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## **The Dynamics of 'Market-Making' in Higher Education**

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### **Biographical notes**

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## The Dynamics of ‘Market-Making’ in Higher Education

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### Abstract

This paper examines what to some is a well worked furrow; the processes and outcomes involved in what is typically referred to as ‘marketization’ in the higher education sector. We do this through a case study of Newton University, where we reveal a rapid proliferation of market exchanges involving the administrative division of the university with the wider world. Our account of this process of ‘market making’ is developed in two (dialectically related) moves. First, we identify a range of *market exchanges* that have emerged in the context of wider ideological and political changes in the governance of higher education to make it a more globally-competitive producer of knowledge, and a services sector. Second, we explore the ways in which *making markets* involves a considerable amount of micro-work, such as the deployment of a range of framings, and socio-technical tools (Çalışkan and Callon 2009, 2010; Berndt and Boeckler 2012). Taken together, these market-making processes are recalibrating and remaking the structures, social relations and subjectivities, within and beyond the university and in turn reconstituting the university and the higher education sector.

**Keywords:** markets, market-making, higher education, university, Callon and Çalışkan, Berndt and Boeckler.

*‘One of the things we haven’t gotten to go around is actually that competition isn’t UK anymore, it is global, and how do we position ourselves to attract talent from overseas. Because there is no point for the UK economy taking staff from each other... you will not grow the national talent pool; all you do is push the cost of the labour market up within the UK. So we need to be looking overseas. And part of my job is to identify talent around the world.’* Interview I1\_13 (Senior Leadership, 22 May 2015)

*‘...it’s all constantly changing, things don’t stop. This is because we have to keep up, we can’t just take it for granted anymore that we’re [Newton University]. There is so many things now that we rely on, there is the National Student Survey that is crucial to [Newton University] and the Research Assessment Exercise and all those mechanisms for funding and recruiting students. I think it makes us more accountable. So you have to keep up.’* Interview I1\_11 (International Office, 15 April 2014)

*‘It used to be “schools liaison” back in the day, then it changed to “recruitment”, and now it’s changed to “student marketing...”. So you can see the journey through name changes. When I joined [about a decade] ago, the word marketing was not there,*

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*anywhere. We didn't market, because we're [Newton University]! And now we've realised that there is a market; it is 'choice'. That's changed. It's a big culture shift'*  
Interview I1\_7 (Student Marketing, 4 April 2015)

## Introduction

Each of our interviewees quoted above works in a part of the administration of the university at the heart of our study – Newton University – a public research intensive university in England. Yet what each interviewee's reflections also show is that they are caught up in, or actively promoting, various aspects of what we have come to call 'the marketization' of the university. Whether worrying about global competition and recruiting talented research staff, student satisfaction, or student marketing – each is talking about the emergence and consequences of an aspect of marketization in their institution. So, what's new, and why are we circling around this topic in search of answers?

At one level, the broad concern of our paper on markets is not new. There is now a large body of work examining the logic of the market in higher education (for example: de Boer & Jongbloed, 2012; Jongbloed, 2003; Kauppinen, 2014; Lynch, 2006; Miller, 2010; Nagavajara, 2014; Noble, 2002; Rutherford, 2005; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Teixeira, 2011, 2006), including its ideological origins (e.g. neoliberalism, New Public Management), symptoms (e.g. competition, privatisation, commodification, trade), and manifestations in changing the structures, strategies and social relations within and beyond the university. Much like our interviewees also note, this literature charts the consequences for the university of these marketization projects: students are referred to as customers; going to university is an investment in human capital; academic work is increasingly driven by economic imperatives; Vice-Chancellors act like CEOs; the university's administration includes units on enterprise and other forms of commercial activity, and so on. And of course all of this is true.

Yet, at another level, we have become disenchanted with some of this literature – not because it is wrong, but because when we try to theorise the kinds of market practices we identify in our case study, it seems to us that much of the higher education literature is found wanting. Very often markets are viewed as simple, static, unwanted, practices. Yet in our experience, and in the experience of our interviewees, market-making in higher education is considerably more dynamic, diverse and difficult. In this paper we will be arguing that there is still conceptual work to be done in exploring and explaining the ways in which markets are *made* in, for and through higher education. We draw upon a case study of a university in the higher education sector – Newton University – to tease out and make sense of these processes, relations and outcomes.

Our account of this process of 'market making' is developed in two (dialectically related) moves. First, we identify and map a range of *market exchanges* that have emerged in the context of wider ideological and political changes in the governance of higher education to make it a more globally-competitive producer of knowledge, and a services sector. Here we focus on the spatial and temporal dynamics at work that move over, and in turn make more porous, the university boundary. These dynamics also create a proliferation of market exchanges, whilst specialist firms also begin to emerge with an inventive array of products for sale to universities and to the sector. In a second move, we explore the ways in which *making markets* involves a considerable amount of macro-meso *and* micro-work (Çalışkan and Callon 2009, 2010; Berndt and Boeckler 2012). But this process is not straightforward at Newton University. We show that market-making is replete with frictions and incomprehensions, as well as imaginative efforts to lubricate relations through trust, the valorisation of symbolic

value like brands, or the strategic use of 'consumer' data which feeds back into the system. Taken together, these market-making processes are recalibrating and remaking the structures, social relations and subjectivities, within and beyond the university, in turn reconstituting the university and the higher education sector.

### **Studying Markets in Higher Education – A Brief Review**

Scanning the extensive literature on higher education reform and markets, there are a range of ways markets in education are studied. A common approach is to show that markets are narrated in policy discourses aimed at restructuring and reforming higher education (Brown 2011a; Jessop, Fairclough, and Wodak 2008; Marginson and Considine 2000; Newson and Buchbinder 1988; Shattock 2008; Williams 2004). However, this literature has less to say about how markets come to be imagined, framed, produced in practices, and reproduced or transformed over time.

A somewhat different approach is by checking the extent to which higher education policies reflect a perfect free market (Brown 2011b; Jongbloed and de Boer 2012; Jongbloed 2003; Marginson 2013; Marginson 2014). The problem here, of course, is that it implies there is such a thing as a 'free market' – an assumption that Karl Polanyi (1944), amongst others, has criticized as flawed in that a market cannot, and does not, exist outside of any society.

A further approach to higher education markets examines the sector as if only one market existed. Yet as Dill (1997), Massy (2004) and Teixeira (2011) point out, there are a range of markets in which universities are competing (including for students, funds, academic staff, and many more), in turn generating complex governance challenges (Jongbloed and de Boer 2012; Middlehurst and Teixeira 2012). Only a few authors (cf. Levy, 2006; Litwin, 2009; Slaughter & Leslie, 2001) note the existence of secondary markets - such as publishing, consultancies, clinical trials, corporate sponsorships, and so on, all enabling the university to diversify its funding streams. Yet, secondary markets can also include real estate and financial markets, privatising of support services, creating internal markets within the university, the development of a parallel economy of private tutoring and test preparation (cf. Lynch 2006; Lynch and Moran 2006), and so on.

Stephen Ball (2007, 2012) captures this complex landscape through his visual representations of market networks. Such representations show the outcomes for the education sector of neoliberal policies at work where government, as the main provider of education, is replaced by governmental and non-governmental organisations – including for-profits - to provide a range of services in the education sector. However, Ball's analysis is largely directed at understanding meso processes, leaving open the question of what kind of micro-foundations are at work in making markets.. In this paper, we are interested in *how* higher education markets are imagined and made at multiple levels – macro-meso and micro.

### **Studying 'Market-Making' – A Macro-Meso-Micro Approach**

Writers in the tradition of Karl Polanyi (1944) have long argued markets have to be produced through social institutions, and legal and political strategies and processes. In arguing this "...Polanyi is rejecting the classical liberal assumption that market society arises organically out of humankind's preferences for market exchanges and private property rights" (Robertson, 2013: 162). Whilst a hugely important theoretical and political intervention, this work tends to focus on the general study of the macro conditions of the production and reproduction of social life in market societies rather than on the meso and micro practices entailed in making market societies (Fligstein and Dauter 2007).

Economic sociologists, such as Granovetter (1985) and colleagues (Smelser and Swedberg 1994), have taken notice of the social nature of markets, and developed aspects of Polanyi's work, such as the idea of the 'embeddedness' of markets in social relations, to help understand specific processes at work in making markets function. Similarly Leys (2003), Slater and Tonkiss (2001), and Peck (2010), amongst others, have also developed more meso-level analyses by focusing attention on the ways actors/institutions strategically advance, and embed, larger political projects such as neoliberalism, in the making of market-societies. Robertson et al (2002) and Verger and Robertson (2012) direct attention to how trade negotiations and agreements aim to advance institutions and global rules for making markets and fixing market rules in sectors like education, in turn constituting them as tradeable education services.

But what of the micro-processes involved in making markets, or as Beckert (2014) describes it – the micro-foundations of markets? How do bigger political projects and strategies turn decommodified social relations, or use values, into commodities and exchange value? What kind of work needs to happen for this transformation take place? A great deal, we will argue. For our purposes here we have found that Berndt and Boeckler's (2009, 2012) work, along with that of Callon and Çalışkan (2009, 2010), is a useful starting point in that they have helped us generate a conceptual grammar that focuses attention on the macro-meso *and* micro processes of market making. Berndt and Boeckler (2012: 205) point out that market-making takes 'investment'; that is ongoing effort is expended in 'framing markets' through the development and deployment of policies, technologies, instruments, and other 'formatting devices'. In the following sections we bring these insights into conversation with our study of Newton University, to make more visible the *work* involved in market-making in the university, and how we can extend the work of Berndt and Boeckler (2009, 2012), as well as that of Callon and Çalışkan (2009, 2010), further.

### **Newton University – Methodological Notes**

Our case – 'Newton University' – was selected because it is a public comprehensive university (with five faculties: science, engineering, social science and law, arts and humanities, and medicine) and is broadly representative of research intensive universities in the UK (widely known as the Russell Group universities). Such an institution has also enabled us to see a range of market-making activities associated with teaching and research. We also decided to focus our attention on 'the administration' of the university where we could see a range of market exchanges with the external world taking place in relation to the day-to-day operation and strategic running of the university.

Newton currently enrolls around 24,000 students and employs about 5,000 staff (of which around 50% are administration). It is an attractive destination for students with many of the undergraduates being recruited from elite, private schools; the university charges the highest allowed tuition fees for undergraduate British and EU students, i.e. £ 9,000, and higher fees for non-EU and postgraduate students; and the percentage of postgraduate full-fee paying international students in 2013 was above 30%, and above 10% for undergraduate programmes.

Our case<sup>2</sup> is constructed from a range of data sources: university documents, undertaking

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<sup>2</sup> We followed BERA ethical standards ("Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research" 2011) and all material we processed is subject to confidentiality agreement. The main ethical moments are: informed consent, avoiding harm in collecting data, doing justice to participants in analysing data, confidentiality in all stages of research including in writing research outputs. We had to take special care of protecting the identity of individuals and Newton University due to the changing nature of the sector, as much of information is now treated to be commercially sensitive.

semi structured interviews with university administration, and data on the English higher education sector. All documents were collected from the website of the university and thus publicly available: annual reports and financial statements between the years of 2002 and 2013: four of Newton University's strategy documents (for internationalisation, education, research, and social responsibility); organisational charts; study prospectuses; visual identity guidelines; and web pages. We also collected statistical data publicly provided by Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and The British Office for National Statistics (BONS) to provide data on sectorial changes, as well as Newton University. We were also given documents available only to staff of the university; examples of emails sent on a monthly basis from the university leadership to all employees, and examples of university strategic information about foreign countries and student recruitment. These documents were used to log university priorities, as well as changes in priorities over time. They also helped us to identify key interviewees in the administration, and plan interviews.

Altogether, 17 individuals were interviewed over a period of two months –March until June 2014. 13 of the interviewees were managers or assistant managers of different units of administration within Newton University (fields of Alumni relations, Communications, Marketing, Student Recruitment, International Office, Public Events, Public Engagement, Research and Enterprise), one was part of the university senior leadership, one was a manager of one of the schools, and two were part of the university students' union. Most interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes; several a little longer. The interviews were semi-structured and the questions ranged over the internal transformations within the 'administrative unit' of the university as well as surrounding external environment, including which companies and services the unit was in touch with. We also asked about the career paths of the interviewees to collect data on their personal engagement with the university, or with the private sector.

Transcribed interviews and documents were then analysed for activities, themes, issues and concerns. We were particularly attentive to the diversity of exchanges, and the ways in which some market exchanges morphed into new practices and products. At this point we found ourselves tracing out the spatial and temporal dynamics of market-making. One result was the creation of categories to record the direction of movement in exchanges – such as 'outside-in' or 'inside-out', as well as who was the 'buyer' and who was a 'seller' in these changes exchanges, and when and how this this relation change. We were also attentive to their descriptions of how new higher education products and services are identified, developed, as well as the considerable frictions and incomprehensions, lubrications and legitimations in efforts to materialise markets. In the following sections were report on these two distinct, though dialectically related processes.

### **Mapping Market-Making Activities and Movements**

The kind of market-creating practices and processes we introduce here are those which show the dynamic temporal and spatial nature of markets; as appearing, growing, shrinking or moving. These temporal and spatial processes are largely developed through wider strategies that connect to the university's wider macro challenges; to be a competitive, reputable, global centre of research and teaching excellence. This in turn legitimates these strategies in that they are viewed as realising the mission of the university.

We distinguished between four groups of markets (see Figure 1) based on two dimensions. The first is whether the university is a buyer or a seller of a commodity (a thing or a service); the second whether a commodity is being exchanged for a being exchanged for a price/for profit or for 'free'/not-for-profit.

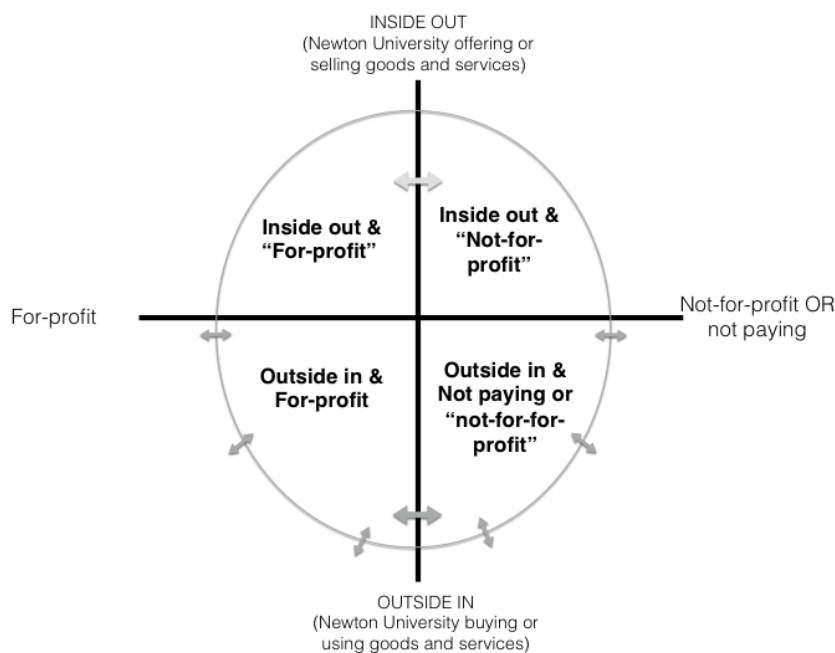


Figure 1. Markets in higher education.<sup>3</sup>

We can see markets being constructed in diverse ways; by the nature of the exchange relation (for-profit/not-for-profit), and by the nature of the movement of the commodity (inside-out/outside-in). This enables us to talk about inside-out/for-profit versus outside-in/for-profit, and so on. We can thus see that the administration of the university is also an active agent in creating markets, and not just the passive recipient of requests for market exchange.

**Inside-out and for-profit:** This group of market-exchanges refers to those where Newton University is selling its services and products to others, and thus behaves as any other market actor aiming at making a profit. In other words, it is acting as a ‘for-profit’ and is competing with other actors selling in these markets. Newton University sells commodities like study programmes (student experience to be more precise) to non-UK and non-EU students, research results, consultancy services, intellectual property, patents, services of venues hire, residences, catering, conferences, and so on.

Newton University has become reliant on income from non-state sources, and consequently on this group of markets. Based on Newton’s financial reports, the total income from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) fell from around 35 per cent of total income to around 20 % between 2002 and 2013, whilst income from tuition fees increased from around 15 to 30 % over this period. Its percentage of income from fees of non-UK and non-EU students increased from 5 to 10 per cent of total income.

**Inside-out and not-for-profit:** This second grouping of market activity is where Newton University generates income, but not explicitly to create a surplus, or profit. This part is mostly supplemented with public sources. Activities here include study programmes to the UK and EU students, sports

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note Newton University is legally, historically, and culturally not aiming to generate profits or surpluses as a corporation might when it is returning value to its shareholders. Technically Newton University is allowed to create surpluses, but it has to spend such funds on its own further development. Thus the phrase ‘For-Profit’ in Figure 1 is used for analytical reasons in that it does generate a surplus.



activities, non-commercial research, services for other public bodies, services for widening student participation, engaging public in university work and promoting science, and the like. This group of activities is what some authors call 'quasi markets' (Le Grand and Bartlett 1993) since they are regulated by the government and publicly financed, or private income is supplemented by public grants. For example, the top amount of tuition fees in England is set by the government to be £9,000<sup>4</sup>. 'Quasi markets' are defined as operating when market forces are introduced into public sectors, but these are not seen as 'real markets' since they do not fulfil requirements of orthodox economic theory of free markets (namely: competition, perfect information, deregulation, monetary transactions without public finance, and the like). However, we suggest that distinguishing between 'quasi' versus 'real' markets is not particularly useful in that regulation is necessarily part of any market.

**Outside-in and for-profit:** Besides selling its services, Newton University also acts as a buyer, and contributes to the profit-making of other actors (third group of markets – Outside-In, For-Profit). Examples include buying computer software, consultancy services, data and research, services of recruitment agents, brand recognition research, representation in foreign countries, and so on. We found the practice of buying these goods and services is uneven across the university, and it tends to happen where the university is also promoting, selling, or commodifying, its own activities. Secondly, these processes contribute to the unbundling of the university as certain tasks get decoupled and outsourced, and help form new market actors. Thirdly, certain university administrative units form hybrid structures. For example, some interviewees in the university reported that companies became extensions of their own teams, and that those companies are regarded as internal partners who have access to university resources, tacit and explicit knowledges, infrastructures, and so on. Lastly, the practice of paying for these services has become 'normalised', and it is not seen as problematic that they are outsourced.

**Outside-in and not-for-profit:** This fourth group of markets refers to situations where the university is using services, but is not paying for them. In other words, there is an exchange of goods or services, but there is no monetary transaction (perhaps a more accurate name here would be 'outside-in and without-pay'). Examples include Facebook groups, Twitter accounts, LinkedIn services, collegial relations with local solicitors, accounts at the Home office for visa advice, and so on. Three such market-making activities of the university are worth elaborating. One is where Newton uses certain services free of charge, but feeds into market opportunities for providers in other markets (like in the case of social media). In other words, use values are being produced and exchanges take place, but those doing the labouring are not paid. A second is when Newton acts as a partner to other actors in projects to get funds, mainly from other sources – such as museums, universities, or non-governmental institutions. A third is when the university allows companies to access Newton's students. Newton University receives a very high number of requests from different companies to reach its student body for different purposes, such as marketing or recruitment. The university is selective, and interviewees report they are not inclined to enable others to target students for marketing from which the company would profit. Despite this principled position, companies are allowed access to students, such as when the university decides it is for the students' gain (like careers days).

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<sup>4</sup> Most recently UK policy enables adjustments of fees to take account of inflation (BBC 2015).

There are other relations that Newton University forms with external actors which have the potential to lead to market exchanges. For example, the university has an informal agreement with local solicitors for mutual benefit. Solicitors offer occasional legal support to the university free of charge, in addition to payable concrete legal outputs, and the university refers its students to them in case of student need. Our interviewee stated that the university takes special care that students do not get abused in this relationship in the sense of being charged higher fees or in receiving lower quality support. In this sense, the relationship between the university and solicitors is far more complex than an impersonal one, as we might see with monetary exchange. Rather, like more traditional relations, it entails high levels of trust and stability, and this is perceived to be beneficial to the university, solicitors and students. In this respect, the social relations of capitalist market exchanges, mediated by money, are interwoven into and supplemented by other forms of market exchange, such as reciprocity, favours, or gifts.

The grey circle in Figure 1 represents the border of what the university has already bought or is using; what is outside the circle are commodities the university (at the time of our research) is being offered but has not yet purchased. This circle and the arrows indicate that certain market actors constantly strategize and work for the commodities that they are selling to cross the border and to enter the university. Therefore there are two main dynamics in our heuristic – the first where commodities attempt to change form (to switch from one group to another), and the second where commodities that are outside of being bought and used attempt to enter the university, or can also exit.

### **Mapping Market Activities at Newton – expanding, specialising, differentiating...logics, practices, and relations**

We can now draw some brief conclusions from this first section on mapping market-activity at Newton University. The first is that we can see that the number of private companies and individuals or other actors selling products and services to Newton University and vice versa has *expanded* over the past decade, and most rapidly in the past five years. Interviewees report that in addition to higher numbers of offers they receive almost every day to buy goods and services, the practices of companies has changed. Specifically, their marketing suggestions, and the tone of communication, have increased in volume and assertiveness. Some interviewees report receiving several phone calls and emails per day. Interviewees stated:

*'I stopped answering my phone now because I have so many people ringing me up now for sales, they find my details online ... and they say, oh, can we do some work for you etc etc. This is on a daily basis. And e-mails as well'* Interview I1\_4 (Communication and Marketing, 31 March 2014).

*'I get a request about twice a week to come and talk to me about "this is what we can do for [Newton University]" ... we cannot meet all of them and find out what they do. So actually my blank response is no ... if you get two a week, you just can't work. It is easier to just say no ... And the industry has ballooned in the last 2 or 3 years'* Interview I1\_13 (Senior leadership, 22 May 2014).

Expansion refers also to the scope of services that the university can now buy. (Public) higher education is increasingly viewed as a services sector, and it is increasingly acceptable to earn significant money from it. Expansion can be seen in the statistical data. The British Office for

National Statistics produces Business Demography data every year. The Standard Industrial Classification in the UK changed in 2007, where it introduced the category ‘education support activities’ out of previously dispersed activities. It is now possible to coherently follow statistics representing the sector from 2008 onwards with categories including activities like: *educational consulting, educational guidance counselling activities, educational support activities, educational testing activities, educational testing evaluation activities, and organisation of student exchange programmes.*

Table 1. Number of births and deaths of enterprises, number of active enterprises in the category ‘education support activities’, and percentage of active enterprises in the category ‘education support activities’ out of all active enterprises in the country (Office for National Statistics 2015).

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Births of new enterprises	155	300	280	395	610	765
Active enterprises	720	755	965	1,275	2,120	2,735
Percentage out of all active enterprises in the country	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.09	0.11

Table 1<sup>5</sup> shows that the number of newly-established companies for education support is growing each year, even though there is a short shelf-life for some of these companies. It is informative to follow the number of active enterprises in the UK; it is up by 380 % for enterprises offering education support activities over the period 2008-2013.

There are also a growing number of companies who now *specialise in higher education* and who sell to universities like Newton. For example, i-Graduate run the international student ‘barometer’ (annual survey on international student satisfaction in the United Kingdom). Recently it proposed a new feedback tool which measures the impact of ‘study abroad’ as part of the student’s experience. Our interviewee reported Newton University was keen to hear about this new product, and considered buying it because it had already established a relationship with the company. However, the administrative unit decided not to purchase the tool for the moment, considering it to be over-priced.

Some market actors who are specialists in the sector try to differentiate themselves from others. Newton is increasingly encountering firms who offer to sell services that help in the overall governance of the university - from organising meetings, to networking opportunities for universities, or providing intelligence and data for the sector.

A notable dynamic of the four groups of markets is that they are relational in the sense that they interact with, and thus reinforce, each other. Administrative staff at Newton University also follow trends and developments in the products and services that the companies are developing contributing to growing proliferation of services. This process in turn contributes to the making of further demands. Actors also strategically work to change the status of a service, from one that is

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to keep in mind that companies work globally and this statistical data can act purely as indicative of the phenomenon. In order to have better view one would need to combine data from different countries around the world.

not commodified to one that is. These actors are thus constantly seeking the means through which they are moving over, and making the boundary between the university and the wider commercial world, more porous, so as quicken the pace and thicken the space of market exchanges. These outside-in dynamics also enable the growing penetration of values from the 'outside' to the 'inside'; values that are anchored in the world of cut-throat capitalism; of financial specialists (such as bankers, accountants, real estate managers, economists and consultants, venture capital) and their metrics (Engelen, Fernandez, and Hendrikse 2014), image makers and their glitzy tropes (advertising firms, branding agencies), rating agencies (such as Moody's) and their pronouncements of worthiness, recruiters and their promises to build new pipelines and value chains, to name just a few. But this is a logic that conflicts with well-entrenched professional interests, and their control over the symbolic categories that have come to carry the weight of what it means to talk about a university, learning, teaching, and so on.

### **Making Markets – Micro Processes**

Earlier we posed the question of how we might systematically understand marketization projects and processes, and what conceptual resources we might use to make these processes visible in relation to our case study. We introduced the work of Çalışkan & Callon (2009, 2010) to help with this task. Here we present an elaboration of these micro level practices they call 'framings' of markets. These are: (i) pacifying goods; (ii) marketizing agencies; (iii) market encounters; (iv) price-setting; and (v) market design and maintenance. We outline the key elements in each of these different framings, and then look at these at work in our case study of Newton University.

*Pacifying goods* refers to those dynamics in which things (ranging from material things to services and other intangibles) are disentangled, made passive and stable, and then invested in. Passivity in this respect refers to the stability and predictability of commodities with fixed qualities, where value and price can be attached (Çalışkan and Callon 2010). This can mean framing a higher education institution as an object to be bought or invested in – much as Laureate Education does when acquires its campuses around the world (Fain 2014a, 2014b); or where 'the student experience' for a university like Newton are given distinctive elements that are packaged up, and 'sold' to students as 'customers'. For example, Newton University was courted by a digital marketing company hoping to sell recruitment services in Nigeria. The first contact was made by the company. Newton University was in conversation with the company for two years before it decided to buy the service. First it needed the time to build confidence and trust for cooperation, and second to define and refine the service/commodity it wanted to purchase.

*Marketizing agencies* set in train a complex of dynamics where many actors compete in defining what is a good or service, and valuing them. This process takes place in socio-technical *agencements*; that is, arrangements of people, technology, tools, laws, calculation, and so on. A competitive university like Newton depends upon a range of socio-technical arrangements to generate efficient market exchanges. Newton has created new positions for this purpose, such as 'market analysts', and a raft of 'public engagement officers' tasked with 'selling' or promoting the university.

*Market encounters* refer to the need for market agencies (such as students, academics, administrators, investors, regulators) and pacified 'goods' to meet one another. Such encounters are multiple, and part of overlapping calculations (Çalışkan and Callon 2010). Market encounters are thus invested in, and cost money, labour, and time. Newton University is itself part of constructing market opportunities: it attends fairs, conference and events; pays for representation offices in foreign countries and recruitment agents; and is increasingly using the Internet as market

encounters. Records show that in 2014 Newton University had 2.5 million page requests, quarter of a million unique users, 60.000 unique browser views, and traffic from over 100 different countries per week. In addition it had several hundred channels and groups on social media. Newton recognises that the digital world is fast increasingly new way of 'market encounters'.

Çalışkan and Callon (2010) argue that marketization theory is successful if it manages to present the above three processes. However, it is incomplete without two more micro-foundations; the study of *price setting* and *market-design and maintenance*. In terms of price setting, this is where valuations and calculations emerge – as prices, but establishing a price is a struggle between different agencies. Newton University is careful regarding price setting for the commodities it buys from others. Not all administrative units have budgets to spend for buying goods and services. In addition, the university needs to follow public procurement rules.

Common issues we discovered at Newton were in deciding how much to pay for a service; in this case it compared prices on the market. Another was deciding on the quality of a product and its supplier; if staff in the university's administration personally knew the person or company, this was more likely to result in deciding on that company – even if the price was higher. Quality was presumed to be a good network and trust. When talking about using two reputable consultancy companies, an interviewee said:

*'They market themselves as time saving, but it does require huge time investment to get real value out of them. So it's possible to make a mistake of thinking that they will arrive on Tuesday and everything will be better by Wednesday. But as long as you get into it with your eyes open, you can extract real value from them. Particularly where both [names of two companies] are most valuable is that they do have wide ranging experience in seeing how things have worked well elsewhere. And how they worked badly elsewhere. So they can stop you doing big mistakes and push you to do things more quickly. They are not cheap, that's the other thing. They are not inexpensive. So it depends very much on who you're working with, but if you want to work with the top people, you are talking about between 1 and 2 thousand pounds per day plus VAT. So that's very expensive in the higher education environment'* Interview I1\_2 (Alumni relations, 25 March 2014).

The final framing is *market design and maintenance* (Çalışkan and Callon 2010). As implied, the design and maintenance dimensions help bring into being, and reproduce, those elements that enable the ongoing extraction of profits from increasingly diverse and specialised suppliers, the legitimisation of the higher education activity as a commodity, and its ongoing stability in the sector as something now that is a market-exchange. At Newton, interviewees stated that increasingly markets were being designed and maintained by a complex set of relations of trust, which in turn helps to lubricate making even more markets.

### **Market Framings at Newton – Lubrications, Experimentations, Positionalities, Technologies**

So far we have outlined a range of ways in which we see Çalışkan and Callon's framing practices operate on and in Newton University. But their approach does not highlight sufficiently the diversity of strategies and processes at play, as new resources and technologies are mobilised, new lubrications and frictions are produced arising from efforts to enclose and commodify previously decommodified social practices, and the incomprehensions that sometimes emerges when the the culture of the university and that of the market clash. In this section we show that market framings:

(i) depend on the establishment of legitimacy, trust and brand; (ii) emerge out of experimentation and the lubrication of frictions; and (iii) can lead to changes in the positionalities of individuals, units, and university as a whole.

### ***Lubricating market relations***

Gaining legitimacy and establishing trust are crucial in framing market actors – both, for Newton University to distinguish itself as a specific and valuable brand amongst competitors, as well as for companies when they promote and sell products and services to the university. This requires a range of what we call lubricating strategies. An important part of these commodities is that what is exchanged is intangible, making trust and brand particularly important. Beckert (2007) argues that the more products are detached from the fulfilment of purely functional needs, such as the value of ‘a Newton degree’, the more it depend on the symbolic assignment of value. This symbolic value is aided by specialists who can help Newton think about itself differently; as a trustworthy ‘Russell Group’ brand worth paying for. Second, trust is an important precondition for market exchange; it functions to eliminate uncertainty about the interaction, whilst branding serves as a conveyor of trust (Beckert 2005). As authors point out, increasingly branding has become an inevitable part of every university’s functioning and practice (Drori, Delmestri, and Oberg 2013). Newton University needs trust in its brand to become visible and stay in top position:

*‘The key attribute is the quality of the students and staff, because that’s what the brand is. The quality. So there may be different aspirations of the universities about growth and financial capacity. For us the driver is quality. We are very clear about that. And so what we have to do is build a brand. The sector has just started to think about that. What is the brand of your institution that attracts the best students?’ (Senior Leadership, 22 May 2014).*

Newton University tries to be savvy about the symbolic construction of value of the brand but it also worries that it really does this effectively.

*‘And actually, if there are things that are really good [about the university], are we telling the world about that? Is it part of the way we present ourselves? One of the things that we know is that employers really like our graduates. We know that because if we look at the data on employability, our graduates are [x] in the world and that’s pretty good. If you come here, actually, what it says is that it is a big step in your career. I think we don’t say that anywhere. It would be interesting to know if the industry knows that’ (Senior leadership, 22 May 2014).*

And though Newton has invested some funds in people, time and technology to secure its brand, it is not confident that those who might employ the universities outputs – graduates – know this, and as a result this makes it a harder sell to the students. Keeping brand coherence in a highly complex organisation is also tricky, as the university is not just selling one thing. But bigger complications emerge when the logic of the market runs head-long into other dominant logics in the university that have their anchors in a rather different way of thinking about universities and their purposes (Engelen et. al., 2014). This makes life particularly difficult for those responsible for marketing. One of the interviewees responsible for student recruitment told us a big part of unit’s work is coordinating university communication to keep the university’s brand coherent:

*'I'm a marketer, I came to work on this kind of thing. For me it's good and progressive activity. For people outside of the unit it might be weird, especially for academics when now they have to sell their programmes. Like on open days when they present a programme and somebody sends a tweet. That can cause me a recruitment problem. It's a different way of working'* Interview I1\_7 (Student marketing, 4 April 2014).

A common strategy used by companies to help lubricate market making is to gain sufficient trust and legitimacy so that this leads to a long term partnership. On the one hand, our university interview saw this as a sign of honest and true engagement. However, these so-called partnerships might also mean that the university is not able to get out of the 'partnership' without financial penalties. An example of this was that one of the Departments of Newton University was considering offering some of its study programmes online, in partnership with a private company from the USA. The company would provide technical support, platform, recruitment, marketing, and tutoring whilst the School would provide academic content and lecturers. The contract would be for several years, with financial returns from the beginning. Our Newton University interviewee stated:

*'We are talking several hundreds of thousands of pounds working into millions over the life course of the contract. The contract is kept quite long because they do want it to be genuine partnership and because they only see the return on investment after the 4th or 5th year, so it is quite a big deal for them'* Interview I1\_1 (School Manager, 20 March 2014).

### **Experimentations**

The practice of framing a wide range of commodities to sell to Newton University is still relatively new (with the exception of some services like cleaning, printing and construction), and the rules of the game are still neither clear nor stable. Considerable experimentation is present, testing what is acceptable to buy and sell, or what the university might outsource. Overall our interviewees were keen on working with private companies:

*'I would like to do more work with agencies and freelancers and I'm getting the impression from the senior management that they would like different divisions of university to start doing that. Because long term it is either that or employing more people. It is very much a mixed approach'* Interview I1\_4 (Communications and marketing 31 March 2014).

*'We could do it ourselves, but maybe not as professionally as those companies do. They invest a lot of money and experience and professionalism into that'* Interview I1\_11 (International Office, 15 April 2014).

But there are also reservations, especially regarding where to find the balance in what to buy, and where the boundary is around what it is that the university must do itself:

*'These are idea management tools, running business plan competitions, connecting ourselves with our alumni networks, educational training software, taking up whole taught unit for a programme. And it's just madness. They all want money for doing it and I don't have it. And universities also want control over it, they don't want to just outsource all of that'* (Research and enterprise, 7 April 2014).

Despite the overall positive attitude of university administrators in working with private companies, there are constant re-negotiations around trust, and concerns over damage to reputation in what is still a close community:

‘...in my experience the consultants are a bit gossipy and especially sometimes when they are pitching for business will also tell you about what’s happening elsewhere. So I find that consultants can be a little indiscrete at times. And when the profession is so small, everybody knows the 20 [name of the post] in the 20 Russel Group universities’  
Interview I1\_2 (Alumni relations, 25 March 2014).

### **Positionalities**

Particular kinds of market framings have the potential to change the positionalities of individuals or units working in the university. Our interviewees at Newton consistently report that employees in the central administration are now taken more seriously by senior management, and by academics. But the relations amongst different administration units varies, as some are seen to be more strategic than others. In essence, the result is a redistribution of power and thus a recalibrating of the asymmetrical effects of power. Interviewees who came from units like the International Office or Marketing Department report they are close to the senior leadership of Newton. Others (typically ones who came from units with a lesser role in commodifying university’s activities), report they *‘have to elbow their way in’*.

### **Technologies**

New technologies are constantly being invested in and deployed ‘to create efficiencies’ in methods of working, as a means to gather more and more information on the institution and its processes, to monitor staff, and to measure a wide range of forms of satisfaction - most particularly student satisfaction. Newton University pays for products like the International Student Barometer which measures the satisfaction of international students around all aspects of their ‘student experience’.

At the same time these technologies are also part of governing tools as its results influence university structures, policies and actions. Besides student surveys, there are also national and international rankings, benchmarks, indicators, and so on, that are part of Newton University’s practices. Our interviewees also report that an important change in time is how much their work is now data driven. When the results of a growing raft of surveys become known, which in most cases is annually, Newton University sets up committees to prepare and implement action plans based on results in order to try and be better positioned next year.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

We began by noting our frustration with the current literature on the marketization and higher education, and laid out a case for why we were attracted to an approach that was attentive to the macro-meso *and* micro processes we could see at work in our case study of Newton University.

We showed that not only is Newton University involved in many different markets, and in different capacities, sometimes as seller and sometimes as a buyer of goods and services. But there



is a dynamic to this process that has resulted not just in a proliferation of market-exchanges between Newton and the wider world, but also that this in turn results in specialist providers, with a diverse array of more and more products and services to sell to universities like Newton.

We have also shown that market-making is precisely that; a process, that requires considerable *social* work to materialise – or *make* – market exchanges and thus markets. But what we have also argued that is though the idea of framings is both valuable and useful, what they do not show are the complex, diverse and inventive ways in which markets are strategized by different actors, or the struggles, frictions and other forms of lubrication (trust, brands, legitimation and so on) are used to keep the dynamics on track.

Most importantly, we can see that these processes operate at macro, meso and micro levels and are relational, often reinforcing each other so that the dynamics resemble a vortex, or moving spiral. They involve not just people, but technologies such as software, algorithms, computers, procedures, and so on, in a rich collage of people, technology and programmes. Making higher education markets is thus a profoundly complex social activity, which has the capacity to transform the spaces of the university, its temporal rhythms, and social relations in ways that align the work of the university with the logics of capitalist markets. Yet taken together, these market-making processes are, albeit unevenly, recalibrating and remaking the structures, social relations and subjectivities, within and beyond the university and in turn reconstituting the university and the higher education sector.

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