driven by competing logics, professional logics, and commercial logics, understand that digital disruption poses a threat to their professional status. The competency frameworks of the profession and professional accounting curricula have been amended to recognise the importance of these skills and to instil such skills into the student membership. These changes are instrumental in opening membership to a wider cohort, one less dependent on an accounting education background.

The digital transformation of professional accounting challenges accounting educators to re-define and re-focus the undergraduate accounting curriculum to increase accounting graduates' employability. The research explored the response of the academic accounting community to the threat posed by this digital transformation. However, as identified in the literature, curriculum change is difficult and strewn with obstacles. These obstacles include the fluidity of skills required by employers, the influence of the PABs on the curriculum, and the structures and attitudes ingrained within HE which impede institutional reform. The research sought to better understand these obstacles to enable the development of an accounting education framework better suited to the needs of the PABs. A detailed examination of the influence and control the PABs have over an academic accounting education and the difficulties of facilitating meaningful collaboration for curriculum change was undertaken. The impact of the marketisation of the HE market was investigated and

found to have created a more managerial and revenue driven approach to HE. This has resulted in the commodification of an accounting education, placing more emphasis on accreditation and exemptions, creating ever busier curriculum, further hindering content development. Simultaneously, marketisation has given rise to a competitive ranking regime where some institutions win, and some lose. It has also increased the focus on quality research often at the expense of innovative teaching. For accounting, the research focussed approach has resulted in little benefit to curriculum development and content has remained primarily technically driven.

Finally, consideration was given to the motivating factors for studying accounting at university. For aspiring accountants, often the objective is to gain a professional qualification, not a degree per se, the choice of course is simply a means to an end. The research revealed that, while accounting faculty often sell accounting courses on the promise of employability, this promise is often knowingly oversold.

Given the above, this study developed a framework for a more PAB relevant accounting degree. The framework proposed by this research addresses these issues by putting student employability at the core. Throughout, the framework balances the need for technical skills with the equally important requirement for professional skills. By including a module explaining the critical nature of professional skills to the PABs in the first semester, the perennial problem of student engagement with such modules is overcome. Each semester of the framework is designed to give the students a balance of technical and non-technical teaching. This research has demonstrated the value of this content to the PABs through the interview process and by researching their competency frameworks.

Each new year of the framework builds on the proceeding one to enhance the employability of the undergraduates, building an armoury of the skills and attributes needed for success as a modern accountant. The framework proposes that the undergraduates finish with the completion of a Capstone project which will enable them to demonstrate the breadth of their learning and allow them to showcase their knowledge.

7.2 Answers to the research questions.

7.2.1 Introduction.

To give the study context, it was important to explore the opinions and views of interested stakeholders towards the value of a current accounting education. The research discovered that the English based PABs were universally dismissive, believing an accounting education to be almost irrelevant. The Scottish PABs not so. The PABs questioned the HE focus on teaching technical skills, highlighting that employers sought less technical and more professional skills. The PABs called for

HEIs to add value to an accounting education by teaching more complimentary content. In interviews, academics demonstrated awareness of this ambivalence and recognised the threat that such attitudes posed to the viability of the accounting discipline. Academic interviewees accepted that professional skills were in demand, but often cited the need to maintain accreditation and exemption as a primary barrier to curriculum development.

For this research three sub questions were developed, the answers to which, in aggregate, answer the overarching research question, how can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant? Figure 1 (page 8) illustrates how these questions are interlinked. The sub questions were 1) how is the impact of technology use by the profession affecting the recruitment of future student members? 2) how can the obstacles to curriculum change in the context of logics be overcome? And 3) why will students remain motivated to study accounting in the future? The answers to these questions are summarised below.

7.2.2 How is the way the profession is evolving due to technology use impacting the recruitment of new members?

Technology is changing society's expectations quickly, altering the scope and nature of what accounting is, and threatening the PABs professional identity. Underpinned by client focus and business partnering, the PABs are actively commercialising their services. Searching for more resilient and sustainable business models, the PABs are adapting to new technological and commercial environments, using their skills and experience to help organisations build robust ethics and accountability frameworks.

Creativity, technology experience, communication, analytic skills, and critical thinking are essential for success in these new roles. In an increasingly digital environment, it is crucial that accountants understand how digitalisation and rapid changes in technology create both challenges and opportunities for organisations. To better inform the accountants role as business partner, management team member, advisor to the Board etc., the PABs have redesigned the professional education curriculum, increasing the focus on digital content and professional skills. The PABs design the content, supply the materials, and set the examinations, while actively promoting their own accounting pedagogy. Simultaneously, PABs are developing their own on-line tools, facilitating qualification for membership without a traditional university education. These on-line resources, providing remote access and flexible self-paced learning, open qualification to a much wider cohort, resulting in non-graduates now accounting for half of their student membership.

The need for technical knowledge will remain, the fundamentals are important, but there is increasing emphasis on digital and soft skills. This will lead to the development of more on-line resources and

other initiatives, increasing the competition for student membership, and further marginalising an academic accounting education. The PABs are unlikely to suddenly embrace the value of the existing accounting education. Accounting faculty, therefore, need to amend the accounting curriculum to enhance its relevance to the profession. Yet, accounting faculty face significant obstacles in achieving this goal.

7.2.3 How can obstacles to amendments to the accounting curriculum in the context of institutional logics be overcome?

To maintain their professional status, the PABs exercise restrictive control over the accounting curriculum and the means of entry to the profession. As HEIs seek accreditation for their degrees this control increases, and curriculum innovation becomes more difficult. Better collaboration surrounding curriculum design would be beneficial. However, the PABs see little value in widespread collaboration so little formal collaboration takes place.

Accounting curricula change also faces obstacles inherent within the HE environment itself. The logics underpinning the structure of an HEI, either state or market logics, alters the teaching ethos of that institution and impacts the curriculum change process. The primacy of market logics and the need to maximise revenue in many HEIs creates busy curricula, leaving little flexibility to amend curriculum. While the increasing influence of managerial logics in HEIs create bureaucratic institutions where the change process is often too complex and glacially slow.

All HEIs are currently facing strong financial headwinds, increasing the importance of commercial activity. Driven by market and business logics, HE has become a more managerial, competitive, and profit (revenue) focussed environment, with accounting education commoditised and viewed as a cash cow. Consequently, in undertaking curriculum change, accounting faculty regularly adopt a cautious approach, conscious of the impact this change may have on an institution's financial models.

Marketisation has also increased competition between institutions and faculty and resulted in the emergence of rankings and league tables. The HE market is now transactional and hierarchical resulting in a zero-sum game and compelling accounting faculty to introduce strategies to improve their position in such tables. For accounting this creates more caution in making any curriculum change as this change may result in losing a prized exemption, negatively affecting the department's ranking.

League tables have also increased the significance of research quality, tilting the balance of the research teaching nexus firmly in the direction of research. The complex relationship between research and teaching, involving questions surrounding which to prioritise, how to incorporate research into the curriculum, and the role of curriculum development in academic reward structures

all impact the ability of accounting educators to amend the curriculum. Academics wanting to make curriculum change often feel unsupported and undervalued, particularly as institutions increasingly reward research output over quality teaching.

The accounting curriculum framework developed for this study addresses the obstacles. The course content for the core technical modules, having been developed by collapsing two existing modules into one, should meet the PABs and AACSB accreditation criteria, retaining an important marketing tool for accounting faculty. The digital competency modules, utilising off the shelf solutions, allow the teaching of valuable digital skills with little financial outlay, a critical consideration as financial models are under increasing pressure. While accepting that incorporating research into the accounting curriculum is difficult, several proposed modules allow some flexibility in this area. However, the primary benefit accruing to the institution is that the broad mix of modules cover the range of competencies required by the PABs, making a graduate from this course highly attractive to prospective employers.

7.2.3 What will motivate students to study accounting in the future?

There is no magic wand for making individuals engage with any subject. Future students, like their current counterparts, will choose accounting largely because of the career prospects on offer. All an accounting faculty can do is design a course which delivers on this employability promise. To achieve this an accounting course must offer the right balance of technical knowledge and professional skills and attributes. Unfortunately, the current curriculum is too technically focussed.

Students enter HE with a pre-formulated goal and a motivation to succeed. Maintaining that motivation should be a key consideration for course design. The proposed framework advocates reducing the places available on an accounting course and requiring a relevant A-level, not maths, believing this would attract focussed, committed undergraduates. With students having prior knowledge gained at A level introductory modules to financial and management accounting could be discontinued. However, the advanced technical module exemptions, which anecdotally motivate undergraduates, would be retained.

In place of the elementary technical courses, an introductory module on the importance of professional skills and attributes should be taught. By making this a compulsory and assessed module, attendance will improve and students' understanding of the significance of these skills enhanced, making the selling and delivery of future professional skills models more engaging and rewarding. The framework also contains an element of experiential learning. Reduced student numbers should aid the finding of work placement sponsors and decrease the administration burden

of any placement scheme. Experiential learning is a proven motivator and valued by those students who participate in such schemes.

7.3 Contribution.

7.3.1 Contribution to knowledge and theoretical contribution.

This study has address multiple issues regarding the relevance of an academic accounting education and in doing so makes several important contributions to the existing body of knowledge.

Firstly, in addressing whether the existing and growing expectation gap between what the PABs require and what HE offers can be closed. The literature review illustrated that many scholars had accepted that a gap exists but believe that that this gap can be closed (Amernic & Craig, 2004; Asonitou, 2021; Flood, 2014; Herbert et al., 2021; Pincus et al., 2017; Rebele, 2002; Sledgianowski et al., 2017; R. Wilson, 2014). This research argues strongly that the closing of this expectations gap is unrealistic. The accelerating primacy of commercial logics within the profession is evolving the accountant's role, leading the PABs to strengthen their grip on the professional accounting curriculum. To protect their professional status, the PABs have invested significantly in curriculum change, redesigned processes, and launched numerous initiatives to widen access to the profession. For student membership, the possession of desired skills and attributes is now more important than educational background.

Secondly, many authors advocate for increasing collaboration between the PABs and academia to affect successful curriculum change (Bui & Porter, 2010; Evans, Burritt, & Guthrie, 2011; R. Jones, 2014, 2017; Seow, Pan, & Koh, 2019; C. Sin, Tavares, & Amaral, 2019). However, this study found that collaboration at scale is unlikely to occur. There is no formal agenda for such collaboration and where collaboration does occur it is vague and based on personal contacts. The PABs have little incentive to collaborate on accounting curriculum change, they view academic accounting education as almost irrelevant and lack understanding of the value of academic research. Most academic accounting research is driven by academic professionalism and aimed at an academic not an accounting market, enabling researchers and institutions to enhance their prestige amongst their peers. Such research is of little interest to the PABs, reinforcing their view of the irrelevance of an academic accounting education.

Further, some scholars advocate lessening the focus on technical skills while developing generic skills linked to critical thinking and the promoting of values, attitudes, and attributes (Al-Htaybat et al., 2018; Asonitou, 2021; Bowles et al., 2020; Coffey et al., 2021; de Villiers, 2019; Rebele & St. Pierre, 2019). However, the obstacles that HEIs face to initiating curriculum reform, despite

significant barriers to successful change existing, is also under researched (Asonitou, 2021; Cooper, 2017; de Villiers, 2019; Nicholas, 2021; Pegg, 2013). Academics raising issues about accounting education appear to have little voice (Ellington, 2017).

This study was not the first to address the impact of institutional logics on the behaviour of HEIs. However, as far as I am aware, this study is the first to explicitly investigate the difficulties of making accounting education curriculum change against the background of dynamic, conflicting, institutional logics relationships. This study found that the complex web of institutional logics at play in HEIs obstructs those intent on curriculum change. Often accounting faculty are subordinate to business school management, which is itself only one school within the wider institution. The needs and objectives of the institution resulting from market and management logics take precedence over the academic freedom and academic autonomy of accounting educators. Decisions over retaining accreditation and exemptions within an accounting degree for example, are often endorsed outside of accounting faculty, driven by the need to maximise revenue streams of the institution. Frequently, accounting faculty has no direct representation and, therefore, influence, on this decision-making process. Yet, these high-level, revenue focussed decisions, result in a busy accounting curriculum where curriculum enhancement is very difficult.

Also, as research quality is one criterion used by ranking tables, the managerial logics driving many institutions leads to an increasing focus on research quality to improve the institution's ranking position and attractiveness to potential undergraduates. This managerial perspective results in promotion and advancement criteria often linked to research publication. This, coupled with the academic logics driving researchers to want to publish, produces volumes of papers that enhance the reputation of both the institution and the author, but for accounting education, research which is rarely used for curriculum enhancement. Accounting educators are torn between prioritising research and quality teaching, maintaining a status quo approach to accounting curriculum as the existing curriculum continues to satisfy the objective of revenue generation. While institutions continue to view accounting as a cash cow underpinning generating revenue, there is little motivation to alter the technical based curriculum which is to the detriment of graduate employability.

At the accounting faculty level, market logics have significant effects. The study found that, in a drive to recruit undergraduates, accounting educators regularly stressed the value of the degree in terms of employability to prospective students. This was despite knowing that these employability claims were often overstated. The study found that accounting faculty were willingly complicit in pushing employability claims and often complacent to the consequences of discovery, believing that prospective accounting students would be either unaware or uninterested that this employability promise was overstated. This raises ethical and moral issues, yet, throughout this study, accounting educators appeared willing to discount these concerns to maintain revenue streams. Consequently,

potential undergraduates were being misinformed and making life choices on incomplete information, a situation difficult to support.

7.3.2 Methodological contribution.

The literature review contained numerous studies addressing accounting curriculum change. However, many of these studies focus on one group of stakeholders, showing only cursory interest in other potential stakeholders. Studies from the profession's perspective addressed the changing skills and attributes required by a modern accountant and outlined what this meant for the professional accounting curriculum (Bowles et al., 2020; Brynjolfsson & Mitchell, 2017; Daugherty & Wilson, 2018; Kanioura & Lucini, 2020; Kruskopf et al., 2019; Weston, 2019). These articles alluded to the challenges faced by accounting but propose no solutions. The impact of this changing professional environment on current accounting undergraduates was rarely, if ever, discussed. Similarly, articles describing the challenges faced by accounting educators and proffering solutions (Bayerlein, 2015; Bui & Porter, 2010; Carmona, 2013; Cooper, 2017; S. Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Fogerty & Lowensohn, 2017; Howcroft, 2017; Lucianelli & Citro, 2018; Seow et al., 2019; Tsiligiris & Bowyer, 2021; Webb & Chaffer, 2016; Yap et al., 2014) failed to examine both the appropriateness of these solutions to the PABs and whether the PABs would have any interest in colluding with HEIs to develop and deliver them.

The researcher believes that this study was the first to examine accounting education relevance by reference to the views and attitudes of all interested parties, the PABs, accounting faculty, and students. By exploring what drives each stakeholder groups to act in any given way and understanding the impact of the relationships and interdependency created by such behaviours, this study developed a holistic view of the relevance of an accounting education. Previous studies, with their focus on individual stakeholder perspectives, propose solutions which may not gain traction with the other stakeholder groups. By understanding the changing skills and attributes required by the PABs and overlaying these onto a framework of curriculum change, this study provides a solution that benefits all stakeholder groups. In asking each interviewee, regardless of stakeholder grouping, the same key questions and allowing their answers to direct further questioning, this study elicited multiple opinions surrounding accounting education relevance. Using QCA as the data analysis tool, several themes emerged which guided the development of the curriculum framework. Key to this development was the recognition that the expectations gap would not be successfully closed by making accounting curriculum change. The PABs has moved too far and opened the profession to a much wider cohort. The best outcome was to create an accounting curriculum framework that created work ready accounting graduates, thereby enhancing their employability and moving them up in the recruitment process.

7.3.3 Practical contribution.

The practical contribution of this study is the curriculum framework developed. Using data gathered from groups representing interested stakeholders, a framework emerged for a curriculum that would be of benefit to each stakeholder group by producing work ready accounting graduates.

From the PABs' perspective the framework contains modules which address their required competencies in areas of technical capability, business knowledge, digital proficiency, and importantly, people skills. For accounting students this framework enhances their employability to prospective employers. Through the professional skills development modules, the student develops skills that complement their technical prowess to create more rounded employable individuals. Finally, this framework allows accounting faculty to offer a tailored degree programme to a focussed and motivated cohort of undergraduates, designed to fulfil the employability promise. Simultaneously, the technical content is sufficient to maintain accreditation, allowing the marketing benefits of exemptions to be retained. The framework content should also be sufficient to meet the accreditation criteria of the AACSB standard 4 and standard 5.

7.4 Limitations.

This research has some potential limitations. I alone designed the interview guide, conducted the interviews, analysed the transcripts, and formulated the findings. This leaves the process open to my own personal biases, potentially limiting the objectivity of the study by taking the project in a predetermined direction. However, the interview guide developed was reviewed independently, the key interview questions were few and open-ended, and in interviews the interviewee took the lead and dictated follow-up questions, serving to mitigate potential researcher bias. For the discussion, analysis, and findings, the coding frame used in the research was built in an inductive, iterative way, and reviewed independently. Also, the data was constantly revisited and re-evaluated to allow findings to emerge throughout the coding process, absent of any pre-existing views of the researcher.

For practical considerations, the number of chosen participants (twenty-five) may be unrepresentative of the large, individual stakeholder pools, leading to germane opinions regarding the relevance of an accounting education being excluded. However, the number of interviews conducted within specific groups of stakeholders was determined by using a purposive sampling strategy. In purposive sampling selection participants are chosen based on non-random criteria founded on a relevant interest in the study topic, in this case accounting education. Such a strategy aids development of representative samples from large sample pools.

While a purposive sampling strategy may increase the representativeness of the sample, it introduces an element of self-selection bias into the sample population. Where participants involvement is voluntary, as in this study, the reasons an individual decides to take part may be different from those of an individual who chose not to get involved. Such self-selection bias is impossible to avoid in interview-based research as voluntary participation is critical for ethical practice. Therefore, the researcher can only recognise the possibility of bias and make judgements about the impact of such bias on the findings of the research.

Addressing the issue of generalisability. Generalisability is important in positivist research as it enables inferences to be drawn for large groups by studying much smaller populations. Generalisability is difficult in qualitative research as findings are always situated in context. The views and opinions of one small group will not reflect the views and opinions of similar groups or the entire stakeholder population. In qualitative research Chamaz uses the term 'resonance' instead of generalisability. This research proposes that readers begin to question their own practices and challenge their existing perceptions. Logics are ingrained in all organisations, influencing behaviour, and presenting organisational challenges to change. Reflecting on which logics are present within their own environment, the reader can begin to challenge the status quo and propose affirmative action within their given circumstances.

Finally, validity. Reliability and validity within qualitative research are difficult to confirm. The subjective nature of the research project means that unequivocal truth cannot be demonstrated, only credibility and plausibility can be established. While designing this research, considerable time and resources were deployed to ensure that the research design was robust, the method chosen to conduct the research (semi-structured interviews) appropriate, and the analytical tools (QCA) were fit for purpose. By being rigorous in methodology and method selection the research process produced rich data and credible findings.

7.5 Potential areas for further study.

For future research, this study recommends a more detailed investigation into the motivation of students choosing to study accounting as a degree. While employability and salary are deemed the key drivers, little empirical evidence exists to verify this. Further research should also investigate developing an accounting education research programme that would better appeal to the PABs and be more appropriate for inclusion into the accounting education curriculum. Much of the current research is aimed at an inappropriate audience and often dismissed by the PABs. The structure of business schools and the relationship between accounting faculty and the business school should be examined. Accounting faculty lack representation at higher management levels yet are so vitally important as a source of income. Finally, the impact of Brexit and recent government policy

initiatives affecting the number of non-UK students enrolling to study accounting at UK universities should be further investigated.

7.6 Final thoughts.

Graduate employability is even more important as financial pressures on HEIs are increasing and have led vice-chancellors to plead for a ‘new model’ of government funding. The recent decision to reduce the number of dependents international students can bring, the effect of Brexit on EU student applications, and the on-going industrial relations issues are causing many HEIs to run at a deficit. This situation is developing rapidly and is highly unstable. UK students are receiving less hours of contact time and graduate with high levels of student debt, making degree apprenticeships more appealing. These challenges have been exacerbated by COVID-19, AI and machine learning, and by changes in the skills required in the evolving business environment. Student enrolment has flatlined while the number of ‘freshers’ at UK HEIs fell for the first time in 2022 (HESA, 2023a) . The ability to learn on-line is further increasing competition in the marketplace, offering a cost-effective way to gain qualifications in many disciplines, including accounting.

Given the above, it seems inevitable that the viability of courses perceived as offering little value for money become questionable. The proposed framework in this research overtly addresses graduate employability, and therefore value for money, ensuring the viability of the proposed course in what is an increasingly competitive market.

Appendices.

Appendix 1 Participant Information Sheet.

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Research: **How can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?**

Principal Investigator: **Andrew William Maddison – PhD candidate – University of Northumbria at Newcastle.**

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide it is important for you to read this leaflet so you understand why the study is being carried out and what it will involve. Reading this leaflet, discussing it with others or asking any questions you might have will help you decide whether you would like to take part.

Description of the Research:

This research seeks to identify and address the gap between the changing needs of the profession, given the availability of new technologies and the current accounting education offering provided by Higher education establishments in the UK with the aim of developing framework for curriculum change to better equip future accounting graduates for employment within the Profession.

If you agree to take part this will involve:

It is important that I gather the personal insight of individuals connected to each group of stakeholders, Higher Education, the profession, and undergraduates. After our initial contact you have indicated that you are interested in taking part in this study. If, after reading this leaflet, you agree to involvement in the study I will contact you to arrange an interview. I estimate that you will be 1 of approximately 20 interviews carried out across the differing stakeholders.

The interview should be no more than **1 hour**, preferably zoom, but other methods (e.g., telephone, or Teams) will be considered. Your opinion of the impact that the use of technology is having on graduate employability and future skills required for successful careers, will form the basis of the interview.

If you do decide to take part, remember that you can stop your involvement in the study whenever you choose, without giving reason. You are completely free to decide whether to take part, or to take part and then leave the study before completion. Should this happen, information from any interview given by you **will not** be used in the study and any record of the interview destroyed.

With your consent the interview will be recorded for transcription later. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you for review prior to any information obtained in the interview being used in the study. Should you not wish the interview to be recorded I will take written, contemporaneous notes and write them up at a later date. Again, a copy of any documents produced will be sent to you for your review and feedback prior to use.

All information and data collected will remain confidential and not discussed with other participants Only with your consent, and coded to protect your identity, will any direct quote be used in the final study. You

will be given the opportunity to review any proposed text containing any contribution from your interview before the study is finalised.

All the information given by you will be anonymised, assigned a password known only to me and held confidentially and securely on the University of Northumbria's IT network.

Data Collection and Storage

Any personal data collected from you will be governed and limited by Article 6(1) (e) of the GDPR, namely processing of limited personal data is necessary for a task (research) carried out in the public interest.

In practice this will result in:

Your name will not be written on any of the data I collect. Your name will not be written on the recorded interviews, or on the typed-up versions of your discussions from the interview, and your name will not appear in any reports or documents resulting from this study. The consent form you have signed will be stored separately from your other data. The data collected from you in this study will remain confidential.

Access to identifiable data will be limited to you (the participant) and myself. The general findings may be reported in a scientific journal or presented at a research conference; however, the data will be anonymized and you or the data you have provided will not be personally identifiable.

All paper data, including the typed-up transcripts from your interview and your consent forms will be kept in locked storage. All electronic data: including the recordings from your interview, will be stored on the University U drive, which is password protected. All data will be stored in accordance with university guidelines and the Data Protection Act (2018).

Personally identifiable data will be kept for as short a period as is possible. This will be no longer than the publication of the study.

Potential risks

As all the information given by you will be anonymised, assigned a password known only to me and held confidentially and securely on the University of Northumbria's network there are no known risks to involvement in this study.

Benefits of the study

Participating in this study may help shape the direction that accounting education at undergraduate level takes in the future so that those undergraduates who chose the Profession as a career enter better prepared to make a meaningful contribution at an earlier stage in their career development.

Study organisation and approval

This study is being organised by Northumbria University. The Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics Committee at Northumbria University has reviewed the study in order to safeguard your interests and have granted approval to conduct the study.

Questions and complaints

Prior to you deciding whether or not to participate and complete the enclosed consent form, should you have any questions or require more clarification around your potential involvement in the study please contact me by email: [**Andrew.maddison@northumbria.ac.uk**](mailto:Andrew.maddison@northumbria.ac.uk)

Data Controller details

The Data Controller for this study is Northumbria University

Should you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of the interview process please contact Duncan James, Data Protection Officer at Northumbria University. His email address is:

Duncan.james@northumbria.ac.uk

Appendix 2 Informed Consent Form.

Informed consent

Title of Research: **How can an academic accounting education remain relevant given that the use of technology is transforming the role of the accountant?**

Principal Investigator: **Andrew William Maddison – PhD candidate – University of Northumbria at Newcastle.**

*please tick or initial
where applicable*

I have carefully read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study and I have received satisfactory answers.

I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason for withdrawing, and without prejudice.

I agree to take part in this study.

I also consent to the retention of this data under the condition that any subsequent use also be restricted to research projects that have gained ethical approval from the University of Northumbria at Newcastle.

I agree to the University of Northumbria at Newcastle recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in the information sheet supplied to me, and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 which incorporates General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Appendix 3 Coding manual, definitions, and examples of subcategories.

Coding frame sub-category definitions			
Sub- category	Description	Exemples of units of coding	Context
Sub – category to current relevance	Sub- category description	Examples of units of coding from actual interviews.	Context
Threat.	A unit of coding will belong in this category if an interviewee expresses an opinion around the threat posed by technology use in the profession.	<i>“Other challenges, well I suppose the whole thing about the development of the technology and keeping up really with the pace of development of technology is something that we’re all struggling with. Integrating that into the curriculum is something that’s quite a challenge.”</i>	Technology based curriculum
		<i>“That’s helped, but I think the IT technology is changing so fast now how can you build all that into a curricula. You just can’t because you’re curricula would be changing all the time.”</i>	Technology acceleration
Professional accounting education market.	A unit of coding will belong in this category if an interviewee references the UK professional accounting education market. This could discussions of 3 rd party providers, competition, or make up of students, the unique characteristics, or the dynamic of the market in the UK.	<i>“And their (students of 3rd party providers) needs are quite different, there’s not a lot of pastoral care, when I was there, they don’t seem to need a lot of that because they get that from their employer. It is very much you are there for delivery.”</i>	Teaching ethos
		<i>“The way you teach (3rd party providers) is very different, it is exam training, it is presenting, you have to do the same thing in the same place as anywhere else... You’ve got very little sort of kind of ability to change anything, you don’t write materials, you don’t write your own questions everything is just prepared”</i>	Teaching ethos
Regard for current accounting education.	A unit of coding will belong in this category if an interviewee expresses an opinion on the current value of an accounting education to the profession. This can be positive or negative. It can refer to the door opening capabilities, employer preferences	<i>“You see I’m not a business school person, but it’s something you can write, and you can be critical, and you know, I remember doing quite a lot of economic history, so I was numerate but I’m not a maths person. I actually think employers might prefer non-relevant graduates”</i>	Employer preference
		<i>“I think accounting education is at a critical phase of its development and I say that because all of the external work that I do, I keep hearing from employers particularly big accountancy firms that whether those students that come through to them have got an accounting and finance degree or not is kind of immaterial. History keeps cropping up, right history students.”</i>	Subject discipline
		<i>“Well I think at the end of the day obviously the degree is just the key to get the interview”</i>	Door opener
Current curriculum content.	A unit of coding will belong in this category if an interviewee expresses comments or views on the current accounting education curriculum. This may be in reference to the current balance of content, the relationship to the professional curriculum or the professional skills inclusion currently in the curriculum	<i>“Well, I think there are some technical skills that are expected, so I think they’re expected to have some. If you’re recruiting someone who is a graduate of an accounting and finance programme. You would expect them to have some base knowledge of things like debits and credits, ... However, from talking to employers that’s not their primary concern.”</i>	Balance of technical and professional skills
		<i>“I worry that actually the fundamentals (technical skills) are getting less and less of that taught. And then there’s other things you might want to add (professional skills), I would think would possibly be ‘icing on the cake’ and you might not like that, things like technology.”</i>	Importance of technical skills
		<i>“Exactly yes, it’s a skill (technical competencies) you can learn. It’s much more about your, broadly called graduate attributes. So are you confident, can you problem solve, can you identify an issue and talk in an informed and appropriate way about it. So, it’s your communication skills, your overall confidence, your ability to synthesise you know, all of that I think, that critical type of thinking that is developed at university”.</i>	Professional skills

Appendix 3 Coding manual, definitions and examples of sub categories (cont.)

Coding frame sub-category definitions			
Sub- category	Description	Examples of units of coding	Context
Professional evolution – changing roles.	A unit of coding belongs in this category if an interviewee discusses the differing roles played by a professional accountant. This will include discussions of historical roles and future roles which the accountant may be required to perform as a result of technological use in the profession.	<i>“Because the role of the accountant in terms of the practical, technical role of the accountant could basically be done very heavily by mechanised machine-based learning now, with the rise of machine based learning and artificial intelligence and data analysis and all of that stuff.”</i>	Technology reducing roles
		<i>“So, yes I’d say for me they are the two biggest things, one is understanding data because that seems to be, since I left the industry that seems to be the biggest drive and then the explaining the numbers and working with someone to make a good decision based on the numbers.”</i>	Professional communicator
		<i>“Being able to look more towards the future than looking back at the, just the information that’s already happened and being able to predict using more financial analysis and looking at the markets rather than the information that’s put in front of you that happened the previous year or whatever.”</i>	Analyse and inform
Professional evolution – changing skills.	A unit of coding will belong in this category if an interviewee references the differing skills that accountants will need in the future. These will include critical thinking skills, a questioning mindset, communication. The role of technology is of significance here but does not exclude general references to skills not directly technology related.	<i>“So, there’s going to be more emphasis I think on those kind of soft skills, enabling competencies, the leadership competencies, the kind of project management competencies. Than perhaps there was previously and yes they were developed over time but maybe perhaps they took longer to develop over time and perhaps a little bit more senior before they got to that level.”</i>	Professional skills requirement
		<i>“It’s a mixture of call it technical skills that you understand how businesses work that’s the accounting side of it, it’s the social skills and how to tell your story if you’re reporting bad or good numbers. What does that mean for the business, so maybe that falls under more being able of predictive analytics and providing insights to companies.”</i>	Communication and insight
		<i>“You know it was probably about 3 years ago I was at a conference at AACSB held and one of the presentations was around the digital future and they were talking about what professions will exist in the future. And obviously Accounting is one that they are really looking at, you know they see there hasn’t been very much change and so it’s about what do we need to do to future proof our students.”</i>	Technology threat
Professional accounting curriculum.	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee discusses the present or future development of the professional accounting education curriculum in the context of developing future professional accountants or future skills sets and keep the curriculum relevant. The professional accounting education curriculum refers to the curriculum that is developed by the PABs. It specifically excludes discussion of the higher education accounting curriculum.	<i>“Yeah, what’s new about it The professional bodies we need to put a lot more of those kind of things (technology related) into the qualification, but I think it’s, I’m quite particular here. I think it’s the profession catching up all this stuff. Data analytics, I got taught that in my degree in 1986. It’s not new it’s basic stats isn’t it? It starts on a spreadsheet?”</i>	Technology content in the professional education curriculum
		<i>“I think a big one for me and this is maybe because my subjects are the ones with technology. Students are coming out of Uni potentially with not really an awareness or an ability with some of the technology stuff. And we’ve now introduced it into like all of our [syllabus] are now examined online, 2 of them involve a lot of the use of technology and the others use a bit of technology to answer.”</i>	Technology content in the professional education curriculum
		<i>“I think as everyone is saying the Pandemic and the fact that everyone has worked remotely and has relied on technology will have moved that forward (professional curriculum development) much more quickly than perhaps otherwise would have been the case.”</i>	Technology content in the professional education curriculum
Widening student membership.	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee discusses the significance of the educational background of new entrants to the profession. Entry routes include, relevant degree, non-relevant degree, apprenticeships, school leaver programmes and employer sponsorships.	<i>“The students I see coming through who have the best sort of understanding of why we do things particularly in financial reporting who really are just learning it Are the ones who are maybe school leavers or have done industrial placements. So, they’ve actually been on the job and understand it. So, I guess maybe more practical stuff, potentially”</i>	School leavers - moulding
		<i>“But a challenge is the students having more options in terms of how they study accounting now. Obviously, there’s the apprenticeship route and I think that decision between do I go apprenticeship, or do I go University is becoming increasingly something that the majority of students are looking at. And also of course what employers are looking at as well”</i>	Entry routes

Appendix 3 Coding manual, definitions and examples of sub categories (cont.)

Coding frame sub-category definitions			
Sub- category	Description	Exemples of units of coding	Context
Influence of the profession.	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee references actions which describe the influence that the PABs have over the HE accounting curriculum. This will include changes to teaching methodologies, the critically the exemptions process and other control mechanisms exercised	<i>"I would like the technology bit ... I'd like to see that perhaps done at universities, but what has happened with accreditation, accreditation for prior learning has been matching the university syllabus to the profession's syllabus."</i>	Technology reducing roles
		<i>"What do they (students) come out with (learning outcomes) and then we map that across and the professional body will take it to a review team and they will say yes, in that finance module that accounting module you are meeting that"</i>	Professional communicator
		<i>"Now that's not to say that exemptions are a bad thing, there are a proportion of students that absolutely want to become professionally qualified accountants at the end of their degree programme. And the fact that they get 9 ish exemptions is quite important."</i>	Analyse and inform
Issues in collaborating.	A unit of coding belongs in this category if an interviewee discusses information exchanges between the profession and the HE sector. The discussion can be either positive, suggesting ways to collaborate, or negative, focussing on the issues surrounding collaboration.	<i>"We have ongoing communication with the Universities, we have a quarterly forum where we get together and we discuss things with the Universities. I'm kind of speaking to them on a fairly regular basis about issues"</i>	Professional skills requirements
		<i>"And that is the time where we need to sit in a room and attempt to fix some of these problems The thing is, as you pointed out, the profession and the universities, they are diverging and the divergence, is just going to get worse especially with the influx of international students"</i>	Communication and insight
		<i>I think you know, there is a, what's the word, a rocky relationship I would say between us, Universities and the accountancy profession. It's not, we should be working together it seems like we're still kind of butting heads. And it's probably because you know a lot of people like me criticise, but we do have that relationship."</i>	Technology threat
HE sector structure.	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee references the impact that the type of institution may have on teaching ethos, methodology, or curriculum change. This will include discussions on the institutions' curriculum change process and the role played by reputation.	<i>I mean I think if you look at say our programme and you contrast that (with) somewhere like [Russell Group university] for example. The things we teach are much more practically based, so we're very much focused on the exemptions, the practical knowledge for students.</i>	Technology content in the professional curriculum
		<i>"Got the impression, need to check this out that the ones in the Polytechnics probably did more teaching because they were mainly teaching institutions and probably did far less research. And so, there's now more of a kind of competition where I think some of the ex-Poly's are trying to prove that they are in a sense, I don't like this, a real University, but I'll use that phrase so they're as good as the others"</i>	Technology content in the professional curriculum
		<i>"It's not, I don't think, you could take, you could go to a sort of University up the road, say [newer university] with us or the [newer university] where they're typically taking students with you know 2 D's and an E onto their degree. The chances of them getting these jobs with the big 4 are quite slim."</i>	Technology content in the professional curriculum
Income generation.	A unit of coding belongs to this category if an interviewee refers to the need to sustain and improve income generation at a university. This may be in reference to tuition fees, monetisation of research internationalisation or views around university financing.	<i>"Sometimes you felt they would get rid of the lecturers and just run, you know rent out of the buildings some of them. I don't think they're that bothered about being a University. So much easier, some of them are probably thinking."</i>	Technology content in the professional curriculum
		<i>"Your funding comes either via the number of bums you can get on seats or you, you can get funding via the Research Excellent Framework and that depends on the levels of 3 star plus publications you get out."</i>	School leavers-moulding
		<i>"I mean the University is always doing things to try and get more international students in you know like Foundation years and bringing in, have you ever heard of anything like study group. They are these bodies that come in and they're taking, it's just a backdoor entry into a University with below par exam, you know entry requirements."</i>	Entry routes

Appendix 3 Coding manual, definitions and examples of sub categories (cont.)

Coding frame sub-category definitions			
Sub-category	Description	Examples of units of coding	Context
Ranking regime	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee expresses a view as to the importance of rankings this can be in reference to the potential for marketing, student recruitment, status enhancement or brand recognition, this can be the value, as they see it, to the higher education community or the students. These expressions of value can be either positive, negative, or neutral.	<i>"Because that [Dora] Declaration and the idea that we should not be using metrics and league tables in making decisions about promotions and appointments. And there's over 21,000 learning societies, publishers, funders, Universities across the globe that have all signed up to it now."</i>	Importance of ranking
		<i>"So what happened with the league tables, this comes from the public sector management and new public management and the critique of all that stuff. The Tories but actually it's all governments since the 70s been obsessed with developing market mechanisms in one form or another"</i>	Metrification
Research Primacy.	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee references the relationship between research and teaching in a way that places one as more significant than the other. References may be made to value, reward, prestige, career progression which has been driven by more importance given to research over teaching.	<i>"it might have been Giddens in his kind of third way period where he talks about what matters is what counts, or what you can count. And so, you know if you put the performance measures up as publications etc., that's what drives it and then the teaching is less of emphasis."</i>	Metrification
		<i>"They seem to have a thing that everybody should be publishing, and everybody should be teaching. But in that sense, I suppose they, you almost felt that they felt that research was more important because it brought in extra money."</i>	Monetisation
		<i>"So, there is a logic to trying to turn the accounting degrees into teaching only, accounting departments into teaching only departments. Pile them high with students, generate loads of surplus there and redistribute that out to management or organisation and employee research where there's more journals to get higher ranks in."</i>	Reputation
Research led teaching.	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee references the integration of research into the curriculum. This may involve the process of integration, the difficulties of integration, or the resources (time and staffing) required to integrate research into the curriculum. teaching relationship.	<i>"Now I know that will then allow that sort of movement towards research based teaching, which in turn should improve the students in terms of their theoretical approach. ... Because a lot of my fellow teachers can't turn theory into how does it work in reality"</i>	Skills sets
		<i>"But some form of accounting type educational experience degree, under-graduate and or post-graduate. I think that would be interesting, ... I've got no doubt if we have the right staff in terms of the research underpinning which we would have to demonstrate to the wider world and also within [Institution]."</i>	Skills sets
		<i>"Those modules actually are as closely aligned to the academic's expertise and research that will ensure that the two marry together with the teaching content. And I suspect that in large business schools that's harder to achieve than it is in smaller universities."</i>	Relevance
Dual responsibility.	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee references the nature of the contracts within an institution. This will reference where an individual has both a teaching and research responsibility and the issues that this may bring	<i>"What's happening at [Institution]... Is that what's happening is because we're moving more towards the AACSB we are more now becoming more output focused. So just being a good teacher is no longer good enough, you have to have sort of that PhD, that sort of publication background."</i>	Researcher/ teacher
		<i>"You've now got 28 year olds who have never been outside the university environment with a PhD suddenly going to teach. It's not smart."</i>	Appropriateness
		<i>"The amount of time you're given, they'll say they're interested in teaching and then if you judge them by their words, they might sound like they're interested but once you judge them by their actions, it's quite obviously not. Give you one-hour preparatory time for a lecture is just absurd, they even reduce that."</i>	Resources

Appendix 3 Coding manual, definitions and examples of sub categories (cont.)

Coding frame sub-category definitions			
Sub-category	Description	Examples of units of coding	Context
Preconceptions.	A unit of coding will belong in this category if an interviewee references opinions and beliefs about the nature of the accounting profession. This may be positive - accounting as a good thing a qualification to be valued or a negative thing, staid, dull, responsible for financial crisis etc.	<i>"... I think in world where you know the accountant is viewed as the very boring person that sits in the corner of the dinner party." (Interviewee 24 – Student)</i>	Beancounter
		<i>"Is that again is the perceived nature of the profession, so the way it works with some families is, first they want you to be a Doctor, If they can't be a Doctor, then be a Lawyer, and then if they're not good enough to be a Lawyer, be an Accountant ... Some families just do it on perceptions of wealth shall we say."</i>	Value
		<i>"You know there's your image problem again, is that we seem to be just caught up in scandal after scandal, to just not doing our job."</i>	Scandal
Expectation	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee comments of or describes communication with undergraduates or prospective undergraduates which influence the students expectation and initial motivation. This can be in a positive manner (employability, salary career prospects) or a negative manner (long hours)	<i>"And people who come to study accountancy generally come to study accountancy because they want to go out into industry relatively few of them are studying accountancy because they want to go off and do a PhD. So, yes, I think that's kind of the environment we're in at the moment."</i>	Career prospects
		<i>"Then it's really about the employability, you know if I've got a degree, I'm much more likely to get a decent job at the end, I'm much more likely to have a decent career trajectory."</i>	Career prospects
		<i>"I think parents that are not accountants but know of the professions are quite influential, so I've heard it say to me, yes, my mom and dad they said you know it's a good profession and you'll get a good income, stable job, good job security"</i>	Career prospects
Exemptions as a motivator.	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee comments about the value of exemptions to the student, not the institution. This can be the actual value or the perceived value.	<i>"The students, do they really select the university by which one they're going to get the most exemptions from? Or do they select the university by can they get into a Russell group, or do they have to end up doing a Post 92 university?"</i>	Over valued
		<i>"The students really, not that, you know they see it (exemptions) as a big thing, I don't know it's like when they get in it's almost like they don't really consider it so much I feel. I don't know."</i>	Over valued
		<i>"What was driving that was accreditations, the student came onto the courses because they wanted to get a degree but they wanted to get maximum exemptions from ACCA or CIMA."</i>	Accelerated qualification
Employability promise.	A unit of coding will belong to this category if an interviewee comments about the importance of employability made to a students or the delivery of this promise.	<i>"Because we know that post 18s see accountancy as a genuine profession, there are always going to be jobs there. It's a bit like nursing, you're going to qualify is something and you will probably end up going to get a job in"</i>	Career prospects
		<i>"That's the thing I think a lot of the students they don't know what it's all about and we are, I think we are profiting from that in some ways. You know sometimes some students will be better off doing a subject that they enjoy, rather than something that they think is going to lead to a job"</i>	Ethical issues
		<i>"So, it is about the programme obviously they have to be on the right programme, something that interests them, something that they think gives them the right prospects. So that when they graduate, they will get into a decent job, I think that employability message is huge"</i>	Expectations management

Appendix 3 Coding manual, definitions and examples of sub categories (cont.)

Coding frame sub-category definitions			
Sub-category	Description	Examples of units of coding	Context
Engagement	A unit of coding belongs to this category if an interviewee discusses the importance of engaging students in the learning process This could take the form of selling the value of certain content, demonstrating the relevance of an issue to future development. It will include discussions of the engagement and feedback processes and processes to increase student involvement.	<i>"I mean obviously there's the surveys and we have the mid-module surveys, the end of the module surveys, the programme surveys, the NSS, the PTES (postgraduate) etc., we've got all the surveys. We have regular student, SSRF, student, staff representative forums so they happen twice a semester, where we have student representatives who come in and tell us what the students really think and that's a two-way conversation"</i>	Formal feedback
		<i>"I've been over to [Department] ... we get students who have worked on projects. It's such a positive experience for them and I know the numbers of students that do the [module]. Every year it goes up because it's word of mouth as well and people hear how good it is"</i>	Involvement
		<i>"Bring in case studies of students that have engaged with that process and then have gone off and done particularly well, bring those students back to speak to our students."</i>	Experience
Experiential learning	A unit of coding will belong in this category if an interviewee references the importance of how any form of experiential learning (placement, internship, WIL ETC) benefits the students in terms of enhanced employability or learning experience. It will also contain comments as to the issues that experiential learning may bring to an accounting faculty.	<i>"That you've got to be working with organisations and so to me it's really important that students get that opportunity through the degree. Because if they don't they're essentially you know, you're doing them a disservice in terms of helping them to understand the relevance of the teaching that you're doing."</i>	Value
		<i>"The way I look at it, how important this is, you would not expect the doctor to do a three-year paper degree and come out and start cutting people up. ... These accountants are looking after your pension, looking after your trust fund, looking after your job. So like the doctor transplanting your kidney, that is quite important in your life... So I think you've got to have that mix of experience, and an internship is great."</i>	Experience
		<i>"But the majority (of internships) and they're competitive, so you might have 50 students applying for them. We don't, we've never gone and I don't know how other institutions do it, we've never gone down the route of placing students with firms because the firm want the person who's the best fit for them. And they make that decision not us."</i>	Sponsor issues

Appendix 4 Data relating to figures surrounding student membership.

Data retrieved from: <https://www.frc.org.uk/auditors/professional-oversight/key-facts-and-trends-in-the-accountancy-profession>

Figure 1 Student enrolment to the PABs, relevant versus non-relevant degree (2010-2021).

Year	Relevant degree	Non-relevant degree
2010	13,937	6,980
2011	11,531	7,411
2012	10,672	6,556
2013	15,347	5,176
2014	12,184	8,941
2015	11,724	9,126
2016	11,992	9,654
2017	10,442	8,711
2018	9,318	7,775
2019	9,122	7,985
2020	8,439	6,615
2021	9,273	7,903

Figure 7 Student membership of the PABs by qualification.

Year	Degree	No degree	% with a degree
2010	20,917	20,334	50.7%
2011	18,943	17,121	52.5%
2012	17,227	17,340	49.8%
2013	20,524	17,854	53.5%
2014	21,125	16,460	56.2%
2015	20,851	15,833	56.8%
2016	21,646	17,143	55.8%
2017	19,153	18,698	50.6%
2018	17,093	18,224	48.4%
2019	17,107	18,082	48.6%
2020	15,055	16,337	48.0%
2021	17,176	16,965	50.3%

Figure 8 Number of graduate trainees entering the PABs.

	ACCA	CIMA	CIPFA	ICAEW	ICAS
2010	11,018	5,284	88	3,741	786
2011	8,298	5,791	144	3,757	953
2012	7,187	5,444	175	3,644	777
2013	8,806	7,502	66	3,376	774
2014	8,382	7,712	101	4,058	872
2015	8,690	6,538	208	4,472	943
2016	8,991	6,903	154	4,489	1,110
2017	8,301	5,412	124	4,418	899
2018	6,931	4,769	48	4,570	775
2019	6,683	4,891	47	4,861	626
2020	5,029	4,288	57	4,885	795
2021	5,729	4,525	59	5,820	1,043

Figure 9 Graduate trainees holding a relevant versus non-relevant degrees.

Year	Relevant degree	Non-relevant degree
2010	66.6%	33.4%
2011	60.9%	39.1%
2012	61.9%	38.1%
2013	74.8%	25.2%
2014	57.7%	42.3%
2015	56.2%	43.8%
2016	55.4%	44.6%
2017	54.5%	45.5%
2018	54.5%	45.5%
2019	53.3%	46.7%
2020	56.1%	43.9%
2021	54.0%	46.0%

Appendix 4 Data relating to figures surrounding student membership (cont.)

Data retrieved from: <https://www.frc.org.uk/auditors/professional-oversight/key-facts-and-trends-in-the-accountancy-profession>

Figure 10 Student trainees in commerce, by educational background.

	Relevant degree	Non-relevant degree	No - degree
2010	31.9%	13.3%	54.8%
2011	32.7%	14.0%	53.3%
2012	32.2%	11.6%	56.1%
2013	42.9%	7.3%	49.8%
2014	35.6%	17.2%	47.2%
2015	35.5%	16.8%	47.7%
2016	33.6%	17.8%	48.6%
2017	28.6%	16.9%	54.5%
2018	27.9%	15.8%	56.3%
2019	28.2%	15.0%	56.8%
2020	26.7%	13.5%	59.8%
2021	27.0%	15.1%	57.9%

Figure 11 Student trainees in practice, by educational background.

	Relevant degree	Non-relevant degree	No - degree
2010	35.4%	28.1%	36.5%
2011	31.9%	32.8%	35.3%
2012	31.2%	33.0%	35.8%
2013	33.6%	32.6%	33.8%
2014	24.5%	42.2%	33.3%
2015	24.9%	42.3%	32.8%
2016	24.0%	41.5%	34.5%
2017	24.9%	39.1%	36.0%
2018	25.8%	39.0%	35.2%
2019	23.5%	43.0%	33.6%
2020	26.5%	40.2%	33.3%
2021	26.6%	40.6%	32.9%

Appendix 5 Data for figures surrounding HE income.

Data source link: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/finances/chart-1>

Figure 16 HE income by source of funding.

£(m)						
Year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Tuition fees	15,541	16,811	17,757	18,950	19,919	21,546
Funding	5,345	5,167	5,105	5,115	5,333	5,499
Research	5,968	5,886	5,916	6,216	6,575	6,293
Other	6,664	6,884	7,004	8,319	8,963	8,589

Data source link: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/finances/chart-1>

Figure 17 Total 2019/20 income of HEIs by source of funding.

£(m)		
Year		2019/20
Tuition fees		21,546
Funding		5,499
Research		6,293
Other		8,589

Data source link: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from>

Figure 18 International students enrolled on accountancy and finance courses.

Year	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
EU.	745	705	705	680	680	710	715
Non-EU.	5,800	5,660	5,885	6,085	6,360	7,565	6,830

Appendix 6 Data used for the following Tables, Table 16, Table 17, and Table 19.

Accountancy and Finance League table 2023							
Rank	University	Overall	Entry standards	Student satisfaction	Research quality	Graduate prospects outcomes	Graduate prospects on track
1	University of Warwick	100.0	163	4.15	3.52	86.1	82.1
2	London School of Economics and Poli...	99.5	187	3.99	3.57	80.1	62.1
3	Durham University	99.0	157	4.11	3.33	84.1	90.1
4	University of Leeds	98.9	165	3.88	3.43	82.1	88.1
5	University of Bath	98.7	152	3.97	3.50	92.1	84.1
6	University of Strathclyde	98.4	223	4.02	3.27	78.1	82.1
7	King's College London, University o...	97.8	164	3.89	3.47	n/a	n/a
8	University of Exeter	97.8	149	4.03	3.47	88.1	84.1
9	Queen's University Belfast	97.7	154	3.92	3.09	94.1	86.1
10	University of Manchester	97.3	170	3.81	3.49	72.1	80.1
11	University of Glasgow	97.3	212	3.95	3.40	76.1	82.1
12	The University of Edinburgh	97.3	192	3.70	3.39	80.1	84.1
13	Cardiff University	95.2	150	3.84	3.34	78.1	84.1
14	City, University of London	95.1	146	3.79	3.52	78.1	86.1
15	University of Liverpool	95.0	148	4.24	3.39	64.1	84.1
16	Loughborough University	94.8	147	3.94	3.24	78.1	84.1
17	Lancaster University	94.4	139	4.11	3.40	74.1	82.1
18	University of Bristol	94.1	158	3.66	3.19	70.1	86.1
19	University of Dundee	93.5	188	4.19	2.80	70.1	88.1
20	Ulster University	93.3	130	4.13	3.22	78.1	88.1
21	University of Nottingham	93.2	149	3.63	3.17	82.1	78.1
22	University of Southampton	92.8	149	3.82	3.25	72.1	76.1
23	Heriot-Watt University	92.5	177	4.08	3.03	76.1	76.1
24	University of Reading	92.3	131	3.93	3.18	82.1	80.1
25	Newcastle University	92.1	147	3.81	3.07	74.1	78.1
26	Aston University, Birmingham	91.8	130	3.75	3.10	82.1	86.1
27	University of Stirling	91.6	190	3.98	2.99	60.1	86.1
28	University of Sheffield	91.4	141	3.80	3.26	62.1	86.1
29	University of Birmingham	91.4	145	3.83	3.31	64.1	76.1
30	University of Surrey	91.2	134	3.88	3.34	70.1	78.1
31	University of Aberdeen	91.0	182	4.07	2.97	64.1	78.1
32	Queen Mary University of London	90.9	146	3.78	3.31	62.1	74.1
33	Bangor University	89.4	130	4.21	2.93	60.1	80.1
34	Swansea University	89.3	123	4.04	3.06	64.1	84.1
35	University of East Anglia UEA	89.0	125	3.99	3.40	70.1	64.1
36	University of Lincoln	88.1	120	4.02	2.79	64.1	88.1
37	University of Kent	87.8	118	4.01	2.99	62.1	84.1
38	SOAS University of London	87.6	124	3.80	3.12	n/a	n/a
39	University of Sussex	87.0	126	3.93	3.24	60.1	66.1
40	Northumbria University, Newcastle	87.0	128	3.83	2.80	62.1	82.1
41	Glasgow Caledonian University	86.5	182	4.11	2.68	60.1	72.1
42	University of Leicester	85.8	117	3.71	3.17	66.1	70.1
43	Nottingham Trent University	85.7	120	3.79	2.87	60.1	82.1
44	University of Hull	85.7	115	4.04	2.93	58.1	76.1
45	Royal Holloway, University of Londo...	85.5	111	3.83	3.13	56.1	82.1
46	University of Essex	84.4	106	3.73	3.05	68.1	72.1
47	Robert Gordon University	84.3	176	4.13	2.57	46.0	78.1
48	University of Portsmouth	84.1	108	3.97	3.03	62.1	72.1
49	Oxford Brookes University	83.5	113	3.73	2.76	64.1	80.1
50	University of Bolton	83.4	126	4.70	1.51	n/a	n/a

Data used for the following Tables, Table 16, Table 17, and Table 19 (cont.)

Accountancy and Finance League table 2023							
Rank	University	Overall	Entry standards	Student satisfaction	Research quality	Graduate prospects - outcomes	Graduate prospects on track
51	Edinburgh Napier University	83.4	154	3.78	2.54	58.1	86.1
52	University of Roehampton	83.2	97	4.08	2.92	n/a	n/a
53	Liverpool John Moores University	83.1	115	4.21	2.43	54.1	80.1
54	University of Greenwich	83.0	113	4.03	2.81	50.1	76.1
55	Teesside University, Middlesbrough	82.9	118	3.83	2.61	62.1	70.1
56	Cardiff Metropolitan University	82.8	107	3.99	2.44	62.1	86.1
57	Keele University	82.7	104	3.82	2.78	58.1	80.1
58	Bristol, University of the West of ...	82.7	108	3.90	2.77	62.1	76.1
59	Kingston University	82.3	108	3.89	2.61	48.0	88.1
60	Brunel University London	82.3	117	3.52	2.73	52.1	78.1
61	University of Brighton	81.9	104	3.50	2.74	70.1	80.1
62	University of Worcester	81.6	113	4.05	2.25	n/a	n/a
63	Abertay University	81.4	146	4.20	n/a	72.1	92.1
64	University of Plymouth	81.4	110	3.52	2.82	56.1	72.1
65	University of Derby	81.3	109	4.12	2.38	46.0	84.1
66	Aberystwyth University	81.2	114	4.19	2.62	48.0	56.1
67	Liverpool Hope University	81.2	110	3.66	2.38	60.1	n/a
68	Manchester Metropolitan University	81.2	115	3.74	3.08	50.1	66.1
69	University of Westminster, London	80.8	112	3.73	2.95	38.0	84.1
70	Leeds Beckett University	80.7	103	3.98	2.24	60.1	82.1
71	Coventry University	80.7	106	3.88	2.89	52.1	72.1
72	University of Huddersfield	80.6	119	3.78	2.65	44.0	68.1
73	University of Central Lancashire	80.6	128	3.43	2.68	50.1	72.1
74	Bournemouth University	80.5	104	3.66	2.61	62.1	70.1
75	University of Chester	80.4	120	3.92	2.55	40.0	74.1
76	Edge Hill University	80.2	122	3.70	2.57	40.0	74.1
77	Canterbury Christ Church University	80.2	93	3.60	2.52	58.1	86.1
78	University of Hertfordshire	80.1	103	3.95	2.80	46.0	78.1
79	De Montfort University	79.5	98	3.82	2.46	60.1	74.1
80	University of Bradford	79.4	117	3.46	3.04	36.0	70.1
81	University of Wolverhampton	79.1	98	4.10	2.61	50.1	70.1
82	Anglia Ruskin University	79.1	95	4.16	3.16	36.0	68.1
83	Sheffield Hallam University	78.6	111	3.80	2.56	48.0	68.1
84	University of Gloucestershire	78.6	97	3.98	2.18	n/a	n/a
85	University of Salford	78.2	108	3.83	2.63	48.0	64.1
86	University of South Wales	78.1	110	4.06	2.28	46.0	64.1
87	Middlesex University	77.9	104	3.65	3.16	34.0	66.1
88	Birmingham City University	77.8	110	3.94	2.37	44.0	66.1
89	Staffordshire University	77.3	n/a	4.01	n/a	58.1	82.1
90	London South Bank University	76.4	101	3.76	2.61	34.0	74.1
91	London Metropolitan University	76.1	86	4.16	2.61	36.0	62.1
92	Buckinghamshire New University	76.0	109	4.39	n/a	n/a	n/a
93	University of Bedfordshire	76.0	125	3.82	n/a	n/a	n/a
94	York St John University	75.9	100	3.68	2.24	n/a	n/a
95	University of West London	74.5	112	4.55	n/a	28.0	70.1
96	University of Winchester	74.5	109	3.73	n/a	58.1	70.1
97	University of East London	74.1	90	4.18	2.31	20.0	78.1
98	University of Sunderland	74.0	106	4.07	n/a	52.1	64.1
99	University of Northampton	73.8	108	3.80	1.20	30.0	82.1
100	University of Chichester	73.4	89	3.93	1.75	n/a	n/a
101	University of the West of Scotland	73.2	140	3.19	2.15	42.0	68.1
102	University of the Highlands and Isl...	72.5	n/a	4.20	n/a	42.0	64.1
103	Solent University (Southampton)	70.4	100	4.16	n/a	42.0	50.1
104	Leeds Trinity University	66.4	83	3.58	n/a	n/a	n/a

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